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A GERMAN SECOND SAILING: DIALOGICAL PLATONISM AFTER HEIDEGGER

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Jede Antwort bleibt nur als Antwort in Kraft, so lange sie im Fragen verwurzelt ist

- Martin Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerks* (GA 5, 5)

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the appropriation of Plato by three thinkers in the context of post-Heideggerian German philosophy: Leo Strauss, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Gerhard Krüger. I argue that their interpretations of Platonic philosophy represent attempts to respond to Heidegger's influential critique of Plato and, thereby, to Heidegger's philosophy more broadly. The crux of their response is the emphasis on Socrates' turn to human speech and human affairs (his so-called "second sailing"). They think that this Socratic reorientation justifies the dialogical form of the philosophical inquiry and prompts a dialogical encounter with ways of life that claim authority on the question of the good and are thus the most challenging to the philosophic life, namely the lives devoted to poetry or politics. Their Platonism is therefore dialogical and opposes Heidegger's dogmatic interpretation of Plato and of his role in the history of philosophy. Chapters 1 to 3 set out the philosophical context of this inquiry. Chapter 1 surveys the Platonism of Marburg Neo-Kantian philosophers. Chapter 2 examines three problems in Heidegger's interpretations of Plato. Chapter 3 deals with the novelty of Paul Friedländer's philological approach to Plato's dialogues. Chapters 4 to 7 compare the Platonism of Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger on the four sets of problems that characterize their understanding of the second sailing. Chapter 4 treats the philosophical meaning of dialogue as a form of writing and thinking. Chapter 5 turns to the "old quarrel between philosophy and poetry". Chapter 6 turns to the relation between philosophy and politics in Plato's *Republic*. Chapter 7 is a critical analysis of their respective interpretations of Platonic metaphysics.

ABBREVIATIONS

Leo Strauss

GS1-3 = *Gesammelte Schriften 1-3*

AAPL = *The Argument and the Action of Plato's Laws*

CaM = "Cohen and Maimonides"

CM = *The City and Man*

ET = "Exoteric Teaching"

FPP = *Faith and Political Philosophy. The Correspondence Between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin 1934-1964*

JPCM = *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity* (ed. K. H. Green)

LHK = "Letter to Helmut Kuhn"

ONIPPP = "On a New Interpretation of Plato's Political Philosophy"

OPS = *On Plato's Symposium*

PR = *Seminar in Political Philosophy: Plato's Republic*

PPH = *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes. Its basis and Its Genesis*

RCPR = *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism* (ed. T. Pangle)

SA = *Socrates and Aristophanes*

SKC = *The Strauss-Krüger Correspondence. Returning to Plato through Kant*

SPPP = *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*

TL = "Two Lectures"

WIPP = *What is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies*

Hans-Georg Gadamer

GW 1-10 = *Gesammelte Werke 1-10*

CP = *A Century of Philosophy*

DD = *Dialogue and Dialectic*

HTJS = "Heideggers theologische Jugendschrift"

IG = *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*

PDE = *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*

PL = *Philosophische Lehrjahre*

RB = *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*

TM = *Truth and Method*

PP = *Plato as Portraitist*

PTI = *Plato. Texte zur Ideenlehre*

WI = "Artworks in Word and Image: 'So True, So Full of Being!' (Goethe)"

Gerhard Krüger

EL = *Einsicht und Leidenschaft. Das Wesen des platonischen Denkens*

EPWA = "Einleitung" zu *Platon. Die Werke des Aufstiegs*

EPS = "Einführung" zu *Platon. Der Staat*

GP = *Grundfragen der Philosophie. Geschichte – Wahrheit – Wissenschaft.*

PMkK = *Philosophie und Moral in der kantischen Kritik*

INTRODUCTION

Und es war schon Marburg, was uns
alle geprägt hatte

- Hans-Georg Gadamer,
Philosophische Lehrjahre

It has been recently recalled and demonstrated that an intense reception of and philosophical encounter with Plato is a characteristic “syndrome” of German philosophy.¹ By examining the Platonism of Leo Strauss (1899-1973), Hans-Georg Gadamer (1901-2002), and Gerhard Krüger (1902-1972),² this dissertation deals with one of the last chapters in this history of German Platonism. These three thinkers received their philosophical impetus as students at the University of Marburg in the 1920s, when Germany was at the crossroads of its economic, political, cultural, and intellectual life. The economic crisis was threatening, the Weimar Republic was about to collapse, a decisively modern artistic culture was exploding, and there was a widely diffused sense of intellectual loss, disorientation, and of a need for new beginnings. Philosophically, this found one of its most important manifestations in the collapse of the previously dominant Marburg school of Neo-Kantianism, the birth of phenomenology, and especially with the rise of Husserl’s *protégé* as the leading philosopher of the time, if not the greatest philosopher of the century: Martin Heidegger.

¹ Kim (2019). This *Brill’s Companion to German Platonism* as a whole is a powerful demonstration of the existence of this syndrome. Less recent monographs dealing with a multiplicity of figures within German Platonism include Kim (2010), Hyland (2004), Zuckert (1996) and Lembeck (1994). Other book chapters and articles dealing with German Platonists will be found in the bibliography.

² Besides philosophical affinity and a shared historical and academic context, the comparison is invited by the fact that the three thinkers were friends. Strauss corresponded intensely with Krüger and Gadamer on philosophical issues, and Gadamer praised Krüger’s life and work several times. For references to these correspondences and tributes, see the bibliography. The lack of scholarship on the Platonism of these three thinkers has been explicitly deplored by François Renaud (2019, 351) “Some of his [Heidegger’s] 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, Jacob Klein, Leo Strauss, and Gerhard Krüger. A detailed study of the connections between what can be called the ‘Marburg School of Plato’ and Heidegger is still needed.” The following inquiry could be understood as an attempt to partially fulfill this need.

Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger did not simply witness this time of crisis and transition as spectators; by conducting their doctoral studies under the guidance of Marburg Neo-Kantian philosophers (respectively with Cassirer, Natorp, and Hartmann) and then turning to Heidegger's thought, they lived, one may even say embodied, this crisis and transition. The parallels do not stop there: all three found profound inspiration in the early teachings of Heidegger, and yet they all thought that Heidegger failed to accomplish successfully what he had promised. Heidegger had indeed proclaimed that the awaited and much-needed philosophical revolution would take the form of a reactivation of Greek philosophy. This is the very promise about which Hannah Arendt famously said: "thinking has come to life again."³ This promise had a tremendous impact on Gadamer, Strauss, and Krüger. Strauss, for instance, recalls that Heidegger's 1922 lectures on Aristotle were absolutely epochal:

I said to [Rosenzweig] that, in comparison with Heidegger, Weber appeared to me as an "orphan child" in regard to precision and probing and competence. I had never seen before such seriousness, profundity, and concentration in the interpretation of philosophic texts. I had heard Heidegger's interpretation of certain sections in Aristotle, and some time later I heard Werner Jaeger in Berlin interpret the same texts. Charity compels me to limit my comparison to the remark that there was no comparison. (RCPR, 28)⁴

As Strauss notes, the *Destruktion* of the Greeks, although it led Heidegger to *criticize* Plato and Aristotle, paradoxically left open the possibility of a new and less critical approach:

Superficially or sociologically speaking, Heidegger was the first great German philosopher who was a Catholic by origin and by training; he thus had from the outset a premodern familiarity with Aristotle; he thus was protected against the danger of trying to modernize Aristotle. But as a philosopher Heidegger was not a Christian: he thus was not tempted to understand Aristotle in the light of Thomas Aquinas. Above all, his intention was to uproot Aristotle: he thus was compelled to disinter the roots, to bring them to light, to look at them with wonder. Klein was the first to understand the possibility which Heidegger had opened without intending it: the possibility of a

³ Arendt (1978 [1971], 295).

⁴ Gadamer says that Strauss was actually so impressed that he would tell this story to anyone who would hear it – see HTJS in Heidegger (1992, 13).

genuine return to classical philosophy, to the philosophy of Aristotle and of Plato, a return with open eyes and in full clarity about the infinite difficulties which it entails. He turned to the study of classical philosophy with a devotion and a love of toil, a penetration and an intelligence, an intellectual probity and a sobriety in which no contemporary equals him. (JPCM, 450)

This idea of a paradoxical and unintentionally opened possibility is precisely how Gadamer retrospectively looked as his own Heideggerian impulse, the one that gripped him when, in 1922, he read the interpretation of Aristotle contained in the *Natrop-Bericht*.⁵ For Gadamer thought that the program therein announced was a revival of practical philosophy and of its hermeneutic salience for the analysis of human existence:

This text was for me a real source of inspiration. [...] When I reread today the first part of the introduction to Heidegger's Aristotle studies, the "Indications concerning the hermeneutic situation," it is as if I rediscover the guiding thread of my own philosophical development and should repeat the elaboration that finally led me to philosophical hermeneutics. [...] Reading this rediscovered program, what now strikes me is that *Phronesis* is not so much at the forefront as the virtue of the theoretical life, *Sophia*. This means that the young Heidegger was not so much preoccupied with the actuality of practical philosophy as with its signification for Aristotelian ontology, for the *Metaphysics*. The sixth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* appears in this program really more as an introduction to Aristotle's *Physics*." (HTJS, 10-12)⁶

We find something analogous in Krüger's own development. In his *Philosophie und Moral in der kantischen Kritik* (1931), which was first produced as his *Habilitation* and which owes much to *Sein und Zeit* and to Heidegger's own interpretations of Kant,⁷ Krüger is in fact led from Kant back to Plato, and so the ultimate sentence of his *Kantbuch* reads thusly: "That the decisive question remains *true*

⁵ Thus Taminioux (2002, 2004) has spoken of Gadamer's debt to Heidegger's reading of Aristotle as the "avatars d'une fascination précoce" and the "fécondité d'un malentendu."

⁶ Cited from Heidegger (1992); my translation.

⁷ Krüger is explicit about his debt to Heidegger there (e.g. PMKK, 3 and 7).

even if it finds *no* answer, the example of *Socrates* can teach it to one who so questions” (PMKK, 236).⁸ Eight years later, Krüger published his book on Plato.

Like many other students of this generation, Gadamer, Strauss, and Krüger would eventually take their distance from Heidegger and, while keeping with the inspiration they received from him, embark on their own philosophical paths. What stands out about these three is that they all thought that this path should be a *new, better reactivation of Plato’s philosophy*.⁹ This reactivation of Plato would not in the end transform itself into an antagonistic critique, as it would eventually for Heidegger, but of a genuine appropriation. To borrow Löwith’s formulation, it would take the form of a “repetition of antiquity at the peak of modernity.”¹⁰

This dissertation examines the appropriations of Plato that are at the core of Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger’s thought. My interpretation advances that their dialogical Platonism should be understood as an attempt to overcome the crisis of philosophy as it emerged around the beginning of the 20th Century in Germany, and especially as a response to the thought of Martin Heidegger. I argue that that Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger should not only be compared and treated together because of the historical-philosophical predicament that they commonly inherit, but also and most of all because they turn to Plato to overcome that predicament in the same specific way, namely by reactivating the Socratic reorientation of philosophy announced in the *Phaedo* as a “second sailing” (δεύτερος πλοῦς, 99c9-d1). I further contend that they not only put the second sailing at

⁸ My translation. Note that the epigraph of the *Kantbuch* is a quote from Plato’s *Apology* (20e: “The λόγος I will say is not from me”). Plato’s Socrates has, so to speak, the first and last word of this work on Kant. I have provided an explanation of this transition from Kant to Plato in Krüger’s thought in my Pageau-St-Hilaire (2022b, 2-3).

⁹ This is not the common path for all of Heidegger’s first generation of students. For instance, Hannah Arendt’s Neo-Aristotelian political thinking is hardly separable from her critique and rejection of Plato (largely based on Heidegger’s own critique), and thinkers like Hans Jonas and Karl Löwith, although they were inspired by aspects of Greek philosophy, are certainly not Platonists.

¹⁰ Those are the words Löwith (1997 [1978], 108) uses to characterize Nietzsche’s work.

the core of their *Platonauffassung*, but that they all singularly understand that second sailing in light of Socrates' other autobiography, namely the account of his Delphic Mission we find in the *Apology of Socrates*.

Thus understood, their Platonism is dialogical in two senses. First, it turns to dialogical inquiry as the only possible philosophical method or orientation. Second, it understands this dialogical path as structured around prominent types of interlocutors, and, consequently, prominent philosophical questions, the preeminence of which is grounded on an authoritative claim on the question of the good human life. These prominent interlocutors are poets and politicians, and these questions or themes are those posed by the confrontation of philosophy with poetry and politics. According to such understanding, the arch of the second sailing in the *Phaedo*, namely the attempt to know the truth of beings – ultimately, Forms – by turning to speeches is mediated by the dialogical encounter prompted by the poetic and political challenges to the philosophical endeavor. This twofold dialogical Platonism is a response to the doctrinal Plato of Martin Heidegger as well as to his dogmatic views on the role of Platonic thought in the history of Western philosophy.

This kind of *Auseinandersetzung* with Heidegger is not a merely historical dispute, and this for three reasons. The first general reason is that it is hardly possible to distinguish Heidegger's thinking from his interpretation of the history of philosophy. In other words, Heidegger is not just the thinker of historicity, but his own philosophy is deeply tied to its relation to the history of philosophy; it is thoroughly historical. Hence, it is impossible to problematize Heidegger's reading of the history of philosophy without problematizing Heidegger's thought itself. Second, Heidegger proclaimed the identity of metaphysics and Platonism,¹¹ so what is at stake when he criticizes Plato

¹¹ GA 14, 71: "Die Metaphysik ist Platonismus."

is nothing less than the fate of metaphysics. Third, the critique of metaphysics as Platonism or of Platonism as metaphysics is not one among many aspects of Heidegger's thinking; the thesis that metaphysics is responsible for the distortion of the *Seinsfrage* and the oblivion of Being rather lies as the *heart* of his work. Responding to Heidegger on the question of the meaning of Platonism, if done effectively, means providing a substantial critique of Heidegger.

1. Recovering the Second Sailing

1.1 The Unity of the Methodological and the Thematic

Gadamer's recovery of Plato has been interpreted as a "re-Socratizing" (*Resokratisierung*) of Plato as well as a post-metaphysical Platonism.¹² These are apt characterizations insofar as they emphasize the importance of dialogue and Socratic ignorance as central to his understanding of Platonic philosophy. And in that respect, it is worth considering whether such interpretations could also account for the recoveries of Plato by Strauss and Krüger. However, we can hardly make sense of the specific directions that Gadamer's Platonic writings take and the questions he prioritizes on these Socratic grounds if we do not further interpret these grounds. This basis alone is equally insufficient to fully account for the most pressing concerns of Strauss's and Krüger's writings on Plato.

If we examine the interpretations of Plato by Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger, we notice that there are resemblances that go beyond their agreement about the Socratic dialogical method. Indeed, there are also evident *thematic* similarities: all three give substantial attention to the same

¹² See François Renaud, *Die Resokratisierung Platons. Die platonische Hermeneutik Hans-Georg Gadamer's* (1999) and Werner Wachterhauser, *Beyond Being. Gadamer's Post-Platonic Hermeneutic Ontology* (1999).

issues in Platonic thought, namely the questions of the meaning of dialogical thinking and writing, the relation between philosophy and poetry and between philosophy and politics. Taken separately, each of these themes is an obvious candidate for Platonic investigations for each is, as a matter of fact, an important question in Plato's works. Yet, attributing the thematic similitudes of their appropriations of Plato to a coincidence is an unlikely solution in the light of two facts. First, these themes were barely given attention by the most important philosophical interpretations in the German context in general, as well as in the Marburg context in particular during the 1920s and 1930s. In fact, neither neo-Kantian nor Heidegger's readings were interested in these questions and focused instead on issues in Platonic epistemology and metaphysics. Second, most interpreters of Plato who consider some of these themes do not treat all of them together. This suggests that they don't see an inner connection between these sets of questions, whereas Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger do.

If there is such a connection, it is appropriate to look into it for insights on a proper characterization of the appropriations of Plato in Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger. My proposal, as I already mentioned, is that we find an articulation of the intimate relation between philosophy, dialogue, poetry and politics if we read the two Socratic autobiographies of Plato's *corpus*, namely the second sailing of the *Phaedo* and the Delphic mission of the *Apology*, through one another. This provides a unity of the methodological and thematic aspects of their Platonism.

1.2 The Second Sailing as Dialogue

In the autobiographical passage of the *Phaedo* (96a-102a), Socrates explains how he became the philosopher that he was. According to this story, Socrates became the Socrates we know by coming

to terms with his dissatisfaction vis-à-vis physicists. Socrates targets one thinker in particular: Anaxagoras. He was at first astonished by the promise contained in the Anaxagorean doctrine of νοῦς, namely the promise to explain how things are in terms of the good (97d-e), that is, the promise to provide teleological explanations of the world. But Anaxagoras did not fulfill this promise and rather provided material or physical explanations for everything. These explanations merely provided *sine qua non* causes, and not sufficient causes: Socrates is not sitting in his prison cell because of his flesh, sinews, and bones (98c-d). It is true that he could not do so *without* these, but that could count as an equally good explanation of Socrates' escape from prison, and Socrates did not escape. Socrates then explains that since he was “deprived [of the cause] and could neither find it by himself (αὐτὸς εὔρεῖν) or learn it from others (παρ’ ἄλλου μαθεῖν),” he resolved to embark on a “second sailing for the search for the cause (τὸν δεύτερον πλοῦν ἐπὶ τὴν τῆς αἰτίας ζήτησιν)” (99c8-d1).

There are many controversies concerning the meaning of this second sailing. In Greek, the idiom refers to a trip where sailors recur to oars when the wind is absent or not strong enough.¹³ It is a “second-best” in the sense that it replaces another means of sailing which would be better *were it available*. There are many disagreements concerning the reference of both the second sailing itself and what it is meant to replace, namely the ‘first’ sailing or πρῶτος πλοῦς. The usual candidates for what the δεύτερος πλοῦς refers to are: 1) the method of hypothesis; 2) the turn to Forms as causes; 3) a method that cannot guarantee certainty in the search for causes.¹⁴ According to the scholarship, the candidates for what the πρῶτος πλοῦς refers to are: 1) teleology; 2) material

¹³ See notably Ross (1982), Rowe (1993), and Gonzalez (1998).

¹⁴ For the second sailing as the method of hypothesis, see e.g. Shipton (1979), Gonzalez (1998), Dorter (2013), and Benson (2015). For the second sailing as the turn to Forms as proper causes, see Burnet (1911), Shorey (1933), Ross (1951), Rose (1966), Vlastos (1969), Burge (1971), Wiggins (1986), and Kelsey (2004). Ross (1982) thinks the second sailing is both the theory of Forms and the hypothetical method. For the second sailing as a method which cannot guarantee certainty, see Shipton (1979).

causation; 3) a method that guarantees certainty.¹⁵ But the passage in which Socrates explains what he means by his second sailing is open to a much more modest reading that has the advantage to be closer to the text. I think that this is the approach that can properly illuminate the Platonism of Gadamer, Strauss, and Krüger. Let us quote the passage first (99d4-100a7):

After this, he said, when I had wearied of investigating beings (τὰ ὄντα), I thought that I must be careful to avoid the experience of those who watch an eclipse of the sun, for some of them ruin their eyes unless they watch its image (τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ) in water or some such material. A similar thought crossed my mind, and I feared that my soul would be altogether blinded if I looked at things (τὰ πράγματα) with my eyes and tried to grasp them with each of my senses (ἐκάστη τῶν αἰσθήσεων ἐπιχειρῶν ἄπτεσθαι αὐτῶν). So I thought I must take refuge in speeches and investigate in them the truth of beings (εἰς τοὺς λόγους καταφυγόντα ἐν ἐκείνοις σκοπεῖν τῶν ὄντων τὴν ἀλήθειαν). However, perhaps the way I picture it (εἰκάζω) is inadequate, for I certainly do not admit that one who investigates beings by means of speeches is dealing with images any more than one who looks at facts (τὸν ἐν τοῖς λόγοις σκοπούμενον τὰ ὄντα ἐν εἰκόσι μᾶλλον σκοπεῖν ἢ τὸν ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις). However, I started in this manner: taking as my hypothesis in each case the speech that seemed to me the most compelling (ἐρρωμένεστατον), I would consider as true, about cause and everything else, whatever agreed (συμφωνεῖν) with this, and as untrue whatever did not so agree. (Trans. Grube modif.)

The notion of hypothesis does not come up until 100a3, although this is usually where commentators rush to in order to argue that the second sailing *is* the “method of hypothesis.” The idea of positing Forms, in the immediate context of the second sailing, does not emerge before 100b5. This is not to say that hypotheses and Forms are not relevant to Socrates’ second sailing, but that they are extensions of a broader reorientation announced by Socrates under the name of δεύτερος πλοῦς, and this reorientation is explained through lines 99d4-100a3. These lines usually do not get the attention they deserve. What they tell us is that Socrates refrained from trying to grasp beings directly by perceiving them in facts (ἐν τοῖς

¹⁵ For the first sailing as teleology, see Shorey (1933), Rose (1966), Vlastos (1969), Burge (1971). For the first sailing as material causation, see Ross (1982, 24). For the first sailing as a method yielding certainty, see Shipton (1979).

ἔργοις) and started instead to investigate the truth of beings through speeches (ἐν τοῖς λόγοις). This is to say that the second sailing is the indirect orientation through λόγοι, and it is meant to replace the direct orientation through ἔργα. Following the meaning of the δεύτερος πλοῦς metaphor, the way ἐν τοῖς λόγοις is privileged because the way ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις is *unavailable*. Why is it unavailable? Because this empirical-perceptual kind of inquiry *blinds the soul*. What kind of blindness is Socrates talking about? It is reasonable to think that he is referring to the *aveuglement* of physicists in the vein of Anaxagoras, that is, of those with whom he was dissatisfied.

It is undoubtable that the Socratic turn to λόγοι involves hypotheses and Forms, but there is a danger to hastily interpret the second sailing as either a hypothetical method or an ontology. The danger is to underappreciate what comes before these, that is, to underestimate the role of this primary flight into the λόγοι. For surely the method of hypothesis and the Forms *presuppose* that one orients oneself according to speeches, and not vice versa. This means that the flight into the λόγοι has not only temporal but also a logical priority. Now the initial description of the “method of hypothesis” (100a3-7) tells us that we need to select the most compelling or healthy (ἐρρωμενέστατον) λόγος and take as true what agrees (συμφωνεῖν) with it. This selection and comparison (indicated by the superlative and agreement components of the sentence expressing the “method”) require that we examine a plurality of λόγοι. Later on, we are told that the process by which we should do that is to give an account or speech (διδόναι λόγον, 101d6), a phrase that is paradigmatic of Socratic dialogue. The best way to be offered a multiplicity of competing λόγοι is to engage in dialogue with others. It might be possible to formulate to oneself (or to give to oneself) a variety of λόγοι, but even solitary and silent thinking is called a dialogue of the soul with itself in the *Theaetetus* (189e4-190a1). The conclusion to be drawn from these remarks is that before being

a turn to Forms or to a hypothetical method, the second sailing is a turn to speeches in the form of a dialogical inquiry.

As already indicated above, it is sensible to contrast the second and first sailings as the way through λόγοι and the way through ἔργα. If this is the case, it hardly makes sense to say that the second sailing replaces teleology. This misreading is somewhat natural insofar as it is clear that when Socrates says at 99c8 that he was “deprived of it (ταύτης ἐστερήθην),” ταύτης refers back to τῆς τοιαύτης αἰτίας (c6-7), which in turn refers to τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ δέον (c5). But the fact that Socrates was deprived of the teleological cause does not mean that he abandoned it or, in other words, that the second sailing is an alternative to τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ δέον.¹⁶ The grammatical argument is thus inconclusive and allows for other interpretations.

Rather, Socrates says that he could not find the final cause by himself (αὐτὸς εὐρεῖν) or learn it from others (παρ’ ἄλλου μαθεῖν), and this most likely means that he could not learn it from physicists who promised it like Anaxagoras. But this leaves open the possibility that he could find it by embarking on a second sailing.¹⁷ The crucial point, it seems to me, is the following: the detour through λόγοι, insofar as it leads to Forms, allows the good to come back as a cause (*cf.* 100b6).¹⁸ The second sailing does not replace, but at best revises teleology. What it *does* replace is a direct perceptual or physical apprehension of beings. It replaces it because this method, the first sailing, does not allow the truth of beings to become manifest.

¹⁶ On this point see especially Ross (1982, 24) *contra* Vlastos (1969).

¹⁷ Wiggins (1986) thinks this is the case; Rowe (1993, 239) acknowledges the plausibility of such reading but does not lean toward it.

¹⁸ Rowe (1993, 239) considers that this is indeed a possibility, although he does not lean toward it. According to Gonzalez (1998, 201), formal and teleological explanations coincide: “the insight that a thing is beautiful solely because this is what is *best* for it to be is reflected in the proposition that a thing is beautiful for no other reason than beauty itself.” In the *Republic*, it is clear that the Good works as a cause, and thus that the teleological framework is not abandoned with the turn to Forms.

1.3 *The Ethical-Political Crux of the Dialogical Inquiry*

There are two reasons to turn to the *Apology* to clarify the question of the second sailing. First, the parallel is invited by the fact that the *Apology* contains another autobiographical passage that is meant to illuminate the nature and intent of Socrates' philosophical activity. Second, if the second sailing is the turn to exchanged λόγοι in dialogue, the question of what kind of interlocutors the philosopher should look for emerges. This is not a random question, for the "hypothetical method" enabled by the turn to human speeches demands that we select the most compelling λόγοι, and this might not be an easy task with any interlocutor. In the *Apology*, Socrates precisely addresses the questions of his interlocutors. On the surface, it looks like he conversed with anyone in Athens. This impression is usually strengthened when he tells us that he engages in dialogue with craftsmen: if Socrates is humble enough to enter into dialogue with artisans, he must be open to philosophize with everyone.

But we ought to be careful when reading Socrates' autobiographical discourse: while he *claims* to discuss with craftsmen, it is striking that Plato, unlike Xenophon (*Mem.* III. 10), *never* displays even one single conversation between Socrates and a craftsman. I am not suggesting that the historical Socrates never did talk to craftsmen, but that Plato's Socrates had preferred types of interlocutors. In the *Apology*, he mentions two other groups of people: poets and politicians (22a). Compared to the case of craftsmen, it is also striking that Plato displays Socrates exchanging λόγοι directly with poets (Agathon and Aristophanes) and political men (Alcibiades, Critias, Charmides, Nicias, Laches, etc.) and indirectly with poets (Homer, Hesiod, Simonides, Theognis, etc.) and political men (Pericles, Solon, Themistocles, Aristides, etc.). Instead of rehearsing the reasons for Socrates' disappointments with his interlocutors in the autobiographical account of his Delphic mission, I would like to ask bluntly the question: why such a precedence of poets and politicians

over craftsmen (and other random people)? While craftsmen are knowledgeable people, they are ignorant about “most important things (τὰ μέγιστα)” (22d6). To be sure, Plato’s Socrates indicates that poets and politicians too are ignorant about τὰ μέγιστα. So, what is the difference? I propose the following interpretation: craftsmen are not just ignorant about the most important things; they are, *qua* craftsmen, *not concerned* with the most important things, that is, they are not concerned with them *in virtue of their τέχνη*. By contrast, politicians and poets claim to know, teach and promote the most important things, namely virtues. They do not simply happen to be concerned with virtue; it is precisely in their capacity of politicians and poets that they have a claim over the good. This is why they are the privileged interlocutors of Plato’s Socrates.¹⁹

We can put the point differently. The problem Socrates encounters through his Delphic mission is not primarily epistemological, but ethical-political, or “agathological.” The issue with the ignorance of his interlocutors is not just that they are unaware of their ignorance; the real issue is that they are unaware of their ignorance about the good while thinking they know the good and claim to be real authorities about it. Craftsmen may be doubly ignorant about virtue, but they are not authorities in matters of moral and political excellence; they are only authorities about the kind of products they make. This is why Plato’s Socrates is not really bothered with craftsmen – as distinguished from the issue of τέχνη itself – but constantly talks to the other two types. Poets and politicians are important interlocutors because they have authoritative λόγοι about virtue and the good. These speeches, and not just any kind of speech, are the kind of speeches that must be examined when one turns to the λόγοι with the purpose of finding the most compelling ones and

¹⁹ This is not to say that there are no other important kinds of interlocutors. Among these, sophists are obviously very important, and the opposition between philosophy and sophistry is one of the great polarities of the Platonic corpus. I wittingly leave this problematic aside in the course of the present investigation, mostly because this great antagonism does not play a very significant role in the Platonism of Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger taken as a whole, although I address some of Gadamer’s thoughts on the topic in chapter 4.

taking them as true. This confirms one of the points argued above, namely that teleology or explanations in terms of the good is not abandoned by the second sailing. On the opposite: the *Apology* confirms the absolute centrality of the question of the good, that is, of the ethical-political crux of Socrates's reorientation.

Together, the second sailing and the Delphic mission thus reveal the shape, method, and themes of the Socratic inquiry. They allow us to see the connection between the form and content of Plato's philosophy. As I shall show, this unity of the dialogical form and of the ethical crux of philosophy is precisely how Gadamer, Strauss and Krüger approached Plato. This gives them a decisive advantage over both Neo-Kantian interpretations and Heidegger's reading, for the latter two in fact jump directly to Plato's *Ideenlehre* without consideration for the Socratic path toward the Forms. This has the effect of transforming Plato's philosophy into rigidified, lifeless doctrines, and of causing the oblivion of the privileged Platonic mode of inquiry. By reviving this dialogical mode, Gadamer, Strauss, and Krüger bring Platonism back to life.

2. Plato and Platonism: Interpretation and Appropriation

So far and in what follows, I did and will not refrain from using the word "Platonism" in a non-pejorative way. This terminology comes with risks of misunderstanding, and I would thus like to clarify this choice and briefly defend it. Two important recent critiques of Heidegger's Plato,²⁰ as well as defenders of Gadamer's Plato,²¹ have preferred to ascribe the label "Platonism" to dogmatic interpretations of Plato, that is, to readings of Plato that transform the dialogues he wrote into a

²⁰ Hyland 2004 (cf. Hyland 1995); Gonzalez 2009.

²¹ E.g. Dostal 2022. Renaud (1999) and Fruchon (2004), however, use the term "Platonism," as opposed to "dogmatic Platonism," in a non-pejorative way.

set of fixed theories and doctrines, like “Plato’s theory of the state,” “Plato’s theory of virtue,” “Plato’s theory of truth,” or “Plato’s theory of Forms.”²² According to them, “Platonism” designates an enemy of the genuine spirit of Plato’s philosophy. In German, the word for “theory” and “doctrine,” *Lehre*, also means “teaching.” Yet it is just as impossible to determine with any precision and certainty what Plato’s teachings were as to determine what his doctrines or theories are, and this for a very simple reason: Plato (almost) never spoke in his own name.²³ The problem of Plato’s anonymity raises tremendous difficulties for the interpretation of his work,²⁴ but I contend that the risk of transforming a philosophical work into a dogmatic falsification of it is a broader and much more pervasive problem, and in fact a tendency that we can see at work at virtually any epoch where interpretations of philosophical texts occur. Philosophically, we can call this the problem of reductionism. Reductionism is the act of reducing a complex phenomenon or thing to one or some of its aspects or parts. We need not explore here the different causes of reductionist tendencies among philosophical interpreters. Suffice it to say that reductionism is a problem insofar as it fails to capture the complexity of what should be brought to understanding through the act of interpretation, and thereby produces misunderstanding instead of understanding. Granting the danger and problematic nature of reductionism, is it the case that any kind of Platonism is a reductive interpretation of Plato? I do not think so.

Rather, what I think the notions of “Platonism” and “Platonist” evoke is an act of appropriation wherein one who calls oneself a Platonist or a philosophical adept of Platonism is calling to attention the intellectual affinity between oneself and what one thinks is the genuine spirit of Plato’s

²² Cf. Hyland (1995, 7).

²³ The exception would be the *Seventh Letter*, if we grant its authenticity (as I am inclined to). But there, precisely when speaking in his own voice, Plato warns us of the weakness of λόγος (343a1).

²⁴ On the theme of Platonic anonymity, see the volume edited by Gerald Press (2000).

philosophy. To be simply an interpreter of Plato allows one to reject what one finds in Plato; to be a Platonist means that one gives one's philosophical assent to what one finds in Plato. This appropriative dimension is the main reason why I resolve to talk of Platonism in a non-pejorative way. However, it is important to see that this appropriation does not work as a two-step process. On a two-step-process model, one first understands Plato's philosophy and only thereafter decides whether one agrees with it and makes it one's own. This model is flawed, for it fails to consider the interpretive character of understanding, or, if it does consider it, it fails to appreciate the appropriative dimension of interpretive understanding. Both Heidegger and Gadamer have provided helpful frameworks to understand the intricacies of understanding, interpretation, and appropriation. In Heidegger's terms, we do not primarily and for the most part understand things as if they were simply "present-at-hand" (*vorhanden*), statically available for a distant theoretical gaze, but as "affordances" (*das Zuhandene*), things that matter to us and with which we are "pragmatically" engaged.²⁵ For Gadamer, interpretive understanding is the dialectic between the alterity of the *interpretandum* and the appropriation of that *interpretandum* by the interpreter.²⁶ It is not possible to properly understanding something if we do not make it our own, that is, if we do not put it in our own words, put it into relation with our own thoughts, experiences, concerns, aspirations, etc. Accordingly, any attempt to understand Plato is an interpretation of Plato on the basis of the "situational finitude" of the interpreter.²⁷

It could be argued that, if this is true, every interpretation, being situated, is intrinsically oriented toward certain aspects of the *interpretandum* at the expense of others, and is thus naturally led to

²⁵ See SZ, 68 ff.

²⁶ See notably GW1, 308-312; TM, 313-318. Another word Gadamer uses for "appropriation" is "application" (*Anwendung*), which is the focus of an entire chapter of *Truth and Method* (GW 1, 312-346; TM, 318-350).

²⁷ I borrow the helpful notion of "situational finitude" from Hyland (1995). Heidegger would speak of facticity (*Faktizität*) and thrownness (*Geworfenheit*).

reductionism. Indeed, perspectival or aspectual understanding can hardly claim to do justice to all aspects or all perspectives. An impartial or non-perspectival sight would require, as Nietzsche puts it, a “non-concept of eye.”²⁸ Yet there is a difference between the perspectival character of hermeneutics and reductionist interpretations. The difference stems from hermeneutics’ acknowledgment of its finite situation and perspectival nature. We can put the point in the following way: perspectivism is a necessary yet insufficient cause of reductionism. Gadamer speaks of interpretation as highlighting (*Überhellung*).²⁹ Highlighting something is a way of emphasizing it, and something is always emphasized at the expense of something else that is not emphasized. But there is still a crucial difference between the two: emphasizing A at the expense of B is not the same as reducing B to A. To acknowledge the finitude of perspectival understanding means to acknowledge that A has been emphasized over B without trying to hide or to cancel out B. Reducing B to A does not allow one to see any remaining glimpse of B.

Following these remarks, we can make a distinction between Platonism as an interpretive appropriation of Plato according to which one can call oneself a Platonist, and dogmatic or doctrinal Platonism, which consists in any kind of interpretation of Plato’s work that reduces it to this or that specific “theory.” Gadamer, Strauss, and Krüger should all be understood as Platonists in the former sense. This is to say that not only do they praise Plato while interpreting his work, but they also articulate their own philosophical thinking as a kind of Platonic philosophy. In that sense, they articulate various yet similar kinds of Platonism. I have qualified their kind of Platonism as dialogical. As I have explained, I take this in a rather specific sense, for their understanding of the dialogical path in Plato is quite singular. But the phrase “dialogical Platonism” should also be

²⁸ *Zur Genalogie der Moral*, III, §12.

²⁹ E.g. GW1, 389; TM, 404.

heard more generally as an opponent to dogmatic or doctrinal, that is, reductive Platonism. Dialogical Platonism does emphasize Socrates' second sailing and its ethical crux, and perhaps it does so at the expense of other concerns one finds in the Platonic corpus – say, logical or epistemological questions –, but it is not guilty of reductionism because it does not pretend to offer a definitive and exhaustive interpretation of Plato's views. In particular, its dialogical character prevents one from the otherwise natural tendency of interpreters to try to “have the last word.”³⁰ As we shall see, they think that for Plato, and this means for *them too*, questions do not just have a temporal but also a substantial or ontological priority over answers. In light of this, the various kind of positive propositions and interpretive conclusions I will discuss in what follows will be understood properly if they allow to reveal the interrogative impulse, the “force of the questions” that prompt them. In this respect, we can let ourselves be guided, somewhat paradoxically, by Heidegger's beautiful words quoted as the epigraph to this dissertation: “Any answer remains powerful as an answer only insofar as it is rooted in the questioning (*Jede Antwort bleibt nur als Antwort in Kraft, solange sie im Fragen verwurzelt ist*).”³¹

3. Structuring the Inquiry

The following inquiry is composed of seven chapters and is divided into two parts. The first part (chapters 1-3) reconstructs the philosophical and philological context in which Heidegger, Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger all found themselves in the 1920s in Marburg and establishes the challenge to which the second sailing of the latter three is a response. Chapter 1 first sets out the Marburg

³⁰ Cf. McIntyre (2002) on Gadamer.

³¹ GA 5, 58.

Neo-Kantian interpretations (Cohen, Natorp, Cassirer) of Plato's "theory of Ideas," which claim that Plato anticipated the modern scientific hypothetical method. This proves important not just contextually, for a crucial contention of this interpretations is that Plato's Forms are not substances or beings, and that very idea will play a significant role in the new readings of Platonic metaphysics proposed by Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger. Chapter 2 discusses problems and shortcomings in Heidegger's treatment of Plato, especially regarding the notions that will structure the Platonic paths of these three thinkers: dialogue, poetry, politics, and Forms. It sets out Heidegger's critique of Platonism as the genuine challenge that the dialogical Platonism of Gadamer, Strauss, and Krüger tries to address. Chapter 3 deals with the philological innovation of Paul Friedländer, who prepares the way for a reading of Plato that considers indispensable the dramatic dimension of the dialogues. I show that Friedländer anticipates the anti-dogmatism and the attention to irony characteristic of the interpretations of Plato by Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger while not allowing the deeper philosophical meanings of these features to emerge.

The second part (chapters 4-7), the crux of the present investigation, turns to the Platonism of Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger. Its structure follows the thematic articulation set out in the preceding remarks, namely that of Socrates' second sailing as the matrix of their Platonism.

Chapter 4 deals with the meaning of Plato's dialogical form of philosophical inquiry. It argues that for Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger, dialogue is not just the way in which Plato presents his philosophical thought but the way in which Plato *philosophizes* and urges us to philosophize in turn. Through authorial anonymity, the dramatic interrelation of speeches and action, and irony, Plato constantly undermines the readers' temptation to reduce the meaning of the philosophical conversations to fixed propositions. Their analysis all point toward a dialogical understanding of *truth*, as opposed to a propositional one, and it does so by anticipating some of Heidegger's own philosophical insights, notably by emphasizing the ethical-political facticity of the philosophical

inquiry and its rootedness in pre-reflexive attunements (*Stimmungen*). Given this emphasis, we are naturally led to inquire into how different kinds of interlocutors shape philosophical dialogues.

Chapter 5 deals with philosophy's encounter with poetry and the poets. While the starting point of Gadamer, Strauss, and Krüger in their analysis of the dialogical form of Platonic philosophy is the paradox of Plato's written critique of writing, the starting point of their analysis of the "old quarrel between philosophy and poetry" is Plato's mimetic critique of mimesis. This paradox leads them to reconsider the critique of poets in a radical way, for they all contend that Platonic philosophy must be poetic to achieve what it purports to do. For them, the encounter with poets leads the Platonic philosopher to acknowledge the limits of philosophical discourse alone, that is, to a λόγος that is not supplemented by the disclosive resources of poetry. Here again, Gadamer, Strauss, and Krüger anticipate Heidegger's deep appreciation for poetic thinking, but reconfigure this appreciation in two ways: first, by emphasizing its "agathological" crux, that is, the centrality of the good life; second, by refusing the dichotomy between philosophy and poetry that is implied in Heidegger's rejection of philosophical discourse in favor of poetic saying and thinking: philosophy can become poetic without ceasing to be philosophy.

Chapter 6 deals with philosophy's encounter with politics and the city by turning to the interpretation of Plato's *Republic* by Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger. It focuses on the meaning of the utopia of philosopher-rulers and argues that for all three, the apparent harmony of philosophy and politics in the *Republic* is ironic. I distinguish two different kinds of ironic readings, represented on the one hand by Strauss, and on the other hand by Gadamer and Krüger. Both readings are ironic insofar as they contend that the *apparent harmonization* of philosophy and politics at once dissimulates and discloses the *real tension* between the two. In the case of Strauss, it is a hyper-irony, for the identity of philosophy and politics embodied by the philosopher-ruler is understood as an indication of the ineluctable antithesis between the two. In the case of Krüger and Gadamer, the

tension obliquely indicates ways in which the philosopher can nonetheless contribute to political life through critique and education. Insofar as they all articulate a tension between the philosopher and the city, their ironic readings of Kallipolis are all antidotes to the kind of reckless political Platonism that Heidegger enthusiastically embraced in his *Rektoratsrede*.

Chapter 7 deals with the interpretation of the Forms. It argues that Gadamer, Strauss, and Krüger all understand Platonic ontology in ways that respond to Heidegger's criticism of Platonism as metaphysics. This critique contends that for Plato, Being fundamentally means intelligibility. Gadamer, Strauss, and Krüger, all try to show that this is at best partly true, or, better put, that the Forms at best indicate a very *partial* intelligibility of Being, and, conversely, that Plato anticipates Heidegger's insight into the fundamental elusiveness of being. However, I show that through their interpretation, Gadamer and Strauss get rid, each in their own way, of the transcendence or the "beyond" that is so characteristic of Platonic Forms and the Good, and argue that, hermeneutically, this is too high a price to pay for responding to Heidegger. In fact, I suggest that it might be possible to argue in favor of the elusiveness of Being in Platonic ontology while maintaining the "beyond," and, in fact, precisely *by* preserving this transcendence. This way is one that Krüger's reading prepares, especially by thinking through the spacing between discursive thought (διάνοια) and noetic insight (νοήσις).

PART I

PLATO AND MARBURG

CHAPTER 1

THE *IDEENLEHRE* AS METHODOLOGY IN MARBURG NEO-KANTIAN PLATONISM

[...] die Geschichte des Idealismus überhaupt in der Geschichte der Philosophie ist ebenso auch die Geschichte des Platonischen Idealismus

- Hermann Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*

Die Methode ist souverän

- Paul Natorp, *Platos Ideenlehre: Eine Einführung in den Idealismus*

When Heidegger started his lectures on Plato's *Sophist* in the Fall of 1924, he introduced them with an *In Memoriam* for Paul Natorp, the leader of the Marburg School of Neo-Kantianism after Hermann Cohen and Heidegger's predecessor as a philosophy professor in Marburg, who had just passed away. Heidegger's words are praiseful but his own intention vis-à-vis Natorp and his school is explicit: "That today we can go beyond Kant is possible only because we were first forced back to him by the Marburg School" (GA 19, 4). There are good reasons to contrast Heidegger's understanding of Platonism with Marburg Neo-Kantian Platonism. As the 1929 Davos debate with Ernst Cassirer would show, there is a genuine philosophical enmity between Heidegger and Neo-Kantianism. While this opposition unfolded on the battle field of the interpretation of Kant, it involved much more than competing readings of Kant.¹ I do not claim that Heidegger's Plato responds to the Neo-Kantian Plato of Marburg. What rather seems to be the case, as it should become clear in this chapter, is that what Heidegger identifies in Plato's philosophy as unprecedented and extremely influential mistakes is what we find in sometimes slightly different and sometimes strikingly similar forms in the praiseful interpretation and appropriation of Plato

¹ While I take this to be a quite uncontroversial point, it has been recently documented anew by Truwant (2022).

by Marburg Neo-Kantians like Natorp, Cohen, and Cassirer. The clearest and most evident case of this is the interpretation of Forms as laws governing thinking, and in particular, logical and propositional thinking. My contention is that if, as I argue, Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger propose new reactivations of Platonism to respond to Heidegger, these reactivations cannot follow the Platonism of Marburg Neo-Kantianism to their ultimate conclusions. At the same time, it is also clear that there are important traces of a Neo-Kantian heritage in the way Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger understood Plato, most notably the Neo-Kantian refusal to understand Platonic Forms as beings, things, or substances. The purpose of this chapter is to present Marburg Neo-Kantian Platonism in order to identify the features that are exposed to Heideggerian criticism, those that anticipate, escape, or avoid it, and those that will be taken up and transformed by Gadamer, Strauss, and Krüger.

The whole project of this Neo-Kantian Marburg Platonism is to show that Plato's *Ideenlehre* is the true origin of transcendental idealism. The crux of this interpretation is that the Platonic Ideas are not immaterial transcendent substances but rather transcendental functions or laws of thinking. While Kant distinguished between the categories of understanding (*Verstand*) and the ideas of reason (*Vernunft*) and praised Plato for his enthusiastic discovery of the latter, Marburg Neo-Kantians ascribed to Platonic Ideas the transcendental role played by the Kantian categories of understanding.² Although it was first articulated by Herman Cohen in an 1878 essay on Plato and mathematics, this view was fully developed by Paul Natorp in his *Platos Ideenlehre*, first published in 1903. The distinction between substantialism and functionalism, upon which the whole project rested and which is so characteristic of this Neo-Kantian Platonism, was further explained and

² Kant, KrV, A313-319/B370-375. Ultimately Kant thinks that Platonic Ideas are a good model for *practical* philosophy, not epistemology. For a good discussion of Kant's reading of Plato in relation to his Marburg epigones, see especially Laks 2003, 18-20.

elaborated by Ernst Cassirer in his 1910's *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff*. In section 1, I identify and explain three phases of Cohen's attempt to disentangle Platonic Ideas from ontology, setting out the functionalist paradigm thanks to which the theory of Ideas could be understood as an epistemological methodology. In section 2, I discuss the major contribution to such an account: Natorp's *Platos Ideenlehre*. Section 3 is devoted to Cassirer's interpretation of Plato. In the concluding section of this chapter, I identify key aspects of this Neo-Kantian *Ideenlehre* that will be explicitly appropriated or rejected by Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger.

1.1 Against Ontology: Hermann Cohen's *Ideenlehre*

1.1.1 *Ideas Psychologized (1866)*

Hermann Cohen attempted to offer an account of Plato's theory of Ideas for the first time in 1866. "The Platonic Theory of Forms Psychologically Developed" was originally published in the *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* and testifies to Cohen's early adherence to the type of psychology theorized by Moritz Lazarus and Heymann Steinthal.³ This *Völkerpsychologie* attempts to identify and explain the conditions of possibility of psychological or spiritual or mental (*geistige*) events, including scientific discoveries. Yet according to *Völkerpsychologie*, these conditions are found neither in the permanent structures of a transcendental subject,⁴ nor in any given individual subject. What is needed is a broader, collective conception of psychology, one that understands the psyche as thoroughly shaped by the historical, cultural, religious, linguistic conditions of a given people.⁵

³ See Lembeck 1994, 23-24 and Edgar 2020, esp. 256-264. Translations of Cohen, "Die platonische Ideenlehre psychologisch entwickelt," *Schriften zur Philosophie und Zeitgeschichte* I, 30 (hereafter SPhZ I) are my own.

⁴ See KrV, A80-81/B106-107, where Kant argues that Aristotle's categories were always subject to change because they proceed from an induction and not a (transcendental) deduction.

⁵ Laks (2003, 20) speaks of a "psychologie' élargie."

Thus, Cohen first approaches the theory of Ideas by trying to account for its *discovery* by Plato. According to the young Cohen, a discovery (*Entdeckung*) is the result of both *a priori* and *a posteriori* elements. The given state of scientific thought (along with its general cultural environment) represents the *a posteriori* aspect, but this *Stoff* can only give rise to a genuine discovery if it is synthesized *a priori* by the activity of a genius thinker (*That der Genius*): “But every discovery, albeit prepared historically through a posteriori knowledge material (*Wissenstoff*), ultimately arises from an *a priori* combination, only in this way is it a *psychic process*.”⁶

Accordingly, Plato’s discovery of the Ideas is understood by Cohen as a particular synthesis of different aspects of Pre-Platonic thought, Athenian cultural production and Greek language.⁷ The crucial aspect of Pre-Platonic thought is the Socratic concept (εἶδος, *Begriff*), but Cohen thinks that the discovery would not have been possible if it weren’t for the creative vision characteristic of Greek art.⁸ Artistic vision is what Plato synthesizes with Socratic εἶδος in order to discover the ἰδέα.⁹ Here we see how important the mediation of Greek language is in Plato’s *a priori* combination (and are thus reminded of the fact that the psychology of discovery is a *Völkerpsychologie*). The shift from εἶδος to ἰδέα, Cohen argues, is, first of all, an intensification of the degree to which the idea is the object of a *seeing* (*Schauen*): “the verb ἰδεῖν underlies more clearly ἰδέα than εἶδος.”¹⁰ Of course, he immediately specifies that this is not a perceptual but an intellectual seeing, a “Schauen im Gedanken” or a “denkende Betrachtung.”¹¹ Thus the notion of Idea is supposed to capture a

⁶ SPhZ I, 30: “Jede Entdeckung aber, so sehr sie durch den aposteriorischen Wissensstoff geschichtlich vorbereitet ist, entspringt doch ihrem letzten Grunde nach aus einer apriorischen Combination, nur so ist sie – ein *psychischer Prozeß*.”

⁷ Lembeck 1994, 30.

⁸ Laks (2003, 21) puts it well: “Dès lors, l’opération platonicienne, décrite en termes de processus psychologique, consiste à féconder le champ de la philosophie à l’aide d’une catégorie, celle de la vision créatrice, empruntée au champ de la production artistique.”

⁹ See esp. SPhZ I, 52.

¹⁰ SPhZ I, 59: “Zudem lag in ἰδέα mehr noch als in εἶδος und deutlicher das Verbum ἰδεῖν zu Grunde.” Lembeck (1994, 31-2) has well argued that this is dubious, both linguistically (the two words equally stem from the aorist form of ὁράω) and textually (the *corpus platonikum* displays both εἶδος and ἰδέα in close relation with βλέπειν).

¹¹ SPhZ I, 53.

creative (*schöpferisch*) element, specifically, the “living thinking activity of seeing” (*die lebendige Denkhätigkeit des Schauens*).¹² Indeed, the generality of the concept that Cohen ascribes to the word εἶδος has little to do with the creative activity of an intellectual seeing.

But while the concept is allegedly impersonal and objective, it is not clear that the same thing can be said of the thinking-seeing he finds in the ἰδέα. Cohen in fact writes: “every Idea is a νοήμα in the soul, a way of thinking, an intellectual intuition that is shaped through the soul.”¹³ Accordingly, the things’ participation in an Idea signifies nothing else than the fact that they have the possibility of being seen by such intellectual intuition.¹⁴ Such formulation emphasizes the subject’s construction of the ἰδέα, and it betrays Cohen’s early commitment to what he will subsequently refer to as the mistake of “subjective idealism.”¹⁵ Cohen’s early commitment to subjective idealism can only be understood in light of the dilemma he then thinks he is facing: either the Idea is a subjective act of seeing, or it is an eternal being or essence, a complete substance (*ewiges Wesen, complete Substanz*).¹⁶ Cohen prefers subjective idealism to a dogmatism of substance, and thus advocates for his subjective interpretation. Given this strict alternative, if Plato were to err, he could only do so by turning the Ideas into substances.¹⁷ And Cohen thinks that the reason why most interpreters of the *Ideenlehre* – starting with Aristotle – have thought of the Ideas as eternal transcendent substances is that Plato, alas, succumbed to the temptation of objectifying the Ideas.¹⁸

¹² SPhZ I, 60-61. Cf. SPhZ I, 65: “lebendige Action des Schauens.”

¹³ SPhZ I, 66. “jede Idee [ist] ein νοήμα in der Seele, eine Denkart, eine durch die Seele gebildete gedankliche Anschauung.” Cf. SPhZ I, 67: “Als absolute Anschauung gefaßt ist die Idee nur einmal vorhanden, so oft sie auch durch das Denken wiederhold wird. Absolut heißt aber: in der Seele *erzeugt*” (my emphasis).

¹⁴ SPhZ I, 67: “das Teilnehmen (μέτεχειν) der Dinge an der Idee nichts Anderes bedeutet als: die Dinge unterliegen der Möglichkeit, angeschaut zu werden, Anschauungsformen zu offenbaren [...]”

¹⁵ Cohen, “Die platonische Ideenlehre und die Mathematik,” 10 (hereafter PIM). While Cohen does not say *explicitly* that he was guilty of such subjective idealism in 1866, I agree with Laks (2003, 28) that his 1878 description of the erroneous position corresponds to his previous argument.

¹⁶ SPhZ I, 54.

¹⁷ His later approach to Plato will reject the view that these are the two only possibilities, as explained below.

¹⁸ Cohen supports this early view with an interpretation of *Parmenides* concerning the question of the existence of Forms “in souls” (ἐν ψυχαῖς). See esp. SPhZ I, 66 and 72. To my knowledge, Cohen will not reinterpret the *Parmenides* afterwards. Only Natorp will provide an interpretation of this dialogue that is compatible with critical idealism.

This very aversion to a metaphysics of substance is the running thread of all Marburg Neo-Kantian interpretations. Cohen will never abandon it, and it will also be embraced by Natorp and Cassirer. Cohen will be able to revise his interpretation by realizing that the problem he encounters in 1866 is a false dilemma: between subjective idealism and a metaphysics of substance, *tertium datur*. This third way is, unsurprisingly, the way of critical idealism.

There is one aspect to Cohen's early interpretation that already suggests a third way: the Idea of the Good resists Plato's alleged transformation of Forms into substances. Cohen thinks that Plato comes to this Idea by asking the question of the unity of the different Ideas: "die Einheit der Ideen ist die Idee des Guten."¹⁹ It is not clear that he deems this as part of the process of substantializing the Ideas, since he never claims that the Good is a substance or an existing thing, but rather sees in it the idea of purpose, which he connects immediately to the purposiveness (*Zweckmäßigkeit*) of Kant's Third Critique.²⁰ So, despite Plato's alleged transformation of Ideas into substances, the "original character of the Idea" is to be seen in the Idea of the Good, which is a regulative concept for the reflective power of judgment.²¹ Like the *Ideen* well understood – that is, as a constitutive concept of reason²², the Good has a transcendental function: "Without a view of the purpose, no knowledge (Ohne Zweckbetrachtung, keine Erkenntniß)."²³ The Good is thus redeemed from Cohen's critique of the alleged substantializing of the Ideas, for if it is beyond being (*ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας*, *Rep.* 509b), it cannot be a being, a substance.²⁴

¹⁹ SPhZ I, 74.

²⁰ SPhZ I, 74. See Lembeck 1994, 39-40.

²¹ SPhZ I, 75.

²² SPhZ I, 75: "als ein constitutiver Begriff der Vernunft." Here, Cohen cannot mean "Begriff" in the sense of the Socratic "Begriff" that, he thinks, Plato overcomes.

²³ SPhZ I, 77.

²⁴ SPhZ I, 77.

1.1.2 Υποθέμενος: A New Functionalist Paradigm (1878)

Cohen's idealism drastically changes once he abandons psychologism.²⁵ This is because the strict alternative between subjective idealism and dogmatic metaphysics does not hold for him anymore: he now sees the third way of critical idealism. In his 1878 essay entitled "The Platonic Theory of Form and Mathematics,"²⁶ Cohen tries to show that Plato's *Ideenlehre* is critical idealism *avant la lettre* by interpreting the Ideas as hypotheses, and the theory of Ideas as the hypothetical-deductive method. Since this is the main shift between Cohen's two interpretations, as well as the matrix of Natorp's following interpretation, I shall focus on this and leave many of Cohen's remarks undiscussed.

Cohen's task is to "access to the theory of Ideas" by turning to the question: "to which place do mathematical objects belong in the ranking and order of being?"²⁷ He recalls that Aristotle has said that they stand somewhere in between the Ideas and the perceptible things.²⁸ And whereas Cohen thinks this can set us on the right path – and will ultimately agree with Aristotle on *this* specific statement,²⁹ the Aristotelian view comes along with the χωρισμός of the Ideas. We are immediately warned that such drastic separation is Aristotle's own deed and is in itself foreign to Plato's authentic understanding of the Ideas.³⁰ Let us note here that Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger all agree that the Aristotelian reading of the Forms is flawed and that a complete separation between Forms and the perceptual world is to be rejected. In light of Heidegger's way of

²⁵ Lembeck (1994, 43) claims that Cohen turns away from psychologism in 1877 at the latest. If this is correct, this would mean that the 1878 essay on Plato represents one of the first testimony of this intellectual shift.

²⁶ Translations of "Platos Ideenlehre und die Mathematik" are my own.

²⁷ PIM, 6-7: "Es möchte daher von vornherein nicht ungeeignet scheinen zu versuchen, ob nicht von der Frage der Eingang zur Ideenlehre zu gewinnen sei: *welchen Platz gemäss derselben die mathematischen Dinge in der Reihe und Ordnung des Seienden einnehmen?*" (emphasis in the original)

²⁸ PIM, 7.

²⁹ Cf. PIM, 31. Yet Cohen does not need Aristotle's help in this respect, since the analogy of the Line at the end of Book VI of the *Republic* already indicates this in-between quite clearly (*Rep.* 509d-511e).

³⁰ PIM, 9-10.

approaching Plato through Aristotle’s lens, Gadamer’s emphasis that the “two-world” Platonism is the invention of Aristotle has Cohenian resonances.

The χωρισμός-thesis, Cohen thinks, is the logical conclusion of an interpretation of the ἰδέα as a being that is independent from thinking.³¹ Mathematics can be instructive about the right way of understanding the “thought-conditioned character of the Idea (*Bedingtheit der Idee durch das Denken*),”³² because Plato’s reflections on mathematical reasoning emphasize the use of hypotheses and explain how this specific use differs from what we find in dialectical reasoning. Cohen recalls the analogy of the Line at the end of *Republic* VI. In the first section of the intelligible side of the Line (where τὰ μαθηματικά belong), the soul proceeds from hypotheses (ἐξ ὑποθέσεων) toward an end or conclusion and not toward a principle (οὐκ ἐπ’ ἀρχὴν πορευομένη ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ τελευτήν). In the second and highest section of the Line, it proceeds from hypotheses toward an unhypothetical principle (ἐπ’ ἀρχὴν ἀνυπόθετον), making its way by and through Ideas only (αὐτοῖς εἴδεσι δι’ αὐτῶν τὴν μέθοδον ποιουμένη, 510b).³³ Cohen first notes that the theory of Forms is here presented as a philosophical *method* (μέθοδος). He then points to the fact that going from Ideas through Ideas also works ἐξ ὑποθέσεως, and ventures to conclude: “*The Idea itself is thought as hypothesis.*”³⁴

Cohen then turns to the *Phaedo* to support this daring view. In the autobiographical passage, Socrates explains how his turn to the λόγοι came with the hypothesis of Ideas: looking for causes, he began with “that which he posited as a hypothesis (ὑποθέμενος),” namely “that there is a beautiful in itself, as well as a good, a large, and the like (εἶναι τι καλὸν αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ καὶ ἀγαθὸν

³¹ PIM, 9. Cohen emphasizes the word “unabhängig”.

³² PIM, 11.

³³ PIM, 24. Note that Cohen here translates εἶδος by *Idee*. This does not mean that he is blurring his εἶδος-ἰδέα distinction. Rather, he thinks (as Natorp will after him) that there is a Socratic use and a Platonic use of εἶδος (as well as a non-technical use, where εἶδος can mean “visible form,” “type,” “species,” etc.). In the Platonic use, εἶδος and ἰδέα both mean *Idee* and not *Begriff*. Cohen translates ἐπ’ ἀρχὴν ἀνυπόθετον by “zu einem *undedingten Anfange*” (emphasis in the original).

³⁴ PIM, 26 (emphasis in the original).

καὶ μέγα καὶ τὰλλα πάντα, 100b).” Cohen claims that the Idea is characterized “in the clearest terms (*in deutlichsten Worten*)” as hypothesis. He then adds, in apparent support to that claim, that Socrates claims later in the dialogue that the theory of Ideas is the “most certain (*sichere*) hypothesis”.³⁵

We face here an important ambiguity in Cohen’s argument. To be sure, Socrates does refer to a solid or safe hypothesis (τοῦ ἀσφαλοῦς τῆς ὑποθέσεως, 101d), but it is not immediately clear from the passage and its context what this hypothesis is.³⁶ Cohen claims that it is the *Ideenlehre*, but right before he has said that the Idea itself was the hypothesis. These two claims are treated by Cohen as though they mean the same thing, but this is highly implausible. In fact, most critiques of Cohen’s interpretation of Plato are leveled at this problem.³⁷ To posit or to make the hypothesis that *there are Ideas* is evidently not the same as saying that *the Ideas are hypotheses*. One can very well hypothesize that there are Ideas, meaning by Ideas eternal substances, unmoved and immovable, identical with themselves, etc. In fact, the act of hypothesis does not necessarily make the content of the hypothesis hypothetical too; it rather renders its existence hypothetical. This seems to be the meaning of Socrates’ words quoted above, since, in all likelihood, the ὑποθέμενος refers to the εἶναι of the Ideas. And whereas it is perhaps possible to make the hypothesis that there are hypotheses, nowhere does Socrates say that this is what he is doing.

It is thus unclear why Cohen authorizes himself to conflate the two different claims. But we may still ask why he could be entitled to think that the Ideas are themselves hypotheses. As we

³⁵ PIM, 27.

³⁶ Cohen refers to 100a-b, 101d and 107b. Whereas in 100a-b, it is pretty clear the hypotheses have to do with the Ideas, and whereas the referent at 101d-e is uncertain, Cohen could be right to assume that Socrates is still referring to the Ideas. However, he also quotes the “first hypotheses [*ὑποθέσεις τὰς πρώτας*]” of 107b, which could very well refer to the first hypotheses of the *Phaedo*, namely that the soul exists before and independently of the body (92d) and that the soul is a harmony (93c, 94b). Whether intentionally or not, Cohen silences these 3 occurrences of ὑποθέσις and its cognates, which has the convenient effect of removing this ambiguity.

³⁷ See Lembeck (1994, 90-94) and Laks (2003, 31-32).

mentioned, Cohen’s first textual support is the difficult passage from *Republic* VI.³⁸ Perhaps even more decisive than his reference to 510b is the passage at 511b, where Plato claims that the power of dialectic, as opposed to that of *διάνοια*, consists in “making the hypotheses not principles but really hypotheses (τὰς ὑποθέσεις ποιούμενος οὐκ ἀρχὰς ἀλλὰ τῷ ὄντι ὑποθέσεις).”³⁹ And given that dialectic tries to make its way from these hypotheses toward “that which is unhypothetical and the principle of the whole (τοῦ ἀνυποθέτου ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ παντὸς ἀρχὴν),” Cohen could *perhaps* be right in thinking that, except for the Idea of the Good, all Ideas are in fact hypotheses.⁴⁰

Whether he is right or not in treating the Ideas as hypotheses, Cohen’s claim is crucial in his understanding of Platonism as critical idealism: “Now the Idea, proven to be hypothesis on the basis of textual evidence, is not to be understood purely psychologically: in it is found the spine of the critique of theoretical knowledge (*der Stachel erkenntnisstheoretischer Kritik*).”⁴¹ Being is here understood as being-thought (*νοητόν*), and vice versa. If the Ideas are hypotheses, they are not substances but the posits of thought that are necessary for the possibility of scientific knowledge. Thus, Platonic mathematical reasoning is to science what dialectic is to Neo-Kantian *Erkenntnistheorie*: the latter two embrace the hypothetical method but supervene its scientific use by treating it as it is, namely, as hypothetical. Philosophy’s task is not to grasp beings that are beyond

³⁸ I must here disagree with Laks (2003, 31), who claims that the passage from the *Phaedo* is the most important one. I think that the *Republic* gives more grist to Cohen’s mill in the 1878 essay.

³⁹ At 510b, the grammatical difference between Plato’s treatments of mathematical and dialectical reasoning leaves more room for interpretation: whereas mathematical thought works from hypotheses (*ἐξ ὑποθέσεων*), dialectic works from an apparently single hypothesis (*ἐξ ὑποθέσεως*). If Ideas were hypotheses (as, say, geometrical axioms are hypotheses), would it not imply that dialectic’s path from forms through forms (*αὐτοῖς εἶδεσι δι’ αὐτῶν*) is *ἐξ ὑποθέσεων* (or perhaps even *διὰ ὑποθέσεων*) instead of working from *one* hypothesis? A plausible interpretation of this difference could be that mathematical reasoning is only possible on the basis of many hypotheses whereas dialectical reasoning only proceeds from one hypothesis (i.e., the theory of Ideas, the view that *there are Ideas*). Yet this appears in tension with 511b.

⁴⁰ However, it could be argued that the plural use of *ὑποθέσεις* here refers to both the many principles of mathematical reasonings and to the theory of Ideas. For dialectic considers *as hypotheses* the hypotheses that the mathematician considers as principles, and may use them as steppingstones. (Similarly, *διάνοια* makes use of images and not just mathematical realities – see 510d-e). This or similar interpretive strategy would have the advantage of treating the passages from the *Phaedo* and the *Republic* more harmoniously.

⁴¹ PIM, 27 (emphasis in the original).

the objects of scientific knowledge, but rather to examine scientific knowledge and its logical principles.⁴²

Yet this strictly methodological approach to the Platonic Ideas appears to contradict what Plato says about the ultimate aim of dialectic. Whereas the Idea of the Good did not represent a difficulty for Cohen's 1866 interpretation, it becomes an important challenge for the new understanding of the Ideas as hypotheses. Whereas Cohen's early interpretation discerned a failure on Plato's part in the tendency to substantialize the Ideas, here it is the Good that reveals the limit of Plato's philosophizing (*die Schranke von Platons Philosophieren*).⁴³ Plato considered the Good as ἀνυπόθετον because he wished not to *explain* science's hypotheses, but to overcome (*Ueberwinden*) them. Cohen claims that the motive for such overcoming was to "consolidate Ethics (die Ethik zu befestigen)," allegedly by refusing to ground it on the hypothetical method.⁴⁴

1.1.3 *The Good Reconsidered (1908)*

Cohen comes back to the problem of the Good in the first chapter of his *Charakteristik der Ethik Maimunis* (1908). There, he appears as a defender of the ἰδέα του αγαθού.⁴⁵ Significantly, between the 1878 essay and this book, Natorp's gigantic *Platos Ideenlehre* (1903) was published. It is all the

⁴² PIM, 29-30. Cf. Dussort 1963, 114: "ce n'est donc pas l'Idée qui est posée comme 'existant véritablement', mais le phénomène bien-fondé; l'Idée 'est' ce qui permet de le fonder. En termes plus modernes, l'Idée est Méthode : celle du savant, qui part du sensible pour en 'poser' la loi, et celle du philosophe, qui part des résultats scientifiques pour en 'poser' les conditions suprêmes de possibilité" Laks (2003, 32) suggests that the interpretation of the Ideas as scientific hypotheses compromises their fixed, atemporal character: "l'hypothèse scientifique, dans le sens où Cohen la considère, est en effet par sa définition révisable en fonction des données prises en considération et de l'évolution des cadres théoriques." As I argue in the second part of this chapter, this 'temporalization' of the Platonic Ideas is clearer and more obvious in Natorp's interpretation.

⁴³ PIM, 28.

⁴⁴ PIM, 30.

⁴⁵ Cohen, "Socrates and Plato. Founders of Ethics," *Ethics of Maimonides*, trans. A. Sh. Bruckstein (hereafter SP, followed by paragraph and page numbers). To my knowledge, interpreters of Marburg Platonism have not paid attention to this text. Given that Cohen's position on the Good seemed to have changed again, and given that this text was read very carefully by Leo Strauss (in his "Cohen und Maimuni", 1931), it deserves to be briefly discussed.

more significant that we find in Cohen's last words on the subject no genuine trace of Natorp's interpretation of the Good.

If the Good can be truly known, Cohen says, it must be an Idea. Yet, Ideas are hypotheses. Therefore, the "grave" problem of Plato's *Ideenlehre* is "is the Good admissible as an Idea?"⁴⁶ Given this problem, the Good "deserves as hypothesis a preferential terminology," namely that of "sufficient" hypothesis (ἰκανόν) – which is, Cohen thinks, the real meaning of the ἀν- prefix in ἀνυπόθετον. It is sufficient in the sense that it is the "telos or end of reason."⁴⁷ It now seems that Plato did not err by setting the Good beyond hypothesis and beyond being. Cohen is indeed rather enthusiastic and praiseful:

Whereas all other scientific hypotheses are predicated upon prior hypothetical propositions, the hypothesis of the Good constitutes its own ultimate ground, closing the cycle of reason. The non-foundation must be considered the ultimate rock-bottom ground of all grounding. Ethics is to be removed from any relativism, even from that which is part and parcel of the methodology of all scientific investigation.⁴⁸

The Good beyond being "separates ethics and logic,"⁴⁹ and we seem authorized to say that it establishes the supremacy of the former over the latter. In the latter part of this chapter, Cohen criticizes Aristotle for scorning the Idea of the Good, accusing him of being oblivious to this primacy and centrality of ethics for philosophy.⁵⁰ Cohen's initial praise for the Idea of the good, momentarily lost between 1866 and 1908, comes back, albeit in a slightly different form. It is now ethics more than aesthetics that secures and justifies Plato's grandiose conceptualization of the Good. We can now turn to Natorp's Platonism to see how it furthers Cohen's emphasis on the

⁴⁶ SP, §14, 8.

⁴⁷ SP, §18, 11.

⁴⁸ SP, §20, 11-12.

⁴⁹ SP, §22, 14.

⁵⁰ The polemic runs from §24 to §29.

hypothetical character of Forms while rejecting the ethical interpretation of the hiatus between the Good and the other Ideas.

1.2 Paul Natorp's Functionalist Interpretation of Platonic Forms

Natorp's *Plato's Theory of Forms: An Introduction to Idealism* (1903) is the major contribution to Marburg Neo-Kantian Platonism. The ambition of the work is gigantic. Through an analysis of twenty dialogues, Natorp aims to show that Plato's theory of Ideas is the birth of idealism, which, in turn, could only be properly understood through the "re-birth of Kantian idealism."⁵¹ The core of the argument follows the anti-ontological interpretation initiated by Cohen but also modifies it uniquely: Ideas are laws (*Gesetze*) and not things (*Dinge*).⁵² This, as we shall see, should not be understood as a rejection but rather as a further determination of Cohen's understanding of the Ideas as hypotheses.

Natorp thinks that the theory of Ideas represents the core of Plato's philosophy. Plato's writing, he thinks, is all about philosophical doctrines (which find their unity and end in the doctrine of the Ideas), even if they are sometimes "dressed up as myths (*in mythisch-dichterischer Einkleidung*)."⁵³ More specifically, the literary character of Plato's works should be understood as a "consequence of a certain obscurity (*einer gewissen Unabgeklärtheit*) in the thoughts," which thus find an "unusual expression."⁵⁴ Natorp's clear remarks on this matter retrospectively reveal something that was already at work in Cohen's Plato and that will be important in Neo-Kantian Platonism: the focus

⁵¹ Natorp, *Platos Ideenlehre. Eine Einführung in den Idealismus* (hereafter PI), vi. I use Politis' English translation unless otherwise noted but always refer to the German pagination of Natorp's book.

⁵² Of course, Cohen does not think Ideas are things, but neither does he interpret them exactly as laws. Natorp acknowledges explicitly his debt to Cohen (PI, vi): "I would not hesitate to declare Hermann Cohen as the scholar who opened our eyes as much to Kant as to Plato."

⁵³ PI, 60.

⁵⁴ PI, 76.

on metaphysics and epistemology comes along with neglect and depreciation of other themes, and especially with a neglect of Plato's poetic and dialogical writing, that is, without giving much consideration to *how* Plato presents his metaphysics.⁵⁵ This, as we shall show in chapter 2, is also characteristic of Heidegger's subsequent interpretations. This approach, which dissociates the form of Plato's writings from the content of Platonic philosophy, is completely at odds with the Platonism of Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger. To be sure, Natorp's systematization of the Platonic dialogues into a unified and unifying theory is part of the attempt, encouraged by Kant himself, to understand Plato "better than he understood himself."⁵⁶ While this is certainly a problem for Straussian and Gadamerian hermeneutic method,⁵⁷ the most important issue in Natorp's systematizing effort is its inability to understand the dialogical element of Plato as more than a mode of presentation and to reflect on the potential meaning of a dialogical philosophizing. The path of Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger is precisely an articulation of this potential meaning.

1.2.1 *Ideas as Laws*

Boiled down to the *Ideenlehre*, Plato's philosophy is an idealism defined by the "unconditional sovereignty of the principle of method [*unbedingte Souveränität des Gesetzes der Methode*]."⁵⁸ In fact, Natorp claims that dialectic is the fundamental "science of method."⁵⁹ This method is characterized by the lawfulness of knowledge. An early step in elaborating it is Natorp's reading of

⁵⁵ I see three exceptions to this rule : 1) Cohen's *early* interpretation (1866) acknowledges the role of poetry and artistic vision *and* Plato's poetic genius (see SPhZ I, 80-81) before silencing it completely afterwards; 2) Natorp's 1920 "Metacritical Appendix" to his *Plato-Buch* weaves the erotics of Platonic writing in his discussion of the *Ideenlehre* (but this much neglected piece is very difficult to follow, and is at times almost mystical in character) ; 3) Cassirer will pay some attention to the aesthetic and political questions in Plato.

⁵⁶ KrV A 314/B 370

⁵⁷ Albeit for different reasons: Strauss famously thinks we should try to understand thinkers as they understood themselves; Gadamer thinks that understanding is always "understanding differently."

⁵⁸ PI, 84.

⁵⁹ PI, 76-7.

the *Charmides*. There, the definition of moderation (σωφροσύνη) coincides with Socrates' concept of self-knowledge.⁶⁰ Distinguishing, within self-knowledge, between the “form and material of knowledge” (respectively, the knowing and the known), Natorp then says that even in self-knowledge, “knowledge is itself something independent, namely, conceived as *consciousness* (Bewußtsein).” Reflecting upon this necessary correlation between knowing and known reveals that knowledge “is the peculiar *lawfulness* (Gesetzlichkeit) according to which consciousness knows.”⁶¹ This lawfulness of consciousness is thus the “form” of knowledge, as opposed to its *Materie*, i.e. any given particular object of knowledge.⁶² But given that the form determines its matter or content, knowledge is “the lawfulness of consciousness, according to which consciousness shapes the object.”⁶³ The lawfulness of knowledge means that “it is, in general, the law that creates (*schafft*) the object in and for knowledge.” Natorp concludes: “this is the ultimate meaning of the ‘idea’.”⁶⁴ This view is restated in the interpretation of the *Gorgias*, where we read that “it is the law, i.e. the unity of thought – the *eidos* or idea – that constitutes (*konstituiert*) objects (τὸ ὄν).”⁶⁵

Why does Natorp call this law a “unity of thought”? Laws are not *in media res* but rather principles that constitute reality. Laws are thought-positings (*Denksetzungen*) and ideas are thus “reduced” to “fundamental positings (*Grundsetzungen*)” of thinking.⁶⁶ Interpreting the *Phaedo*'s second sailing, Natorp calls the “turn to the λόγοι” the turn toward “logic” and the “logical way”: “two ways are contrasted: the attempt to grasp realities or facts (πράγματα or ἔργα) directly as given, viz. given in sense perceptions, which is the dogmatic way of traditional natural science and

⁶⁰ PI, 24.

⁶¹ PI, 27. Emphasis in the original. Natorp writes later that “Bewußtsein” corresponds to the Greek ψυχή, understood as a function and not a substance (PI, 111).

⁶² PI, 27.

⁶³ PI, 28-29.

⁶⁴ PI, 29.

⁶⁵ PI, 50.

⁶⁶ PI, 78; 155.

which left Plato ‘blinded’ (99e; see also 96c); and the novel, logical way, which we may simply call the critical way.”⁶⁷ Λόγοι are identified with Ideas as thought-positings and now with propositions too: “It is in the logical shape of being that the truth of facts is posited in the first place. [...] the ‘facts themselves can only be justified as true by being grounded in fundamental positings or logical ‘principles.’ And hence the λόγοι, in which the truth of the ὄντα is to be founded, are the propositions, the positings peculiar to thought”.⁶⁸ Ideas understood as laws are fundamental propositions that make reality intelligible, and these propositions are posited (*gesetzt*) by thought. Here again we should note how Natorp’s position on the meaning of the second sailing differs from the approach of Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger that I have presented in the introduction. Specifically, what is striking in the case at hand is how Natorp adopts a strictly *logical* and *propositional* interpretation of λόγος and the turn to λόγοι. This reading is relatively original insofar as most commentators read the second sailing as a turn to Forms or the method of hypothesis.⁶⁹ But in the light of Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger, it mostly appears as an obstruction of the dialogical by the logical, or a reduction of the dialogical to the logical (although Natorp does not really consider dialogue as such). What should also be noted is that this reduction of the dialogical to the logical and the propositional is also characteristic of Heidegger’s reading of Plato, as it will appear clearly in the next chapter. The difference here is that while Heidegger criticizes the “logical prejudice”⁷⁰ that Platonic dialectic presupposes, Natorp instead interprets it as proto-Kantian critical idealism and embraces it. From a Heideggerian perspective, we could thus see in Natorp a genuine follower

⁶⁷ PI, 153.

⁶⁸ PI, 154: “In ihr [die logische Gestalt des Seins] ist die Wahrheit der Tatsache allererst gesetzt. [...] die »Tatsachen« selbst sind als wahr allein zu rechtfertigen durch die Begründung in den fundamentalen Setzungen, den logischen »Grund-Sätzen«. Die logoi also, in denen die Wahrheit der ontia zu gründen, sind die Sätze, die eignen Setzungen des Denkens.”

⁶⁹ Cf. section 1.2 of Introduction.

⁷⁰ This expression comes from Daniel O. Dahlstrom (2001).

of Platonism, that is, a philosopher who repeats one of the most fundamental “mistake” of metaphysics as initiated by Plato.

1.2.2 *Ideas and Laws as Hypotheses*

We are now in a better position to understand why Ideas as laws are also hypotheses. Just like laws and propositions, hypotheses are *posited* by thought. Natorp indeed translates, from the *Phaedo*, ὑποθέμενος as “ich setze als Fundament” and its root, τίθημι, as “Ich setze.”⁷¹ Natorp clarifies the ambiguity we find in Cohen’s interpretation concerning *what* is being hypothesized – the Ideas themselves or the *Ideenlehre*: “Plato’s first hypothesis is not only that there are ideas, it is that the ideas themselves are hypotheses.”⁷² While he does not provide textual support in favor of this solution, the understanding of hypothesis as *Denksetzung* makes the identification of two different kinds of hypotheses - the theory of Ideas and the Ideas themselves – somewhat unproblematic. Indeed, the potential difficulty of having to understand the fact that there are Ideas as being itself an Idea (since hypotheses and Ideas are the same) will be solved by Natorp’s interpretation of the Good.

The hypothetical character of the Ideas must not be misunderstood as connoting a sense of skepticism, improbability or uncertainty. For these laws are posited by thought, but certainly not by any (or each) particular subjective thought. The creative ἰδεῖν which formulates and posits a law is by no means the “*Ich schaue*” of Cohen’s 1866 subjectivist interpretation. For if that was the case, Plato’s theory would collapse on Protagoras’ relativistic view that “man is the measure of all

⁷¹ PI, 154.

⁷² PI, 155. This is what Natorp calls Plato’s “first hypothesis” in the *Phaedo* – yet, as mentioned above, this first hypothesis likely concerns the soul, not the Ideas.

things.”⁷³ Natorp’s idealism is all but a relativism. In fact, the model he has in mind is Newtonian laws, which “represent the purer fulfillment of the logical requirement that Plato did not totally succeed in formulating in the *Phaedo*.”⁷⁴ Although Newton’s unique genius was necessary for *him* to formulate his principles, the law of inertia is certainly not his own subjective creation; it is posited by thought, and Newton was the historical-empirical expression of such a thought-positing.

But while these laws are not implausible or dubious, they are neither dogmatic propositions about reality. The hypothetical character of the Idea as law is revealed by Natorp’s language: “Only Newton’s laws, *or whatever may yet take their place as an even more radical expression of what is sought* [...]”⁷⁵ If the model for understanding the Ideas as hypotheses is the notion of scientific law, then the principle of falsifiability is what accounts for their hypothetical character. Newton’s laws are not simply the expression of Newton’s mind because they could have been discovered by another genius and because they may be replaced by better laws. They should neither be looked at with a skeptical eye, nor taken as expressions of the natural world viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*. Ideas are not dogmatic propositions about being, but revisable laws that represent an eternal task for human thought.⁷⁶ Natorp then explains why, despite the importance of empirical observations, these laws are not empirically grounded. Recalling Kant’s words, he claims that it is rather the laws of Platonic idealism that are “capable of grounding the ‘possibility of experience’.”⁷⁷ But by insisting on the falsifiable character of laws, Natorp introduces in his transcendental interpretation of the Ideas something that appears foreign to both Plato and Kant. For Plato’s Ideas are eternal and

⁷³ Cf. PI, 104, 108-109.

⁷⁴ PI, 162.

⁷⁵ PI, 162: “Erst die Newtonschen Gesetze, *oder was je als noch radikalerer Ausdruck des Gesuchten an deren Stelle treten mag*” (my emphasis).

⁷⁶ PI, 399: “the process of determining the *x* of experience by means of pure thought is an infinite task” – cf. PI, 411. On the Idea of the Good as an *undendliche Aufgabe*, see PI, 532. Cf. Mittelstrass 1962, 31 and Kim 2010, 86-7

⁷⁷ PI, 163.

immutable, and Kant does not seem to think that the categories of understanding can be revised.⁷⁸ But Natorp's view implies that the transcendental structure that the Ideas represent is susceptible of diachronic change. We find in *Platos Ideenlehre* one of the first attempts to temporalize the Platonic Ideas.⁷⁹

But if Ideas ground the possibility of experience (and not *vice versa*), and remain themselves hypotheses, we may ask what grounds the validity of these thought-positings. Or, to put it differently, and try to elucidate one of the still unclarified notions mentioned above: what is the *method* of Ideas? In short, Natorp answers that “it is the method of deduction.”⁸⁰ The deductive method secures the validity of the Ideas by confirming the *logical coherence* between the diverse hypotheses: “The fundamental positings in thought justify themselves by the establishment of their internal deductive coherence with one another.” In its way “downwards,” the deduction reveals a failure in *Denksetzung* if the presupposition “betray[s] itself through contradiction in the consequences, contradiction namely in relation to knowledge that is otherwise secure.”⁸¹ However, such a method implies that there is an ultimate presupposition that does not need further grounding. Natorp admits this and will address the question of this ultimate founding when dealing with the question of the Good.

1.2.3 *Participation as Subsumption and Predication*

Understanding Ideas as laws, Natorp has a convenient solution to the otherwise difficult problem of the things' participation (μέθεξις, *Teilhabe*) in the Ideas. “Participation means quite simply the

⁷⁸ See *supra*, note 4.

⁷⁹ Cf. Kim 2010, 87.

⁸⁰ PI, 157.

⁸¹ PI, 157.

relationship of a case to a law – the fact that the case is logically subsumed under a law, or simply subsumption.”⁸² This is intuitive when we think of empirical observations and scientific laws, a model that Natorp cherishes: a motion X “participates” in the law or Idea of inertia insofar as such law “obtains,” i.e. if the motion remains straight and at a constant speed until it is acted upon by a force. As for Plato’s use of strange or hyperbolic language to describe participation (e.g. the *παρουσία* of the Ideas; the *κοινωνία* with Ideas, etc.), Natorp assures us that it is merely metaphorical, “for every verbal expression of pure abstraction is a metaphor.”⁸³ But even if we grant Natorp’s metaphorical interpretation of participation as well as his view that participation means subsumption of a case under a law, this explanation becomes less evident when we look, not at scientific laws of nature anymore, but at Plato’s privileged examples of Ideas, namely the Good, the Beautiful, the Just, etc. For instance, how should we understand the subsumption of something under the “law of the Beautiful”?

Answering this question leads us to Natorp’s alternate (yet not substantially different) explanation of *μέθεξις*. We should here recall the identification of Ideas with *λόγοι*, which, as *Denksatzungen*, are fundamental propositions (*Grund-Sätze*). The solution must be sought in this equation of the Idea as law with the Idea as fundamental proposition. For the “law of the Beautiful” thus understood would not mean anything else than the fundamental proposition(s) about the Beautiful, which Natorp does not hesitate to call the *definition* of the Beautiful. Participation thus becomes an agreement of a given thing to a definition.⁸⁴ Therefore, the logic of participation is not different from the logic of *predication*.⁸⁵ Indeed, to say that a thing x is in agreement with the definition A is simply to predicate A of x ; in the judgment “ x is A ,” the fundamental proposition or

⁸² PI, 155.

⁸³ PI, 155.

⁸⁴ PI, 155-6.

⁸⁵ See also 235: “Die Teilhabe bedeutet die Prädikation”

judgment (“*A* is such and such”) is nothing else than the definition of *A*.⁸⁶ The predication “*x* is *A*” is equivalent to *x*’s participation in the Idea *A*.

The reduction of the Idea to the definition through this propositional-predicative interpretation of participation, while it was prefigured in the interpretation of the second sailing as the turn to logic, is certainly a *tour de force*. But the question of whether Natorp is still following Plato’s text should not distract us from the immediate consequence of this twofold explanation of μέθεξις.⁸⁷ For μέθεξις in the Ideas is the conceptual counterpart to the χωρισμός (*Sonderung, Absonderung*) of the Ideas, and interpreting one also means interpreting the other. Like Cohen, Natorp, in fact, rejects vehemently the thesis of a radical separation between empirical things and the Ideas. In a violent polemic against Aristotle (to whom the two last chapters of *Platos Ideenlehre* are devoted), he claims that only a substantialist understanding of the Ideas like the Aristotelian could introduce the notion of a real separation.⁸⁸ Naturally, there is a *distinction* between the laws posited by thought and the empirical content that is subsumed under them, but their relation cannot be one of separation.⁸⁹ Natorp will go as far as asserting that the *Symposium* establishes the “immanence” of

⁸⁶ PI, 156.

⁸⁷ An obvious problem with this logical-linguistic interpretation is that it treats the Ideas as definitions. If this was true, we can hardly understand why Plato insists, in *Republic* VI on a distinction between discursive thinking (διάνοια) and the intellectual grasp (νόησις) of the Ideas (510b-511d, cf. 533e-534a), a distinction acknowledged by Natorp (PI, 193-4). See also the *Seventh Letter* (342b-d) on the distinction between the definition (λόγος) of the circle and the knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) of the circle itself (αὐτὸς ὁ κύκλος). The two texts differ with respect to the status of image (εἶδωλον), but the difference between science and definitional grasp is clear in both passages. Ironically, Natorp’s view seems closer to Aristotle’s than Plato’s, for Aristotle argues in the central books of the *Metaphysics* that the εἶδος means λόγος and ὀρισμός (e.g. Δ6, 1016b33, Z12, 1038a25-26).

⁸⁸ E.g. PI, 74-5; 141; 167; 179; 231ff and chapter XI and XII. Importantly, Natorp recognizes that many of Aristotle’s arguments against the theory of Ideas are already presented in Plato’s *Parmenides* (PI, 233).

⁸⁹ On this difference between real/effective and notional/intellectual separations, see especially Fronterotta 2000, 324. Fronterotta sees in Natorpian-Platonic participation the equivalent of transcendental schematism in Kant’s first Critique (2000, 325n20): “Le rapport participative devient en effet dans cette optique la relation que l’intellect établit entre les données sensibles indéterminées et l’unité déterminée des idées, comprises quant à elles comme les catégories *a priori* de l’intellect qui établissent la vérité de la connaissance et du jugement.”

the Ideas, an immanence grounded on the “methodical connection” between Ideas and appearances.⁹⁰

1.2.4 *The Idea of the Good*

If Ideas are not separated from sensible things, how can we make sense of the fact that the Good is “beyond being”? Similarly, if Ideas are hypothetical laws, why does Plato call the Idea of the Good an unhypothetical principle? Like Cohen’s, Natorp’s transcendental interpretation of the *Ideenlehre* cannot avoid these pressing questions.

His solution is already visible in his reading of the *Symposium*. Natorp observes that Diotima shifts from talking about the Beautiful to talking about the Good, as if these Ideas were equivalent (*Symp.* 204e, cf. *Phil.* 64e). He claims that their equivalence is based on the fact that they are not just of “some one idea, but *the* idea, not some one law, but *the* law.”⁹¹ An interesting distinction is nonetheless made between the Good and the Beautiful: “[the good] emphasizes rather fundamental unity itself, in which everything manifold is comprehended and remains preserved; whereas the beautiful emphasizes rather the relation of unity to the manifold, and the way in which this relation produces mutual harmony, and thus satisfaction, in the manifold.”⁹² It is because the Good expresses “unity itself” that it is *the* overarching Idea. Let us note a striking parallel between Natorp’s interpretation of the Good in relation to the Beautiful and Gadamer’s. As I shall show in chapter 7, Gadamer also thinks that the Beautiful represents the relation between the One and the Many, and this is why Beauty plays such a foundational role in his hermeneutic ontology. If Beauty is that in which, as Gadamer thinks, the Good withdraws because it is “absolutely ungraspable,”

⁹⁰ PI, 167; 179.

⁹¹ PI, 176.

⁹² PI, 177-8.

(GW 1, 484) it might be precisely because the Idea of the Good beyond being is “unity itself” and stands too far remote from the Many. Natorp does not give precedence to the Beautiful over the Good as Gadamer does, but this is because he thinks that unity as such has the form of logical lawfulness, something which, as already mentioned, is quite foreign to Gadamer’s understanding of λόγος.

In fact, already in his interpretation of the *Gorgias*, Natorp had determined the “meaning of the good” as “preservation of unity in the midst of change and becoming,” and that such preservation is only made possible through “the lawful.”⁹³ This view comes back in his analysis of the *Republic*. If Ideas in general are laws, the Idea must be the “law of law,” that is, “lawfulness itself (*Gesetzlichkeit selbst*).”⁹⁴ Recall that Ideas as laws ground each other in a coherent logical system of deduction. But if each law is deduced from a previously established law, and if we wish to avoid an infinite regress, we need an ultimate principle which itself need not further grounding. This is the role of the Good understood as lawfulness itself:

For the “starting-point” of a deduction is what is called a law. In general, it is the law that constitutes the object. Hence, this law, namely the law that objects are to be grounded in law, is itself beyond all objecthood, indeed it is beyond all specific law (λόγος): it is not *a*, but *the* law. [...] This is the final sense of the term ἀνυπόθετον, i.e. what transcends the procedure of presuppositions and is the ultimate principle of this procedure.⁹⁵

Thus, the Idea of the Good is not just any Idea but the “Idea of Ideas,”⁹⁶ not any λόγος, but αὐτὸς ὁ λόγος, “the principle of the logical itself and generally [or absolutely] (*das Prinzip des Logischen selbst und überhaupt*).”⁹⁷ It is not hypothetical because it is the ultimate condition of possibility of laws of thinking. Although Natorp does not say this explicitly, we seem to be offered

⁹³ PI, 50. Cf. 195.

⁹⁴ PI, 176.

⁹⁵ PI, 194-5.

⁹⁶ PI, 201; 218.

⁹⁷ PI, 194.

here a transcendental deduction of the Idea of the Good.⁹⁸ It could hardly be overemphasized that this interpretation of the highest principle of Platonic philosophy as the principle of logic itself is a perfect target for the Heideggerian attack against Platonism.

At any rate, if Natorp is comfortable with the claim that the Good is ἀνυπόθετον, he seems less so with the view that it is ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας. Significantly, he does not adopt the easy solution (which we have seen in Cohen's early interpretation) of translating οὐσία as "substance" and claiming that since Ideas are emphatically *not* substances, the Idea of the Good must be "beyond" substance. Instead, he insists on the "exuberance" (*Überschwenglichkeit*) of Plato's language. Natorp's problem is that so far, understanding the *Ideenlehre* did not require anything else than a "realm" of thinking and a "realm" of being as being-thought. He thus chooses to reveal an ambiguity in Plato's text, bringing to his readers' attention all the phrases where Plato nonetheless seems to treat the Idea of the Good as being "in the genus of the thinkable (in the νοητὸς τοπος, 508c, 509d)", belonging to "that which is" (518c, 526e, 532c), and even as "being itself (αὐτὸ τὸ ὄν, 537d)."⁹⁹ The only aspect under which the Good can be considered "beyond" both being and knowing is that "it is, to use Kant's expression, what 'makes at all possible' all specific knowledge and all the specific object-relatedness of knowledge."¹⁰⁰ Natorp does not get rid of Plato's most hyperbolic and metaphysical language, but he seriously qualifies it.¹⁰¹ Although the reasons why their respective Platonism can hardly accommodate the radical transcendence of the Good differ, Gadamer follows a strategy very similar to Natorp's when he calls the ἐπέκεινα of the Good a "mythical expression" (GW 7, 198).

⁹⁸ On Natorp's Platonic Ideas as transcendently deduced, see also Servois 2004, 139.

⁹⁹ PI, 191.

¹⁰⁰ PI, 192.

¹⁰¹ *Contra* Fronterotta (2000, 325), I think Natorp also significantly downplays the ethical meaning of the Good. For he is very clear that the Good means for Plato "lawfulness, and nothing else" and that its account is "purely logical" (PI, 195-6). In this respect, Natorp clearly disagrees with Cohen.

1.2.5 *Furthering the Method: The Status of the Sophist and Philebus*

There remains at least one obvious problem for a comprehensive interpretative-appropriative project such as Natorp's study of Plato. The difficulty consists in the alleged progressive disappearance of the vocabulary related to the theory of Ideas in "late" dialogues. Specifically, in texts like the *Sophist* and the *Philebus*, Plato is sometimes said to have abandoned his early view about Ideas and replaced it with a new kind of ontological project.¹⁰² If this were true, Natorp's whole reading of Plato's philosophy as focusing only on the Ideas, as well as his attempt to present Plato as a proto-Neo-Kantian idealist would be seriously threatened. Once again, Natorp does not silence the difficulty or put it aside. He rather interprets the *Sophist* and *Philebus* (as well as the *Statesman*) as dialogues whose metaphysics simply sheds new light on the *Ideenlehre* and helps Plato's students to get a better grasp of the Ideas and their "method." This broad non-developmental approach will be at work in Cassirer, and it will also be taken up explicitly by Gadamer and implicitly by Strauss and Krüger too.

In the *Sophist*, the problems related to the relation of Being and non-Being lead to establishing the five greatest genera (251d-259d): being (τὸ ὄν), motion and rest (κίνησιν καὶ στάσιν), sameness and difference or otherness (τό τε ταῦτόν καὶ θάτερον). Since these principles are supposed to sketch a solution to the question of being, it can seem intuitive to consider them as replacement of the Ideas. But Natorp thinks that the μέγιστα γένη rather represent the basic notions needed for a "general theory of predication," namely the "fundamental kinds of combination (*Grundarten der Verknüpfung*)" that are available for thought and λόγος.¹⁰³ If we recall the discussion of eidetic participation as logical-linguistic predication, Natorp's interpretation, if it is to remain coherent,

¹⁰² This view is still commonly held in recent scholarship – see e.g. Crivelli 2019.

¹⁰³ PI, 296; 299.

faces an alternative: the theory of the highest genera is either a supplement to or a replacement of the theory of the Ideas. Natorp sees no reason to suppose the latter view.

Just as the notion of participation is meant to temper (or, as Natorp thinks, oppose and replace) that of separation, so do the highest genera. In fact, an important question of the *Sophist* is how λόγος as a combination or community (συμπλοκή, κοινωνία) of concepts is possible. On a static (mis)understanding of the *Ideenlehre*, “the *eidōs* ‘itself’, as well as the *eidē* remained immovable; motion, acting and suffering, becoming and passing away remained purely and exclusively on the side of the things that *merely partake* of the ideas.”¹⁰⁴ Instead of replacing the Ideas, these new genera refine the theory of Ideas, introducing “motion and rest” in the “realm of pure being,” i.e. among Ideas, such as *to make relation intelligible*.¹⁰⁵ In fact, the reason why being signifies “equally” identity and difference, Natorp argues at the end of his chapter on the *Sophist*, is that “being, the being of judgments, signifies, in the most fundamental sense, relation.”¹⁰⁶

In a similar vein, the *Philebus* provides Plato’s student with an additional conceptual apparatus to illuminate the theory of Ideas. To show the intimate connection with his previous discussions of the *Ideenlehre*, Natorp emphasizes that, although through a discussion of pleasure, the “theme of the *Philebus* is the concept of the Good.”¹⁰⁷ In this dialogue, Socrates establishes that there must be four principles of being: the indeterminate (ἄπειρον), the determinate (πέρας), their mixture or community (μικτή, κοινόν) – which is the generated *being* (οὐσία) – and the cause (αἰτία) of this mixture (27b-c, 30b).¹⁰⁸ Natorp claims that the cause of the mixture of being is “law and order”

¹⁰⁴ PI, 295 (my emphasis).

¹⁰⁵ PI, 294.

¹⁰⁶ PI, 306.

¹⁰⁷ PI, 313.

¹⁰⁸ Natorp thinks that the πέρασ-ἄπειρον couple of the *Philebus* maps unto the κίνησις-στάσις and the ταῦτὸν-θάτερον couples of the *Sophist* (PI, 334-335).

(νόμον καὶ τάξιν, 26b).¹⁰⁹ Since, according to his interpretation, Platonic Ideas are *laws*, this means two things: 1) that the theory of Ideas appears, in the light of the *Philebus*, as a theory of the active determination of the indeterminate; 2) that the cause of such mixing or determination is also a law, and therefore an Idea. Framing law as the cause of lawful determination, Natorp's reading of the *Philebus* repeats the analysis of the Good in the *Republic*:

[...] the idea of the good is conceived not merely as a principle of the ideas, but as itself an idea, that is, not merely as a principle of all law, but as itself a law; and the content of this law cannot be anything but lawfulness itself conceived as the logical reason – or, in Aristotelian terms, the formal reason (*Formalgrund*) – of all being and truth. [...] Now, we are no doubt perfectly justified in identifying the principle of reason (*Prinzip des Grundes*) in the *Philebus* with the “idea of the good.”¹¹⁰

There seems to be a leap in Natorp's interpretation, for νόμος and τάξις at 26b are not directly presented as the αἰτία of the mixture, but simply as containing or having a limit (πέρας ἔχόντων). In fact, it is intelligence and wisdom (σοφία, σοφία καὶ νοῦς), and not law, that operates as the cause of the mixture (30b-c, 30e). Natorp solves this difficulty by arguing that this “wise” cause of the determination of being is logic itself, which appeared as αὐτὸς ὁ λόγος in the *Republic* and “is now called ‘Intelligence’ (*Vernunft*).”¹¹¹ From the Heideggerian standpoint, Natorp's suggestion that there is no difference between logic and intelligence or reason confirms the suspicion that the logical prejudice of metaphysics is implicitly a metaphysics of subjectivity, that is, a deformation of the question of being through the position of the human subject. Once more, Neo-Kantian Platonism aligns with what Heidegger sees as the mistakes of Platonism.

It should finally be noted that Natorp's *Philebus* does not merely repeat the *Republic* and the previous accounts of the *Ideenlehre*. That the Ideas have to do with determination (the pole of πέρας)

¹⁰⁹ PI, 326.

¹¹⁰ PI, 330.

¹¹¹ PI, 331.

was already perhaps evident from the fact that they “constitute (*konstituieren*)” τὸ ὄν.¹¹² But the *Philebus* adds to this determination a correlate that happens to be essential: the ἄπειρον. Being is constituted because the empirical manifold is an indeterminate that calls for its determination; the indeterminacy (ἀπειρία) is always the “not yet determined (*das noch nicht Bestimmte*)”, that is, the “infinite possibility of determination.”¹¹³ And thus the task of thought, through the “method” of Ideas, is to proceed to this infinite task of determining the indeterminate manifold of nature through laws. The *Philebus* provides Natorp with the missing elements to complete the Kantian framework of his appropriation of Plato. Ideas are not substances; they simply express the workings of scientific knowledge and the “sovereignty of [its] method”.¹¹⁴

1.3 Ernst Cassirer’s Platonic Functions and Symbolic Forms

Cassirer published *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff* in 1910. The effort of the book was to distinguish the notion of function from that of substance, showing how the concept of function as used in mathematics could be applied to logic and epistemology. Not only did Cassirer provide Natorp and Cohen with a more robust articulation of their insights on the function-substance opposition and its historical-philosophical expression in the opposition between Plato and Aristotle, but he also elaborated some of his own arguments directly from readings of Plato.¹¹⁵

¹¹² PI, 50.

¹¹³ PI, 110; 268. See Politis 2004, 41-2. Cf. Servois 2004, 145 : “L’*apeiron* n’est donc pas le phénomène en tant que ce dernier assume une position *dans* le procès de détermination mais le fond d’indétermination du phénomène ou sa phénoménalité même (le *phainesthai selbst*).” One must add, however, that the ἄπειρον is the phenomenon insofar as it does not *yet* assume a position in the process of determination.

¹¹⁴ PI, 349. Cf. PI, 238.

¹¹⁵ This latter point is assessed by Janz 1997, 421; 425 432-33.

While Aristotelian logic and psychology rest on the metaphysical assumption of substance,¹¹⁶ Plato appears to Cassirer as a proponent of a non-substantial psychology. The key passage for him (as it was for Natorp) is in the *Theaetetus*, where the soul is discovered as the “some one form (μία τις ἰδέα)” through which human beings perceive (*Theaet.* 184d). This expresses the soul not as a thing, but rather as a “general function of synthetic unity” and a “pure activity of thought.”¹¹⁷ In the same vein, Cassirer thinks that Plato’s “concept” – the Idea – is not an object, substance or thing.

In 1910, Cassirer argued that Plato recognized the crucial function of mathematics as “the ‘mediator’ between the ideas and the things of sense.” Yet his argument is different than the one we find in Cohen’s 1878 essay on the *Ideenlehre*. Looking at the *Philebus* instead of the *Republic*, he claims that mathematics transforms “the sensuous indefinite” into something “quantitatively definite,” which is a necessary step to get to concepts or Ideas: “the chaos of sense perception must be confined in strict limits, by applying the pure concepts of quantity, before it can become an object of knowledge.”¹¹⁸ He concludes from this that for Plato, “the mathematical order is at once the condition and the basis of the existence of reality.”¹¹⁹ While ‘conceptual realists’ think they can establish the existence of supersensible substances and while empiricists rest satisfied by collections of “individual facts,” the mathematical method of hypothesis “establishes an *ideal* connection among these facts [and thus] creates a new unity to be tested and verified by thought, but which cannot be directly given by sensation. This view implies that the proper object of knowledge is neither individual facts, nor metaphysical substances, but “ideal connections” within reality, that

¹¹⁶ Cassirer, *Substance and Function* (trans. M. C. and W. C. Swabey), 8-9.

¹¹⁷ These are Servois’s (2004, 28; 30) words about SF 327-328. Cf. Cassirer, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms III* (hereafter PSF, followed by volume number), 241.

¹¹⁸ SF, 134 Cf. PSF III, 403.

¹¹⁹ SF, 134.

is, *relations*.”¹²⁰ The *functional* nature of mathematics in such Platonic theory of knowledge thus leads to the interpretation of the concept – of what is known, the ‘object’ of knowledge – as a relation.

This is why, in his *Philosophie of Symbolic Forms* (1923-1929), Cassirer argues that the *Sophist*’s insistence on the *κοινωνία τῶν γενῶν* is a deepening of the *Ideenlehre*, and not the articulation of another, late ontology. In the *Sophist*, Cassirer claims, “Plato comes closest to a knowledge of the pure relational nature of the concept.”¹²¹ Ideas are “relational” in the sense that they make reality intelligible through constant sets of specific relations, just as Natorp’s Ideas-laws subsume individual cases. But they also are relational insofar as the relations that make experience possible are related to one another as well: “when we come to the relations, it would seem that the operation of their particular forms becomes intelligible to us only when we think of them as connected by a higher synthesis.”¹²²

In a sense, this Platonic “community of the genera,” which Cassirer calls the “systematic ‘community’ of pure ideas and formal concepts,” still lives through his own system of symbolic forms.¹²³ For symbolic forms designate the totality of forms through which the human world, the world of culture is constituted and made possible as such,¹²⁴ and these particular forms cannot “simply stand side by side”; there must be a “factor which recurs in each basic cultural form but in no two of them takes exactly the same shape.”¹²⁵ This recurring factor is “meaning” (*Sinn*): all symbolic forms synthesize the manifold of the cultural world in unities of meaning (*Sinn-Einheit*)

¹²⁰ SF, 135.

¹²¹ PSF III, 299. Cf. PSF I, 94-5.

¹²² PSF, I, 94.

¹²³ PSF I, 95.

¹²⁴ E.g. PSF I, 91: “Not only science, but language, myth, art and religion as well, provide the building stones from which the world of “reality” is *constructed for us*, as well as that of the human spirit, in sum the World-of-the-I” (my emphasis).

¹²⁵ PSF I, 84.

and totalities of meaning (*Sinn-Ganzheit*).¹²⁶ In all three of Cassirer's great symbolic forms – language, myth and knowledge, Plato plays a role.

In the “phenomenology of linguistic form,” Plato appears as a pioneer of the representative function of language.¹²⁷ While the *Cratylus* “tears down the thesis that there is a ‘naturally’ correct term for every existing thing,” this does not mean that there is no relation between words and knowledge.¹²⁸ The naïve view refuted in the *Cratylus* is refined and nuanced in the *Seventh letter* (342b) by showing that the relation between ὄνομα and ἐπιστήμη is *mediated* through the definition (λόγος) and the image (εἶδωλον).¹²⁹ Language is just a step toward knowledge, but a necessary step. Its function is representative, for it “represents a specific ‘meaning’ by a sensuous ‘sign’.”¹³⁰ This direction of representation is what Cassirer thinks is at work in the philosophical method explained in the second sailing of the *Phaedo* – the way through λόγοι toward πράγματα – and thus Cassirer sees in the problem of language the Platonic *Ideenlehre*.¹³¹ We must note that Cassirer is not merely repeating Natorp's assimilation of eidetic participation to logical predication: given its representative character, language here is definitely not reduced to its logical functions. This is a distinctive feature of Cassirer's appropriation of Platonic Forms. Cassirer does not explicitly repudiate Natorp's interpretation, but his way of situating Forms on the site of language without reducing language to propositional logic does constitute a break with Natorp. We shall see that this specific direction away from logic toward language is exactly the framework of Gadamer's own appropriation of Platonic metaphysics. And while Gadamer will disagree explicitly with Cassirer

¹²⁶ E.g. PSF I, 86; 93-94; 95; 107. Cf. Philonenko 1989, 142-3.

¹²⁷ Janz 1997, 429-30.

¹²⁸ PSF I, 123.

¹²⁹ PSF I, 124.

¹³⁰ PSF I, 125.

¹³¹ PSF I, 125.

on the nature of language, the trajectory he takes to rescue Plato from Heidegger's criticism is analogous to Cassirer's trajectory *vis-à-vis* the precedent readings in the Marburg School.

Cassirer's position on the Idea of the Good seems to have shifted. In *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff*, the Good is presented as the culmination of Plato's teleological thinking (a position that is close to Cohen's). In the second volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, it is relegated to an example of the symbolic form of myth.¹³² This is different from Natorp's claim that Plato's language concerning the transcendence of the Good is exuberant, because that hermeneutic gesture allows Natorp to reduce the Good to the logical (by emphasizing the αὐτὸς ὁ λόγος formula and downplaying the ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας formula). For Cassirer affirms that Plato sees myth as a means of philosophical creativity that remains sharply distinguished from genuine philosophical knowledge, so it cannot be understood as logic itself or the lawfulness of thinking as such¹³³ As I have already mentioned and as I shall show in chapter 7, the identification of the Idea of the Good with mythic or mythological language plays a crucial role in Gadamer's interpretation of the Forms. While it is not clear at all that the exuberant formulation of the transcendence of the Good should be understood as a myth, the interesting feature of Cassirer's interpretation is that it does not attempt to see this mythic language as a mere dressing-up (*Einkleidung*) for a more easily graspable notion or for something that fits well with an interpretation already articulated. In this sense, Natorp's reduction of the Good to the logical and Gadamer's reduction of the Good to the appearing character of the Beautiful are structurally similar, and Cassirer's mythological

¹³² Cf. SF, 133 and PSF II, 252. The reference to the ἐπέκεινα of the Good in "Eidos und Eidolon" (1924) does not relate it to myth and is closer to the teleological framework of 1910. To add to these inconsistencies, Cassirer writes in the *Myth of the State* (1947, 66 hereafter MS) that Plato replaces the mythical gods by the highest knowledge, i.e. the idea of the Good.

¹³³ Cf. SF II, 2: "For in his contemplation of the mythical world Plato never dwells on the endless details; this world seems to him a self-contained whole which he juxtaposes to the whole of pure knowledge in order to measure one by the other." This view is intensified in the chapter on Plato's *Republic* in the *Myth of the State* (see esp. MS, 67; 77).

interpretation stands out. And insofar as it ultimately asserts that the Idea of the Good is the philosophical measure of myth in Plato,¹³⁴ it has the advantage of preserving the uniqueness of the Good and keeping something of its transcendence.

Even though he follows Natorp and Cohen in praising the Greek philosopher for his relational and functional view of the concept as well as for perceiving the importance of mathematics in science, Cassirer proposes a different interpretation of the problem of the transcendence of the Ideas. Commenting on the πέρως-ἄπειρον dialectic of the *Philebus*, he asserts that “the opposition between ‘determination’ and ‘undetermined’ now embraces that other opposition which according to Plato's basic theory subsists between the world of ideas and the world of phenomena.”¹³⁵ In his 1924 essay entitled *Eidos und Eidolon*, he asserts the mutual relation between separation and participation and argues that “we cannot understand the systematic meaning of separation, of χωρισμός, without the meaning of participation, without μέθεξις.”¹³⁶ But whereas Natorp's emphasis on participation *abolished* separation and replaced it by *distinction*, Cassirer thinks Plato maintains a separation between the eidetic and the phenomenal: “the relation between the two always involves the necessary distance between them, their fundamental ‘otherness.’ And no participation of the phenomenon in the idea can bridge this gulf, can efface the factor of ἑτερότης.”¹³⁷ Returning to his analysis of the *Seventh Letter*, he talks about this gulf in terms of the “tragedy” encountered by the dialectician: “The tragedy here is to search for something ultimate and unconditioned and yet to be bound, in the presentation of this unconditioned, to the insurmountable dependence on mediated expression. [...] [The dialectician] cannot move beyond

¹³⁴ MS, 67.

¹³⁵ PSF III, 390.

¹³⁶ Cassirer, *Eidos und Eidolon* (hereafter EE), 224.

¹³⁷ PSF III, 390.

the domain of mediation, and thus beyond the domain of μίμησις.”¹³⁸ As I shall show in chapter 5, this very understanding of the tragic finitude of philosophy is extraordinarily close to Krüger’s own interpretation of the matter.¹³⁹

1.4 Neo-Kantian Traces

The Marburg School’s broad intention to bring Plato back to life was decisive for Strauss, Hans-Gadamer, and Krüger. In concluding this chapter, it is appropriate to identify some of the traces of this Marburg neo-Kantian Platonism in their own Platonic orientation. Among these, the most general and most important contribution is the non-substantialist view according to which the Aristotelian critique of Forms is completely misguided. Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger never adopted the positive alternative articulated in the Marburg interpretations of the *Ideenlehre*, but the convincing attack on the hitherto dominant Aristotelian reading represented an unprecedented hermeneutic liberation, a freedom to be seized. Let us briefly sketch the directions they took from this Neo-Kantian point of departure.

1.4.1 *Leo Strauss*

Strauss was interested in Cohen more than in any other members of the Marburg School. The reason for this is twofold. First, Cohen’s recurring philosophical concern for the status of religion in the system of philosophy as well as his attempt to revive interest in Maimonides was of great

¹³⁸ EE, 240. Cf. Hagelstein 2012, 242: “seule la *rupture* entre le monde sensible et le monde intelligible permet de penser leur relation” (my emphasis).

¹³⁹ Cf. esp. EL, 299, 304, 309.

relevance for a young Jewish philosophy student like Strauss.¹⁴⁰ By contrast, religion was barely treated as one expression of mythical symbolic form among others in Cassirer's work. Second, Cohen recognized and emphasized the centrality of ethics for philosophy while Cassirer "*silently dropped*" ethics (*RCPR*, 28). When Cassirer finally dealt explicitly with politics in the chapter of *The Myth of the State* on Plato's *Republic*, Strauss wrote a review of the book. While it is partly praiseful, the central critique is harsh:

If Cassirer were correct in his appraisal of the rights-of-man doctrine in the eighteen century, an adequate answer to the challenge raised by the doctrines favoring the political myth of our time – for example those of Spengler and Heidegger (pp. 289-93) – would have been *not an inconclusive discussion of the myth of the state, but a radical transformation of the philosophy of symbolic forms into a teaching whose center is moral philosophy*, that is, something like a return to Cassirer's teacher Hermann Cohen, if not to Kant himself. (WIPP, 295; my emphasis)

The fact that Strauss urges Cassirer to return to Cohen's ethics does not mean that he was satisfied with neo-Kantian or even Kantian ethics. But Strauss knew that Cohen could serve as a fairly good point of entry into premodern philosophy. This path – roughly, from Cohen to Maimonides' Platonism and from Maimonides to Plato – is the one he followed himself and that he explains in his posthumously published lecture entitled "Cohen und Maimuni" (1931).¹⁴¹ There, Strauss argues that Cohen can provide a good access to Maimonides since he understands him as a Platonist, but warns that we should not follow this access "blindly." (CaM175; GS 2, 393). The reason why following Cohen blindly would lead to a misunderstanding of Maimonides is that Cohen is himself *aufgeklärt* and an *Aufklärer* (CaM, 177; GS 2, 395). Following Kant, Cohen thinks one can understand an author better than he understood himself – this is what he calls an "idealizing interpretation" (CaM, 185; GS 2, 401). Strauss argues that Cohen "idealizes" Plato by

¹⁴⁰ Strauss' relation to Cohen and to Neo-Kantian philosophy has been very well documented by Von Wussow (2020, esp. chapters 1, 4, 8 and 9).

¹⁴¹ Yaffe (2014) and Von Wussow (2020) present good discussions of "Cohen und Maimuni."

replacing the centrality of *politics* and *law* with the centrality of *morality* (CaM, 222, cf. 200; GS 2, 429, cf. 412-13). Strauss hopes that by revealing the presuppositions of this idealization, one can learn from Cohen's mistakes:

We will not be able to understand Plato, and thereby also not Rambam, until we have acquired a horizon beyond the opposition progress/conservatism, Left/Right, Enlightenment/Romanticism, or however one wants to designate this oppositions; not until we again understand the idea of the *eternal good*, - the *eternal order*, - free from all regard for progress or regress (*nicht eher, als wir den Gedanken des ewigen Guten, der ewigen Ordnung, frei von aller Rücksicht auf Fortschritt oder Rückschritt, wieder verstehen*). (CaM, 222; GS 2, 429)

We already sense here the strong anti-historicist inclination of Strauss' recovery of Plato – and, it seems, of Platonic metaphysics. While a distinctive feature of Strauss' writings on Ancient philosophy is that considerations about ontology or metaphysics are extremely rare, he does address these issues and explains the “eternity” of the Platonic Ideas in terms of the permanence of the “problems” that are coeval with the human mind.¹⁴² As I shall argue in the last chapter of this dissertation, this view is very much aligned with a functionalist and non-substantialist interpretation of the being of Ideas.

1.4.2 *Hans-Georg Gadamer*

Despite Gadamer's obvious antipathy for neo-Kantianism, Grondin has identified several ways in which his neo-Kantian formation before his moving closer to Heidegger may have influenced his thought.¹⁴³ Most but not all of these are “negative” ways: Gadamer did work out his concepts and

¹⁴² On the equivalence between eternity and permanence, see e.g. NRH, 89. On Ideas as “permanent problems,” see e.g. NRH, 32; WIPP, 38-9; on Ideas as “eternal,” see e.g. CM, 79, 92.

¹⁴³ Grondin (2010) highlights five aspects of this heritage. In addition to the points that I identify here (because of the focus on Plato), he addresses: 1) the “validity claim” of the *Geisteswissenschaften*; 2) the reliance on humanism and the importance of culture; 3) the notion of consciousness (*Bewußtsein*)

arguments through a critical distancing from neo-Kantians, but he also follows Natorp and Cassirer on a number of decisive points.

First, Gadamer famously characterized Paul Natorp as the “strongest fanatic of method (*Methodenfanatiker*) and logicist of the Marburg school” (PL, 62). This shows in his interpretation of Plato insofar as Natorp understands the Ideas as scientific laws of nature, and thus the theory of Ideas as scientific methodology (PL, 66; cf. GW 7, 272-3 and PTI, 9). To be sure, Gadamer’s polemic against method in his *opus magnum* is not a critique of the hypothetic-deductive method of modern natural sciences; rather, it is the critique of the invasive tendencies of this method in the things that pertain to the *Geisteswissenschaften*, philosophy included. But by collapsing Platonic concepts unto the scientific model, Natorp reduces philosophy to an articulation of method and thus appears as a sort of paradigm among Gadamer’s plausible targets.

Second, Gadamer rejects Cassirer’s interpretation of the *Cratylus*, where the *speculative* function of language is denied and replaced by a mere *representative* function. Thus, Gadamer explicitly confronts Cassirer’s idea that language is a symbolic form (GW 1, 408). His critique is not that language *does* not produce the human world of meaning, but rather that it is not only *one* (subjective) mode of symbolization among others: language is *the* element through which meaning emerges and understanding occurs, for any “being that can be understood is language (GW 1, 478).”

In light of this, there almost seems to be an anti-neo-Kantian program to Gadamer’s elaboration of philosophical hermeneutics. But the paradox is that his Platonic hermeneutics, as I have noted, also incorporates several insights one finds in Natorp and Cassirer. First, Gadamer has a non-substantialist interpretation of the Ideas, and like Natorp, he emphasizes participation over and against separation. Second, like Cassirer and Natorp, he explicitly rejects the developmentalist approach that distinguishes between the ontology of late dialogues and the theory of Forms, and

uses instead the conceptual apparatus of the *Philebus* and the *Sophist* to shed light on the theory of Ideas. Third, there are striking neo-Kantian echoes to Gadamer's tendency to downplay the transcendence of the Good at the end of *Republic* VI and interpreting it as a mythical formulation. Fourth, Gadamer's rejection of Natorp's logicism is an alternate understanding of the meaning of λόγος, and, despite his disagreements with Cassirer's views on language, he certainly follows Cassirer in interpreting λόγος as language, not logic, and seeing language as the site of Platonic Forms.¹⁴⁴

1.4.3 Gerhard Krüger

In the introduction of *Einsicht und Leidenschaft*, Krüger mentions Natorp's *Platos Ideenlehre* and criticizes his "idealist" approach for reasons similar to those invoked by Gadamer: understanding Plato through the modern notions of laws and method is succumbing to "modern misinterpretations (EL, xiii). Paying attention to how much notions such as the "modern sovereignty of human freedom" are foreign to Plato should reveal that they consist in a *historical* attempt of philosophical modernity and not an eternal truth (EL, 7).

Throughout his book, Krüger thinks with Plato to highlight the limits of what he calls the "independence (*Unabhängigkeit*)", "spontaneity (*Spontaneität*)" or "sovereignty" of the human mind (e.g. EL, 17). Krüger's target is not explicitly mentioned. And while someone may think here of the role of the *Spontanität der Begriffe* in Kant's First Critique, Krüger's own interpretation of Kant emphasizes the "passive" counterparts, insisting on the original givenness which alone makes any

¹⁴⁴ Grondin (2010, 105) goes as far saying that "Gadamer's notion of language can indeed only be understood as a correction of Cassirer's conception."

transcendental synthesis possible.¹⁴⁵ However, Marburg Neo-Kantians rejected this dependence of thought on sensible intuition and fully replace givenness with transcendental construction.¹⁴⁶ Thus, reading Natorp's interpretation of Plato has revealed that the crux of Platonic "idealism" is for him the *sovereignty* of method, which is not bound to intuition but fully determined by *Denksetzungen*.

While Gadamer opposed the supremacy of *method*, Krüger seems to elaborate his appropriation of Plato against the Neo-Kantian *sovereignty* of human thought implicit in the primacy of method. Plato, against these modern principles, enables us to see how much philosophical thinking depends on things that exceed the scope of human autonomy. Picturing *Eros* as the center and essence of philosophy, Krüger's Plato emphasizes that philosophy is fully dependent on a human *passion* (*Leidenschaft*), in which we must hear the passive character of *πάθος*. Through philosophical desire, sensible receptivity (*Rezeptivität*) and the givenness (*Gegebenheit*) of human nature, we ought to understand that we are not sovereign or fully independent thinking beings (e.g. EL, 45; 46; 49).¹⁴⁷

Thus, while Krüger's Plato is clearly not a Neo-Kantian Plato, the *Leitfaden* of his interpretation makes very little sense if we abstract it from the context of the Marburg School. Moreover, just like Strauss and Gadamer, Krüger seems to have succumbed to the novel charm of the functionalist understanding of the Platonic Ideas. Despite his explicit disavowal of Natorp's hyper-methodological and "legalistic" interpretation of the *Ideenlehre* (e.g. EL, 222; EPWA, xxx), he retains the Neo-Kantian view that Ideas are not substances and thus escape the Aristotelian critique (cf. EL, 211 and EPWA, xxxvi). As I mentioned above, Krüger agrees with Cassirer on the finitude of

¹⁴⁵ Kant, KrV, A50/B74. Kant actually insists on the complementarity of this spontaneity and the *Rezeptivität der Eindrücke*. Krüger emphasizes the receptive aspect, downplayed by Marburg Neo-Kantians. See e.g. PMkK, 15-22; 23. On the insistence on passivity and givenness in Krüger's Kant, see esp. Langlois 2011.

¹⁴⁶ See e.g. Kim (2010, 80) about Natorp and Cohen: "The categories are no longer merely the conditions of synthesizing *sensible intuition* into empirical cognitions, but are *themselves* the laws of scientific thought" (my emphasis).

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Ordi i Fernández 2009, 119.

the Platonic mind vis-à-vis the Forms. I will show in chapter 7 how Krüger articulates this finitude in terms of the way eros bridges between νοήσις and διάνοια on the one hand, and noetic and dianoetic objects on the other.

Conclusions

While a lot of the conclusions reached by Cohen, Natorp, and Cassirer bring Platonic metaphysics on the site of logic and the method of modern natural science, and thus appear as some kind of confirmation of Heidegger's critique of Platonism *avant la lettre*, the functionalist paradigm guiding their interpretation of Forms can nonetheless prove helpful in responding to Heidegger. Specifically, Marburg Neo-Kantian Platonism is exposed to the critique of the logical prejudice of metaphysical thinking and its distortion of the original meaning of truth (from disclosedness to propositional correctness) and to the critique of the metaphysics of subjectivity. What I think it can hardly be vulnerable to is the accusation of ontotheology. For ontotheology is the allegedly pervasive understanding of the question of Being (*Sein*) in terms of the question of the highest or supreme being or entity (*Seiende*), which for the most part took the form of God in the metaphysical tradition. Now, *the* guiding thread of Marburg Neo-Kantian Platonism is that the *Ideenlehre* has nothing to do with ontology, that is, it is not a theory about beings or substances: Forms are functions and laws, not metaphysical entities.

To be sure, we can wonder what is gained by being able to resist the ontotheology accusation if one must at once plead guilty to the charge of reducing the question of being and truth to the question of logic and propositional correctness. I contend there is at least one significant advantage: it shows that a substantial revision of traditional understandings opens up new possibilities for thinking about both Plato and the task of philosophy. We can put the point in a somewhat

Heideggerian fashion: Marburg Neo-Kantians saw the potential of articulating a Platonism untainted by Aristotelianism in thinking about Forms beyond the substance-paradigm, but they *fell back* onto other Aristotelian reflexes by reducing them to the logical and lawful form of thinking. But it is possible to acknowledge their breakthrough without committing oneself to their subsequent mistakes. Doing so can give birth to radically new kinds of Platonism like the dialogical Platonism of Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger.

Before turning to an examination of Heidegger's critique of Plato, it is worth noting two things. I have shown that Natorp played a central role in the transformation of the Theory of Forms into logic. But while Cohen initiated this transformation by emphasizing the hypothesis-character of Forms and while Cassirer maintained the function-substance difference and championed Plato as a thinker of functions, not substances, they both see and alert us to some kind of limit to the logical-scientific picture of that interpretation. For Cohen, ethics is the site of this limit; for Cassirer, it is language. Both of these, ethics and language, as well as their interconnectedness, will prove crucial in the dialogical Platonism of Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger. It will help them overcome Heidegger's attack on Platonism, to which we now turn.

Chapter 2

THREE PROBLEMS IN HEIDEGGER'S PLATO

In the previous chapter, I have exposed the great lines of the appropriations of Plato by Marburg neo-Kantians and showed that the recovery of Plato operated by Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger displays the imprint of these appropriations in two ways: while all three inherit aspects of the functionalist approach to Plato's metaphysics, they also oppose the primacy of epistemology and scientific method. This opposition to the methodological fanaticism of the Marburg school— to speak like Gadamer — was facilitated by the rise of another figure in the philosophical landscape of Germany at the time: Martin Heidegger.¹

While Plato is for Natorp the forerunner of Galileo, Newton and Kant, Heidegger's approach to Greek philosophers started as an attempt to perform a *Destruction* of the philosophical tradition that stands between the Greeks and contemporary readers. Because, he argues, this tradition distorts more than it reveals the meaning of Greek philosophy, it has to undergo a process of dismantling (*Ab-bau, de-struere*) so that the original intentions of Plato and Aristotle can be discovered anew.² From the standpoint of Heidegger's phenomenological *Destruction*, Neo-Kantian Marburg Platonism appears as a paradigmatic product of this distorting tradition. It is thus somewhat ironic that the first document of this Heideggerian *Destruction* of the Greeks is the 1922 *Natorp Bericht*, in which Heidegger presents to Natorp his approach to Aristotle to show his worth as a successor of

¹ With the exception of *Sein und Zeit* (hereafter *SZ*), Heidegger's works will be quoted according to the volumes and pagination of the *Gesamtausgabe* (hereafter GA). Unless otherwise noted, I will use the following English translations of Heidegger's texts: *Plato's Sophist* (GA 19), trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer; *Being and Time* (*SZ*), trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson; *On the Essence of Truth. On Plato's allegory of the cave and Theaetetus* (GA 34), trans. Ted Sedler; "The Self-Assertion of the German University" (in GA 16) in *The Heidegger Controversy. A Critical Reader*, trans. William S. Lewis, *Being and Truth* (GA 36/37), trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt; *Nietzsche. Volumes I and II* (GA 6.1), trans. David Farrell Krell; "Plato's Doctrine of Truth" (in GA 9), trans. Thomas Sheehan (Cambridge University Press, 1998); *Parmenides* (GA 54), trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer; "Letter on Humanism" (in GA 9), trans. Frank A. Capuzzi. For complete references, see the bibliography.

² On *Destruction*, see e.g. GA 19, 413-414 and *SZ*, 19-27.

Natorp in Marburg.³ Heidegger's work on Plato and Aristotle between 1922 and the publication of *Sein und Zeit* (1927) attempts to show that the most fundamental concern of these two philosophers was not epistemology or methodology in the modern scientific sense, but rather the question of Being (*Seinsfrage*).

The Heideggerian promise of an *original* access to the thought of Plato and Aristotle made an extraordinary impression on many of his students in the 1920s. What I wish to show in this chapter is that there are in Heidegger's critique of Plato problems and limits, the overcoming of which is crucial in the Platonic recoveries of Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger. These problems, I contend, are not limited to Heidegger's reading of Plato. In fact, Heidegger's conception of philosophy is deeply *historical*, in the sense that for him, philosophy is inseparable from a restless mutual explanation with its history.⁴ Such a historical self-understanding implies that the problems we encounter in Heidegger's Plato should be palpable in Heidegger's own way of thinking, and vice versa. Therefore, Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger's responses to the problems of Heidegger's Plato should be understood, more broadly, as critiques of Heidegger's philosophy.

Yet, while their own appropriations of Plato are directed against his thought, they all acknowledge a debt to Heidegger. This debt has to do with the phenomenological intent of Heidegger's reading and with the task of *Destruktion*, which go hand in hand because dismantling distortive aspects of the philosophical tradition is meant to free an access to the very issues and matters that lie at the heart of Plato and Aristotle's writings, that is, to lead one to the "things themselves." However, in the eyes of Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger, there is inevitably in

³ Written in 1922, the *Natorp Bericht*, entitled *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles (Anzeige der hermeneutischen Situation)* is now printed in GA 62, 343-399. It is worth mentioning that the preface to the *Sophist* lectures is a "Nachruf auf Paul Natorp," where Heidegger affirms that the Marburg School's contribution was to allow to move beyond it: "That today we can go beyond Kant is possible because we were first forced back to him by the Marburg School" (GA 19, 4).

⁴ See for instance GA 19, 10-11.

Heidegger's dismantling a destructive aspect – a part of *Zerstörung* in *Destruktion*.⁵ The critical intent of this method was indeed so prominent that it gradually resulted in interpreting aspects of Plato's own philosophical effort as various steps in the distortion of the question of Being.

This ambiguity between the effort to rediscover the original meaning of Plato's philosophy and the tendency to see in Plato the beginning of the occlusion of this original meaning results in a very complicated philosophical *Auseinandersetzung*. The oscillation between praise and critique in Heidegger's interpretations is partly due to the transformation of his own thinking, but the ambivalence is irreducible to chronology and the different stages of his philosophical work. For instance, the earlier texts on Plato (and Aristotle) are usually more enthusiastic about the perspective of recovering the *Seinsfrage* in these philosophers than later ones, but we do find sharp criticism of Plato in the 1924-1925 lectures on the *Sophist* already. And while the 1931-1932 and 1933-1934 courses on the allegory of the cave and the *Theaetetus* lay the ground for the critique of Plato's transformation of the "alethic" understanding of truth into the notion of truth as correctness, the 1933 *Rektoratsrede* appears as a praise and imitation of the politics of Plato's *Republic*.

This ambivalence can be explained by revealing three main problems that emerge in Heidegger's Plato. It must be said that while addressing these problems requires to survey *most* of Heidegger's interpretations of Plato, the purpose of the following observations is not to engage with Heidegger's readings in all their details and richness. One of the most striking characteristics of Heidegger's hermeneutics, namely to think what remains "unthought" (and therefore unsaid) in a philosopher's thinking, makes it difficult – or at least methodologically problematic – to assess the merits of his interpretations against the philosopher's texts. Yet Heidegger cannot proceed toward what is allegedly unthought without starting from what is explicitly said. He allows himself to

⁵ Heidegger acknowledges the violence (*Gewalt*) of *Destruktion* in *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* (GA 3, 202).

examine the unsaid in light of what is actually thought out, the implicit in light of the explicit. Thus, the grounds for a hermeneutics of the unthought remain textual. This does not mean that examining problems in Heidegger's reading of Plato amounts to asserting the letter of Platonic texts against Heidegger's claims about what remains implicit in these texts. Instead, what I shall do in what follows is to articulate different accounts of what remains unsaid in light of what is said. These alternate accounts should show what Heidegger may have missed in thinking with and about Plato.

The first of these problems is Heidegger's dissatisfaction with Plato's dialogic writing and dialectical thinking (first section). The second is the eclipse of ethics and politics by ontology in Heidegger's reading of Plato (second section). The third concerns Heidegger's critique of Plato's ontology and the reduction of it to a specific doctrine about Being, which equates Being with presence and producedness, and truth with correctness (third section). These three problems are not independent of one another. As it will become clear, the second and third could hardly emerge without the first one. And the second problem, the eclipse of ethics and politics, is what makes it possible for Heidegger to at once praise Plato's "politics" and criticize his ontology.

2.1 Dialogue and Dialectic

2.1.1. Dialectic, Dialogue, and the Fourfold Weakness of Λόγος

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger famously called dialectic a "philosophical embarrassment (*Verlegenheit*)" (SZ, 25). The context clearly indicates that Plato is at least as much the target as Hegel, if not more. What kind of embarrassment does Heidegger have in mind? What are the shortcomings of dialectic? We can find answers to these questions already in the 1924-1925 lectures on Plato's

Sophist. At first glance, one of the most striking features of these lectures is that more than the first third of the sessions were devoted not to Plato but to Aristotle⁶ – mostly, but not entirely, to the analysis of the intellectual virtues as modes of the soul’s ἀληθεύειν in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that is, the ways in which the soul dis-closes or un-covers beings (οἷς ἀληθεύει ἢ ψυχῇ ,1139b15). While the core of Heidegger’s analysis of Aristotle is foreign to our present purpose, what is worth our attention in this particular detour is rather the reason why Heidegger thinks we must go to Plato through Aristotle. The explanation he gives his students is “the old principle of hermeneutics” according to which we “should proceed from the clear into the obscure” (GA 19, 11).

The reason why Aristotle is clear and Plato obscure is that Aristotle understood what Plato said but succeeded in saying it “more radically and develop[ing] it more scientifically [*wissenschaftlicher*]” (GA 19, 11-12). Plato’s deficiencies are not limited to what the dialogues say but to the dialogical form itself is made clear later in the course: “The fact that Plato did not advance far enough to see beings themselves [das Seiende selbst zu sehen] and in a certain sense to overcome dialectic is an insufficiency [Ungenügen] included in his own dialectical procedure” (GA 19, 198; modif. trans.). The insufficiencies embedded in dialectic, Heidegger, sums up, are “indications of a fundamental confusion and unclarity” on Plato’s part. To be sure, Heidegger charitably grants Plato that the “difficulty of the matters themselves [Schwierigkeit der Sachen selbst]” made Plato’s very “first foundational research” extraordinarily difficult (GA 19, 198). However, Heidegger’s subsequent praise of Aristotle’s understanding of dialectic as a *preliminary* stage (*Vorstufe*) to a pure insight (νοεῖν) suggests that Platonic dialectic is not merely a *sign* of this insufficiency, but also its *cause*.

The most important reason for the insufficiency of dialogue and dialectic is their being grounded in λόγος. As the etymology of the word suggests, διαλέγεσθαι is a way *through* (δια-) λόγος, a way of

⁶ As it has been noted many times, 226 of the 610 pages of GA 19 is devoted to Aristotle, and 374 pages to Plato.

inquiring that is steeped in speech, μετὰ λόγου. Heidegger explains that our reliance on λόγος is due to the human incapacity to disclose beings through the pure perception (*reine Vernehmen*) of νοῦς: for us, “νοεῖν is initially and for the most part διανοεῖν, because our dealing with things is dominated by λόγος (der Umgang-mit durch den λόγος beherrscht ist)” (GA 19, 196). With this typical *zunächst und zumeist*, Heidegger then foreshadows an important aspect of the analysis of *Dasein*'s facticity in *Sein und Zeit*, explaining how the dominance of λόγος is not just a mark of human finitude but more specifically the sign of a falling (*Verfallen*):

According to its original sense and according to its original facticity as well, λόγος is not disclosive (*aufdeckend*) at all but, to speak in an extreme way, is precisely *concealing* (*verdeckend*). Λόγος is at first mere *idle-talk* (*Gerede*), whose facticity is not to let thing be seen (*sehen zu lassen*) but instead to develop a peculiar self-satisfaction at adhering to what one so says (*eine eigentümliche Genügsamkeit auszubilden, bei dem stehen zu bleiben, was man so sagt*). The domination of idle talk (*Herrschaft des Geredes*) precisely closes off beings for the *Dasein* and brings about blindness with regard to what is disclosed and what might be disclosive. (GA 19, 197)

The concealing character of λόγος (as devolving into *Gerede*) intrinsic to dialogue and dialectic implies that Plato's mode of philosophical inquiry constantly runs the risk of failing. To be sure, the Platonic dialogues are not praiseful of idle-talk and rather try to refute and thus transfigure doxastic speech through cross-examination. Heidegger seems to recognize that, and therefore proposes an ingenious and compelling interpretation of the meaning of the particle “δια-” in διαλέγεσθαι. The way *through* λόγος implies that the goal that it sets out stands outside of λόγος: dialectic attempts to pass “through what is merely spoken of (*durch das nur Besprochene hindurch*)” (GA 19, 198; my trans.). Yet Heidegger immediately warns us that passing through λόγος cannot achieve the purpose of freeing the inquiry from the dominance of speech and toward the the pure perceptive insight (*reine νοεῖν*) that it seeks:

Yet insofar as the consideration remains in λέγειν and as διαλέγεσθαι continues on in thorough discussion, such speaking through (*Durchsprechen*) can indeed relinquish

(verlassen) idle talk but cannot do more than *attempt* to press on to the things themselves (den *Versuch* machen, zu den Sachen selbst vorzudringen. (GA 19, 197; my trans.)

Dialectic is insufficient (*ungenügend*) because, while it can move beyond idle-talk, it remains affected by the λόγοι that it examines and remains itself a kind of λόγος. In the 1924-1925 course, the standard against which the disclosive power (or rather: powerlessness) of λόγος is measured is Aristotle’s speechless insight (νοῦς ἄνευ λόγου).⁷ Yet in previous courses we find a different standard that provides a similar measure: in the 1923 course on *Ontology: Hermeneutics of Facticity*, dialectic is criticized on the grounds of its alleged fundamental opposition with phenomenology (e.g. GA 63, 42). There, it is not so much Aristotle’s νοεῖν that is at stake but Husserlian phenomenology, which finds its core in intuition (*Anschauung*). What dialectic lacks compared to phenomenology is a “radical fundamental look on the *object of philosophie (der radikale Grundblick auf den Gegenstand der Philosophie)*” (GA 63, 43-44). Phenomenology is a matter of direct, immediate seeing, while the element of dialectic is mediation and λόγος. Thus, at a unique moment where Heidegger praises the Eleatic Stranger’s version of dialectic, he interprets it not as λόγος but exclusively as a kind of seeing:

In the *Sophist*, Plato also calls διαλέγεσθαι διαπορεύεσθαι διὰ τῶν λόγων (cf. 253b10) or ἡ τῶν λόγων μέθοδος (cf. 227a8), “the direction taken with the λόγοι.” Above all we must exclude – this should be clear on the basis of the foregoing – every extrinsic technical interpretation of dialectic. *The essential element in it is the ὄρᾶν*. Συναγωγή is a mode of seeing [eine Weise des Sehens], i.e., seeing the ἔν; and even διαίρεσις, as an uncovering, is carried out on the basis of constant looking upon the ἔν [Hinblicken auf das ἔν]. [...] διαλέγεσθαι in the sense of διαίρεσις returns to the original attitude of sheer seeing [ursprüngliche Haltung des schlichten Sehens], ὄρᾶν, as it is constantly carried out in relation to the ἔν. This nothing-but-looking-on [Nur-mehr-Hinsehen] is the simple having of the ἄτομον εἶδος, specifically such that the entire connection of

⁷ This raises an important problem, since it is not clear that Heidegger thinks that Aristotle’s νοεῖν is a genuine human possibility and rather favors φρόνησις. However, as Figal points out, Heidegger’s elaboration of a phenomenological hermeneutics of facticity in the 1920s does not favor the articulation of the hermeneutic experience and interpretive apprehension into speech – *silence* is preferable to let that *seeing* occur – see Figal 2000, 103-105. Likewise, φρόνησις, once ontologized, is more a matter of seeing (and thus in a sense close to θεωρία) than of speaking (see Gonzalez 2009, 28 ff.). For a broader critique of Heidegger’s “Aristotelian” approach to Plato, see Rosen (1991).

the διαλέγεσθαι, starting with the ὄρᾶν of the ἔν up to the seeing [Sehen] of the εἶδος is a seeing enclosed in itself [in sich geschlossenes Sehen], a seeing of the history of the provenance of the being in question. (GA 19, 349-50)

The astounding character of this account is, of course, that Heidegger transforms the way *through speeches* (διὰ τῶν λόγων) into a procedure that rather starts with a seeing and ends with a seeing, and is therefore “a seeing enclosed in itself.” (We wonder if what stands between these two seeings could not be precisely this, speeches, but this possibility is not evoked here.) So, it seems that Heidegger’s early critique of dialectic (at least up until *Being and Time*) is grounded in a critique of the concealing character of λόγος in contradistinction to a phenomenological-hermeneutic look or seeing.

But there seems to be more to Heidegger’s critique of λόγος already in *Being and Time*.⁸ There, the disclosure of Dasein to itself occurs in the experience of anxiety (*Angst*). While anxiety does open up a space wherein Dasein can have itself into view as a whole, and thus to allow some kind of self-seeing, the very experience of anxiety is not in the first place a seeing that occurs to Dasein but rather something to which Dasein is attuned. The disclosive aspect of anxiety is thus first and foremost the disclosure of an attunement (*Stimmung*). If *Stimmung*, and not λόγος, is responsible for the disclosedness of Dasein and of the meaningfulness or significativity (*Bedeutsamkeit*) of beings in general, then dialectic seems useless. But if, in addition, λόγος obstructs *Stimmung* rather than allowing it to happen, then dialectic is not just useless but also harmful to the pursuit of truth. By emphasizing that the experience of anxiety presupposes a silence or a silencing (*Schweigen*) of discourse (*Rede*) as the most fundamental mode of *Rede* (SZ, 296), this is precisely the implication of Heidegger.

⁸ Significantly, νοεῖν and *Anschaung* will become metaphysical problems for Heidegger after *Being and Time*. Cf. the remarks from “Platos Lehre von der Wahrheit” cited below.

There is another obvious critique of λόγος in Heidegger, which, insofar as λόγος is the core of dialectic, is also a critique of dialectic: the critique of λόγος as logic. Heidegger's critique of the presuppositions of logic and of the "logical prejudice" of metaphysics is an immense topic,⁹ but it would not be inaccurate to summarize the problem in the following way: propositional logic assumes that truth is the correspondence between a λόγος and the facts about which that λόγος is. Heidegger never rejected this understanding of truth *per se*; he rather opposed its dominance, and especially its tendency to obstruct the most fundamental meaning of truth, namely truth as disclosedness, manifestness. As we shall see Heidegger's argument is that truth as correspondence or correctness presupposes a prior disclosedness, and *not* vice versa. Thus, the centrality of λόγος in dialectic, and, furthermore, the requirement of logical consistency and the demands of logical argumentation in the conversations depicted in Plato's dialogues would betray his implicit and perhaps even unwitting commitment to this logical prejudice.¹⁰

Last but not least, Heidegger thinks that situating λόγος at the heart of the ontological inquiry can only lead to a metaphysics of subjectivity. Such a metaphysics sets the cognitive powers of the human being as the appropriate standpoint for an understanding of Being or perhaps even as the measure of Being. Doing so, it runs the risk of distorting Being and truth by submitting them to the characteristic features of the human thinking subject. While Heidegger does not explicitly target dialectic when he criticizes the metaphysics of subjectivity, he *does* associate Plato with it, and very plainly so:

As Plato conceives it, unhiddenness remains harnessed in a relation to looking, apprehending, thinking and asserting (*Aussagen*). To follow this relation means to relinquish the essence of unhiddenness. No attempt to ground the essence of

⁹ See esp. Dahlstrom (2001).

¹⁰ It is interesting that Heidegger's critique of the Platonic transformation of truth into correctness does not target dialectic, but the allegory of the cave. However, he does think that Plato falls back onto the propositional understanding of truth (GA 34, §46).

unhiddenness in “reason,” “spirit,” “thinking,” “logos,” or in any kind of “subjectivity,” can ever rescue the essence of unhiddenness (GA 9, 238).

It would then seem that Heidegger’s critique of Platonic dialectic amounts to a critique of the fourfold weakness of λόγος: 1) λόγος does not open up a space for a pure seeing; 2) λόγος obstructs the disclosive potentiality of *Stimmung*; 3) λόγος brings with it the logical prejudice of metaphysics concerning the nature of truth; 4) λόγος is trapped within the limits inherent to human subjectivity and so constantly runs the risk of distorting its objects in terms of these limits.

2.1.2 Plato on Dialogue and Dialectic, and the Limits of Λόγος

The problem that Heidegger poses for Plato’s dialogues and Platonic dialectic is thus fundamentally the problem, or more accurately the *many problems*, of λόγος. While the third and fourth problems identified above can only be sufficiently addressed by discussing directly Heidegger’s critique of Plato on Being and truth (section 3), I shall here propose a provisional Platonic response to Heidegger concerning the first and second problems in light of the second sailing of Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger, and suggest a way in which their understanding of that reorientation includes the beginning of a response to the third problem.

Concerning the first problem, namely the insufficiency of λόγος in contradistinction to seeing and intuition, we ought to consider the Divided Line in Book VI of the *Republic* and the *Seventh Letter*’s philosophical “digression.”¹¹ These two texts intimate Plato’s awareness that λόγος, while essential to the philosophical inquiry, is not its ultimate horizon. This is not contradicted but rather corroborated by the turn to λόγοι as articulated in the *Phaedo*. In the *Republic*, this awareness is manifest in the difference between discursive thought (διάνοια) and pure intellection (νόησις, 511d).

¹¹ Gadamer, Strauss, and Krüger, like Cassirer before them, all think that the *Seventh Letter* is authentically Platonic.

Socrates thinks that knowledge in the highest sense, that is, genuine knowledge – knowledge of the Forms or Ideas – exceeds *διάνοια*, and this is why he describes cognition of Forms as a relation between *νοῦς* and *νοούμενα* (508c). Likewise, the *Seventh Letter*'s philosophical “digression” explicitly emphasizes of the weakness of speeches (*τὸ τῶν λόγων ἀσθενές*, 343a1), and, as Cassirer had already acutely seen, Plato there depicts *λόγος* as preparation for genuine philosophical insight of the things themselves, an insight that is speechless because beyond speech. Finally, as the *Phaedo*'s autobiographical passage indicates, Plato's Socrates thinks of *λόγοι* as an *image* of the truth of beings (*σκοπεῖν τῶν ὄντων τὴν ἀλήθειαν... ἐν εἰκόσι*, 99e-100a), that is, he distinguished between *λόγος* and what *λόγος*, precisely as an image, is supposed to disclose, namely, truth. In this respect, it is highly significant that Heidegger never attempted to interpret the *Phaedo*. And it is quite natural that critiques of Heidegger's Plato have turned to the *Phaedo* to show what Heidegger may have missed.¹²

Heidegger did, however, consider the philosophical “digression” of the *Seventh Letter* in the *Sophist* lectures. In this short section, Heidegger reads the letter as a continuation of the critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*. Not only does he consider it an authentically Platonic text, but he even ventures to say that Plato there “summarizes what determined all his work,” namely that the total structure of knowledge is “constructed out of the phenomena of *ὄνομα* [name], *λόγος*, *εἶδωλον* [image], *ἐπιστήμη* [knowledge], and *ἀληθές* [the true]” (GA 19, 345). While Heidegger is right that the first three phenomena are oriented and directed toward truth, he does not explain this orientation and we hardly see how he could account for the fact that *λόγος* can lead to truth, especially given that he translates *λόγος* here as “what is said as such [das Gesagte als solche].” According to his reading,

¹² Most prominently Rosen (1991, 46-95) and Gonzalez (2009, 327-340). Although their critiques of Heidegger's Plato agree on many points, the interpretations of Plato through which they perform that critique is quite different.

only ἐπιστήμη is a “pressing on from the εἶδωλον to the thing itself [das Vordringen vom εἶδωλον zur Sache].” We find here again the same vocabulary and the same gap between speech and a direct access to the things themselves. The only mediating function is granted to the image because the image has to do with a kind of seeing (albeit a deficient one, *Nur-so-Aussehen*), and, as we have already observed, Heidegger thinks that the direct access to being in νοεῖν is a form of seeing (*Sehen, Anschauen*, cf. GA 19, 198). He fails to see the mediating function of λόγος, and therefore forecloses the disclosive potential of λόγος as presented in the second sailing.¹³

As we have seen in the introduction, the second sailing described in the *Phaedo* contrasts the inquiry through λόγοι with the direct apprehension of beings, the way ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις, of Socrates’ predecessors. Two points are noteworthy here. First, the metaphor of the soul’s risk of blindness suggests that what is at stake is indeed a seeing: direct perception obstructs seeing; λόγοι enable it. This optic metaphor also brings the second sailing closer to the light imagery of *Republic* VI and VII, and closer to Heidegger’s understanding of truth as disclosedness or manifestness too.¹⁴ Second, the indirect way through λόγοι toward the truth of beings is not, as Heidegger suggests, an alternate and deficient mode of access to the truth of beings. Rather, as I have argued, the image of a second sailing implies that the other method, the “first sailing,” is unavailable, and that it is unavailable not due to some human insufficiencies but to how *things* are. Accordingly, a *direct* or *immediate* seeing of Being or the truth of beings, which Heidegger sets as the standard against which we should measure the power of λόγος, is impossible and thus an incorrect standard as far as λόγος in Platonic dialectic goes. This is not to say that no seeing of Being and truth is possible, but that

¹³ For a reading of the *Seventh Letter* in response to Heidegger’s Plato, see Gonzalez (2009, 27-28; 340-42)

¹⁴ Thus Fried (2021, 105) rightly claims that “even Heidegger is a Platonist in that his most prevalent metaphors for the understanding and for what makes understanding possible are also grounded in vision and light.”

Heidegger conflates the destination and the means used to reach such destination. Λόγοι do not *replace* the noetic seeing; they *enable* it.

As I have noted, the Divided Line in Plato's *Republic* shows that Plato was aware that genuine philosophical insight is beyond λόγος. Yet the image of the *Phaedo* that was just discussed seems to foreclose the possibility of such insight beyond speech: staring directly at the sun blinds the eyes; looking directly at the truth of being blinds the soul. This is why, I think, it must be completed by a very similar image from Plato's *Republic*: the allegory of the Cave. Once the prisoners are freed and have climbed outside the cave, Socrates says, they will not be able to stare directly at the sun. They must first look at *reflections* of the sun in water and on other surfaces (516a). This is exactly what the image of the *Phaedo* says. But the image of the Cave adds this very important step: after having sufficiently habituated their eyes to reflections of the sun, they will finally be able to look at the sun itself (516b-c). "With toil and pain (μόγισ),” the soul can come to *see* (ὁρᾶσθαι) the Idea of the Good (517b8-c1). What is crucial is that knowledge of the Idea of the Good is only made possible by some sort of habituation and through many difficulties. In the Cave image, these difficulties and this habituation consist in looking at reflections or images. If we transpose the allegory to the educative curriculum of the guardians – something we are entitled to do since the Cave is an image of παιδεία and ἀπαιδευσία (cf. 514a2) –, the toil and pain of looking at the reflections of the Good is an image of dialectic, where dialectic is not restricted to a noetic sight of the Forms but rather includes and supposes the knowledgeable back and forth of questions and answers (ἐρωτᾶν τε καὶ ἀποκρίνεσθαι ἐπιστημονέστατα, 534d9-10). It thus makes perfect sense that the reflections, in the image of the *Phaedo*, are λόγοι. And the *Seventh Letter* also refers to the toil and pain (μόγισ) of the path to knowledge – there is no knowledge without a long examination of λόγοι through questioning and answering (ἐρωτήσιν καὶ ἀποκρίσεις, 343b3-c1). It is only through

this back and forth that sparks of insight can kindle (341c-d). The mediation that is required for grasping Being is the mediation of λόγος, that is, διαλέγεσθαι. One last thing must be said about this noetic grasp of the Good with respect to Heidegger's concern about λόγος and the seeing of Being. If we take the Sun Analogy seriously, it should imply that we cannot look directly at the Sun, or, rather, that we can only do so at sunset.¹⁵ What this suggests resonates quite well with Heidegger's view that Being discloses itself in its withdrawal. And while Socrates does say that the freed prisoners will ultimately be able to "behold the sun itself by itself in its own region (αὐτὸν καθ' αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ χώρᾳ)" (516b), this need not imply that they can see it *completely* in its full brilliance.¹⁶ At any rate, this kind of contemplation is enabled (and not replaced) by λόγοι.

This finds an important parallel in Plato's compositions. Plato did not write treatises in which a more or less direct access to knowledgeable propositions is offered. He instead decided to have his readers toil through λόγοι. What I hope to have shown is that the reason for this is not simply to secure a hardworking and serious readership – for Plato knows too well that most readers will turn his writings into the pseudo-wisdom of treatises (cf. *Seventh Letter* 341b ff.; *Phaedrus*, 275a-b).¹⁷ It rather follows from an inner necessity of what philosophy is for him: the only possible access to wisdom is the mediated access through dialectic and dialogue. It is because Heidegger downplays the importance of the mediation and indirectness of dialogue for Plato that he reads the *Sophist* as an "ontological treatise" and sees the Eleatic Stranger as the direct expression of Plato's thought

¹⁵ On this point see Hyland's (2011, 171-172n31) remarks.

¹⁶ On the ambiguity of the "seeing" of the sun and "knowledge" of the Good, see Hyland (2011, 161). After all, when looking at a sunset, it is nothing else than the sun itself by itself in its own region that we see (i.e., we do not see an *image* of it). Simply, we see it incompletely. Sallis (2004, 54 ff.) suggests that the Sun's "own χώρα," is as elusive as (and clearly a reference to) the χώρα of the *Timaeus*. This is so because he claims (reasonably so, I think) that seeing the sun in its χώρα is nothing different than seeing it "itself by itself": the χώρα and the ἐπέκεινα are different expressions of this fundamental elusiveness.

¹⁷ Cf. Heidegger's own comment on Plato's critique of the mistaking epigones of his work in the *Seventh Letter* (GA 19, 347). Heidegger then observes: "it is perhaps an irony of history that this letter has been considered to be spurious." Heidegger's own misunderstanding makes this historical irony even more ironic.

(GA 19, 231).¹⁸ Considering that the Stranger is a character whose overall dramatic intervention consists in *silencing* Socrates and Socrates' dialectic, this is quite revealing of Heidegger's position on dialogue and dialectic.¹⁹

Concerning the second problem with λόγος, namely its obstruction of *Stimmung*, the case against Plato is somewhat stronger because Plato did not theorize *Stimmung* like Heidegger did. However, if we consider *Stimmungen* as pre-reflexive and non-discursive attunements that have a disclosive effect on the people who are attuned to them, we would have to grant that Plato seemed concerned with the effect of non-discursive dynamics in the process of the philosophical inquiry. It could be argued that this is indeed why he presents so diligently different effects of different conversations on different people in different contexts and settings. Plato's dialogues are not a mere collection of λόγοι; the dialogical form, by systematically weaving these λόγοι with an action, an ἔργον, are constantly showing the limits of discourse. They show these limits not just by their form, but also in their content, notably by pointing out the inescapable function of the non-rational (passions, emotions, pleasures and pains) in rational inquiry and a life lived according to reason. As we shall see, Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger are all very sensitive to this situational, active and non-discursive dimension pictured in Plato's works, and Krüger goes as far as claiming that Plato understood *eros* as Heidegger understood *Stimmung*.

Concerning the third problem, namely the problem of the logical prejudice of metaphysics, it is important to note that the dialogical understanding of λόγος, coupled with the approach to λόγοι

¹⁸ Cf. Fried (2006, 176n18): "Apart from rare moments, Heidegger seems unable to read Plato as anything but the writer of treatises. The Platonic *dialogue*, as such, as an instantiation of the *dialectic* between finitude and transcendence, is quite simply invisible to him."

¹⁹ As Rosen (1991, 320) and Gonzalez (2009, 56-63) point out.

as images of the truth of beings and the attention paid to the non-discursive in Plato's works, anticipates the alethic conception of truth that the logical prejudice is said to distort.

In fact, while logical consistency is at play in the dialogues, it is not the only the driving force of the compositions, and sometimes, even the arguments within the dialogues employ rhetorical strategies and fallacies instead of sound reasoning procedures. The reason for this, I suggest, is that the purpose of the elucidation in a philosophic dialogue according to Plato is not to implement a set of sound λόγοι in the mind of the student. For philosophic education is a matter of converting the soul (ψυχῆς περιαγωγή, 521c), not of transmitting knowledge. This is true at the level of the interlocutors' conversation as well as at the Platonic level of the conversation between the readers and the dialogues: we are not transformed by sound arguments alone but by the very unfolding of the back and forth of question and answers and of its specific dramatic setting, that is, by the movement of the dialogue as a whole. Of course, the explicitly aporetic nature of so many dialogues is also hardly compatible with the view of a triumphing λόγος that would correspond to the matter under investigation. Should we say that the "early dialogues" have nothing to do with truth because they do not correspond to their object? What is the status of their truth if it is not such correspondence? Should we not say instead that the truth of the dialogues – even the aporetic ones – are their disclosive effect? Dialogues reveal the force of questions, make manifest the complexity of problems, disclose the limits of our human attempts to provide definitive solutions to these problems, etc. But this kind of alethic revelation is not that of a correspondence.²⁰

Likewise, Socrates' view, in the *Phaedo*, that λόγοι should be treated as images of the truth of being also speaks against the logical prejudice. The point there is *not* that λόγοι are images of beings – that would indeed suggest a correspondence theory of truth wherein λόγοι are more or less true

²⁰ This point has been very well put by Hyland (1995, 139-163).

according to the extent to which they match their originals. Rather, λόγοι are considered as images of the *truth* of beings. The former view sees λόγος as the locus of truth; the latter sees truth as tied to beings, and λόγος as an image through which we can access that truth. There, truth is itself the “original,” and not merely the correspondence between an original and its image. So, even where Plato’s Socrates seems to put λόγοι at the very forefront of the philosophical inquiry, he does so in a way that is hardly compatible with Heidegger’s claim concerning the logical prejudice of metaphysics. Finally, as I mentioned above, Plato’s meticulous attention to the “other” of λόγος in his dialogues, to the ἔργον and to all the non-discursive contributions to the unfolding of the encounter suggests that he does not consider λόγος as does the logical prejudice.

The fourfold critique of λόγος we find explicitly or implicitly in Heidegger’s aversion to Platonic dialectic thus finds three initial yet important responses in a dialogical interpretation of Socrates’ second sailing. The problems of logical truth and metaphysics will be further considered in the third section of this chapter.

2.1.3 *A Remark on Dialogues and Poetic Expression*

Before turning to the problem of ethics and politics in Heidegger’s Plato, I would like to call to attention a specific silence in his reading. I have already claimed that Heidegger fails to appreciate the dramatic structure of Plato’s dialogues and to reflect on the meaning of the interaction between the arguments and the action of Plato’s texts. While this can blind Heidegger to the philosophical meaning of a Platonic dialogue like the *Sophist*, it is worth asking a more basic question about this distortion: what prevents Heidegger from interpreting these features? Why does he read Plato’s dialogues like (weak) Aristotelian treatises? The most obvious answer to this question is that he fails

to consider Plato's texts as what they are, namely imitative fictions replete with poetic devices like images and myths.

It is quite odd that Heidegger fails to consider this important dimension of Plato's philosophy. For in the context of Plato's critique of imitative poetry, deliberately embracing an imitative form for the expression of his philosophical thinking brings Plato somewhat closer to the poets than what the mere λόγος of his critique suggest. Heidegger's discussion of this critique (especially Book X of the *Republic*) in the Nietzsche lectures will emphasize the conflict between poetry and philosophy and the deficiencies of poetry concerning truth without reflecting either on the meaning of the imitative form of Plato's dialogues or on their recurrent recourse to myths (GA 6.1, 190-201). This is surprising because Heidegger's own fascination with the power of poetry will lead him to think that an authentic meditation of Being could find better expressions in poetic saying (*Dichten*) than in more traditional philosophical prose. And while trying different ways of writing philosophy, he himself composed philosophical dialogues.²¹ Because Heidegger was not a poet, he was better at trying to show how some Greek and German poems could express meditative thinking of Being than at speaking poetically himself – although he attempted to write poetry and to speak poetically too. As for his dialogues, the interpretation of which is obviously beyond the scope of the present inquiry, suffice it to say that their dramatic aspect or action (ἔργον) is so subordinated to Heidegger's own λόγος that they are mere fictional disguises of Heidegger's positions.²²

That Heidegger misses the importance of the question of poetry in Plato is all the more significant given that it will be absolutely central to the Platonic philosophy of Strauss, Gadamer

²¹ Heidegger wrote the *Country Path Conversations* (1944/45) and a "Dialogue on Language Between a Japanese and an Inquirer" (1959). Heidegger's 1932 course on the *Phaedrus* (in GA 83) also offers a praise – a qualified one, to be sure – of dialogical writing. Since this is an *exception* to his critique of dialectic, it is beyond the scope of the present observations. To my knowledge, the only study of this exception is Gonzalez (2015).

²² For a compelling interpretation of their failure *qua* dialogues, see Gonzalez 2009, 273-280.

and Krüger. As I will show in chapter 5, there are reasons to consider that the poetic elements in Plato's writing have a disclosive power that is unavailable to unaided philosophic discourse. This potential and the corresponding limits of rational λόγος are so close to Heidegger's turn to poetic thinking that it is difficult not to suggest that there could have been here an important Platonic rejoinder in Heidegger's thought on this very point – one that could perhaps even, if taken seriously, have prevented him from accusing Platonism of being identical with metaphysics. At one point in the 1931-1932 lecture on the Allegory of the cave, Heidegger came quite close to recognizing the role of something like poetic thinking in Plato:

The presentation of an allegory, of a sensory image, is therefore nothing else than a clue for seeing [sehen-lassendes Winken] (a provision of a clue through something which is presented sensuously). Such a clue leads us to what simple description, be it ever so accurate and rigorous, can never grasp. There is thus an inner necessity to the fact that when Plato wants to say something fundamental and essential in philosophy, he always speaks in an allegory and places us before a sensory image. Not that he is unsure about what he is speaking of; on the contrary, he is quite sure [*überklar*] that it cannot be described or proved. (GA 34, 18-19)

I see no explicit reason why Heidegger has either abandoned or seriously downplayed this kind of insight into the meaning of the poetic dimensions of Platonic compositions. One can only conjecture what the implicit reason is: exploiting these and similar ideas would require a serious revision of the thesis concerning the fate of Platonic metaphysics, especially as compared to the status that early Greek philosophers such as Heraclitus and Parmenides have in Heidegger's reading. The "old quarrel between poetry and philosophy" might reveal that Plato anticipated Heidegger's thought more than we would normally suspect. As chapter 5 will show, this "old quarrel," however, leads the Platonist toward the field of political philosophy and to the question of philosophy's potential contribution to the city. Heidegger's position on this very question is not just strange. It is paradoxical and condemnable.

2.2 Ontology Eclipses Ethics and Politics

There is indeed a paradox in Heidegger's position vis-à-vis Plato. On the one hand, as we have already seen, Heidegger condemns Platonism as metaphysics. On the other, he oddly praises some kind of Platonic politics. In this praise, he even claims that philosophy has a crucial role to play for the political community. What positive role could a philosophy play for politics if it is so catastrophically mistaken? The fact that this paradox characterizes his reading and appropriation of Aristotle too suggests that it is the expression of a deeper tendency.

In fact, Heidegger ascribes a metaphysics of presence to Aristotle's ontology as early as 1924 (e.g. GA 19, 33). In the very same course, he praises and appropriates Aristotle's account of dianoetic virtues in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and especially of φρόνησις. Despite the interpretive controversies concerning this appropriation,²³ what is quite clear is that Heidegger's interest in φρόνησις is strictly ontological: the main takeaway for him is that through φρόνησις, what Dasein discloses is nothing else than itself. This autotelic mode of ἀληθεύειν, for Heidegger, has nothing to do with moral and political action, but solely with Dasein's self-disclosure. What is at stake here is an ontologization of Aristotelian πρᾶξις, such that the properly ethical and political dimensions are evacuated of the analysis and do not come back at any point. This is why *Being and Time*, which, as Volpi has persuasively shown,²⁴ proceeds from the ontologizing of Aristotle's practical philosophy, has nothing to say about ethics or politics. So, in the case of Aristotle, Heidegger rejects ontology but finds ontological inspiration in ethics and politics, such that practical philosophy is appropriated in a *strictly ontological form*. What I will now show is that the same kind of approach is at play in Heidegger's Plato. He depoliticizes and withdraws any ethical

²³ I have provided a *status quaestionis* of this debate and my own position in Pageau-St-Hilaire (2017, 2018).

²⁴ Volpi (1988).

meaning from the image of the cave, the Idea of the Good, and even the notion of the city, and this is what enables himself to embrace in the 1930s a kind of “Platonic” political program – that is, a political program that is completely ontologized. The terrible tragedy of Heidegger’s strange position is that by ontologizing this political program, he blinded himself to the horrors it would ontically, concretely allow to happen.

2.2.1 *Depoliticizing the Cave*

Heidegger’s only *official* treatment of Plato, that is, published during his lifetime, is the 1942 “Platos Lehre von der Wahrheit.” Francisco Gonzalez has compellingly argued that the 1942 piece, along with the Nietzsche lectures that were delivered in the preceding years (1936-1940), consists in a crystallization or radicalization of a dogmatic approach to Plato’s ontology, an approach that was not fully dominating before in Heidegger’s reading.²⁵ “Platos Lehre von der Wahrheit” does indeed condense and oversimplify the more nuanced readings of the allegory of the cave in the 1931-1932 lectures entitled *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit. Zu Platons Höhengleichnis und Theätet* (GA 34) and in the 1933-1934 lectures on the same topic (GA 36/37). While this dogmatization of Plato will prove especially relevant to understand Heidegger’s reduction of Plato’s ontology to a metaphysics of presence (to which I turn in the third and last section of this chapter), I wish here to draw attention to a striking similarity of all of Heidegger’s readings of the allegory of the cave: its depoliticization.

One could immediately object to this thesis that Heidegger’s 1933 interpretation of the cave is an exception to this characterization, and a very significant one. Indeed, the remake of the 1931-1932 lectures during Heidegger’s Rectorate in Freiburg is steeped in a highly politicized context

²⁵ See Gonzalez (2009 and 2019a).

and the National Socialist revolution is explicitly thematized as the decisive event of that background. Is that not a politicization, indeed an extreme politicization of the allegory of the cave? This is an important question, which calls for a clarification of what I mean by “depoliticization.” I do not intend to silence or minimize the importance of the political background or the significant political elements – either direct references or indirect allusions to Nazism – of these lectures on the allegory of the cave. What I mean is rather that all of these political elements and references are interpreted by Heidegger in a purely ontological fashion, such that their genuine political character and the concrete and particular content of these political elements are completely dissolved into general considerations about Being and the truth of Being. Heidegger depoliticizes the political by ontologizing it: *qua* political, these political affairs vanish. Ontology, once again, eclipses politics. I think that the depoliticization of National Socialism goes hand in hand with and is even prepared by the depoliticization of Plato’s political philosophy as presented in the *Republic*, and especially in the allegory of the cave.²⁶ Since I have suggested that this depoliticization was already at work in the 1924-1925 lectures and that the project *Being and Time* rests on the simultaneous and mutually dependent ontologizing and depoliticization of the human affairs, I now want to turn to Heidegger’s interpretation of the cave allegory. I will first discuss the 1931-1932 lectures and “Platos Lehre von der Wahrheit”, and subsequently address the more problematic 1933-1934 lectures.

For Heidegger, there is little doubt that that *truth* is the subject matter that the allegory presents. While ἀλήθεια certainly is a prominent theme of the allegory, the explicit purpose of Plato’s Socrates is a different one. Indeed, it is only at the end of book VI that we are told about the

²⁶ While I agree with most of Gonzalez’s (2012) conclusions on this topic, my arguments leading to these conclusions are different.

purpose of using images in a philosophical dialogue. There, Socrates acknowledges what Heidegger has observed concerning the limits of scientific λόγος, but the subject matter whose difficulty prompts the use of images is the Good, that is the Idea of the Good, and not truth (505a). Socrates explicitly says that he is not able to treat the Good as he treated the other cardinal virtues like “justice, moderation and the rest” (506d) – in Book IV, Socrates had provided *definitions* of courage, wisdom, moderation and justice (428a ff.).

The other important thing to note is that Socrates does not only craft *one* image or analogy but *three*: the Sun, the Divided Line and the Cave are all meant to picture the Good beyond the inherent limits of λόγος and definition. That these three images form a sort of tryptic is indicated by the fact that the Cave is explicitly read by Socrates through the lens of the Line (533e-534a) and by the crucial role that the sun plays in the image of the Cave. Now one may object that the Cave explicitly introduces the *new* theme of education, for education and the Good are not the same topic. The truth is that education only appears as a new theme if one forgets the context in which the question of the Good was brought up in Book VI: we must investigate the Good because it is the “greatest thing learned (μέγιστον μάθημα)” by the philosopher-rulers (505a2). The image of the Sun gives us an approximation of what the Good might *be* and the image of the Divided Line hints at where the Good stands in the ontological hierarchy and thereby at what cognitive faculty would be able to grasp it. Last but not least, the image of the Cave alludes to the ascent to the Good as a picture of the philosophical education and thus wraps up the discussion of the Idea of the Good as the greatest object of learning for philosopher-rulers. It is crucial that the Cave does not picture a philosophical education purely and simply, but rather the education of philosopher-*rulers*, for if we abstract from this important element, we could barely understand why the ascent outside the cave must be completed by a descent back into the cave. So, while truth is important in all three images,

the core of the tryptic is the Good as the goal of an education for philosopher-rulers. Heidegger could have seen this if he had taken into account the context of the allegory of the Cave. But he deliberately refuses to do so:

In the following interpretation, we deliberately leave unconsidered the precise placement of this allegory within the dialogue. To begin with we leave aside all discussion concerning the dialogue as a whole. What is crucial about the allegory is that it can stand entirely on its own, so we can consider it by itself without in any way minimizing its content or meaning. (GA 34, 18)

In 1933-1934, he will go as far as saying that the allegory “could really have a place in any Platonic dialogue” (GA 36/37, 124). Even if one is willing to grant this to Heidegger, one would immediately need to add a qualification to the effect that the Cave would have a different meaning in a different dialogue. The preceding remarks should be preliminary evidence that Heidegger *does* minimize the content and meaning of the Cave. For it is only thanks to this abstraction that he is able to interpret the whole allegory as being just about truth and Being. What Heidegger’s interpretation most strikingly leaves out is that that the Cave is about the education of political rulers. Bearing this in mind is crucial because it reveals that the play of darkness and light in and outside the cave is not simply the play of truth and untruth understood as hiddenness and unhiddenness (although it may importantly be this too). It is also – and perhaps first and foremost – the picture of a tumultuous relation between philosophy and politics, embodied in and lived out by the person of the philosopher-ruler.

In fact, Plato does not simply use the cave in the allegory as an image of hiddenness: the cave first and most importantly stands for the city. And Socrates points out that imagination (εἰκασία) and trust (πίστις) can be brought together under the title of opinion, δόξα (534a). Therefore, the continuity between the inside and outside of the cave is a continuity between the *opinions of the city* and philosophical inquiry into Being. In other words, appreciating the concrete, ontic details of the

Cave reveals a continuity between ontology and politics in Plato's *Republic*. There is no door that one must break open to go outside the cave; the path is rough but the entrance is open. Philosophers must not simply run away from δόξα to finally grasp the Forms and the Good; they are required to examine dialectically the city's opinions and it is only through such examination that they will be able to ascend toward the Good. To use the vocabulary of *Sein und Zeit*, Plato recognizes a way of speaking and thinking through *das Man* that allows one to overcome its contradictions, superficiality and limits; he does not think like Heidegger that speech (*Rede*) amid *das Man* must necessarily be idle talk (*Gerede*) and, therefore, he does not think that the only possibility to overcome this chatter is *silence* (cf. *SZ* 160-166, 273, 296).²⁷

This ontological-political continuity goes both ways. This is why the descent of the philosophers back into the cave is essential. Despite the great difference between knowledge and opinion, Socrates repeatedly affirms that philosophical knowledge is required to deal appropriately with what is going on in the cave: philosophers will “become useful and beneficial (χρήσιμα καὶ ὠφέλιμα γίνονται)” because they will have some grasp of the Good (505a4); “one who will act prudently in private or in public (ἐμφρόνως πράξειν ἢ ἰδίᾳ ἢ δημοσίᾳ) must see [the Good] (517c5)”; once the philosophers will be habituated to the darkness of the cave, they will see “infinitely better (μυρίῳ βέλτιον) than those who are there [in the cave] and will know each of the images and of what they are the images (ἕκαστα τὰ εἶδωλα ἅττα ἐστὶ καὶ ὦν) because (διὰ) they will have seen the truth about the beautiful, just and good things (τᾶληθῆ ἐωρακέναι καλῶν τε καὶ δικαίων καὶ ἀγαθῶν πέρι, 520c3-6)” There is another important continuity between ontology and politics: the incorruptibility of philosophers *qua* rulers is guaranteed by the fact that they have experienced ontology and know that it is far superior to the messy world of politics; their lack of desire to rule is crucial in their

²⁷ Cf. the analysis of *Sprache* as rooted in *Schweigen* in GA 36/37, 107-112.

being appropriate rulers, but this lack of desire is the counter-part of their insatiable longing for Being (520c6-d4; cf. e.g. 475b4-c8; 485b1, 485c2-3). This continuity between ontology and politics, however, is not an identification: for there to be a continuity between two things, these two things must remain different. This is why there is both a continuity and a tension between ontology and politics in Plato, whereas Heidegger's reading blurs the difference and identifies politics with ontology.

I do not mean to minimize the importance of the tension between the cave and the freed prisoners.²⁸ Yet if Socrates points to a continuity between ontology and politics, there must be something that makes ontology somewhat suited to the descent back into the cave. It is highly plausible that it is with this continuity in view that Plato called the highest point of his ontology the Good and not the One (as Neo-Platonists would have it) or Being as such (as Heidegger has it). From an Aristotelian standpoint, the good is the object of practical philosophy and disclosed by practical wisdom, whereas Being is the object of first philosophy and disclosed by theoretical wisdom.²⁹ But such a convenient distinction does not seem to correspond to how things stand in Plato's *Republic*, where the unhypothetical principle of all things is the Good and where the meaning of φρόνησις is broader than that which Aristotle gives to it, and certainly irreducible to practical wisdom alone.³⁰ Given how Heidegger blinds himself to a potential continuity between ontology

²⁸ While we may expect Heidegger to try to overemphasize this tension – for this way, ontology could be absolutely separate from politics –, his strategy is rather to ontologize the inside of the cave, turning all the significant ontic details in the story into ontological meanings. A significant example of this is his account of the death of the philosopher who frees prisoners. According to Heidegger, the threat is not ontic: it simply represents the impossibility of the philosopher to be understood by *das Man* (GA 34, 83-84; GA 36/37, 182-183)! On this interesting feature, see Ralkowski 2009, 87 and Gonzalez 2012, 93.

²⁹ Of course, nuances should be made with respect to Aristotle – after all, the prime unmoved mover, which is pure activity, is also called 'good' in *Metaphysics* Λ 7 (1072b). A sharp division is more clearly palpable in the Aristotelian tradition initiated by Saint Thomas Aquinas (see esp. *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 95 a. 2, *resp.*).

³⁰ Even Heidegger recognizes this (GA 34, 36): φρόνησις ist für Platon der Titel für Erkenntnis überhaupt, d.h. Erfassen des Wahren, Umsicht *und* Einsicht, bezogen auf Welt *und* Selbst, beides in Einheit. Ich betone das, weil dann bei Aristoteles der Begriff φρόνησις ganz anders, und vor allem verengt, gefaßt ist." This acknowledgement is only apparently paradoxical, for Heidegger thinks both *Umsicht* and *Einsicht* as ontologically (and not ontically) oriented.

and ethics and politics, we should not be surprised by his interpretation of the Good as being “not at all a matter of ethics or morality [Es handelt sich überhaupt nicht um Ethisches oder Moralisches]” (GA 34, 100).³¹ Repeating that “it does not have any kind of *moral* [*sittlich*] meaning,” he adds: “ethics has corrupted [verdorben] the fundamental meaning of this word” (GA 34, 106). To be sure, Plato’s ἀγαθόν cannot have anything to do with what Heidegger calls the “harmless meaning suitable for aunties” – i.e. it does not point to Christian or ordinary post-Kantian morality.³² Yet, how is that enough to rule out any kind of ethics (*irgendeine Ethik*) as relevant to understanding the Good (GA 34, 100)? Why renounce to any relation to an ethical meaning if, as we have seen, virtuous political rulership requires some grasp of the Good? As for politics, the proper element of the cave, Heidegger does not *even mention it* in the 1931-1932 lectures. This is because he interprets the Good in a purely ontological way, and thus depoliticizes it just as much as he depoliticizes the cave. In 1942, Heidegger repeats his point that any ethical interpretation of the Good “falls outside of Greek thought,” but adds that such interpretation was a risk that Plato ran when he called the Good an Idea: it “offers the occasion for thinking of ‘the good’ ‘morally’ and ultimately for reckoning it to be a ‘value’” (GA 9, 227).³³

A similar depoliticization of the Good is at work in the 1933-1934 lectures: “The ἀγαθόν has no content of its own but means a *way in which* something is – something that prevails, that holds firm, that stands firm, that is upright and fit [Das ἀγαθόν hat nichts Inhaltliches, sondern es meint eine Weise, wie etwas ist, das sich durchsetzend, durchhaltend, standhaltend, wacker, tauglich ist].” (GA 36/37, 219; cf. 202). The rejection of any ethical or political meaning in the Idea of the Good once again takes the form of an ontologizing: by seeking a strictly ontological meaning, Heidegger

³¹ Gonzalez (2009, 33-34) and Hyland (2011, 174n58) also think that we should read the Good both ethically and ontologically.

³² Cf. GA 34, 100 on “Christian morality and its secularized corruptions [säkularisierte Abarten].”

³³ This is, of course, a way that Heidegger uses to draw a single line between Plato and Nietzsche.

talks about the Good in terms of steadfastness, prevailing, resistance. The obvious problem with this interpretive gesture is that we hardly see how the characteristics he ascribes to the Good could not *equally apply* to say, terrible cleverness (τὸ δεινόν).³⁴ Heidegger could object that to consider the terrible under the guise of steadfastness and prevailing is precisely to give the good a specific content, which he says is a mistake. But the problem is that if we refuse *any* content to the Good, “good” could be an appropriate characterization of what is clearly *not* good. But this is only a paradox if we ask about the relation between the Good and good things, that is, if we think about an ontic-ontological continuity. Heidegger seems reluctant to do so.

How should we understand, then, the horrifying politics woven in the 1933-1934 course? There, Heidegger’s long prelude to the interpretation of the Cave emphasizes the political moment as historically decisive.³⁵ In these appalling pages, he considers things such as the essence of the people and of the state, speaks of the *German* Dasein in its relation to the Greek beginning, where the latter is supposed to allow “to perceive the primordial laws of our Germanic ethnicity [germanischen Menschenstammes] in their most simple exigency and greatness” (GA 36/37, 89). He also interprets Heraclitus’ saying that “war is the father of all things” as meaning that “the essence of Being is struggle [Das Wesen des Seins ist Kampf]” (GA 36/37, 94).³⁶ In this ontological war (for he also translates πόλεμος by *Krieg*),³⁷ the most dangerous “enemy” is internal and the German people should get ready to look “far ahead with the goal of total annihilation” (GA 36/37, 91). Shortly before turning to the Cave, Heidegger affirms that humanity is at a turning point where a

³⁴ I am referring to τὸ δεινόν precisely to use a *Greek* notion and avoid talking in terms of “evil” (*Böse*), which Heidegger rejects, following Nietzsche’s *Genealogie der Moral*, as a Christian misunderstanding.

³⁵ Comparing the two lectures reveal that in 1933-1934, seven sections (38 pages) were added before the discussion of the ordinary view of truth as correctness with which the 1931-1932 course starts.

³⁶ This could remind the reader of Nietzschean themes. On the Nietzschean influence of the German readings of Heraclitus at the time, see Most 2010, 250-253.

³⁷ The 1933-1934 course appears as an exception to Fried’s (2000, 15) claim that Heidegger’s πόλεμος means first and foremost *Auseinandersetzung* and not *Krieg* or *Kampf* (GA 36/37, 89-95).

“historical transformation of the essence of truth and Dasein” appears possible. What follows this announce helps us see who (or what) the internal enemy might be:

At this point, it is getting embarrassing that there are more and more people who believe they have discovered that liberalism must be refuted. Certainly it should be overcome, but only when we comprehend that liberalism is just a marginal epiphenomenon, a very weak and late one at that, rooted in great and still unshaken realities. And there is the danger that the overzealous killers of liberalism will quickly turn out to be so-called “agents” of a liberal National Socialism, which just drips with the naive and upright innocence of the youth movement. (GA 36/37, 119)

The enemy is not liberalism, but the “great and still unshaken realities” that are responsible for liberalism. These realities refer to the “tradition that sweeps over us in a manner that is as great and rich as it is petty and empty,” a tradition that “rules over us without our knowing.” We are then told that this tradition rules over us through the “usual conception of the essence of truth,” namely “truth conceived as *correctness* [*Richtigkeit*]” (GA 36/37, 120). So, the internal enemy of German Dasein is the “orthotic” conception of truth, which should be fought in order to defend the “alethic” understanding. And the problem is not National Socialism, but National Socialists who cannot see this “spiritual” meaning of this revolutionary fight. According to Heidegger, politics is truly the unfolding of *Seinsgeschichte*. Politics is completely absorbed into ontology and identified with it.

In this perspective, National Socialism is supposed to bring a spiritual renewal that will overturn the domination of the “doctrine of Ideas,” which “determined the next two millenia” in the way humans thought and still think about Being (GA 36/37, 146-148). Despite Plato’s responsibility in leading the way to this domination, Heidegger thinks the allegory of the cave can tell us something about the liberation he sees in the 1933 revolution. For after all, this image is the story of a liberation. As Heidegger insists, the genuine liberation is not the unshackling of the prisoners, but the turning around of their soul toward the light. Significantly, Heidegger translates this $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta\varsigma$

περιαγωγή as the “leading of the essence of humanity around and out [Herum- und Herausführen des Wesens des Menschen]” (206). The peculiarity is that “soul” here is not an individual *Mensch*, but the “whole human essence [das ganze Wesen des Menschen]”. The liberation is therefore general and ontological, a “liberation of humanity to the essence of its Being [Befreiung des Menschen zum Wesen seines Seins] (225, modif. trans.) and it concerns the “total history of a people [die Gesamtgeschichte eines Volkes]”. National Socialism thus appears to Heidegger as a sort of repetition of the Greek beginning.

Once Heidegger has completely ontologized the meaning of the Cave, and therefore completely transformed ethics and politics into ontology and the history of Being, he can interpret the 1933 revolution as Germany’s “collective breakout from the cave.”³⁸ To be sure, the *Republic* does not convey the idea of a collective liberation from the cave. Only a very few philosophical guardians can become truly free, and Heidegger is aware of that (e.g. GA 36/37, 194). But his hope seems to be to guard the state to make sure that it is liberated from ontological misunderstandings – Germany can be thusly freed whether most Germans are aware of it or not: “Philosophers, as philosophizing human beings, have the task and function of φύλακες, guardians [Wächter]. They have to be on guard to make sure that rulership and the state’s ruling structure are thoroughly under the sway of philosophy [durchwaltet ist von der Philosophie]” (GA 37/37, 194). This seems to be the dreadful “Platonic” program of Heidegger’s rectorate.³⁹

³⁸ To borrow Safranski’s (1998) expression, appropriated by Ralkowski (2009, 64).

³⁹ To borrow – with qualification – the title of Christian Sommer’s short book, *Heidegger 1933. Le programme platonicien du Discours du rectorat* (2013). While Sommer’s analysis is perceptive and helpful, I fundamentally disagree with him insofar as I don’t think that Heidegger’s understanding of Platonic politics is adequate. Because he ontologizes politics, Heidegger’s politics are only Platonic in a superficial and misleading sense, that is, “Platonic” but not Platonic.

2.2.2 *An Apolitical Πόλις? On the Paradox of Ontological “Platonic” Politics*

It should now be clear that Heidegger consistently depoliticizes politics by ontologizing it, and that the 1933-1934 reading of the Cave is not exception to this feature of his thought but rather its most extreme expression. It is only possible to understand the alleged Platonism of his 1933 *Rektoratsrede* against the background of this ontologizing depoliticization. In short, Heidegger thinks that Plato’s ontology is problematic – for reasons explained in the next section of this chapter – but that his politics, *once ontologized*, can be appropriated. It appears that the ontologizing of politics is not a problem for Heidegger. I have shown that ontologizing the cave made us lose sight that the cave represented the πόλις, a *political* community. But according to Heidegger, there is nothing wrong with conceiving the πόλις *apolitically*. This will become extraordinarily clear in the *Parmenides* lecture of 1942-1943, where he stresses the “primordial relation” between πόλις and Being:

Πόλις is the πόλος, the pole, the place around which everything appearing to the Greeks as a being turns in a peculiar way. The pole is the place around which all beings turn and precisely in such a way that in the domain of this place beings show their running and their condition. [...] The πόλις is neither city nor state and definitely not the fatal mixture of these two inappropriate characterizations. Hence the πόλις is not the notorious “city-state” but is, rather, the settling of the place of the history of Greek humanity [...] The πόλις is the abode, gathered into itself, of the unconcealedness of beings. [GA 54, 132-133]

So, both the Greek city and the city’s regime, the πόλις and its πολιτεία are “essentially unpolitical” in character because genuinely ontological (140):

Each πολιτικόν, everything ‘political,’ is always only an effect of the πόλις, i.e., of the πολιτεία, is not itself determined or determinable ‘politically.’ The πόλις is just as little something ‘political’ as space itself is something spatial. The πόλις itself is *only* the pole of πέλειν, the way the Being of Beings, in its disclosure and concealment, disposes for itself a ‘where’ in which the history of a human race is gathered. [...] the Greeks are the utterly unpolitical people, unpolitical by essence, because their humanity is *primordially and exclusively determined from Being itself*, i.e. from ἀλήθεια [anfänglich und ausschließlich vom Sein selbst her, d.h. aus der ἀλήθεια bestimmt ist] (142; my emphasis)

It is on the ground of this understanding of the political community that we should understand how Heidegger presents himself as a Platonist in the Rectoral Address. There, the National Socialist revolution is once again a “spiritual mission” understood as the submission to the beginning of the German “spiritual-historical existence,” namely the beginning [*Aufbruch*] of Greek philosophy (SA, 29; 31; GA 16, 107-9). Heidegger explains that what needs to be recovered is the Greek understanding of θεωρία as the highest ἐνέργεια (activity) of man, as the “supreme realization of genuine practice” (SA, 32; GA 16, 108). Despite the reference to Aristotle’s notion of activity and of theory as the highest practice, the end of the address reveals that Heidegger understands this as being in tune with a crucial feature of Plato’s *Republic*, namely the proposition of philosophical rulership.⁴⁰ In fact, he concludes the speech with a quote from Book VI and translates it in a very peculiar way: τὰ [...] μεγάλα πάντα ἐπισφαλῆ (497d9), which Heidegger renders as “all that is great stands in the storm [*Alles Große steht im Sturm*]” (SA 39; GA 16, 117).

There, the greatness Socrates is referring to is philosophy and the city going hand in hand. Thus, Heidegger is referring to his rectorship as ‘Platonic’ philosophical rule. But, as many observed, while Socrates is expressing the *fragility* of this coincidence of philosophy and politics, Heidegger’s impossible rendering of ἐπισφαλῆ (‘to be prone to fall, unstable, precarious’) as “standing in the storm” turns the meaning of the phrase upside down.⁴¹ Another interesting feature is that Socrates immediately relates the fragility of the great things with the difficulty of the beautiful or noble things (τὰ καλὰ τῷ ὄντι χαλεπά, 479d10). While the *hardship* associated with the καλόν could have been a better fit for Heidegger’s desire to emphasize the resisting power of great things, Heidegger could *not* allow himself to conclude his speech with an appeal to fine/beautiful/noble

⁴⁰ On this point, I disagree with Ralkowski (2009, 97), who argues on the basis of the former reference that the Address is more inspired by Aristotle than by Plato.

⁴¹ See. e.g. O’Connor (2002, 162; 199-200); Gonzalez (2012, 117-118). *Contra* Sommer (2013, 17) who barely mentions in passing that the translation is “controversial.”

things. The reason for that, I contend, is not that a rhetoric appealing to nobility would be odd in a Nazi speech, but that the *καλόν* has an immediate and unavoidable *ethical* significance. And giving a moral connotation to his rectoral program would have worked against his own conviction that the 1933 revolution is completely foreign to ethics and politics: it is easier to give a strictly ontological meaning to τὰ μεγάλα than to τὰ καλά.⁴²

In fact, Heidegger's philosophical rulership in the *Rektoratsrede* is, once again, completely ontologized. While accounting for the fragility of philosophical rule would require some ontic considerations about how, concretely, philosophers ought to return to the cave and *adapt* their sight to the gloomy world of politics (517d-e; 539e-540b), Heidegger's gaze is solely turned toward the theoretical life. Through knowledge service (*Wissensdienst*), the German university "educates and disciplines the *leaders and guardians* [*Führer und Hüter*] of the fate of the German Volk" (SA, 36; GA 16, 114).⁴³ But the *Wissenschaft* Heidegger has in mind has no ontic content; it is the "*questioning, unsheltered standing firm in the midst of the uncertainty of the totality of being* [*fragenden, ungedeckten Standhaltens inmitten der Ungewißheit des Seienden im Ganzen*]" (SA, 33; GA 16, 111). Such ontological questioning is supposed to create Germany's "spiritual world." Philosophical rulership is not political because the "political" revolution is in Heidegger's mind an ontological revolution. Heidegger did not see the fragility or precarity of philosophical rule because his own appropriation of philosophical kingship excludes the political: there is no problem or tension if the philosophers' rule *consists in*

⁴² We should also note that Heidegger's characterization of "all that is great" in terms of a *stehen* echoes how he ontologizes Plato's Good in various modes of *setzen* and *halten* (GA 36/37, 219).

⁴³ An important "Platonic" feature of the *Rektoratsrede* is the tripartition of the student life, through the *Studentenschaft*, into a working service, a military service and a knowledge service. *Contra* Sommer (2013, 32-33), this importantly differs from Plato's tripartition of the city in two respects. First, in the *Republic*, justice requires that each class "minds its own business," whereas the three levels of the *Studentenschaft* presumably apply to all students. Second, Heidegger affirms that "the three forms of service [...] are equally necessary and of equal rank" (SA, 36; GA 16, 114);, whereas in Kallipolis, the three classes are all necessary but very clearly hierarchized, and this hierarchy is essential to justice. We must conclude that by the *Republic's* standards, the *Studentenschaft* would be purely and simply unjust. Yet, as we have seen, justice is not a concern for Heidegger.

inquiring into the meaning of Being. The problem, of course, is that he could not see the horrifying character of what was truly happening during his “ontological” rulership.

Heidegger’s errancy can thus be traced to his persistent ontologizing of ethics and politics, which prevents him from appreciating the concreteness of communal life. Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger avoid such hyper-ontological interpretation of politics in general and of Plato’s political philosophy in particular. They will also and most importantly provide interpretations of Plato’s *Republic* that are deeply aware of the precarity of Plato’s beautiful city that Heidegger refused to consider and that will prevent hubristic attempts to realize the ideal of philosophical kingship.

2.3 On Being, Truth, and Presence

Heidegger thought he could appropriate Plato’s political philosophy because he completely ontologized it and thus suppressed the properly political and ethical elements of Plato’s politics, but he is certainly *not* a Platonist as far as ontology goes. In fact, Plato’s ontology as Heidegger interprets it is completely at odds with his own understanding of the meaning of Being. We can distinguish three critiques that Heidegger addresses to Plato, and while each of these critiques are grounded on different interpretive claims, they are closely related to one another. The first claim is that Plato, like “the Greeks” in general,⁴⁴ thinks that “to be” (*Sein*) means “to be present” (*Gegenwärtigsein*, *Anwesenensein*, *Vorhandensein*), and therefore he thinks Being as presence (*Gegenwart*, *Anwesenheit*, *Vorhandenheit*). In 1924, when Heidegger first affirms that presence is the meaning of

⁴⁴ For a good discussion of why Heidegger’s generalizations under the title “the Greeks” are problematic, see Most 2002. Heidegger’s own subsequent readings on early Greek philosophers confirm that this label is too broad to be accurate.

Being for the Greeks, it is not quite clear that he rejects this understanding, but this is very clear by 1927.⁴⁵ In fact, Heidegger writes at the beginning of *Sein und Zeit*:

in our process of destruction [Destruktion] we find ourselves faced with the task of interpreting the basis of the ancient ontology in the light of the problematic of temporality [des Bodens der antiken Ontologie im Lichte der Problematik der Temporalität]. When this is done, it will be manifest that the ancient interpretation of the Being of beings [die antike Auslegung des Seins des Seienden] is oriented towards the ‘world’ or ‘nature’ in the widest sense, and that it is indeed in the terms of ‘time’ that its understanding of Being [das Verständnis des Seins aus der ‘Zeit’] is obtained. The outward evidence for this (though of course it is *merely* outward evidence) is the determination of the meaning of Being [die Bestimmung des Sinnes von Sein] as παρουσία or οὐσία, which signifies, in ontologico-temporal terms, ‘presence’ [was ontologisch-temporal ‘Anwesenheit’ bedeutet]. Entities are grasped in their Being as ‘presence’; this means that they are understood with regard to a definite mode of time – the ‘Present’ [Seiendes is in seinem Sein als ‘Anwesenheit’ gefaßt, d. h. es ist mit Rücksicht auf einen bestimmten Zeitmodus, die ‘Gegenwart’, verstanden]. (SZ, 25; modif. trans.)

Therefore, the first charge is that Plato (and the Greeks) failed to understand the meaning of Being in the *full* or *complete* horizon of time by privileging *one* specific mode of time – the present. The temporal horizon in which Heidegger will attempt to understand Being is broader; it is the horizon of the *three* “ekstases of temporality [Ektstasen der Zeitlichkeit]” (e.g. SZ, 329).⁴⁶ In short, if Being *is* time, it cannot be mere presence.⁴⁷

The second claim is that Plato thought that “to be” means “to be produced” (*Sein = Hergestelltsein*). While Heidegger ascribes this view to Plato as early as the *Sophist* lectures, he only develops it fully in the first part of the *Nietzsche* lectures (1936-1937), through an interpretation of

⁴⁵ To my knowledge, nothing on Greek philosophy in 1922 or 1923 (*Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles. Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung, Natorp-Bericht, Phänomenologische Interpretation ausgewählter Abhandlungen des Aristoteles zu Ontologie und Logik, Ontologie. Hermeneutik der Faktizität, Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung*) ascribes this view to any Greek philosopher. If I am right, the thesis first emerges in the interpretation of ‘actuality’ in the 1924 *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie*, is ascribed to Plato for the first time in the 1924-1925 lectures on the *Sophist* and it becomes *explicitly* pejorative in 1927. Fronterotta (2020, 171) claims that this critique emerges only in the 1930s, but obviously misses what Heidegger says about the Greek notion of “Being as presence” in *Sein und Zeit*.

⁴⁶ Within this ecstatic whole, however, future has priority (SZ, 329): “Das primäre Phänomen der ursprünglichen und eigentlichen Zeitlichkeit ist die Zukunft.”

⁴⁷ I think Gadamer is right to put Heidegger’s project in *Sein und Zeit* as straightforwardly as this in *Wahrheit und Methode* (GW 1, 261): “Heideggers These war: Das Sein selber ist Zeit.”

Book X of the *Republic*. He criticizes the “productionist” understanding of the meaning of Being because he claims that it puts Being under the power of a creative subject – Plato’s *Ideenlehre* would in this respect be the emergence of the “metaphysics of subjectivity” that will culminate in Nietzsche’s “doctrine” of the will-to-power.⁴⁸

The third and last claim is that we find in Plato the last battle in the war between truth understood as unconcealedness or unhiddenness (ἀλήθεια, *Unverborgenheit*) and truth understood as correctness (ὀρθότης, *Richtigkeit*), a battle in which unconcealedness surrenders and leads the way to the dominance of the “correspondence theory of truth.” For Heidegger, there are several reasons why this surrender represents a loss. First, truth as *adequatio intellectus et rei* presupposes that there is something which is made manifest to the intellect in the first place for there to be such correspondence. Thus the “orthotic” understanding of truth is seriously flawed if taken independently of the “alethic” understanding. Second, to understand truth as the correctness of a correspondence of the intellect to the being it apprehends is to identify the real locus of truth with a subject and not with beings and their Being. This has the unfortunate consequence of dissociating the question of truth from the question of Being, and therefore of contaminating the question of truth with the forgetfulness of Being (*Seinsvergessenheit*). Finally, the “orthotic” view presents truth as essentially tied with a *measuring* intellect, reducing being and truth to what can stay under the mastery and domination of human subjectivity. This measuring mastery has the further consequence of pulling apart truth and untruth as if these were simply two opposite and completely separate poles, and to hold on to everything that is unconcealed to the expense of what remains hidden. For Heidegger, this runs the risk of occluding the intimate relation between the hidden

⁴⁸ For a critical discussion of Heidegger’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s will-to-power as metaphysics, see Pippin (2015, 179-196).

and the unhidden and the fact that the unhidden is only so because wrested or extracted (*abgerungen*) from hiddenness in a constant struggle (*Kampf*) against it (GA 34, 125).

What is common to these three claims and critiques is an understanding of Being as *static*. Heidegger thinks that in all his attempt to tackle the *Seinsfrage*, Plato succumbs to the temptation of interpreting Being as what *remains* at the disposal of a thinking subject, blinding himself to the dynamic and temporal character of Being, and therefore to its fundamental elusiveness. Let us now turn to Heidegger's interpretation of these alleged mistakes in Plato's ontology.

2.3.1 Presence, δύναμις, Idea

In the *Sophist* lectures, the claim that Plato understands being as presence first occurs in the interpretation of the notion of production (ποίησις) as "leading into being" (ἄγειν εἰς οὐσίαν, cf. *Soph.* 219b4). Heidegger explains that if it is possible to bring into being, then being as οὐσία has the sense of being produced (*Hergestelltsein*). But to be produced means to be present in a certain way: "Here, therefore, Being signifies, in a wholly determinate sense, *the presence of definite things in the circuit of everyday use and everyday sight [die Anwesenheit bestimmter Sachen im Umkreise des täglichen Gebrauchs un des täglichen Sehens]*" (GA 19, 269) The fact that "Being" here is exposed in the specific context of discussing productive activity does not prevent Heidegger to generalize this alleged meaning of being and apply it to different Platonic contexts. Later in the course, he thus affirms that the being of the ἰδέα is the "presence for correct seeing [Gegenwart für das rechte Sehen]" (334).

There are two plausible reasons for the extension of this meaning: either Heidegger thinks that ποιήσις is the correct paradigm for an understanding of Plato's ontology, or Plato is simply

repeating in his own way “the sense of Being for the Greeks” – a phrase that recurs abundantly in the course. In fact, both reasons concur insofar as he claims that Plato inherits this meaning of Being from the factual Dasein of the Greeks, itself dominated by a world whose core is production and possession: “And indeed the Greeks drew their implicit sense of Being out of the natural immediate interpretation of Being by factual Dasein, where Being means to be there already at the very outset as possession [Besitz], household [Hausstand], property [Anwesen]-put more sharply: as presence [Anwesenheit]” (GA 19, 467).

Not only is this reliance on the *ordinary* meaning of οὐσία for the Greeks to determine its *philosophical* meaning in Plato dubious,⁴⁹ but Heidegger meets in his reading of the *Sophist* further determinations of Being that complicate his identification of Being with presence. First, he notices that Being is defined by the Stranger as a “power to affect or to be affected (δύναμις εἶτ’ εἰς τὸ ποιεῖν εἶτ’ εἰς τὸ παθεῖν, cf. 247 d8-e1 and 248c4-5)” (GA 19, 474). We have here a dynamic conception of Being that hardly fits the claim that Being means presence. Second, this power to affect or to be affected is further determined as a power to “share” or “be with” (κοινωνεῖν, cf. 248b1-6 with GA 19, 478: “δύναμις κοινωνίας): “being now means, if we insert κοινωνία: δύναμις κοινωνίας, the possibility of being with one another [die Möglichkeit des Miteinanderseins]” (GA 19, 479). As, Figal and Gonzalez rightly argued, Heidegger quite clearly faces here an alternative to Being as presence in Plato’s text.⁵⁰ For a capacity or power cannot be the same as static presence, and this *Miteinandersein* show a way of understanding Being as relational, and relation differs from static presence. It is only possible to reduce relation to presence if one forces the notion of presence onto the relation, like Heidegger does in his “different” formulation of this *Miteinandersein-Können*:

⁴⁹ Heidegger himself notes in *Sein und Zeit* how important the philosophical transformation of language is (SZ, 39).

⁵⁰ Figal (2000, 107-108); Gonzalez (2009, 87-93).

“to be capable of presence with something (*Imstande-sein zur Anwesenheit bei etwas*)”, “co-presence (*Mitanwesenheit*)” (480). The result of this interpretation is that both the dynamic and the relational elements are lost: the capacity is no longer a capacity to be in community with (*κοινωνία*) but simply the possibility of something present to be present alongside (*bei* takes over *mit*) something else that is also present. Co-presence is no community. While the *Sophist* points to an understanding of Being as a power to relate (Being is characterized by its potential to mix, and especially to mix with the other great kinds [motion, rest, sameness and otherness]),⁵¹ Heidegger transforms this singular ontological insight into the dogma he has already ascribed to Plato. As Figal rightly suggests, abandoning this doctrine in favor of the dynamics of being and its relations to Ideas and genera would require to take a step in the direction of Platonic dialectic.⁵² And we have seen above that Heidegger is highly suspicious of dialectic.

We already see in 1924-1925 a twofold meaning of “presence” in the understanding of being as being produced: presence for use (*Gebrauch*) and presence for sight (*Sehen*). While the linguistic argument in favor of the doctrine that Being for the Greeks means presence seems rooted in *use* (*οὐσία* as property, possession), there is already in the *Sophist* lectures a brief interpretation of the Platonic *ἰδέα* as presence. It is *this* interpretation that Heidegger further develops in the 1930s in order to maintain his thesis. In the 1931-1932 and 1933-1934 courses on the allegory of the cave, Heidegger divides the image into four stages: 1) the situation of the prisoners in the cave; 2) the unshackling of the prisoners as first (and failed) liberation; 3) the turning around of the prisoners and ascent outside the cave as genuine liberation; 4) the return to the cave.

⁵¹ See Figal (2000, 108): “The *γένος* of being only has a meaning together with the other *γένη* being the combination of them. But also it can be distinguished from all the other *γένη*: no other *γένος* means ‘the potential of being combined.’ [...] Being, as we may conclude, so means *the realm of possibility for the relation among genera and ideas*; being is, then, also *their very relatedness*.”

⁵² *Ibid.*

As far as the ontic-ontological distinction is concerned, there is no important difference for Heidegger between the first two stages. Speaking of the shadows, Heidegger says: “The people there have no relation to the fire and the light, so they are unable to tell bright from dark. What they see is not a *semblance of something else*, but *beings themselves*, τὰ ὄντα = that which is [das *Seiende selbst*, τὰ ὄντα = das Seiende]” (GA 36/37, 132; GA 34, 27). In the second stage, the prisoners are blinded and confused by the light of the fire and prefer to go back to the comfort of their initial situation, thinking that the shadows are *truer* (ἀληθέστερα, *unverborgener*) even though the puppets are to a *greater extent* (μᾶλλον ὄντα, “mehr *seined, seinder*”) (GA 34, 32-33; GA 36/37, 137-138). What is important for our present purpose is that the second stage is still understood as a relation or comportment to beings (Verhalten zu Seiendem, GA 34, 38): Being is still not in view because the prisoners cannot yet see the difference between Being and beings (GA 36/37, 140). This difference is seen in the third stage, when the prisoners truly free themselves and ascend outside the cave. This is so because the third stage opens up the prisoners’ eyes to the Ideas. The ἰδέα, Heidegger asserts, gives us “what a thing *is*, – its *Being* [was ein Ding *ist, sein Sein*]”: “In the idea we see *what* every being is and *how* it is, in short the *Being* of beings [In der Idee erblicken wir das, *was* jedes Seiende ist und *wie* es ist, kurz: das *Sein* des Seienden] (GA 34, 51-52; cf. GA 36/37, 152, 161).

Since the subterranean realities are to the Ideas what beings (*Seiende*) are to Being (*Sein*), we should look at the meaning of ἰδέα to figure out the meaning of Being according to Plato. Heidegger’s interpretation of the Ideas takes its bearings on the etymological meaning of the word ἰδέα: “Ἰδέα is that which gives itself and is there for and in ἰδεῖν, in seeing, to which there corresponds what is seen, what is sighted [Ἰδέα ist das, was sich gibt und da ist für das un im ἰδεῖν, im Sehen; diesem entspricht das Gesehene, Gesichtete]” (GA 34, 48; modif. trans.). Heidegger further comments on this “what is seen,” explaining that something which is “seen” must present

(*darbieten*) itself, be available to sight in a “look” (*Anblick*). And thus the notion of presence resurfaces: “It is through these looks [Anblicke] that individual things *present* themselves [sich *präsentiert*] as this and that, is present and *present* [präsent und *anwesend* ist]” (GA 34, 51; modif. trans.) It is right after this “proof” that Heidegger recalls his famous thesis about the meaning of Being for the Greeks: “Presence [Anwesenheit] means for the Greeks *Being* [Sein]. Something *is*, i.e.: it is present [es ist anwesend], or better (as we must say in German): it *presences* in the present [es *west an* in der Gegenwart]” (GA 34, 51; my trans. cf. GA 37/37, esp. 152).

We may here ask if Heidegger is really showing that his thesis about Greek ontology applies to Plato or if he is instead imposing this view on the Platonic Ideas. Are the Ideas truly a matter of seeing? What kind of seeing? Heidegger’s main example to explain the relation between Idea (as Being), sight and beings is the seeing of a book. “In the strict sense, Heidegger says, I cannot see the book.” (GA 36/37, 152):

When we say that 'we see the book', we use 'see' in a meaning which *goes beyond* perceiving the object by means of the sense of sight with the help of our eyes. However sharp and highly developed our tools for seeing, however excellent our sense of sight, we can never see a book through our sense of sight. We would never see anything like a book were we not able to see in another *more primordial* sense [*ursprünglicheren* Sinn]. To this latter kind of 'seeing' there belongs an understanding [Verstehen] of what *is* there [was da *ist*], what encounters: book, door, house, tree. (GA 34, 50; modif. trans.)

Accordingly, it is *through* the Idea of a book that we can truly see a book as a book, and not as some aggregate of perceptible features (color, texture, shape, weight, etc.). On this reading, Ideas are not immaterial substances, but the conditions of possibility of our everyday encounter with beings, that is, of our capacity to encounter things *as* what they *are*. Heidegger’s interpretation here seems close to the transcendental or functionalist reading of the Marburg neo-Kantians, except that here Ideas are not functions of *scientific thought* but functions of any *relation to beings in general*: “This discovery was not some far-flung speculation on the part of Plato, but relates to what

everyone sees and grasps when one comports oneself to beings [wenn er sich zum Seienden verhält]” (GA 34, 51; modif. trans.).

There are two potential problems with this interpretation. First, if the paradigmatic experience for the relation between Being and beings (Idea and things) is recognizing a book as a book when seeing it in virtue of a prior understanding of what a book is, understanding the Being of beings appears as a means to our encounter with beings. While this model accounts for the *importance* of Being, it does very little to help us understand why a Platonist would desire to dwell in the pure understanding of Ideas: there seems to be indeed little interest in the contemplation of the Being of books, tables and doors (cf. GA 34, 50). Second, if the Being of a thing like a book is the paradigm for an understanding of the Ideas, we wonder why Plato’s Socrates usually prefers to speak of the Beautiful, the Just and the Good when discussing his “theory.” In other words, the Platonic question that seems to prompt the hypothesis of the Ideas is not “why is this book a book?” but “why is this book good or beautiful?”⁵³ While the first question seems to reduce the ἰδέα to the Aristotelian εἶδος or Husserlian essences⁵⁴ by inquiring into the essence (τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι) of a particular “this” (τοδὲ τι), the second redirects the sight from a particular being toward the reason for that being’s goodness. In turning to λόγοι, we indeed observe that contradictions and controversies in δόξα arise when the second kind of question is raised, for people disagree about the just, the beautiful, and the good (cf. *Euthyp.*, 7c-d): there is next to no disagreement as to whether a book is a book, but disputes can arise as soon as someone claims that a book is good or a painting

⁵³ Thus in the *Phaedo* (99a-b), Socrates implies that the real question is not *what* makes it possible for him to be sitting in his cell (bones, flesh, and the whole constitution of his body), for there is no real difficulty there, but *why* he is sitting in his cell, which is the equivalent of asking *why it is good* for him to be sitting in his cell.

⁵⁴ On Husserlian essences as the inspiration for Heidegger’s interpretation of Forms, see Kim (2004).

beautiful. And one must admit that seeing a book as a book and seeing it as good imply different kinds of seeing.⁵⁵

Taking the book as his example for the understanding of the Platonic Idea, Heidegger can argue for his interpretation of the Idea as a “look” that makes itself present for sight. It thus makes plausible the view that the paradigmatic relation to Ideas is one of seeing, which in turn is, presumably, the justification for ascribing to Plato’s ontology the thesis that Being means presence. But although Plato does use verbs related to sight to characterize the soul’s relation to Being, he also abundantly uses *erotic* language to do so (e.g. *Theaet.* 186a: ἐπορέγεται; 186d: ἄφασθαι; 186c: τυχεῖν; *Rep.* 490b: πλησιάσας καὶ μιγεῖς; *Phd.* 68a: συνέσεσθαι; 83e: συνουσίας). Even Heidegger recognizes this in his 1932 interpretation of the *Theaetetus* when interpreting ἔρωσ as *Seinserstrebnis*, and painstakingly tries to transform it into a “seeing striving” (*sehendes Streben* – GA 34, 223).⁵⁶ While we wonder how the essence of a book or table could be the object of the philosopher’s erotic longing, Plato is quite clear that the Beautiful and the Good are objects of ἔρωσ. This, I suggest, is related to the fact that the nature of beauty and goodness eludes us far more than the nature of a book, a table or a bed, and that we do not experience erotic longing for what we can fully possess. Plato’s characterization of the relation to Being as erotic problematizes the view that the

⁵⁵ Here lies my main disagreement with Stanley Rosen’s understanding of Plato’s Ideas in *The Question of Being: A Reversal of Heidegger*. In fact, Rosen repeatedly uses particular things’ essences (their “whatness”) as appropriate examples of Platonic Ideas and suggests that it makes no difference to speak of “cows, beauty, or goodness” insofar as there is an Idea for all of them (Rosen 1991, 6; 92; 106; 118-119; 124). Although he criticizes Heidegger for (mis)reading Plato through Aristotle, the same could be said *in fine* of Rosen’s version of the *Ideenlehre*. The difference is that Rosen thinks that Heidegger wrongly forces Aristotle’s doctrine of the *categories* on the Platonic Forms and rather suggest a harmony between Aristotle’s εἶδος and Plato’s Ideas (10; 34, 44). Yet, he himself notes that Heidegger also thinks that the two are roughly the same (8).

⁵⁶ I am indebted here to Gonzalez’s (2009, 188-198) illuminating analysis of the significance of *eros* in Plato as incompatible with Heidegger’s claim that Being for Plato means presence for sight.

paradigmatic relation is one of seeing, and thereby the claim that the meaning of Being for him is presence.⁵⁷

2.3.2 *Idea and Production*

As we have just seen, taking into consideration that the Ideas are chiefly related to qualities such as goodness, beauty and justice and the implication of this concerning seeing complicates Heidegger's thesis that Being for Plato means presence. But there is one Platonic text that Heidegger could mobilize to maintain that artifacts *are* appropriate examples for a discussion of Plato's Ideas: the critique of imitation in Book X of the *Republic*. Heidegger's interpretation of the passage about the Idea of the bed in the first *Nietzsche* lectures not only supports his prior interpretation of Being as presence, but also ties Being with production.

The passage Heidegger discusses (595c-598b) aims at showing that imitation is “third remove from truth.” Schematically, the truth of beings is the Idea; the demiurgic craftsman uses this Idea as a model in producing an artifact; the imitative poet, like a painter, then imitates that artifact. In Plato's example, the Idea is the Idea of a bed. Producing the bed and the imitation of the bed are ways of making the Idea of the bed (its outward appearance, *Aussehen*) shine forth. “Something produced ‘is’ because the Idea lets it be seen as such, lets it come to presence in its outward appearance, lets it ‘be’ [im Aussehen anwesen, d.h. ‘sein’ lässt]. Only to that extent can what is itself produced be said ‘to be’ [‘seiend’ gennant werden].” (GA 6.1, 177). Heidegger insists,

⁵⁷ Heidegger's 1930-31 reading of Plato's *Parmenides* (in GA 83) runs against this general thread of identifying the meaning of being in Plato with presence, since it claims that the focal notion of the dialogue is the “sudden” (ἐξαίφνης), a temporal determination where presence and non-presence converge. This Heideggerian exception is beyond the scope of the present analyses. For interpretations of this course and its signification in Heidegger's understanding of Plato, see Backman (2007) and Gonzalez (2019b).

however, that the making itself does not produce this outward appearance, that is, the Idea: “Making and manufacturing therefore mean [...] to ‘pro-duce’ the outward appearance, not in the sense of manufacturing it but of letting it radiantly appear [das Aussehen ‘her-stellen’, nicht es selbst anfertigen, sondern es erscheinen lassen]” (178). Here again, the Platonic Idea is Being. Yet, the artifact and its imitation, while they let Being shine forth, are beings and not Being itself. So, in this picture, it seems that (some) beings are produced, but not the Being of these beings. And Heidegger is perfectly clear that the “craftsman does not produce the Being of beings [dann stellt auch der Handwerker nicht das Sein des Seienden her]” (182). How then do we go from there to the claim that Being (and not beings) means being produced?

The crucial point for Heidegger’s argument is that Plato’s Socrates claims that the Idea is one and simple because the god “wanted to be the real producer of the real bed [βουλόμενος εἶναι ὄντως κλίνης ποιητῆς ὄντως οὐσίης],” and not just of any bed (ἀλλὰ μὴ κλίνης τινός, 597d1-2; my trans.). Once Heidegger gets hold of this notion of a productive divinity, he can easily conclude that the Being of beings is itself produced (not to mention the easy path from there to the claim that Plato’s ontology is ontotheology): “In what, then, is the essence of the Idea, and thereby of Being [das Wesen der Idee und somit des Seins], ultimately grounded for Plato? In the initiating action of a creator” (GA 6.1, 186). The most fundamental “presencing” of Being is to be found in the initial production of Being by the god. It is precisely as produced that Being is presence.

Yet, Heidegger gets to his conclusion quickly, and some of his own gloss on Plato’s text seems to complicate the view that Being is produced by the god. For right after claiming that the god is a ποιητής, Socrates calls it a φυτουργός. While the metaphorical meaning of φυτουργός is that of a begetter or creator, the ordinary meaning from which that metaphor emerges is that of a gardener. A gardener works *with* plants and secures their growth, but does not *produce* plants – plants by nature

produce themselves. This is very important since the production of the god is explained in terms that are related to nature and growth: the god did not “begot the Bed one by nature,” he “let it grow one by nature [μίαν φύσει ἀπὲν ἔφυσεν]” (597d3, cf. c4-5: ἐφυτεύθησαν, φυῶσιν). If we take these terms seriously, divine production is not so much production as an attending to the production of φύσις, nature.⁵⁸ But, as Heidegger himself perfectly recognizes, this kind of production is a self-emergence, growth without “any medium,” in sum, nothing like a *Herstellen*, *Machen* or *Anfertigen* (GA 6.1, 183-184). And he characterizes our divine gardener accordingly: “the one who takes care of and holds in readiness the emergence of pure outward appearance [der das Aufgehen des reinen Aussehens besorgt und es bereithält]” (GA 6.1, 187). We must therefore be somewhat puzzled by the fact that he nonetheless calls the φυτοθργός a *Hersteller*. The most plausible explanation is that if he fully acknowledged that Ideas are φύσει, that is, by nature, he could hardly maintain that Being for Plato means *Hergestelltsein*.

There are further complications to the thesis of the *Nietzsche* lectures on Plato. As I have suggested above, it is unlikely that artifacts are paradigmatic cases of Forms. While there is a tension between this suggestion and Socrates’ discussion of the Idea of the bed, one may consider the possibility that using the example of an artifact is expedient if the purpose of the discussion is to chastise imitative poetry. The point of Plato’s Socrates is allegedly that poetic imitations are images, and thus ontologically distant from Ideas. And while he may have communicated this idea in a pedagogically effective way through an inaccurate example, he need not be committed to the inaccurate example to hold that view. There are good reasons to think that this might be what is happening at the beginning of Book X of the *Republic*. In fact, Socrates’ target there is chiefly Homer, and poets like Homer do not attempt to imitate *objects* of daily life, but *human lives*. In fact,

⁵⁸ I fully agree with Rosen’s (1991, 13) critique here.

Socrates *explicitly* says that Homer attempts to speak about “the greatest and fairest things,” namely “wars and commands of armies and governance of cities, and about the education of a human being” (599c-d; trans. Bloom). Philosophy and poetry do not compete over the best way of grasping the essence of bed or tables, but over the question of the good human life. Therefore, Socrates’ point is not that Homer is third remove from the truth about the bed, but “third remove from the truth about virtue” (τρίτος ἀπὸ τῆς ἀληθείας [...] ἀρετῆς πέρι, 599d2-3). If one neglects this, one is led to think that when Socrates then accuses poets of addressing the appetitive part of the soul at the expense of φρόνησις (603a ff.), he is formulating a completely different accusation, moving from an ontological critique to an ethical critique of poetry. In fact, these are closely intertwined critiques, for what is really at stake is not the Idea of the Bed but the Idea of the Good.

The last difficulty with Socrates’ discussion of these three productions – divine production of the Idea, demiurgic production of the artifact, poetic production of the imitated artifact – lies in the fact that the ontological considerations of Book VI and VII of the *Republic* make no mention of a productive god. There, the highest honor and power is conferred to the Idea of the Good (509b9). More importantly, in the way the Sun is the steward (ἐπιτροπέω) and cause (αἴτιος) of all visible things, the Good causes all intelligible things (516b10-c2). This would mean that the Ideas are *secured* by the Good, but not *produced* by a divine creator.⁵⁹ It is quite unlikely that Plato thinks of Being as producedness.

⁵⁹ Despite the precautions and subtlety of Plato’s language when talking about a “production” of Ideas, Heidegger seems to have already decided in 1927 that the Good was a producer in the poetic-technical sense (GA 24, 405): “Was soll die Idee des Guten mit dem Herstellen zu tun haben? Ohne darauf näher einzugehen, geben wir nur den Hinweis, daß die ἰδέα ἀγαθοῦ nichts anderes ist als der δημιουργός, der Hersteller schlechthin. Das läßt bereits sehen, wie die ἰδέα ἀγαθοῦ mit dem ποιεῖν, πράξις, τέχνη im weitesten Sinne zusammenhängt.” While this interpretation of the good as demiurgic producer does not figure in the interpretation of the early 1930s, it seems to come back in the *Nietzsche* lectures. On the role of this demiurgic moment in Heidegger’s interpretation, see Dostal (1985, 87 and 98).

2.3.3 *Truth under the Yoke of the Good*⁶⁰

The two critiques I have proposed of Heidegger's productionist model for the understanding Plato's ontology have led us to the central Platonic notion of the Idea of the Good. While considering the Good problematizes the claim that to be means to be produced, it also problematizes the claim that being means presence. For if we grant Heidegger that Idea means Being and Being means presence, what is the status of the Idea of the Good? Since it is "beyond Being," should we conclude that it is "beyond presence"? And if the Good is the touchstone of Plato's ontology, should we think that it saves Plato from Heidegger's critique?

It is tempting to see in the Idea of the Good the greatest possible affinity between Plato and Heidegger. The transcendence of the Good seems to parallel Heidegger's search for an understanding of Being that fully appreciates the ontological difference: in 1927, Heidegger indeed wrote that the *ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας* was what he was looking for (GA 24, 404). Ralkowski has claimed that the Idea of the Good correctly understood was, despite what Heidegger says about it, the same as Heidegger's notion of Being as such (in contradistinction to the Being of beings).⁶¹ Yet, as I have argued above, the fact that Plato calls his highest principle the Good and not Being should be significant enough for us to avoid identifying the two.⁶² Furthermore, while Heidegger does not transform the Good into some sort of hyper-presence over and above the presence of Being, he nonetheless gives it a prominent role to play in the story of the forgetfulness of ἀλήθεια, of truth as unconcealedness.

According to Heidegger, Plato's Cave displays two different understandings of truth – truth as unhiddenness or unconcealedness (ἀλήθεια) and truth as correctness (ὀρθότης). The fact that Plato

⁶⁰ Parts of this section have been published in a different form in my Pageau-St-Hilaire (2022b).

⁶¹ Ralkowski 2009, 63, 75-85. See also Hyland (2011, 167).

⁶² To my knowledge, Ralkowski (2009) does not appreciate this importance difference.

calls the shadows that the prisoners τὸ ἀληθές is a sign that truth is, at the very start, nothing like the correctness of an assertion or its correspondence to a thought, but rather the unconcealedness of beings (*Unverborgenheit*; GA 34, 25-30). The notion of correctness does appear in the second stage of the allegory, but not yet in a problematic sense. The prisoners, unshackled and now facing the puppets instead of their shadows, are told that they see more correctly (ὀρθότερον) because the things they see *are more* (μᾶλλον ὄντα, “mehr seined, *seinder*”) (GA 34, 32-34; GA 36/37, 137-138). But, as Heidegger points out, the correctness of their sight is wholly dependent on the clarity and degree of unconcealedness of the beings that they are looking at: “*Truth as correctness is impossible without truth as unconcealment [...]* The concept of correctness already brings unconcealment with it” (GA 36/37, 139; cf. GA 34, 34). The second stage also introduces the adjective ἀληθές in the comparative (ἀληθέστερα), showing that there are degrees of unconcealedness (GA 36/37, 137). Thus, the play of light in the image of the Cave is the play of truth as *Unverborgenheit* in its diverse degrees. Heidegger’s analyses of truth in terms of *light* further supports the view that Plato champions truth as unconcealedness, not correctness (GA 34, 47-60 and 100-106; GA 36/37, 153-157 and 195-200).

When, then, does ἀλήθεια start to give way to ὀρθότης? Only at the very end of the 1931-1932 and 1933-1934 interpretations, where Heidegger starts to misread the analogy of the Sun and transforms the Good into a power mastering both truth and Being. In fact, Heidegger does not yet declare the victory of the orthotic understanding of truth, but he sets the terms in which he will be able to proclaim it in the official interpretation of the 1942 “Platos Lehre von der Wahrheit.” The Sun Analogy claims the following (507a-509b):

Sun (source of)	Light (allows)	Sight (of the)	Visible
Good (source of)	Truth (allows)	Intelligence (of the)	Intelligible (i.e. Forms)

Plato's Socrates further explains that sight and the visible are yoked together under the yoke of light (507e6-508a2). In 1931-1932, Heidegger misconstrues this by claiming that light and brightness correspond to the Ideas, and therefore that the Ideas, and above them the Good, yoke *voeîn* and *vooόμενον* together (GA 34, 106). Yet, if we follow the analogy, it is intelligence and the Ideas that should be yoked together under the yoke of *truth* (not of the Good). In 1933-1934, Heidegger sees that it is truth that yokes (and not the Ideas), but nonetheless claims that the Good yokes too: "the *yoke* just mentioned, the one that joins both (*ὄρᾶν* and *ὀρώμενα*), is in some sense the *light* and correspondingly the source of light = the sun" (GA 36/37, 197). Once again, while we should have *one yoke*, namely the yoke of truth enabling knowledge of the Ideas, Heidegger persists in having *truth under the yoke of the Good*. Because he sees *voûς* as *Seinsverständnis*, the Good is now the master of both truth and the understanding of being: "*Truth* as the openness of beings, *Being* as the possibility of grasping beings, both stand under a yoke" (GA 36/37, 205). While we should have *voeîn* and *vooόμενα* yoked by truth understood as light, and thus *the correctness of voeîn under the yoke of unconcealedness*, we now have ἀλήθεια under the yoke of the "highest Idea."

The rest of the story of the forgetting of *Unverborgenheit* is told in 1942: "Ἀλήθεια comes under the yoke of the ἰδέα" (GA 9, 230) This is supposed to mean that "the essence of truth [...] shifts to the essence of the ἰδέα" and thereby "gives up its fundamental trait of unhiddenness." But why? Heidegger relies once again on his interpretation of ἰδέα as being a matter of *seeing* (*ιδεῖν*) it: "if our comportment with beings [Verhalten zum Seienden] is always and everywhere a matter of the *ιδεῖν* of the ἰδέα, the seeing of the 'visible form' [das Erblicken des 'Aussehens'], then all our efforts must be concentrated above all on making such seeing possible. And that requires the correct vision [das rechte Blicken]" (230). Of course, the key phrase here is *rechte Blicken*, which allows Heidegger to return to the previously mentioned passage where, in the Cave, the prisoners are told that their

sight is more correct (*ὀρθότερον*) when they look at the puppets instead of the shadows. The astonishing thing is that whereas in the 1930s lectures, Heidegger insisted that the correctness of the prisoners' sight was grounded on the greater unconcealedness of the beings into view, and thus that the orthotic truth was entirely dependent on alethic truth, he now affirms the opposite. Beings are more disclosed because the human comportment to beings – the seeing – is more correct: the locus of truth has changed; it is not anymore “a fundamental trait of beings themselves [Grundzug des Seienden selbst]” (231). With this change, what happens is nothing less than the “beginning of metaphysics,” of a tradition that allegedly culminates in Nietzsche (236-7). Because it sets human discourse and human mind as the new locus of truth, this metaphysics is, *in fine*, a metaphysics of subjectivity (cf. GA 9, 238).

Heidegger's most official critique of Plato is grounded upon a subordination of truth to the domination of the Idea; and a heavily linguistic interpretation of the Ideas in terms of sight and seeing. As we have seen, both premises are already developed between 1931 and 1934. But since these premises are difficult to maintain upon closer examination of Plato's texts, the conclusion must be put into question too.

I have shown that Heidegger's three theses concerning the meaning of Being in Platonic philosophy – Being means presence, Being means producedness, and disclosedness is replaced by a correspondence theory of truth and thus by a metaphysics of subjectivity – all have serious shortcomings. What I have also tried to show through my analyses is that articulating these shortcomings in responding to Heidegger's challenges reveals resources for thinking anew about Plato. The view that Plato should not be seen as the father of a dogmatic metaphysical tradition whose ossification leads to the end of philosophy is going to be a running thread in the Platonic thought of Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger. But this Heideggerian challenge forces them to articulate

radically novel understanding of Platonism. In this sense, their Platonism is philosophically, and not just historically, post-Heideggerian.

2.4 Post-Heideggerian Directions

We may now conclude by schematizing how the three problems I have discussed in Heidegger's Plato serve as roadmaps to the new directions taken by Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger. These problems will guide us through the study of their own Platonic philosophy in providing us with the essential structure of their understanding of Plato. In brief, they will all try to recover Plato at the very places where Heidegger has either downplayed, missed, or distorted his most fundamental insights.

First, the dialogic-dialectic form of the philosophical inquiry is absolutely crucial to these three new Marburg Platonists. They all see in this form Plato's way to overcome – to the extent to which that is possible – the deficiencies of philosophical *writing*. More specifically, the dialogical structure, weaving argument and action (λόγος and ἔργον), points beyond what is immediately present in Plato's writings. While this should indeed lead Plato's philosophical readers beyond the text toward what is not explicitly said, this “unsaid”, unlike Heidegger's version of it, is *intended* by the Platonic text itself and therefore does not represent a failure or limit of Plato's thought. This means that it is impossible to extract doctrines from the dialogues without neglecting the dialogical form and refusing the hermeneutic task that Plato's text sets for its readers. It is all the more surprising that Heidegger refused to pay serious attention to the dialogical in Plato that, as all three suggest, there are strong affinities between the dialogic situation of Plato's interlocutors and a phenomenology which interprets the emergence of philosophy out of pre-theoretical facticity. Krüger will even note that philosophy of existence enabled a discovery or rediscovery of the significance of Plato's

dialogical writing (EPWA, xi). As I have already announced in section 1, dialogue and dialectic are ways through which Plato attempts to mitigate the dominance of λόγος by alerting us to its weakness and using new rhetorical and writerly devices to exploit the revelatory potential of his compositions without reducing them to mere speeches.

Second, for Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger, Plato's writings are, insofar as they *imitate* human lives and conversations, poetic compositions. While for Heidegger, the question of poetry is essentially the question of its disclosive power in terms of an understanding of Being, Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger force us to consider the twofold dimension of the "old quarrel between philosophy and poetry." For them, the issue of the status of poetry vis-à-vis philosophy is both the question of their respective revelatory potential and the ethical-political polemic about the authority concerning the good. Thinking through the treatment of this problem with Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger will help us understand in what ways their Platonic understanding of this question differs from the Heideggerian path.

Third, Heidegger's political mistakes were, as I have interpreted them, intrinsically related to an ontologizing of Platonic politics which amounts to a dangerous unpolitical interpretation of political life. On this point, Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger will prove essential, for their own understanding of the relation between philosophy and politics and of the role of philosophy in the political community are antithetical to Heidegger's blinded hubris. For all three, Plato was deeply aware of the concreteness of practical life and did not allow himself to solely look for the meaning of Being when living inside the cave. In other words, Plato is a politically *prudent* philosopher, where prudence does *not* mean Dasein's self-disclosing like it does in Heidegger's ontologizing reading of

Aristotelian φρόνησις,⁶³ Gadamer and Strauss will explicitly criticize Heidegger for conflating ontology and practical philosophy.⁶⁴ The latter even affirms that ontology is the wrong starting point for both political philosophy *and* ontology – one must start with the political, with Plato’s Cave.⁶⁵ Thus, for all three, the *Republic* is not a political program at all, and its propositions are not to be taken straightforwardly. On the contrary, Plato’s political philosophy shows a deep awareness of the fragility of philosophical thought amidst the political and the need to think through the meaning of the political situatedness, one might say the political finitude, of philosophers.

Finally, Heidegger’s critique of Plato’s ontology finds a strong opposition in Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger. Because Plato’s philosophy is dialogical, we cannot ascribe him some catastrophic ontological doctrine. This dialogical dimension reflects the fact that Plato’s meditation on the meaning of Being fully acknowledges its mysterious or elusive character. Platonic Forms do not betray an unsaid metaphysics of presence or a productionist ontology. As we shall see, they all learned from the neo-Kantian *Ideenlehre* that Ideas do not have to be understood as eternal substances but can rather be functions of thought, conditions of possibility of philosophy.⁶⁶ Strauss sees in the Ideas the perennial problems of philosophy, which both make philosophical questioning possible and prevents the serious philosophical mind to comfortably rest on definite answers and

⁶³ The *locus classicus* of this interpretation of φρόνησις is of course GA 19, 48-57, esp. 56. For contrasting yet both seminal discussions of this ontologization see Volpi (1988) and Taminioux (1991).

⁶⁴ See Strauss’ letter to Voegelin from March 14, 1950 (FPP, 66): “the root of all modern darkness from the seventeenth century on is the obscuring of the difference between theory and praxis, an obscuring that first leads to a reduction of praxis to theory (this is the meaning of so-called rationalism) and then, in retaliation, to the rejection of theory in the name of a praxis *that is no longer intelligible as praxis* [my emphasis].” See also Gadamer’s retrospective critique of the *Natorp Bericht* in Gadamer (1989).

⁶⁵ Speaking of him and Kojève, this is how Strauss ends his restatement on *On Tyranny*: “For we both apparently turned away from Being to Tyranny because we have seen that those who lacked the courage to face the issue of Tyranny, who therefore *et humiliter serviebant et superbe dominabantur*, were forced to evade the issue of Being as well, precisely *because they did nothing but talk of Being*” (OT, 213; my emphasis).

⁶⁶ This is not to say that Marburg neo-Kantians escape the Heideggerian charge of being metaphysicians. To the contrary, Natorp’s logical interpretation of the Ideas and his focus on scientific method correspond very well to Heidegger’s charges of the forgetfulness of truth as *Unverborgenheit* and a metaphysics centered around the knowing subject.

certainty: they are the conditions of possibility of philosophy in the zetetic mode. Gadamer sees in the Idea the unification of a multiplicity, which need not point to something eternal but instead reflects the work of language in its attempt to disclose meaning in temporally-bounded truth-events: Ideas and participation in the Ideas are the conditions of possibility of philosophical hermeneutics and its universality under the guidance of language. For Krüger, Ideas are the hypotheses that one must make in order to account for the *erotic* character of philosophy, which in turn reveals the finitude of human *Einsicht*: we ecstatically strive for what is eternal without ever being able to reach it. Ideas are never present or fully present to the soul, but they are the conditions of possibility of philosophical *eros*, which stand, as the child of both Poros and Penia, somewhere in-between the emptiness of ignorance the plenitude of knowledge.

* * *

Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger's post-Heideggerian Platonic paths not only start with, but are wholly grounded upon their understanding of dialogue and dialectic. And while Heidegger did not pay attention to the form of Plato's philosophical inquiry, they did thanks to some philological training under the guidance of Paul Friedländer. So before turning to the heart of the second sailing of Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger, we must briefly examine Friedländer's rediscovery of the dialogical structure of Plato's writings. We will then be in a better position to understand how this philological insight was given philosophical significance by all three of them.

CHAPTER 3

PHILOLOGICAL INTERLUDE: FRIEDLÄNDER'S PLATONIC DISCOVERY

At the University of Marburg, Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger all studied Greek philology under the guidance of Paul Friedländer at the time he was working on his three-volume *Platon*.¹ While Friedländer's interpretation of the dialogues appeared philosophically dissatisfactory to them, it nonetheless proposed an approach of extraordinary importance for all further study of Plato, starting with theirs. To put it simply, Friedländer's claim was that we cannot understand Plato's works without paying sufficient attention to their dramatic form. Depending on what is meant here by "sufficient attention," such hermeneutic principle will appear more or less evident to many students of Plato, but it is far from clear that this would be the state of affairs if Friedländer's insight had not been disseminated through Strauss, Gadamer, and, to some extent Krüger.²

In the 1964 preface to the third edition of his *Platon*, Friedländer explains how he conceived of his task in the 1920s. On the one hand, philosophers studied Plato without considering the literary and poetic element of the dialogues as anything more than accessory and framework; it had no fundamental worth (*grundsätzlichen Wert*) for them. On the other hand, there was the approach of the great classicist Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, whose biographical approach to Plato's texts came along with a neglect of the philosophical substance they contained. Friedländer asserts:

¹ Paul Friedländer, *Platon I. Seinswahrheit und Lebenswirklichkeit* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1964 [1928]); *Platon II. Die platonische Schriften. Erste Periode* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1964 [1930]); *Platon III. Die platonische Schriften. Zweite und Dritte Periode* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975 [1930]). Originally published as two volumes, the work was expanded and republished in 1954, 1964 and 1975. Unless otherwise noted, I use the English translation of the first volume: Paul Friedländer, *Plato: An Introduction*, trans. Hans Meyerhoff (New York/Evanston: Harper & Row, 1958).

² The dissemination of the dramatic readings of Plato through Strauss is probably the most obvious, especially in the United States, whether among Straussians (e.g. S. Benardete, A. Bloom, T. Pangle, C. Zuckert, etc.) or non-Straussians (e.g. G. R. F. Ferrari). While Gadamer's influence on the dramatic readings is more striking in Germany through the work of his student W. Wieland, it is perceptible (along with Friedländer's repercussions) in the United States in the work of C. Griswold, G. Press or C. Kahn. While Krüger's *Platonbuch* is barely read in the North America, it is widely known in Germany (with six editions between 1939 and 1992) and still a reference in German scholarship on Plato (see e.g. Ebbesmeyer 2017).

“To bridge this opposition was at the time and is still today the task.”³ As we have seen in the two previous chapters, the dialogical form of Plato’s writings was for Marburg neo-Kantians and Heidegger at best an elegant ornament, at worse the sign of philosophical weakness. For Wilamowitz, their dramatic form was the pure consequence of certain aspects and events of Plato’s life. Indicating that the new title of his first volume, *Seinswahrheit und Lebenswirklichkeit*, was meant to showcase this relation between philosophical content and the concreteness of the philosophical life that the dialogues beautifully stage, Friedländer said that it could be translated as “Idee und Existenz.” His attempt is indeed to articulate the existential dimension of philosophy and philosophical thought, and to show that Plato never separated philosophy from the living motion of philosophizing.

In this respect, Friedländer’s task requires a significant modification of both “camps” as he describes them. Indeed, understanding the relevance of the philosophical existence for philosophical thinking is surely nothing like leading back a text to a moment in Plato’s life or the history of Athens. And due attention to the literary form of Plato’s thought cannot let the philosophers’ Platonic “doctrines” untouched. For Friedländer, bridging between philosophy and philology meant giving up both philological historicism and philosophical dogmatism. Through a critique of the historicist positions of Wilamowitz (and to some extent of Werner Jaeger) on the meaning of the dramatic form of the dialogues, Friedländer articulates a position from which he could reject philosophical dogmatism. Despite the dissatisfactions of Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger with Friedländer, his position programmatically contains many elements they will appropriate for their own understanding of the meaning of Plato’s dialogical writing.

³ Friedländer, *Platon I*, “Vorwort zur dritten Auflage.”

3.1 Friedländer's Discovery of the Dramatic Structure of Plato's Dialogues

At the beginning of the 20th century, the idea that Plato wrote poetically, and that his dialogues are a mixture of philosophy and poetic expression is not new. Wilamowitz, Friedländer's master, acknowledged this important dimension of Plato's work. According to him, however, it can be wholly explained through an account of Plato's life. His assimilation of philology to biography is radical:

The philologist is thus an interpreter, but not simply of the words; he will not understand them if he does not understand the soul out of which they come. He must also be an interpreter of this soul. Because it retains its entire art in interpreting, biography is quite genuinely a work of philology, only in its highest potency. And so there is no higher task than that of understanding how that human being has become, what it had wanted, thought and done.⁴

Accordingly, Wilamowitz contends that the structural order of Plato's writings follows the epochs of his life (youth, maturity, old-age) as well as the death of Socrates and his travels.⁵ Not only is each work led back to a specific life-event or experience, but the form of all his writings is also thusly explained. The decisive biographical element in this respect is that Plato used to write tragedies, all of which he allegedly burned after his encounter with Socrates. Both features play a role in Wilamowitz' explanation. First, Plato *had* to write poetically *because he was a poet*: "He must [write] because he is a poet; Eros and the muses lead him. He does not pursue a practical purpose; the seed that sprouts in his soul rises in him, grows in him, presses toward light."⁶ Second, both the "matter" and "form" of his poetic writing are reducible to his experience of Socrates' confrontation with the Sophists: "The sophists and Socrates their conqueror [Überwinder], this is what he has seen. He must give form to the lived experience [Das Erlebnis muß er gestalten]: therewith he has

⁴ Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Platon. Erster Band. Leben und Werke* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1920 [1918]), 4. The English translations of Wilamowitz are all mine.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 126. Cf. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Platon. Zweiter Band. Beilagen und Kritik* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1921 [1918]), 29: "Unter ihnen ist ein Poet [...] weil er Künstler ist, stilisiert er, weil er Poet ist, gestaltet er um, gestaltet er freier und frier, schreitet er dazu fort, ein volles Gemälde zu entwerfen."

the matter [Stoff]. The skillful orators succumb to the casual dialogues of Socrates: therewith he has the form.”⁷ In Wilamowitz’s eyes, Plato is not so much a philosopher as an artistically gifted man who fell under the charm of Socrates.⁸ Thus he claims that Plato’s early writings did not represent Socrates for philosophy’s sake, but rather contained philosophical matters *because he wanted to present Socrates*.⁹ At any rate, there is nothing in Wilamowitz to suggest that the choice of writing dramatically could be *philosophically* intended by Plato.

The originality of Friedländer’s reflections on the meaning of the dialogical form of Plato’s texts is even clearer once we see that the student of Wilamowitz who most opposed his biographic-genetic approach to Plato failed to reach a much different conclusion on this very issue. Werner Jaeger was indeed the greatest opponent of such methodological historicism because it implies that the value and meaning of Plato’s works are confined to the specific time and context out of which they emerged.¹⁰ What Jaeger wishes classical philology to awaken is a sense of timelessness or enduring presence of Antiquity for a “Hellenocentric” Europe, a “geistige Gegenwart der Antike.”¹¹ Plato plays a central role in Jaeger’s project of a “Third Humanism,” as the structure of his *Paideia* shows. But despite the antihistoricism of his attempt to revitalize the European *Bildung* through a revival of the classical tradition, Jaeger treats the question of the meaning of the Platonic dialogue with a *reductio ad historiam* reminiscent of Wilamowitz’s: “The form of the Platonic dialogue was quite certainly created by a historical fact [au seiner geschichtlichen Gegeneinheit

⁷ Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Platon. Erster Band*, 128

⁸ Cf. Tigerstedt 1977, 41-42, 47, 48.

⁹ Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Platon. Erster Band*, 131.

¹⁰ As it has been noted by Kahn (1992, 71 and 73), this is strange given that Jaeger is the father of the “developmentalist” theory in the interpretation of Aristotle with his *Studien zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Metaphysik des Aristoteles* (1912) and *Aristoteles: Grundlegung einer Geschichte seiner Entwicklung* (1923).

¹¹ Werner Jaeger, “Die geistige Gegenwart der Antike” in *Humanistische Reden und Vorträge* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1937), 169-190. On this idea of the “timelessness” of Greek Antiquity for Jaeger, see Andurand’s (2009, 57) even stronger formulation: “la vérité éternelle de l’expérience hellénique.” For a critique of the anti-historicism of this project, which could have politically blinded Jaeger, see esp. Adurand (2011, 8-11), but also Kahn (1992, 80-81).

ausgegangen] – the fact that Socrates taught by question and answer.”¹² This encounter, coupled with the other historical fact that Plato was “a born dramatist” allowed Plato to “enlist his dramatic genius in the service of philosophy.”¹³ Jaeger’s Plato is more a philosopher than Wilamowitz’s Plato, but the significance of the dialogical form is reduced on both accounts to the imitation of Socrates’ pedagogical conversations.¹⁴

After the First World War, Friedländer distances himself explicitly from the approach of his old master. In a letter to Wilamowitz on 4 July 1921, he confesses: “for many years I have become in battle against you, or perhaps better, against the Wilamowitz in me.”¹⁵ A central point of this battle is Friedländer’s rejection of Wilamowitz’s historicism.¹⁶ He specifically points at his own work on Plato, which could appear to Wilamowitz “almost as an affront.”¹⁷ Friedländer’s treatment of the question of the dialogical form does not deny that “the Platonic dialogue mirrors Socratic conversation” or that Plato’s poetic genius was a condition for that form to succeed.¹⁸ But he does not think that these two elements exhaust its meaning. To elucidate this meaning, one must break with the habit of understanding the *Phaedrus*’ critique of writing (*Phdr.* 274d-279c) as a new and more mature stage of Plato’s thought, as if Plato finally came to depreciate his own written work.¹⁹ Rather, if Plato criticizes writing through a certain form of writing, it is because “this way of writing

¹² Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: Die Formung des griechischen Menschen. Band 2* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1944), 66; Eng. trans, p. 19.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ For a critical stance on the philosophical value of Jaeger’s Plato, see Kahn 1992. According to Kahn, the philosophical limits of his interpretation are due to his systematic redirection of everything in Plato to the notion *paideia*, leaving most theoretical aspects of the dialogues aside. Tigerstedt (1977, 51) attributes the failure of his interpretation of Plato to the fact that he “contended neither the Geneticists nor the Unitarians.”

¹⁵ In Calder and Huss 1999, 213. Trans. Caroline Buckler.

¹⁶ As both Tigerstedt (1977, 49) and Calder (1980, 91-92) rightly point out, although Calder is eulogistic of this approach – see Calder 1991, 348 and 352.

¹⁷ In Calder and Huss 1999, 215. See also Harold Cherniss’ reminiscence of Friedländer’s confession in Calder 1980, 101: “He [Friedländer] was shocked by Wilamowitz’ *Platon*... and he told me that it was in direct opposition to Wilamowitz’ work that he undertook to write his *Plato*”

¹⁸ Paul Friedländer, *Plato: An Introduction*, 158, 165.

¹⁹ This is ostensibly Jaeger’s view, paradoxically inherited from Wilamowitz’ genetic-biographical historicism – see Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: Die Formun des griechischen Menschen. Band 3* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1947), 269; Eng. trans, 195.

would at least obviate the objection made against written books that they are rigid and do not know how to answer.”²⁰ Because “the written dialogue transmits its dialogical and dialectical dynamics to the reader,” Platonic dialogues are “the only form of book that seems to suspend the book form itself [die einzige Form des Buches, die das Buch selber aufzuheben scheint].”²¹

How can that transmission happen? Friedländer thinks that it requires an effort from the reader “to inquire more deeply than is usually done into the symbolic meaning of the spatial setting and the physical happenings [leiblichen Vorgänge]” and examine not only their historical or aesthetic roles but also the “genuinely philosophical significance” of this “existential content [Existenzgehalt].”²² Understanding the relation between the action and the speeches of a dialogue demands to put ourselves in dialogue with the text.²³ This kind of reading is an immersive experience that presses upon ourselves the very questions that are at stake in the Platonic drama. Dialogues, unlike the written words in the Myth of Theuth, do not say one same thing regardless of their reader (cf. *Phdr.* 275d-e). Just like what Socrates says varies according to his interlocutors, what Plato’s works say depends on the reader’s dialectical encounter with the very dialogical structure of the texts. Whereas most if not all of his predecessors discerned only one dialogical level in Plato’s texts, namely the dialogue between the interlocutors of the conversations that Plato wrote, Friedländer insightfully revealed two additional layers, namely the dialogue between λόγος

²⁰ Paul Friedländer, *Plato: An Introduction*, 165-166.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 166; *Platon I*, 177. Cf. his reading of the critique of writing in the *Phaedrus* as an explicit reference to his own *Dialogdichtung* in Paul Friedländer, *Platon III*, 213-214.

²² Paul Friedländer, *Plato: An Introduction*, 161; *Platon I*, 172 (modified translation).

²³ One may object that this is not peculiar to dialogical texts. It could indeed be asked whether this method of a dialogical engagement with the text is not required by *any* intelligently written text (philosophical treatises, essays *à la* Montaigne, poems, polyphonic aphorisms *à la* Nietzsche, etc.). While this might very well be the case (as will explicitly claim both Straussian and Gadamerian hermeneutics), one must admit that texts where there appears to be only *one* voice are more likely to be read straightforwardly, passively as it were. However, polyphonic texts, and especially polyphonic texts where the author does not have its own explicit voice, are more likely to be read dialogically – the most obvious of these, I think, are dramatic plays. Friedländer’s point, in a nutshell, is that Plato’s dialogues should be read more like plays than like treatises.

and ἔργον orchestrated by Plato, and the dialogue between the text and the reader prompted by this structure.

3.2 The Meaning of the Dialogical Form: Anti-Dogmatism, Irony, Ineffability

This dramatic structure and its corresponding hermeneutic principle constitute Friedländer's main discovery.²⁴ But overcoming the limits of the written speech identified in the *Phaedrus* could hardly be the last word on this matter. Why is fixed speech wrong for philosophy? Why must dialogues speak differently to different readers and readings? Friedländer attempts to answer these questions, albeit in a somewhat tentative and allusive way. We still recognize in his indications important themes that will be developed by Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger.

The first and central reason for Plato's dramatic compositions is that Platonic philosophy is anti-dogmatic. Philosophy is not constituted of propositional knowledge but is rather a questioning *activity*: "there is no ready-made knowledge simply transferable from one person to another [fertiges, übertragbares Wissen], but only philosophy as an activity [nur ein Philosophieren], the level of which is invariably determined by one's partner."²⁵ Friedländer does not think that this only applies to the early Socratic or aporetic dialogues. For according to him, even the theory of

²⁴ Strictly speaking, Friedländer would probably claim that it is a *rediscovery* since he thinks that, among all Neoplatonists, Proclus had seen the introductory action of the dialogues have a genuinely philosophical (and not merely aesthetic) significance (Paul Friedländer, *Plato: An Introduction*, 161). Friedländer will of course claim that this is true of the *whole* action of Plato's texts, not just its beginning. On Friedländer's admiration for Proclus among all readers of Plato, see his letter to Wilamowitz on 4 July 1921 in Calder and Huss (1999, 216): "I believe Proklos more than Schleiermacher, you, and *even myself*" (my emphasis). This perhaps surprising claim raises the question of the originality of Friedländer's claim vis-à-vis Schleiermacher's Platonic hermeneutics. Schleiermacher sees in the dialogical form a written teaching that attempts to imitate the superiority of oral teaching, but, while he distinguishes between what is explicitly said and what remain unsaid, he does not insist on a philosophical meaning of the interweaving of speech in action, nor does he seek in this action what the dialogues leave unsaid. In this respect, he does not advocate for a truly dramatic reading. On Schleiermacher's contribution to this question, see Laks 2019. On how Schleiermacher's distinction between an esoteric and exoteric meaning of Plato's works differs from the thesis of the Tübingen school, see Szlezák 2019.

²⁵ Paul Friedländer, *Plato: An Introduction*, 166; *Platon I*, 177.

Forms cannot be understood as a doctrine. While it does represent for him a form of *answer* – “The Platonic ‘theory of *Ideas*’ is the answer to the question of Socrates, the ὁ ἔσται the answer to the question τί ἔσται” – Friedländer insists that it confirms “Heidegger’s insight that ‘any answer remains powerful as an answer only as long as it is rooted in the question pertaining to it.’”²⁶ Despite an apparent metaphysical dogmatism, Socratic-Platonic philosophy is “an unending dialogue that continuously renews itself through the question [das sich aus der Frage immer erneuert].”²⁷

Friedländer thinks that Plato’s aversion for philosophical dogmas is reflected in the play of irony at work in his dialogues. “Genuine irony,” he writes, “contains an element of tension: on the one hand deceptively concealing, on the other uncompromisingly revealing, the truth [the being, *das Seiende*].”²⁸ Socratic irony is related to the anti-dogmatism of the dialogues insofar as Socrates’ irony often consists in including himself among the ignorant interlocutors of the conversation. This dramatic gesture both reveals and conceals Socratic knowledge, and it can do so because Socratic knowledge is *docta ignorantia*, knowledge of one’s own ignorance. There surely is a pedagogical function to this use of irony – coupled with *eros*, Friedländer calls it “the net of the great educator”²⁹ –, but it especially suited to a teacher whose knowledge has the same structural ambiguity as irony itself. This also applies to Platonic irony, a level which Friedländer distinguishes from the Socratic level.³⁰ Plato is according to him “the ironic metaphysician.”³¹ To make this point, he uses Friedrich Schlegel’s view according to which irony expresses the opposition “between the

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 136; *Platon I*, 144 (modified translation). The Heidegger quote is from *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerks* (in GA 5, 58) and is quoted as the epigraph of this work: “Jede Antwort bleibt nur als Antwort in Kraft, solange sie im Fragen verwurzelt ist.”

²⁷ Paul Friedländer, *Plato: An Introduction*, 113; *Platon I*, 118 (my translation).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 144; *Platon I*, 152-153.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 141; *Platon I*, 148.

³⁰ See Dostal 2008, 263-264.

³¹ Paul Friedländer, *Plato: An Introduction*, 147; *Platon I*, 156.

impossibility and the necessity of a complete communication.”³² While Plato does write about the Forms, he does so in dialogues where the interlocutors painstakingly try to allude to these realities through various images, metaphors or hyperbolic language, the inadequacy of which is often thematized by the interlocutors themselves. To Friedländer, this signals that there is something about the Forms that at once must and cannot be properly said. This must not mean and does not mean in Friedländer’s interpretation that Plato writes ironically about the Forms because he does not really think that there are Forms.³³ He is not an ironic metaphysician in the sense of an anti-metaphysician who cloaks himself in metaphysics. This mode of Platonic irony rather points to another important theme in Friedländer, namely the “ineffability of the highest Platonic vision.”³⁴

We have seen in the previous chapter that Plato locates genuine knowledge of Forms beyond λόγος. Friedländer modifies this in his own notion of Platonic ineffability. While Plato seems to mean that the highest knowledge is speechless and incommunicable, Friedländer argues that it is not communicable *because* it is not *knowable*, and thus the dialogues are only ways pointing *toward* this ineffable beyond: “For Plato the dialectical path leads to that which is ‘beyond being.’ The ‘beyond’ (*epekeina*) is not knowable; hence, not communicable. Only the way to it can be prepared.”³⁵ The question is, of course: how can one know that something is not communicable if one does not have knowledge of it? Friedländer claims that what Plato has in terms of metaphysics is not knowledge – the “dialectical inexorability [Unerbittlichkeit]” of philosophy allegedly prevents it –, but a *vision*. This vision is not communicable through philosophical λόγος, and according to Friedländer, this is why Plato uses myths in his dialogues. Through myths, Plato’s

³² *Ibid.*

³³ While this view comes close to some Straussian interpretations of Plato, I shall argue later that it is not quite Strauss’ own understanding of the matter.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 169; *Platon I*, 180-181.

writings reach “a new philosophical level.”³⁶ From this notion of metaphysical irony and ineffability, Friedländer can ascribe to the poetic aspects of Plato’s writing a philosophical meaning that was lacking in the other philological attempts to decipher the meaning of the Platonic dialogues.

3.3 Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger from Philology to Philosophy

In the eyes of Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger, Friedländer’s insights and suggestions concerning the riddle of Plato’s dialogical writing had to remain what they are – insightful suggestions without much philosophical justification and development. Among the three, Strauss is certainly the harshest:

... the way in which Plato is read, especially by professors of philosophy and by people who do philosophy, is wholly inadequate because it does not take into account the dramatic character of the dialogues, also and especially of those of their parts which look almost like philosophic treatises. The classical scholar Paul Friedländer had seen this to some extent, but Friedländer had no inkling of what Plato meant by philosophy. (JPCM, 462)

A more charitable mind would perhaps prefer to concur with Tigerstedt’s verdict and say that “Friedländer has a better appreciation of Plato the writer than of Plato the thinker.”³⁷ At any rate, while Gadamer has praised him several times, he also indicates in his *Selbstdarstellung* that while Friedländer and his successors help learn how to “read Plato mimetically,” “the task is far from being solved” (GW 2, 501). Krüger also acknowledges both his debt and his dissatisfactions (Cf. e.g. EL, 317n20 and 319n23.). Indeed, Friedländer’s comments on the philosophical issues discussed in the dialogues are mostly sets of allusive remarks that prompt more questions than they can answer, and most of his specific textual observations – however brilliant they may be – usually

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 182; *Platon I*, 193.

³⁷ Tigerstedt 1977, 50.

do not succeed in relating to philosophical themes or claims. As Strauss writes to Voegelin about Friedländer's *Platon*: "I find here and there good observations, but nowhere a clear exposition that goes to the bottom of things."³⁸ Strauss was not the only one to note this. Both Julius Stenzel and Helmut Kuhn made similar critiques. Perhaps due to the influence of the poet Stefan George and his circle, the philologist's insights are often underdeveloped (and thus often remain allusions) and are instead interwoven in paraphrases of the dialogues and eulogies of Plato's poetic genius.³⁹ As Stenzel puts it, Friedländer was right to identify the danger of a dogmatization (*Dogmatisierung*) of Plato's philosophy into a doctrine, but he failed to appreciate the opposite danger, namely that of eliminating the philosophical claims of Plato's dialogues.⁴⁰ In the same vein, Kuhn observed that his methodological principle was oriented toward the "lived necessity [erlebte Notwendigkeit]" of Plato's work instead of the "logical connection of his fundamental concepts [logische Verknüpfung der Grundbegriffe]."⁴¹ If the Ideas and Forms do not constitute a doctrine, what *are* they? What is their function? Are they separate? How do particular perceptible entities "participate" into them? Is there a Form for each kind of being? Is Socratic irony truly limited to his proclamations of ignorance? Is Platonic irony limited to the way he writes about the Forms? (And if so, why?) Is the impossibility of communication to which Schlegel's account of irony refers simply due to the ineffability of a metaphysical "vision"? Is such "vision" of a philosophical nature if it resists philosophical speech? Friedländer's *Platon* prompts all these very important and stimulating questions (to name but a few) but does not answer them.⁴² In this respect, his attempt to bridge philology and philosophy was not truly successful, and perhaps he was himself aware of this when

³⁸ Strauss to Voegelin on February 25, 1951 in FPP, 79.

³⁹ On the "Georgean" influences on Friedländer's books, see Stenzel (1932), Tigerstedt (1977), Calder (1980).

⁴⁰ Stenzel (1932, 409).

⁴¹ Kuhn (1955, 551).

⁴² Thus Stenzel (1932, 402) is right that Friedländer's *Platon* provides "Rätsel, nicht Lösungen."

in his 1964 preface he wrote that bridging this alleged opposite was, back in the 1920s “*and still today*[,] the task.”⁴³

To incorporate Friedländer’s philological and literary insights into a genuinely philosophical approach to Plato is, at any rate, the task that Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger set to themselves. At the same time, their work testifies to the fact that Friedländer’s attempt was not wholly unsuccessful, since, in their writings on Plato, most of Friedländer’s insights are given philosophical depth. The most prominent of these is the idea that Plato’s thought is fundamentally non-dogmatic. Not only does this prompt a radical reappraisal of the so-called *Ideenlehre*, but all three will give enormous importance to Friedländer’s allusive idea of the persistence of the *question* in the said “theory.”⁴⁴ They also all pay a great attention to the function of irony in the Platonic dialogues, as well as to Friedländer’s distinction between Socratic and Platonic irony.⁴⁵ But, in contradistinction to Friedländer, their reflections on the dialogical structure of Plato’s writings will lead them to the core of Plato’s philosophy and not to some notion of ineffability that redirects all of Plato’s philosophical efforts to a mythic vision that would be philosophically uncommunicable.

Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger agree with Friedländer that dialogical writing is meant to display philosophy in its concrete existential situation, but they pursue the meaning of this situation in the light of Heideggerian phenomenology. Strauss thinks that Heidegger is right to be attentive to our facticity and to think that what is primordial or original are the πράγματα, the things we handle, deal with and are concerned with (JPCM, 461; RCPR, 29), but he will give back to these πράγματα and to this facticity their political texture. The world in which we are as being-in-the-world is always already the world of the πόλις. For Strauss, as we will see, the meaning of Plato’s dialogical

⁴³ Friedländer, *Platon I*, “Vorwort zur dritten Auflage” (my emphasis).

⁴⁴ See e.g. Strauss (cf. WIPP, 38-39 and FPP, 90) Gadamer (e.g. GW 1, 368-384, 494; GW 2, 502), Krüger (esp. KMK, 236 cf. GFP, 282 and EL, 309)

⁴⁵ With perhaps the exception of Gadamer (cf. GW 5, 226-227).

writing is deeply tied to the fact that philosophy takes place in the world of such a political community. Gadamer sees in the dialogical situation of Plato's thought an *ethical* situation and thus breathes ethics back into Heidegger's ontologizing of Aristotle and Plato (esp. GW 5, 15-48). For him, philosophy must be dialogical and therefore cannot, *pace* Heidegger, be dissociated from ethics and politics altogether: neglecting "dialectical ethics" causes it to collapse into unphilosophical discourse (like eristics or sophistry). Gadamer sees in the "Doric harmony" of λόγος and ἔργον, of speech and deed in Plato's dialogues a sign of this ethical boundedness. As for Krüger, the most important feature of Heidegger's thought is *Stimmung*: Plato wished to show that genuine philosophy is wholly dependent on an attunement – not the attunement of angst, boredom or wonder, but of *eros* (cf. EPWA, xi; EL, 49-52).⁴⁶

The unfolding of their reflections on the dialogical aspect of Plato's philosophy will lead us to the heart of their own non-doctrinal Platonic philosophy. Indeed, as we shall see, their interpretations of dialogue and dialectic reveal the other Platonic problems they deem necessary to address as well as *how* they must be addressed (that is, dialogically). For all three, the meaning of the dialogical form points to the questions of the philosopher's situation vis-à-vis poets and poetry, politics and the political community, and Being and truth. It is thus befitted to begin our investigation by examining their treatment of Plato's dialogical writing.

⁴⁶ On *Angst*, *Langweile* and *Er-staunen* or θαυμάζειν as *Grundstimmungen* in Heidegger, see respectively SZ 184-191, 310; GA 29/30, §18-39, GA 45, 171.

PART II

POST-HEIDEGGERIAN PLATONISM

Chapter 4

ON THE MEANING OF THE DIALOGICAL FORM OF PLATO'S WRITINGS

Die Form ist flüssig, der „Sinn“ ist es aber noch mehr...

- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*

The previous chapters have shown that the dominant pictures of Plato in the philosophical context of Marburg in the 1920s, despite their differences, had one important thing in common. Plato was, both for Marburg neo-Kantians and for Heidegger, the name of a philosophical doctrine. For Cohen, Natorp and their followers, this doctrine was the hypothetical method of modern natural sciences and it was chiefly expressed in the so-called “theory of Forms,” the *Ideenlehre*, and especially in the understanding of Ideas or Forms as the “thought-positings” (*Denksetzungen*) required for the possibility of scientific knowledge. For Heidegger, Plato’s dogma was the “metaphysics of presence,” a doctrine that also found its expression in the notion of *ἰδέα*, and which was in his eyes guilty of three charges: the reduction of the temporal meaning of Being to the sole present, the transformation of truth as disclosure and disclosedness (*Unverborgenheit*) into mere correctness (*Richtigkeit*), and the interpretation of being as being-produced (*Hergestelltsein*). It is striking that, despite their enormous difference, these two dogmas are very similar in that they both construe Plato as the earliest and perhaps most important precursor of modern rationality, for better or worse.

It is just as striking that, as I have shown, these two approaches considered that the form in which Plato communicated his thought was irrelevant to the substantive content of his philosophy. To be sure, Schleiermacher’s opposite conviction could have awakened a suspicion that form and

content have a much more intimate relation in Plato's writings, but it was perhaps too easy to dismiss his Romanticism from the "more serious" vantage point of either epistemology or ontology. Likewise, the major philological intervention of Paul Friedländer, that is, his discovery of the λόγος-ἔργον architecture of Plato's writings and his insistence on its significance for the content of Plato's thought, did not succeed in disturbing the dogmatic picture of Plato that prevailed in the dominant philosophical interpretations. It took a new generation to give Friedländer's insights a philosophical meaning and thereby to challenge the established views of a dogmatic Plato. The immensity of the task is reflected in the fact that despite their effort and subsequent similar attempts, the picture of Plato as a philosopher whose failed treatises presented a collection of doctrines was more or less the rule until at least the 1980s.¹

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer reflected on Plato's dialogues and wrote: "The literary form of the dialogue places language and concept back within the original movement of the conversation [in die ursprüngliche Bewegung des Gesprächs]. This protects words from all dogmatic abuse [gegen allen dogmatischen Mißbrauch]" (TM 377; GW 1, 374). This chapter shall show that this general orientation on the question of Plato's dialogical writing perfectly characterizes the approach of Leo Strauss and Gerhard Krüger too, and that this orientation provides a substantial challenge to Heidegger's critique of Platonic dialectic.² But there are different ways to explain why Plato's dialogues should prevent dogmatic interpretations, and while Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger converge toward this general conclusion, their understandings of the meaning of the dialogical form of Plato's writing differ in several respects. I shall argue that in addition to their agreement on the non-dogmatism of dialogical writing, all three of them take as their starting-

¹ For a survey of the evolution of the *status quaestionis* in Plato scholarship, see Press (1996, 2018).

² Cf. e.g. Krüger (EPWA, xxi) and Strauss (ONIPPP, 351): "Plato composed his writings in such a way as to prevent for all time their use as authoritative texts."

points the same insights, namely that dialogues are meant to overcome the limits of written speech as identified in the *Phaedrus*, that dialogues are and should be read as dramas with a complex interaction of setting, characters, action and speech, and that Plato speaks only anonymously through this complex interweaving of λόγοι and ἔργα. Yet I will show that they have different ways of interpreting the meaning of these literary devices and that these interpretations give different inflections to the way in which they will approach the Platonic issues that the general question of dialogical writing raise, especially concerning poetry, politics and ontology. Thus, this chapter shows that the question of the meaning of dialogues truly is the prism of their post-Heideggerian Platonism.

What this inquiry into the diversity of their dialogical Plato also reveals is that the rejection of a dogmatic Plato need not result in a monolithic Platonic skepticism that decries all serious conceptual work as mere vanity in the light of human ignorance. To echo Gadamer's formulation, putting back concepts into the movement of dialogue does not mean getting rid of concepts altogether. For Strauss, dialogical writing has methodological, political and ontological implications which leads him from the tension between δόξα and philosophy to the essential elusiveness of Being. Gadamer sees in Plato's compositions an important ethical meaning as well as indications about his understanding of truth: the practice of dialectic through dialogue is coeval with specific ethical demands that the philosopher cannot neglect, and the ideal harmony of λόγος and ἔργον suggests that truth in Plato is to be found *beyond* the texts, in the interpretive dialogue that we ought to conduct with the dialogical compositions. Krüger is led by the form of Plato's writings to argue about the importance of the pre-discursive and pre-reflective conditions of philosophy, which he explores under the labels of receptivity and "attunement" (*Stimmung*) and to revisit the notion of truth, proposing a radically non-assertional account of it.

4.1 Leo Strauss: From Dialogue to Irony and Esotericism

As I mentioned, Strauss' point of departure is the same as Friedländer's, namely the apparent contradiction between the fact that the *Phaedrus* expresses a severe critique of writing and the fact that the *Phaedrus* is Plato's own written composition. Friedländer reasoned that the solution to this contradiction must have been that Plato thought he could write in such a way as to overcome the essential defects of written works (in his words, they are the form of books that perform the *Aufhebung* of books).³ Likewise, in the *City and Man*, Strauss writes:

Plato's Socrates discusses the literary question – the question concerning writings – in the *Phaedrus*. He says that writing is an invention of doubtful value. He thus makes us understand why he abstained from writing speeches or books. But Plato wrote dialogues. We may assume that the Platonic dialogue is a kind of writing which is free from the essential defect of writings. (CM, 52)

Yet, Strauss expressed in the following way to Eric Voegelin his dissatisfaction with Friedländer's interpretation of this overcoming:

I do not believe that the problem of the dialogues is irresolvable. It only seems to me that we are still quite far from doing so. Since when has the problem actually been noticed? Hardly before Schleiermacher, whose solution is demonstrably false. Then P. Friedländer began again – fundamentally [his interpretation was] only aesthetic. I find here and there good observations, but nowhere a clear exposition that goes at the bottom of things. (February 25, 1951; FPP, 79)

If a merely aesthetic solution is insufficient – regardless of whether this adequately captures Friedländer's approach –, what then, is an interpretation of dialogical writing that would go “at the bottom of things”? To judge from Strauss' own attempt, it would show that dialogues are what they are because of 1) the political situatedness of the philosophical inquiry, 2) the resulting paradoxical nature of philosophical activity and the consequent need for irony and dissimulation, 3) the way Plato understands the question of Being.

³ Paul Friedländer, Paul Friedländer, *Plato: An Introduction*, 166; *Platon I*, 177.

4.1.1 “The Only Possible Orientation”: Political Πράγματα, Opinion, and Dialectic

Several times, Strauss asserts that Plato’s dialogues are imitations. Among other things, they certainly imitate a certain practice of philosophical inquiry: dialectic (cf. CM, 54). Dialogues do not imitate dialectic only in the sense that they reproduce arguments and counter-arguments leading to different conclusions. They imitate dialectic in its concreteness, one may even say in its phenomenological development: “The starting point for the understanding of science would be, in an expression which is today very frequently used, the situation of man. One can say that this is the initial theme of every Platonic dialogue” (OPS, 73). For according to Strauss, it is characteristic of ancient philosophy, as opposed to modern philosophy, to start with the concrete situatedness of the philosophical activity. In this sense, Strauss agreed with Heidegger’s radicalizing of Husserl’s approach: “Our primary understanding of the world is not an understanding of things as objects but of what the Greeks indicated by *pragmata*” (RCPR, 29). Likewise, he agrees with the idea that the question of Being should be “addressed to that being which *is* in the most emphatic or the most authoritative way” (37). Simply, he disagrees with Heidegger that being-in-the-world must be ontologized from the very start, and especially disagrees that it should be thereby depoliticized. Being-in-the-world is being-in-the-πόλις; τὰ πράγματα are τὰ πολιτικά. Ontologizing the nexus of ethical-political questions in which human beings – What is justice? What is noble and shameful? Who should rule?, etc. – find themselves amounts to an obstruction of the primary source of *Bedeutsamkeit*.

It is on this ground that Strauss thinks of ancient philosophers as proceeding in the properly phenomenological way. Classical philosophers, especially classical political philosophers “see the political things with a freshness and directness which have never been equaled. [...] They do not look at political things from the outside, as spectators of political life. They speak the language of

the citizens or statesmen: they hardly use a single term which is not familiar to the market place” (*WIPP*, 27-28). Ancient political philosophy is a “movement” that goes “from opinion to knowledge,” “from the here and now to what is always or eternal” (28). Strauss argues that modern philosophy, which is the opposite movement (from the abstract to the concrete), is necessarily “untrue to the phenomena” and “miss[es] the concrete” (29).⁴ As imitation of philosophical inquiry, dialogues show dialectic in its political situatedness, and therefore in the element of the opinions one encounters in the πόλις. But what does philosophy or dialectic have to do with the sphere of δόξα?

Strauss provided his very first (and perhaps most thorough) interpretation of Plato’s dialectic in a surprising place, namely his 1936 book on Hobbes.⁵ The purpose of this long excursus is to show that by criticizing Aristotle for edifying his practical philosophy on the basis of commonly accepted opinions or ἔνδοξα (what Hobbes calls the “name of things”) and praising Plato for orienting himself on the “ideas of things,” Hobbes in fact misunderstood Plato as well as the difference between Plato and Aristotle. Perhaps having in mind that for Aristotle, dialectic is a preliminary and preparatory stage of a subsequent scientific inquiry, Strauss asserts that “Plato, much more than Aristotle, orientates himself by speech” (*PPH*, 141). Not only does Plato orient himself by speech, but Strauss reads the turn to λόγοι explained in the *Phaedo* as “the *only possible* orientation, which is originally at the disposal of men” (153; my emphasis). Why is speech “the only entrance into the true reasons of things which is open to man” (142)? Strauss’ answer is at first quite counterintuitive: speech is the only access to truth because what human beings say is contradictory.

⁴ Cf. his comments on Husserl and Heidegger on the necessity of starting with the appropriate foundation, namely the truly “first” phenomena, instead of starting with “the roof” (*SPPP*, 31).

⁵ *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes. Its Basis and its Genesis* was originally written in German but first published in the English translation of Elsa M. Sinclair with some additions by Strauss in 1936. The German version, *Hobbes’ Politische Wissenschaft in ihrer Genesis* (prior to Strauss’s additions) is now published in *GS* 3.

Contradictoriness is key for two reasons. The first is that “the fact that what men say is contradictory proves that there is truth hidden in what they say,” the second is that “the most obvious contradictions which underlie every contention and every enmity, concern the just, the beautiful and the good” (143).

Why should contradictions be thought of as signs of truth? Strauss illustrates what he means by taking the example of what people say about the good. Despite their contradictions,

men are in greater concord as regards the good than as regards any other subject, and in such a fashion that this real concord is the ultimate ground of all possible concord. All say of the good that they really wish it. That means that they want the truly good and not merely the appearance of good, and further they wish it; they pursue it, they desire it, they know, therefore, that they lack it, and that it is external to them. [...] Now a moment’s reflection shows that what men usually conceive of as good – wealth, honours, and so forth – is not the same good as they *mean*; for they *mean* by ‘good’ what is in every respect the contrary of evil, that which is completely free from evil. (PPH, 143-144; my emphasis)

A “truth-revealing” approach to human speech can therefore shed some light on a gap between what people say and what people *really mean* (albeit unwittingly) when they speak about virtues or human goods. Strauss goes as far as saying that the transcendence of the Ideas is visible in their “independence in speech” (PPH, 142). Ciccarelli has attempted to explain this “genetic relationship between ordinary language and transcendence of ideas” as a “basically phenomenological thesis.”⁶ The genuine intentionality of ἔνδοξα is not to be located in what individual Athenians actually have in their minds when they express their opinions (e.g. “the good is political honor”); rather, it is the intentionality of speech, of the λόγοι themselves. This is why Strauss can assert that “whenever we speak of virtue – whether we attribute virtue to a man, a woman, a child, or a slave – whether we characterize temperance, courage or justice as virtue – we, in all these cases, use the same word virtue, we always *mean* the same thing” (141-142; my emphasis). For Strauss, this is the

⁶ Ciccarelli (2020, 291). Specifically, he claims that “Strauss transforms, or enlarges, Husserlian intentional consciousness into linguistic-doxastic intentionality.”

sense in which, according to the second sailing, λόγοι are treated as images of the truth of beings. Dialectic attempts to purify these λόγοι and get at what they truly intend, and what they truly intend are the Ideas. The orientation by speech also reveals, through the *loci* of its contentions, that there are only Ideas of human goods such as virtues, beauty and, of course, the good.

This dialectical method leads to a problem. In fact, the purification of λόγοι by dialectic results in a disharmonious relationship between philosophy and its starting point. Dialectic begins in δόξα but attempts to transform it in such a way that it is eventually incompatible with it. This point is crucial in Strauss' argument in the Hobbes book and in general in his understanding of Platonic-Socratic inquiry. Dialectic does not stay at rest in the doxastic element; in its attempt to get from opinion to truth, it is rather a "demand for exactness" which results in a "paradoxical philosophy" (PPH, 145). The paradoxical dimension of philosophy that Strauss points to has a much broader meaning than what is nowadays referred to as the "Socratic paradox," namely the view that virtue is knowledge and that therefore no one ever does wrong knowingly. Although it certainly includes it, the paradox of philosophy as dialectic is, on Strauss's account, not only understood in relation to specific opinions, but rather applies to δόξα as a whole; it is *para*-doxical in the sense that it stands beside and against opinion; in Heidegger's language, beside and against *Gerede* and *das Man*. Strauss supplies several examples which testify to the breath of the paradoxical character of philosophy in Plato's compositions: 1) the fact that even genuine courage is demoted to the rank of the lowest virtue; 2) the antithesis between the fitting (*das Richtige*) and the great (*das Große*); 3) the antithesis between truth and appearance; 4) the antithesis between reason and passion (146-149).⁷ From the

⁷ In the economy of Strauss' broader argument in the chapter of the Hobbes book, the paradoxical or antithetic character of philosophy is what Hobbes takes from Plato but with a crucial modification (which brings him somewhat closer to Aristotle): "Hobbes' political philosophy is, therefore, different from Plato's that in the latter, exactness means the undistorted reliability of the standards, while in the former, exactness means unconditional applicability" (PPH, 151).

situational viewpoint from which, following Strauss's Plato, we started, the paradoxical nature of philosophy easily becomes a problem for the philosopher. For as much as Socratic inquiry transcends the sphere of political opinions, Socrates still lives in the midst of the πόλις whose ἔνδοξα he destabilizes. The philosopher must conduct her inquiry in a way that will pacify as much as possible the potential tensions between her way of life and the political situation which, through the contradictoriness of its commonly held opinions, alone makes such a way of life possible.

4.1.2 The Chiasm Between Argument and Action: Paradox, Irony, Esotericism

The paradoxical character of philosophy as imitated in Plato's dialogues leads Strauss to reflect on philosophy's mode of communication. Already in the Hobbes book, Strauss asserts that Plato denies to the philosopher the "right to seek his own happiness, without a thought for the unphilosophic many" and thereby distinguishes between an esoteric and exoteric message in Plato's work: "in itself wisdom stands supreme, but justice stands supreme from an exoteric point of view" (PPH, 147). Since Strauss's distinction between esoteric and exoteric communication is one of his most discussed and most controversial contributions to hermeneutics and to the history of ideas in general, it is important to treat it carefully. It can be confusing especially in the context of the interpretation of Plato, where the notion of esotericism can easily refer to the Academic doctrine of the two principles – the One and undetermined Dyad – and in particular to its interpretation by the Tübingen school.⁸ Comparisons between esotericism in Strauss and esotericism *à la* Tübingen are especially problematic since, as Trabattini has rightly pointed out, they are in fact quite opposite understandings: while the Tübingen school sees Socratic skepticism

⁸ While Sklezák (2014) rejects the idea that there is or was such a thing as a "school" structured around disciples and masters in Tübingen, this τόπος is so widespread that I will, like he himself does, refer to it as such for the sake of clarity and brevity.

as the exoteric teaching hiding an esoteric dogmatic teaching, Strauss thinks that dogmas are exoteric teachings hiding an esoteric aporetic thinking.⁹ Instead of reading Strauss' texts on the esoteric/exoteric "art of writing" and projecting its theses onto his reading of Plato, it is best to start with what he wrote on Plato. For the case of Plato is not like any other cases of "esotericism" according to Strauss. The very fact that Plato wrote dialogues complicates the forms through which he conveyed esoteric and exoteric messages: "the rules of exactness governing the interpretation of Plato's books are much stricter than those governing the interpretation of most books" (ONIPPP, 351-52). In this respect, it is crucial to distinguish between the intra-dialogical and the extra-dialogical levels of communication, that is the level of the *dramatis personae* within a dialogue, and the level of Plato's dialogical compositions and Plato's readers. As it will become clear, this amounts to distinguishing between Socratic and Platonic irony and identifying the different levels of relations between the argument and the action in and of Plato's works.

As we have seen, Strauss thinks that the philosopher's inquiring speech transcends her initial political situation; her paradoxical λόγος goes beyond the living action (ἔργον) from which it stems. At this very first level, argument and action are disharmonious. But the argumentative process as displayed in the dialogues is itself an action in the sense that the philosopher never fully transcends her political facticity, and thereby always addresses her λόγος *to someone* and with specific purposes in mind: all things considered, Socrates does not speak so abstractly when he chooses to discuss moderation with Critias, courage with Laches, piety with Euthyphro, etc. Following Friedländer's insight, Strauss thinks that understanding this action is essential for an understanding of the argument's unfolding in Plato's dialogues. Precisely because dialogues are *not* a mere sequence of λόγοι, Strauss provocatively claims that "one cannot settle any Platonic question of any

⁹ Trabattoni (2009, 196). For further problems in comparing the Straussian and Tübingen approaches, see Szlezák's (2014) response to Staehler.

consequence by simply quoting Plato” (RCPR, 193). This represents, again, an important challenge to Heidegger’s treatment of dialectic, and to Plato’s “metaphysics” much more broadly. “We cannot ascribe to Plato any utterance of any of his characters without having taken great precautions,” Strauss says, because “we must understand the ‘speeches’ of all Platonic characters in the light of the ‘deeds’” (CM, 59). Not only is Plato’s thought hidden somewhere in this complex dramatic interweaving, but we can only understand the λόγοι of a dialogue’s interlocutors in light of their actions. For Strauss, this does *not* mean that λόγοι and ἔργα are attuned to each other: rather, the reason why he thinks that we can learn so much from carefully observing this action is that “the action may reveal what the speech conceals” (RCPR, 189). If this is so, we cannot trust speeches on their own. This would imply that a philosophical interlocutor like Socrates is dissembling.

Such dissembling is, for Strauss, the chief characteristic of irony. Taking his bearings on the original meaning of the word εἰρωνεία and Aristotle’s discussion of the ironic attitude in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he writes:

Irony is a kind of dissimulation, or of untruthfulness. Aristotle therefore treats the habit of irony primarily as a vice. Yet irony is the dissembling, not of evil actions or of vices, but rather of good actions or of virtues; the ironic man, in opposition to the boaster, understates his worth. [...] Irony is then the noble dissimulation of one’s worth, of one’s superiority. We may say, it is the humanity peculiar to the superior man: he spares the feelings of his inferiors by not displaying his superiority. The highest form of superiority is the superiority in wisdom. Irony in the highest sense will then be the dissimulation of one’s wisdom (CM, 51)

If Socrates is ironic – and he is the supreme ironist for Strauss –, then he attempts to hide his wisdom to his inferior interlocutors (that is, to most if not all his interlocutors).¹⁰ But irony is not pure hiding or dissimulation. Irony at once conceals and reveals, that is, it reveals through

¹⁰ Cf. CM, 55: “there is no Platonic dialogue among men who are, or could be thought to be, equals.”

concealing.¹¹ It does so by revealing to those who understand the irony and concealing to those who do not. This of course admits of different degrees: one can sense that an utterance is ironic without fully seeing what the irony conceals; different people may understand the irony to a different extent. While Strauss hastily and without further argument attributes these differences to a “natural order of rank among man,” his conclusion that “irony consists in speaking differently to different kinds of people” appears reasonable (CM, 51).¹² It also finds support in an interesting comment the narrator of the Platonic or Pseudo-Platonic *Rival Lovers* makes about a response of Socrates’ interlocutor: “And ironically, he answered two things/in a twofold way (καὶ μάλα εἰρωνικῶς εἶπε δύο, 133d8-e1).”¹³

For irony to be effective and reveal to some while concealing to others, there must be hints at the fact that a λόγος is ironic. These hints would allegedly be perceived only by careful listeners and more or less missed by more or less careful ones. Strauss thinks that an important kind of hint is when one’s action betrays a tension with one’s speech: if Socrates claims X and his actions happen to be opposed to X, then we may doubt that Socrates really meant X. There are obviously other ways to hint at irony: facial expressions, saying something inconsistent with something

¹¹ On this point and Strauss’s account of irony is too political to show this with the necessary force, see Hyland (1995, 89-94).

¹² I do not dispute that there *is* an inequality among different human beings in the degree to which they can perceive irony and what it conceals, but that this inequality is *natural* does not follow from the sheer fact that human beings are unequal in that respect. In an earlier account of the difference between “extremely inattentive” and “extremely attentive” readers, Strauss emphasizes, *contra* Schleiermacher’s “tacit” assumption of a continuity leading from non-philosophical life to the philosophical life, a radical conversion or *περιαγωγή*. He thus concludes that the difference is not one of “degree, but of kind” (ET, 281). Yet a substantial and qualitative change need not reflect a distinction in *nature* – after all, the image of the Cave on the basis of which Strauss argues is a picture of *education*.

¹³ Strauss is extraordinarily hesitant in general to athetize dialogues that were transmitted through the tradition as Platonic, the *Lovers* included. Petit (2001, 144-145) has documented the textual “evidences” that Strauss provides – typically, without any explanation of how the passages in question are proof of Plato’s esotericism. One of the most decisive of these is found at *Tim.* 28c3-5, which says, about the origin of the whole: εἰς πάντας ἀδύνατον λέγειν (‘it is impossible to say it to all’). Yet, as Petit (2001, 144) rightly argues, this impossibility could be due to the intellectual difficulty of the matter to communicate, and need not be read as a willful discrimination on the philosopher’s part. The other “evidences” are even less clearly proving anything about a potential esotericism; they simply testify to an acute and explicit awareness of the insufficiencies of ongoing arguments (*Phil.* 23d9-e1; *Pol.* 262c4-7, 263a, 284c7-d2; *Rep.* 506b8-507a5, 509c3-10, 517b5-8, 533a1-15; *Soph.* 247e5-248a1).

previously said, changing one's tone, etc. But these and similar hints are all, precisely, part of the ἔργον of the conversation, and this is why it is much easier to perceive irony when we are participating in or at least concretely spectating the conversation. Strauss thus relates irony to Plato's Socrates' critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*. The yardstick by which writing is measured is the lived conversation, in which one can say different things to different people and also be silent with some (*Phdr.*, 275d-e). Socratic irony as Strauss understands it perfects this model, and it does so especially in displaying the difference between λόγος and ἔργον.

This dialogical model is, as we already mentioned, also the model for a potential kind of writing that would overcome the usual deficiencies of written speech: Platonic dialogues. The problem is that one's control over the destiny one's writing is much more limited than one's control over the destiny of one's conversations: "the proper work of a writing is to talk to some readers and to be silent to others. But does not every writing admittedly talk to all readers?" (CM, 53). According to Strauss, Plato's dialogues do not talk to all readers indifferently. In fact, Plato hides himself much more efficiently than does his Socrates, for Plato's own ἔργον is much more difficult to perceive and decipher than the action of his characters. The guiding hermeneutic principle in this respect is that there is *nothing* arbitrary in Plato: everything in the dialogues is as it is insofar as it follows a "logographic necessity" (CM, 54, 60). Strauss alerts us to the titles of the dialogues, the distinction between the narrated and performed dialogues, the voluntary and involuntary conversations, the dramatic groups as well as the number of all the dialogues and of the dialogues composing each

group.¹⁴ The light under which Plato reveals himself is much dimmer than that under which he reveals his Socrates. In this sense, it is far from true that the Platonic dialogues speak to every reader in the same way. They too are “radically ironical” (CM, 52-53).

As Strauss recalls in the beginning of “Persecution and the Art of Writing,” *scribere est agere* (PAW, 22n2). We may say that, at the level of Platonic irony, Plato’s action is his art of writing. According to Strauss, most readers fail to decipher the subtlety of such a skillful art and thereby are addressed by the dialogues with meanings that are suited for them, that is, for readers that are not careful enough or that are perhaps even careless. This would be Plato’s exoteric teaching. The esoteric meaning would be accessible only to those who are able to and actually make the effort of understanding Plato’s irony. Conventional readings of Strauss’s thesis about Platonic esotericism argue that Plato’s art of writing is meant to protect himself from political persecution by cloaking politically dangerous thoughts meant only for philosophically inclined readers with teachings more suitable for good citizens.¹⁵ An obvious problem with this view is that, as Strauss himself argues in his Hobbes book, the dialectical confrontation with the opinions of the city result in deeply paradoxical positions and these are positions to which *any* reader of Plato has access (cf. CM, 60).¹⁶

¹⁴ The intensity with which Strauss applies this notion of a logographic necessity to Plato’s work is easily prone to criticism. His insistence on the importance of the number of dialogues is especially weak: had Plato lived longer or shorter, would that number not have been different for reasons escaping the logographic necessity? Cf. CM, 55: “Let us then return once more to the surface. Let us abandon every pretense to know. Let us admit that the Platonic dialogue is an enigma-something perplexing and to be wondered at. The Platonic dialogue is one big question mark. A question mark in white chalk on a blackboard is wholly unrevealing. Two such question marks would tell us something; they would draw our attention to the number 2. The number of dialogues which has come down to us as Platonic is 35.”

¹⁵ See e.g. Petit (2001), Trabattoni (2009, 185-197), Basili (2020). Frazer (2006) and Kerber (2019) are notable exceptions but only Kerber (2019, 12-22) deals directly with the case of Plato.

¹⁶ Petit (2001, 141) signals this problem with respect to the critique of democracy: “Platon donne-t-il le sentiment d’avoir eu recours à une telle protection, étant donné, par exemple, sa critique ouverte de la démocratie dans la *République*? N’est-ce pas la ‘doxocratie’ par excellence qui est ainsi visée sans fard, cette critique rendant superflète l’hypothèse du ‘concealing’?” Petit (2001, 142) then responds to this objection by saying that a critique of the prevalent regime in Athens is much less dangerous than a critique of the city’s religion, and that *this* might be what Plato’s esotericism tries to conceal according to Strauss. But the obvious problem with this response is that the *θεολογία* of *Republic II* is fairly openly a critique of Greek religion, including Athen’s – this is something that Strauss notes (see e.g. *HPP*, 55).

This suggests that the cause of Plato's exoteric teaching may have been something else than the danger of political persecution. As Kerber notes, Strauss' focus in "On a Forgotten Kind of Writing" is not political persecution *per se* but the broader tension between philosophy and politics.¹⁷ Plato's apparent (or exoteric) positions in the dialogues are certainly paradoxical and they therefore challenge commonly held views, but they are perhaps nonetheless compatible with political life in general. They are, after all, positive doctrines according to which the δόξα could possibly be rearranged, albeit radically so. But Strauss thinks that the *ultimate* (and, obviously, esoteric) meaning of Plato's dialogues is much more fundamentally aporetic and much less suitable to political life.

4.1.3 *The Irony of Being?*

In fact, the ultimate meaning of Plato's esotericism in Strauss is ontological or metaphysical, and not just political.¹⁸ What I mean by this is that what is truly at stake for his Plato is not just the irony of the philosopher in its political situatedness, but the irony of Being itself. This is indicated in Strauss' most explicit attempt to decipher Plato's own logographic action, and therefore to explain how Plato speaks to careful readers, not *in* his dialogues, but *through* his dialogues (cf. *RCPR*, 187):

Plato's work consists of many dialogues because it imitates the manyness, the variety, the heterogeneity of being. The many dialogues form a *kosmos* which mysteriously imitates the mysterious *kosmos*. The Platonic *kosmos* imitates or reproduces its model in

¹⁷ Kerber (2019, 8-10). *Contra* Kerber, however I do not think that the syllogistic structure of Strauss' argument is a *partial* presentation reducible to its logographic context – see Kerber (2019, 9-10). Rather, the contrast between the threat of persecution and the necessary opposition between philosophy and politics is a contrast in scope or breath: persecution is but a *particular* and *contingent* expression of the more general problem that the conflict between philosophy and the political community represents. Frazer (2006) has well shown that esotericism on grounds of persecution is contingent and a weaker form of esotericism than the kind practiced in view of the essential tension.

¹⁸ To my knowledge, only Benardete (2000, 409) noted this "metaphysical esotericism" in Strauss. As discussed in the previous chapter, Friedländer had spoken of Plato as an ironic metaphysician but in quite a different sense: Friedländer treated the *communication* of metaphysics as tainted with irony and playful allusions, not the *content* of metaphysics.

order to awaken us to the mystery of the model and to assist us in articulating that mystery. There are many dialogues because the whole consists of many parts. (CM, 61-62)

The whole of being is mysterious precisely qua whole. A whole is “the totality of parts,” and we ought to know these parts in order to know the whole (*WIPP*, 39); but parts cannot be fully known before we know what is their position and function in the whole, which in turn suppose a knowledge of the whole. Thus, “the elusiveness of the whole necessarily affects the knowledge of every part” (CM, 21). The dialectical structure of the whole and its parts makes it impossible in principle to fully know Being as a whole.

It is worth pausing to note two things about Strauss’ claim. First, Strauss is not offering an epistemological argument about the limits of human knowledge. Although it surely has such epistemological consequences, the proposition is ontological. For Strauss could have argued that because human beings are just a part of the whole of Being and therefore cannot have a synoptic grasp of the whole, we cannot understand it. If anything, Strauss thinks that the human position in the whole is more privileged than limited because he thinks that (1) “the human soul is the only part of the whole which is open to the whole and therefore more akin to the whole than anything else is” and that (2) knowledge of the human soul is available to human beings (*WIPP*, 39). Instead of proceeding through the limits of human knowledge, Strauss proceeds through the reciprocally determining relation between a whole and its parts. Second, Strauss never quotes any of the Platonic dialogues when he makes his claims about the elusiveness, mystery or enigmatic character of Being as a whole (*ONIPPP*, 351; *WIPPP*, 38-39; *CM*, 20-21, 61-62). Instead, his argument seems to be a Platonically-inspired transposition of the German formulations of the hermeneutic circle of whole and parts (e.g. in Schleiermacher or Dilthey) to the level of ontology.¹⁹ In this

¹⁹ See Gadamer on Schleiermacher’s formulation (*GW* 1, 296) and Hirsch (1967, 77, 259) on these German formulations.

respect, it would not seem inappropriate to read these thoughts as a kind of implicit conversation with Heidegger's ontology.²⁰ Strauss, like Heidegger, would think that Being is only partially intelligible because Being reveals itself only partly, namely, in its withdrawal.²¹

How can dialogues imitate the elusiveness of Being? The imitation of the heterogeneity of Being through the plurality of dialogues is tenuous. Strauss seems to think that the way in which Plato shows himself through concealing himself in the logographic complexity of his work is a way to imitate the manner in which Being shows itself by concealing itself in the parts that it comprises.²² Another way in which Plato's compositions imitate the riddle of Being is through what Strauss calls "abstractions": since we can only have "partial knowledge of parts," "each dialogue reveals the truth about [a] part" but does so by abstracting "from something that is most important to the subject matter of the dialogue" (WIPP, 39; CM 61). Of course, this is an imperfect imitation insofar as a voluntary abstraction implies knowledge of what is abstracted; and, in that case, the knowledge of the part of the whole articulated in a particular dialogue does not completely elude the author. But a perfect imitation would perhaps not be an imitation.

This ontological position of Strauss already points in the direction of his interpretation of the Platonic Ideas, which will be discussed in chapter 7. What is important in the present context is to note that there are ontological roots to Strauss' understanding of Plato's esotericism, and therefore ontological roots to his understanding of the dialogical form of writing. Plato wrote complex

²⁰ An indication that Heidegger is Strauss' interlocutor here can be found in his explicit opposition of historicism and philosophy as an attempt to know the whole (WIPP, 227): "if one does not take seriously the intention of the great thinkers, namely, the intention to know the truth about the whole, one cannot understand them; but historicism is based on the premise that this intention is unreasonable because it is simply impossible to know the truth about the whole." Cf. *NRH*, 30-31, 35, 122-23, 125-26. In *Natural Right and History*, Strauss discusses Heidegger as the "radical historicist."

²¹ The difference would be that for Heidegger, this withdrawal is intimately connected to the temporality – and, thereby the historicity – of Being, something that Strauss needs to deny. I return to this issue in chapter 7.

²² Taminiiaux (2002, 214-215) has interestingly suggested that Heidegger's idea that self-disclosure and self-concealing belong to each other is visible in Strauss's thought that truth hides itself in opinion and, more generally, φύσις discloses itself by concealing itself in νόμος.

dialogues because he thought it would be the most appropriate way to reflect the fundamental elusiveness of Being itself. Plato ironizes because Being is ironic, that is, discloses itself by concealing itself. This insight about the irony of Being is communicated only esoterically not because it is politically dangerous, but because it is *unpolitical*. In 1946, Strauss thought it would be good to reveal this in broad daylight, most likely because he was repulsed by the uses, misuses and abuses of what had been exoterically accessible to politically wicked readers of Plato:

His dialogues supply us not so much with an answer to the riddle of being as with a most articulate “imitation” of that riddle. His teaching can never become the subject of indoctrination. In the last analysis his writings cannot be used for any purpose other than for philosophizing. In particular, no social order and no party which ever existed or whichever will exist can rightfully claim Plato as its patron. (ONIPPP, 351)

4.2 Hans-Georg Gadamer and the Harmony of Λόγος and Ἔργον

Like Strauss, Gadamer follows Friedländer and takes as the principle of his approach to the dialogical form of Plato’s writing the view that they are meant to overcome the defects of written speech so vehemently criticized in the *Phaedrus*. In his 1934 “Plato und die Dichter,” he asserts that “Plato is able to escape the trap of the ever so vulnerable written work, which cannot come to its own defense” (DD 70; cf. 126 and TM 377). It is clear that for him, once again like Strauss, the meaning of the dialogues is not to be found *in* the dialogues strictly speaking, for they “say something only to him who finds meanings beyond what is expressly stated [das Wörtliche] in them and allows these meanings to take effect within him” (DD 71). To study Plato well is to think *through* the dialogues and attempt to understand what they reveal. For Gadamer, such a study shows three things. First, philosophical dialogues intimate a dialectical ethics, that is, the dialogical situation is an ethical situation that demands certain moral dispositions in order to allow the emergence of a shared understanding between the interlocutors. This mutual relation between the practical

situation and the theoretical endeavor anticipates the second point, namely that the compositional key of Plato's dialogues is the harmony of λόγος and ἔργον, a harmony that proves to be not just a hermeneutic principle determined *a priori*, but an ideal sought-for in the conduct of interpretation. Finally, Plato's irony and playfulness confirm that the most important dialogue is not the dialogue between the characters of Plato's dramas but between the reader and Plato's texts. This dialogue between Platonic texts and their readers, again, is not one in which conclusive λόγοι are abstracted and treated as Plato's theses. It is the movement of the dialogue as a whole that has a disclosive power on the reader's soul. These three points are not only relevant to Gadamer's interpretation of Plato but also to his hermeneutics more broadly.

4.2.1 *Dialectic, Dialogue and Ethics*

Gadamer's most developed account of the dialogical method of inquiry in Plato is the first part of his *Habilitationschrift, Platos dialektische Ethik. Phänomenologische Interpretationen zum Philebos* (1931). Albeit an early work, its insights anticipate much of his later thoughts on dialogue in general and on Plato's dialogues in particular, most notably of his discussion of the hermeneutic priority of the question in *Truth and Method*.²³ In what sense is there a dialectical ethics in Plato? Gadamer's answer to this question is unintelligible without first acknowledging his premise that, according to Plato, dialectic is *inseparable* from dialogue. In the 1931 preface, he boldly asserts that the "theory of *dialectic*, in Plato, is the theory of the possibility of *dialogue*" (PDE, xxv cf. PTI, 8). Gadamer is perfectly aware that this is open to serious objections from the standpoint of the developmentalist approach, which claims that this development represents precisely a transition from Socratic

²³ On this anticipation and continuity, see Renaud (1999, 97n68) and Davidson (2005, 261). On a discontinuity between Gadamer's early Heideggerian and interpretation of Plato on the issue of *metaphysics* and his later readings, see Gonzalez (2010, 189-191).

elenctic and aporetic conversation, through the dialectic of Ideas of the middle period, to the method of division and collection (διαίρεσις and συναγωγή) of the late dialogues. Gadamer instead claims that the method of the *Sophist* is the same as that of the *Phaedrus* (PDE, 93), that the arithmetic structure of λόγος (prefiguring the Academic principles of the One and unlimited Dyad) is already at work in the early dialogues (DD, 129),²⁴ that the method of division is “less a method than a practical task” (IG, 42), and, more generally, that

the theory of dialectic must be grasped on the basis of the concrete situation of coming to a shared understanding (*Verständigung*). By comparison with this, all inquiry regarding a change and development in Plato’s dialectic is secondary and must itself get its orientation from the genesis of dialectic from dialogue. (PDE, 113)

Despite the controversial character of this premise, one may note with Davidson that Gadamer’s choice of the *Philebus* is especially well suited for his purposes, since the *Philebus* is a *late* dialogue with a so-called “late ontology” which apparently “comes back” to the elenctic method (assuming that it had been abandoned at one point).²⁵ At any rate, relocating dialectic within the concrete dialogical situation allows him to argue for his notion of a dialectical ethics.

Several important points of Gadamer’s argument in *Platos dialektische Ethik* – as he himself admits – are significantly Heideggerian. First, he proposes to access Plato through Aristotle, as Heidegger had done in his *Sophist* lectures. The purpose of this detour is to understand the dialogical situation in light of the emergence of the theoretical comportment from the average everyday life, as Aristotle had explained at the beginning of his *Metaphysics* (A 1-2): “science, theoria, is itself a specific way in which the care of being-in-the-world is put into effect (ein eigentümlicher Vollzugscharakter der Sorge des In-der-Welt-seins)” (PDE, 27).²⁶ Second, Gadamer exploits the

²⁴ And so would be the method of division and collection (PDE, 113).

²⁵ And, as Davidson (2005, 265-266) notes, successfully so.

²⁶ Cf. IG, 38-39: “Dialectic is not so much a technē—that is, an ability and knowledge—as a way of being” (there, Gadamer refers in a note to *Sein und Zeit*).

Aristotelian distinction between craft (τέχνη) and practical wisdom (φρόνησις) – a distinction that plays a crucial role both in the *Sophist* lectures and in the development of Heidegger’s conceptual apparatus in *Sein und Zeit* –²⁷ in order to differentiate dialectic from any kind of technical method. Third, Gadamer interprets *Dasein* as being constantly in tension between the possibility of successful dialogue (where Heidegger’s *Sein-zum-Tode* becomes *Sein zur Sache*) and fallen forms of discourse (*Verfallsformen des Sprechens*) in which no genuine understanding can occur.

It is on the basis of this third similarity with Heidegger that Gadamer can actually depart from the analyses of *Sein und Zeit*. For whereas Heidegger has argued that the alternative to the idle talk of *das Man* was a silencing (*Schweigen*) that enables the solitary disclosing experience of anxiety, Gadamer believes that there are successful ways (*Vollzugsarten*) to comport oneself in λόγος *with* other people. “Speech, in its primordial form, is part of a shared having to do with something (gemeinsamen Zutunhaben mit etwas)” (PDE, 29). The first sense in which dialectic is ethical is that it emerges out of a facticity which is first and foremost an *ethical* facticity (and not, *pace* Heidegger, strictly ontological): “All Dasein lives continually in an understanding of arētē [virtue]” (PDE, 53). Because the horizon of existence is ethical, both the failure and success of such a communal existence will have ethical meanings.

The analysis of the conditions that make this shared speaking a dialectical dialogue, a dialogue genuinely oriented toward understanding, reveals that the theoretical purpose of coming to an understanding requires to avoid degenerate speaking comportments and adopt good ones. Therefore, the shared *Verständigung* (or its failure) has not only an ethical meaning, but implies an

²⁷ As convincingly shown by Volpi (1988) and Taminiaux (1991, 111-137) *inter alia*.

ethical normativity of sort.²⁸ Because the abuse of λόγος is a “moral matter” (IG, 99), the moral vice at its root must be identified and criticized. For Gadamer, this critique is summed up in Plato’s critique of φθόνος (ill-will, malice, envy). He explains: “*Phthonos* [...] means concerns about being ahead of others or not being left behind by others. As such, its effect in conversation is to cause an apprehensive holding back from talk that presses toward discovering the true state of affairs (Aufdeckung des wahren Sachverhalts)” (PDE, 44-45). Thus, the minimal ethical imperative of dialectic is to be ἄφθονος.

Φθόνος disrupts authentic dialogue in several ways. First, it generates the intention of producing the “strongest” speech *irrespective* of its adequacy to the matter under investigation (PDE, 48).²⁹ This can manifest itself in the preference for long speeches (μακρολογία) over the back-and-forth of cross-examination. Second, making one’s speech stronger at all cost often finds its expression in “the refutation of others for the sake of refutation” (49). But dialectic is “not the art of arguing”; it is the “art of thinking” (TM, 376). Refutation at all costs transforms dialectic into eristic, a technique which Plato has magnificently parodied in the *Euthydemus*. The virtuous counterpart to φθόνος is not the mere absence of envy, but a positive disposition toward truth as something genuinely striven for, and Gadamer thinks this requires dispositions toward the interlocutors as well. The reason why being-toward-the-thing in λόγος implies a way of being-with-others is that “in speaking about something, Dasein always expresses *itself* at the same time” (PDE, 37).

²⁸ *Contra* Taminioux (2002, 173), there remains in Gadamer’s work a dichotomy between authenticity and inauthenticity. This is obvious in the *Vollzug-* and *Verfallsformen* of λόγος in the *Habilitationschrift*, the “critical distinction between authentic and inauthentic dialogue” in *Truth and Method* (TM, 371), and in the idea that sophistry is a threatening *Verfallsform* of λόγος always lurking, a position still held in his 1978 *Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles* (e.g. IG, 99). Gadamer also explicitly endorses Heidegger’s contrast between authenticity and inauthenticity in IG, 39n6.

²⁹ It is interesting to note that in 1931, Gadamer seems to hold a theory of truth as adequacy or correspondence with the facts of the matter (*Sachangemessenheit*, e.g. PDE, 40, 46). As we shall see, this is no longer the case in *Truth and Method* (1960), where the event-character (*Ereignischarakter*) of truth is put to the fore.

In a dialogue in which there is such a “mutual self-expression,” Gadamer identifies a danger in the resulting impression of mutual understanding, namely the difficulty of not letting this understanding take precedence over the inquiry about the *Sache*. In fact, if I understand someone very well, I may tend to minimize the *sachlich* intent of her speech and rather reduce it to the expression of her person as I understand it, which would, in a way, put me and my speech out of her reach. “For a person who thinks that he understands another person who contradicts him in some way and that he understands him without agreeing with him has by that very means protected himself from the other person’s contradiction” (PDE, 37). In the language of *Truth and Method*, this amounts to minimizing the alterity of the interlocutor and reduce it up to a point that it has been wholly appropriated (cf. TM, 314-316). The remedy against this tendency is to be genuinely open to learn something from the other and to be guided to understanding by her. Now I contend that this has two further ethical implications. First, one must be able to presume a certain equality between the interlocutors with respect to the matter sought for. Of course, this does not mean that there must be an actual intellectual equality between the interlocutors. What it does require is that each interlocutor is in principle open to the possibility that, at least in *some* respects, one is wrong or has misunderstood something and that the other interlocutor is right and has understood something better. Second, both interlocutors must speak transparently and openly and be reasonably able to assume that the other is too. For one can hardly hope to learn from someone if one suspects this person of lying or hiding some of her thoughts about the matter.

It is worth pausing here to see that Gadamer formulates an *ethical* response to an important aspect of Heidegger’s critique of dialectic. For according to Gadamer’s argument here, Heidegger’s worry about the concealing character of exchanged λόγοι dissipates if we pay proper attention to

the way in which, and especially the ethical intention with which we exchange these λόγοι. In other words, Gadamer's Plato sees very clearly this Heideggerian worry but answers it ethically.

To be sure, such a response is not unproblematic. There are indeed several obvious objections to such a phenomenology of the successful dialogue, only one of which is explicitly addressed by Gadamer. First, Socrates often uses in Plato's dialogues argumentative or rhetorical strategies similar to those of sophistry and eristics. Gadamer acknowledges this, but solves the problem by arguing that Socrates "keeps his eye on the subject matter even in these circumstances" (PDE 56-57). This is to say that he uses the ill-willed strategies of sophistic speech in a non-malicious way (ἀφθόνως). In this regard, Gadamer likes to recall that Aristotle's distinction between sophistry and dialectic is truly a distinction in the intention (or choice) that guides a way of life as a whole (τοῦ βίου προαίρησις, *Met.* Γ2 1004b24-25; DD, 6; IG, 100). Gadamer might therefore argue that the use of sophistic strategies is a means used by the prudent Socrates to rectify the defects in the dispositions of his interlocutors – recall that for him dialectic is a πρᾶξις governed by φρόνησις and not by τέχνη.³⁰ Relatedly, the second problem concerns the usual inequality or asymmetry between the interlocutors of the Platonic dialogues, an asymmetry which is seldom noticed by Gadamer, especially when he takes Plato's dialogues as the models of genuine dialogues.³¹ In fact, Gadamer admits that when Socrates claims that he is ignorant and eager to learn from his interlocutors, he is ironic (PDE, 56) – Socrates is clearly *not* the inferior participant. This ironic claim of ignorance and inferiority brings us from the problem of inequality to the related problem of ironic speech.

³⁰ Cf. IG, 46 and Fruchon's apt characterization of Gadamer's picture of Socrates as a "Socratisme de la *phronêsis*" – see Fruchon (1994, 333-398). On Gadamer's fusion of Aristotelian φρόνησις and Plato's dialectic, see also Decker (2000, 10) and especially Renaud (2019, 352). I have argued in Pageau-St-Hilaire (2019, 191-192) that Gadamer downplays the theoretical aspect of Platonic φρόνησις to bring it closer to the Aristotelian version.

³¹ On the Platonic "model," see e.g. TM, 370-78 and GW 7, 380. The problem that this asymmetry represents for Gadamer has rightly been noticed by Davidson (2005, 266), Cleary (2010, 194) – although they regard the *Philebus* as a notable exception – and Nielsen (2021, 18-22). For a defense of dialogical asymmetry *contra* Gadamer, see Höhle (2012, 461-62).

Nielsen has compellingly argued that Socrates' "Silenic Ways" (as Alcibiades portrays his irony in the *Symposium*) "do not sit well with the reciprocity that Gadamer emphasizes as a requirement for genuine transformative dialogue."³² In general, Gadamer's hermeneutics is a hermeneutics of "confidence" (as opposed to a hermeneutics of suspicion), so it cannot take ironic speech as its model.³³ The problem is that Gadamer wants to take a model in which irony is allegedly omnipresent. This may be why in the introduction of *Platos dialektische Ethik*, he confesses (PDE, 14): "The suspended, ironical quality that characterizes Plato's writings, not only where everyone perceives the irony but continually, is entirely disregarded here [...] Its attitude is that of a humorless listener to the conversation." It is unclear that such a self-conscious humorless neglect is hermeneutically legitimate in the attempt to establish on Platonic grounds a dialogical model, but this is not Gadamer's last word on the issue of irony.

4.2.2 *The Doric Harmony of Λόγος and Ἔργον*

In spite of the abovementioned objections, Gadamer maintains that Socrates respects Plato's dialectical ethics. The development of this ethical imperative tied with the dialectical inquiry anticipates an important theme of his understanding of the dialogical form of writing Plato employs. For what this dialectical ethics implies is that one's speech and one's action or practical comportment are necessarily interdependent. This means that one cannot be understood without the other. Platonically put, λόγος and ἔργον must be understood in each other's light. Gadamer

³² Nielsen (2021, 15).

³³ This has been well shown and documented by Dostal (2008). The dichotomy between confidence and suspicion is borrowed from Paul Ricoeur – on the hermeneutics of moral confidence, see esp. Foster (1991). Although Dostal illuminates Gadamer's position on irony in contrast to Strauss and Derrida, he does not discuss the obviously important issue of the tension with its Socratic-Platonic model. I have elsewhere tried to address this problem of irony and asymmetry in the Platonic model of dialogue in Gadamer and argued that Gadamer "Aristotelizes" Plato in order to reach the kind of model of philosophical conversation he needs – see P. St-Hilaire (2016).

thinks that not only are λόγος and ἔργον related to each other and mutually illuminating, but that we ought to understand their relation as a *harmony*. In this respect, Gadamer departs from Strauss' analysis of the disjunction between the argument and action of Plato's dialogues.

Strauss argues that because speech can be deceiving, we ought to shed light on the veracity of the λόγοι with an examination of the deeds; Gadamer thinks that λόγος and ἔργον point in the same direction in Plato's dialogues. This is not to say that both speech and action mean the very same thing, for if it were the case, we could hardly see why it would be important to consider them together. Gadamer's point is rather that the action of a dialogue illuminates that which is implied in its argumentative sequence without being fully explicit. Let us briefly turn to Gadamer's chief example of such a reading – his interpretation of the *Lysis* – to see how this plays out.

In “*Logos und Ergon im platonischen Lysis*,” Gadamer claims that “the usual approach” to the argument runs into difficulties “*for it fails to take the principle of the Doric harmony between logos and ergon as its guide*” (DD, 6). The bulk of Gadamer's interpretation is that the λόγος of Plato's *Lysis* fails because its ἔργον predestined it to fail: “one suddenly recognizes that any discussion which Socrates conducts about friendship with two young boys *must* end in an *aporia*, for children do not yet know what friendship is and how complex a relationship an enduring friendship creates between friends” (6). Gadamer is not merely explaining an aporetic ending by the deficiencies of the interlocutors – for this could be done for at least every single one of the early dialogues. His point is not about a kind of intellectual or moral deficiency, but is specific to their age. Furthermore, this interweaving of argument and action reveals something positive about friendship, namely that friendship in deed, as well as an understanding of this relationship, demands maturity and a shared experience.

Gadamer also directs our attention to a peculiar failure of the dialogue's argument, namely the exclusion of both theses that “like” seeks out “like” and that dissimilarity is what causes friendly

attraction (214a-216b). The first thesis is refuted on the grounds that two unjust people will likely harm each other instead of becoming friends, and, if both are truly good, they are self-sufficient and do not need each other. The second thesis is also refuted “in a curiously sophistic way” (DD, 13): taken at its extreme, the thesis implies that one’s friend and one’s enemy (for there is no greater opposition) would attract each other and become friends. Likewise, the just would be friend with the unjust, the moderate with the immoderate, etc. Socrates then moves on to the third logical possibility left open by the previous alternative: a person is attracted by another who is neither like, nor unlike her. This would mean that friends are neither good, nor bad, but somewhere “in-between” (218b-c). Socrates, however, attempts to reject this new possibility by assimilating it logically to the first thesis. While he captures this in-between with the word “familiar” (*oikeion*), which he proposes to distinguish from the “like” (*homoion*), he then asserts that the good is familiar to the good and the bad is familiar to the bad: this puts us in the same difficulties that pertained to the first thesis that “like” seeks “like.” Lysis and Menexenos accept the conclusion, and this acceptance leads the dialogue to its aporetic finale. Gadamer indicates that if we consider that their acceptance of this conclusion is due to their immaturity, we can reach something positive about friendship. For to be familiar to the good is not exactly the same as to *be* good, and it is precisely this difference that explains both the familiarity with and the desire of the good:

The logos here has not yet revealed something in deed (*ergon*) to this boy, whose experience still lags behind what Socrates has been saying.

Socrates plays a singularly reserved role here. Indeed it is more accurate to say that he makes every effort to obscure the truth to which the discussion leads. *The reader* might notice that the answer, “to *oikeion*,” contains the deeper meaning of what was meant by “the same” at an earlier stage in the discussion, and very likely it will not be lost on him that what is called “*oikeion*” and “the same” can also be called “good” (DD, 20)

Lysis and Menexenos consent to Socrates’ aporetic conclusion because they fail to see that in the οἰκεῖον of friendship, both “sameness and difference, longing and fulfillment” are at play (DD,

20).³⁴ The third thesis (which in a way shows both previous theses *somewhat* right) was the right one: “Friendship has its basis in a neither/nor which longs for the positive, longs for the good” (15). The boys, Gadamer says, fail to see this because they are too young for a genuine experience of friendship.³⁵

The case of the *Lysis* is significant because it shows that the harmony of speech and deed is performed by the reader and *not* achieved by the characters of the dialogue. This is perhaps not that surprising. Gadamer picks up the principle of the Doric harmony between λόγος and ἔργον from something Socrates says to Laches in the *Laches*: their conversation lacks this harmony because Laches is courageous in deed without being able to compellingly say what courage is (193d-e; DD, 2). Because the dialogue is aporetic, there is no remedy to this disharmony. The case of Critias in the *Charmides* seems to display an even greater disharmonious relation: Critias, one of the Thirty Tyrants, praises moderation and self-knowledge. This, Gadamer says, reveals “how sharp the conflict was between logos and ergon in Plato’s Athens” (DD, 3). In fact, it reveals more. Whereas the Doric harmony of λόγος and ἔργον is manifest in an ideal dialogue like the one that Gadamer phenomenologically describes in his *Habilitationsschrift* and thereby appears to be an appropriate hermeneutic principle for understanding Plato’s dialogues, these very dialogues fall short of the ideal harmony at the intra-dialogical level. If this principle of harmony is, as Gadamer says, posited “as something for which we must continually strive,” it should not be sought for *in* the dialogues

³⁴ This in-between which is neither good nor bad recalls Eros as offspring of Poros and Penia, for erotic love is a kind of having which is at the same time a not-having, a mixture of lack and fulfillment. On this, see especially Heidegger’s excellent remarks on erotic striving and two kinds of having in Plato’s *Theaetetus* in GA 34, 204-218. The connection between erotic love and friendship is confirmed by the beginnings of the *Lysis*, where Socrates claims that he is ignorant, except for his knowledge of lover and beloved (γνῶναι ἐρῶντα τε καὶ ἐρώμενον, 204c2 – cf. *Symp.* 177d7-8: ὃς οὐδὲν φημι ἄλλο ἐπίστασθαι ἢ τὰ ἐρωτικά).

³⁵ Gadamer thinks that Socrates’ brings the dialogue in its final aporia by making a “false” distinction between τὸ ὁμοῖον and τὸ οἰκεῖον, but the problem, I think, is rather that he does not hold unto that distinction. If he did, he would not lead us back to the problems of the view that the good is friend of the good (cf. 222d). For a different reading of the *Lysis* inspired by Gadamer but which further intensifies the principle of the harmony of argument and action, see D’Angelo (2020, 68-76).

but perceived *through* the dialogue and accomplished by an interpretation in which we put ourselves in dialogue with Plato's texts.

4.2.3 Beyond the Written Work: Irony and the Elusiveness of the Dialogues

Thus, with their interweaving of argument and action, Plato's dialogues point to a more important dialogue to be performed between his works and the reader. Within the dialogues, the harmony of λόγος and ἔργον and its idealized dialectical ethics is always threatened by Socrates' superiority and ironic speeches. Nielsen has aptly suggested that the inadequacies of the dialogues depicted by Plato could be the philosopher's way of indicating the more genuine dialogue to be had with him: "it seems that Plato in refraining from proclaiming a 'last word' and choosing instead to open up a space for the ongoing critique of philosophical practices and the philosophical life, is a better dialogue partner than Plato's Socrates."³⁶ It must be added that Nielsen's suggestion is explicitly made by Gadamer: "In these dialogues we ourselves are the ones (thanks to the lasting effect of Plato's artful dialogical compositions) who find ourselves addressed and who are called upon to account for what we are saying" (DD, 128; cf. 20, 26). After all, Gadamer thinks of interpretation as a dialogue between the interpreter and the text (TM, 376). Plato is no exception.

But if we are to overcome this tendency to failure by entering in dialogue with Plato's dialogues, should it not require that our interpretation overcome the problems of inequality and irony described above? Deciphering Platonic irony is indeed, according to Gadamer, an indispensable yet immensely difficult task. His most thematic statement on the issue was written in 1933, in a

³⁶ Nielsen (2021, 23).

piece on “Die neue Platoforschung.” Commenting on Friedländer’s *Platon*, he first affirms the absolute omnipresence of irony in Plato:

The question of whether a determined expression [bestimmte Äusserung] is seriously or ironically meant, a question which imposes itself again and again to interpreters oriented toward Plato’s doctrine appears to be posed in a fundamentally wrong way. Insofar as irony and seriousness are opposites, Plato is through and through ironic and never serious. This means that none of Plato’s expressions is an *abstract* expression of his opinion [keine Äusserung Platos ist *abstrakte* Äusserung seiner Meinung] [...] The continuous and general boundedness to the situation [Situationsgebundenheit] of everything that is said makes it ironic. (GW 5, 226-227)

Gadamer then goes on to explain that Plato truly hides himself (“verhüllt sich”) in his compositions, and that the seriousness of his irony consists precisely in the fact that it says a hidden truth in a way “that it is only revealed to those who are capable [of revealing it] on their own (daß sie nur dem von sich aus zu ihr Fähigen offenbar wird)” (GW 5, 227). Here, we are close to Strauss’ understanding of irony as dissimulation. But whereas Strauss provides some hermeneutic tools to begin sorting out Plato’s irony, Gadamer is much more elusive. His elusiveness is grounded in a reflection on what one could call the application of the hermeneutic circle to the case of Plato’s irony. The task of deciphering Plato’s irony is infinite because it supposes that the interpreter understands and sees things from the perspective of the most intimate consonance or harmony with the spirit of Plato about the matter at hand (*aus einem innigsten sachlichen Einklang mit dem Geiste Platos*, 227). The problem is that Plato’s teaching will always be accessible to us only through this very veil (*Verhüllung*) that we attempt to unveil.

For Gadamer, such a circle only displays the narrowness and relative arbitrariness of dogmatic interpretations of Plato. This does not mean that all interpretations of Plato in general or of Plato’s ironies are arbitrary, but it means that (1) there is no method to guide these interpretations and that (2) no interpretive attempt should ever be held as *definitive*. This may be why there is no strong consistency unifying Gadamer’s punctual observations about irony in the dialogues. Smith’s claim

that Socratic irony is a “prime example of something which must be understood *e contrario*”³⁷ is misleading, for this is only the meaning of *some* ironic speeches according to Gadamer. Other instances of irony are characterized by Gadamer as comic, expressing criticism or ambiguity, voluntary obscuring or dissembling, or simply marks of playfulness.³⁸ There is no reason for reading all these different understandings of irony as meaning that the speeches in question should be read *e contrario*.

Gadamer need not commit to any of these different senses of irony as the prevailing one, for that would precisely abstract λόγοι from their *Situationsgebundenheit* and settle in advance the meaning of what is to be interpreted in an equally situated dialogue to be had with Plato. Plato’s dialogues remarkably overcome the limits of written speech since they put the reader in a new dialogical situation beyond what is merely written. Likewise, the truth of the dialogues is not unchangingly fixed by their written words and rather varies according to their interpretation, which, like task of dialectic, is infinite (cf. DD, 152). This elusiveness built in Platonic speeches runs directly against Heidegger’s critique of λόγος in Platonic dialectic, for dialogues thus understood never propose a truth in the form a discourse that corresponds to the reality under investigation. Gadamer’s Platonism is aware of the weakness of λόγος: the locus of truth is not somewhere *in* the speeches but in the disclosive experience that these speeches enable through their interweaving movement. Krüger’s Platonism will also emphasize the displacement of this locus of truth.

³⁷ Smith (1986, xii n5).

³⁸ See for instance: “*e contrario*” irony (DD, 1-2, 9); comic irony (DD, 12, 19, 28, 55n7, 68, 94); criticism through irony (DD, 42, 80); irony as expression of ambiguity (DD, 69, 70, 160); irony as concealing or dissimulation (DD, 76, 91n8, 94); irony as playfulness (DD, 203; IG, 54, 108).

4.3 Gerhard Krüger on the *Stimmung* of Plato's Dialogues

In his *Platonbuch*, Gerhard Krüger treats the question of the dialogical form under the heading: “The Uniqueness of Eros and the Platonic Poetry [Die Eigenart des Eros und die platonische Dichtung]” Like Gadamer and Strauss, Krüger thus understands Plato's writings as poetic compositions. But what do dialogues have to do with *eros*? Approaching this question correctly requires grasping the status of *eros* in Krüger's Plato. As the title of his book – *Einsicht und Leidenschaft: Das Wesen des platonischen Denkens* – indicates, *eros* is a passion. Krüger thinks this passion is so primordial that it is constitutive of the essence of Plato's thinking. Now, the contrast between *eros* as *Leidenschaft* and *Einsicht* could suggest that Krüger is simply contrasting passion with intellect, thus revisiting the *locus communis* of the relation between the rational and appetitive capacities in the Platonic pictures of the human soul. While Krüger indeed does not think that Plato is setting reason and passions apart as opposite forces, understanding *Leidenschaft* in Krüger as mere passion as distinguished from reason would be missing a crucial aspect of his argument, namely that *eros* as *Leidenschaft* is a *Stimmung*. If Krüger thinks that the dialogical *Dichtung* and *eros* ought to be treated together, he must think that dialogue and *Stimmung* are importantly related. This *Stimmung* of Plato's dialogues is, as I shall argue here, the guiding thread of Krüger's interpretation of the Platonic form of writing – and, as it should become clear throughout the present work, of his whole appropriation of Plato.

4.3.1 *The Dialogical Situation and the Stimmung of Philosophy*³⁹

In his introduction to Rufener's translation of Plato's early or "Socratic" works,⁴⁰ Krüger explicitly acknowledges that "the philosophy of existence" (in which he certainly includes Heidegger) "has made us conscious that there is an essential relation between attunement [*Stimmung*] and understanding, human life-decisions and scientific attitude" (EPWA, xi). Asserting that Plato's thinking is "not just intellectual but also human [nicht bloß denkerisch, sondern menschlich]," he goes as far as calling him an "existential thinker" (x). What Krüger first means by calling Plato's thought human and existential is that his work presents philosophy in the whole of its concreteness (*in seiner ganzen Konkretion*, EL, 77; cf. EPS, 29). *Pace* Heidegger's purely ontological facticity and more like Strauss and Gadamer, he emphasizes the embodied and social nature (*leibhaft-geselliges Wesen*) of the philosopher, whose "belonging to a human community" Plato never abstracts from (EL, 77, EPWA x).⁴¹ Plato's way of acknowledging this existential concreteness of philosophy is to weave arguments in the fabric of an elaborated action, λόγοι into ἔργα.

This is why Krüger's interpretation of the *Symposium*, to which is devoted most of *Einsicht und Leidenschaft*, begins with the observation that *eros* is both the theme of the dialogue's conversations (its thematic λόγος) and the overarching principle of its dramatic action. Because the participants of the drinking party must praise of Eros,

Eros enters the stage as the object of the meditation. But it must not be underestimated that the speakers and their very society have something erotic in them—so much so that the last speech is not directed at Eros anymore, but at Socrates as the beloved of Alcibiades who is giving that speech (222c). The symposium with which Agathon celebrates his first victory in the poets' competition brings together a circle of men who,

³⁹ Part of this section has been published in another form in my Pageau-St-Hilaire (2022b)

⁴⁰ *Platon. Die Werke des Aufstiegs* (Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1948)

⁴¹ Note the use of the Heideggerian language of other expressions such as "faktische Leben" (EL, 12).

taken together (177d-e) and as individuals, are explicitly portrayed as lovers (*Erotiker*).⁴² (EL, 3)

It is significant that Krüger notes that the eroticism of the characters goes beyond their being individually in love with each other: they are also lovers *insgesamt*. That *eros* here both includes and transcends the individual passions is of special importance for understanding how the *Leidenschaft* of *eros* is interpreted. Krüger notes that *eros* “grips [ergriff] not only the senses but the ‘whole’ human being; we see how ‘thinking’ too is changed under the influence of love” (EL, 10): *eros* is not simply a matter of feeling as distinguished from thinking. Yet, because it affects the way we think and presumably compromises rational capacities, we nowadays understand *Leidenschaft* privatively as the opposite of reason. Krüger notes that we moderns might as well follow Kant in calling the being-gripped of passion (*Ergriffenheit der Leidenschaft*) “madness” (*Wahnsinn*) (EL, 12). By contrast, Plato’s *Phaedrus* calls it *μανία*, but in such a positive way that he thinks of philosophy as an expression of erotic madness. In fact, Krüger argues, this positive understanding of *eros* as madness was necessary for the interpretation of *eros* as a divine power.⁴³ The experience of *eros* is thus understood by Krüger as a thoroughly *religious* experience.⁴⁴ The positive character of the subjection of *eros* becomes understandable once we consider that human beings do not have access to the world through the pure autarchic freedom of spontaneous thinking. Instead,

the relation between affect and passion [...] is constitutive of *human beings in general*, which are *essentially needy* and dependent on things outside of themselves. There, concrete human beings, who are not self-sufficient, not elevated above everything “else,” cannot be confronted indifferently with the things familiar to them even if they

⁴² “Der Eros tritt insofern als Gegenstand der Betrachtung auf. Aber es darf dabei nicht unterschätzt werden, daß die Redenden und ihre Gesellschaft selbst etwas Erotisches an sich haben – so sehr, daß die letzte Rede gar nicht mehr Eros gilt, sondern Sokrates als dem Geliebten des redenden Alkibiades (222c). Das Gastmahl, mit dem Agathon seinen ersten Sieg im Wettstreit der Dichter feiert, vereinigt einen Kreis von Männern, die insgesamt (177d-e) und im einzelnen ausdrücklich als ‚Erotiker‘ geschildert werden.”

⁴³ See EL, 13: “Der entscheidende Schritt zum Verständnis des Eros als eines Gottes ist getan, wenn man seine Wirkungen schlechthin als Güter anerkennt.”

⁴⁴ This important feature of Krüger’s Plato will be discussed in chapter 5 in relation to the tension between philosophy and poetry. For a treatment of *Einsicht und Leidenschaft* that focuses on this issue, see Ordi i Fernández (2009, 105-130). On the “Augustinian” dimension of Krüger’s Plato, see his letter to Strauss of 29 December 1932 (SKC, 55) and Tanguay (2018, 137-140).

strive for a Stoic ataraxy. The things make an impression on them; they ‘captivate’ and ‘overwhelm’ them – in the sense of both lure and terror. As a result of this dependence, human beings find themselves essentially in a *condition* that is unwillingly given to them, a condition with which all actual and possible “authentic” *comportment* – however creative it may be – must come to grips..⁴⁵ (EL, 22)

After making an unsurprising reference to Heidegger’s concepts of “thrownness” and “project,” “facticity” and “existence, “Stimmung” and “understanding” (EL, 315-316n11), Krüger summarizes what is at stake in his interpretation of *Leidenschaft*: “We know this world ‘full of impression [eindrucksvolle]’ as such only in the orientation by the ‘authentic’ *Stimmungen*” (EL, 22). Therefore, *eros* is not a feeling but a *Stimmung*, an attunement that both enables and conditions the givenness of the world (*die Gegebenheit der Welt* – EL, 23). With such a depiction of passion – being under the spell of *eros* is like the *Ergiffenheit* of a *Stimmung* which alone makes an access to the world possible – Krüger is appropriating Heidegger’s understanding of the concept of *Stimmung*.⁴⁶

It is worth pausing a moment to appreciate the weight of Krüger’s interpretive gesture. If *eros* is a *Stimmung* and not merely a feeling, it is not just a subjective state.⁴⁷ This is why *eros* can be the ἔργον of Plato’s *Symposium*, the fundamental setting of its action: it is not simply that all characters are individually under the spell of erotic love, but that they find themselves amidst an erotic atmosphere which gives the tone of their interaction and to which they are, in turn, attuned.⁴⁸ This

⁴⁵ "das Verhältnis von Affekt und Leidenschaft [...] ist konstitutiv für das *wesenhaft bedürftige*, auf die Dinge außer ihm angewiesene *Menschsein überhaupt*. Da der konkrete Mensch nicht autark, nicht über alles ‚Andere‘ erhaben ist, kann er den Dingen von Hause aus nicht gleichgültig gegenüberstehen, selbst wenn er eine stoische Ataraxie erstrebt. Die Dinge machen ihm Eindruck; sie ‚fesseln‘ und ‚überwältigen‘ ihn – im Sinne der Lockung und des Schreckens zugleich. Der Mensch befindet sich infolge dieser Abhängigkeit *wesenhaft* in einer ihm selbst unwillkürlich gegebenen *Zuständlichkeit*, mit der sich alles wirkliche und mögliche ‚eigene‘ *Verhalten* – wie schöpferisch es auch sein mag – auseinandersetzen muß."

⁴⁶ Cf. e.g. *SZ*, 138: "Wir müssen in der Tat *ontologisch* grundsätzlich die primäre Entdeckung der Welt der ‚bloßen Stimmung‘ überlassen."

⁴⁷ As Wellbery explains, this is true of *Stimmung* in general and not merely of Heidegger’s use of the notion. See e.g. Wellbery (2018, 8): "*Stimmungen* are not only modes of the interior psychic life, they are also atmospheres that surround us."

⁴⁸ Krüger’s use of the verb *sich befinden* in this context is all but insignificant: *Befindlichkeit* and *Stimmung* are almost equivalent in *Sein und Zeit* (see esp. *SZ*, §40 entitled "Die Grundbefindlichkeit der Angst als eine ausgezeichnete Erschlossenheit des Daseins").

is very important, for it implies that a Platonic dialogue presents the philosophical inquiry as inseparable from a *Stimmung* that makes philosophy possible in the first place. Krüger seems to resist Heidegger's exclusively ontological interpretation of the notion (cf. 316n11), but he certainly agrees with the idea that *Stimmung* is that through which truth as disclosure is enabled.⁴⁹

Heidegger and Krüger obviously disagree about what the *Grundstimmungen* are. While Heidegger gives preponderance to anxiety and boredom,⁵⁰ Krüger thinks chiefly (but perhaps not exclusively) of *eros*.⁵¹ This difference is not just one of taste for brighter or darker moods. While they all are disclosive of the world in which human beings find themselves, different *Stimmungen* disclose this world in such different ways that they end up unveiling different aspects of it. On the one hand, *Angst* and *Langweile* ultimately disclose Dasein's temporality, and while they may very well be communicable and perhaps even eventually "contagious," the experiences of such attunements are solitary.⁵² On the other hand, *eros* is essentially relational, and what it discloses must therefore be more communal. One thing that the erotic *Stimmung* is supposed to disclose is the fundamental *dependence* and *passivity* underlying any spontaneous and free activity of thinking – this finitude is something to which Krüger comes back tirelessly.⁵³ But, as Heidegger would perhaps recall, this is something that all *Stimmungen* as such disclose. Krüger does not specify what is disclosed in particular when *eros* opens up the world for a lover. But since he ties *eros* to philosophical madness,

⁴⁹ Cf. Wellbery (2018, 34).

⁵⁰ Respectively in *Sein und Zeit* (1927) and *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik. Welt – Endlichkeit – Einsamkeit* (1929-1930).

⁵¹ Elsewhere he suggests that to be "placed before death [vor den Tod gestellt]" and to be "shaken by the care for the State [von der Sorge um der Staat erschüttert]" could play analogous functions (supposedly in the *Phaedo* and *Republic*) to that which is played by *eros* in the *Symposium* (EPWA, x).

⁵² On the communicative and "contagious" dimensions of *Stimmungen*, see Wellbery (2018, 8), as well as Heidegger's thoughts on *Langweile* as the *Stimmung* of the actual *epoch* in *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik* (GA 29/30, 111-16).

⁵³ This is a running thread in Krüger's work. It is already important *Philosophie und Moral in der kantischen Kritik* (1931) and persists until his last course (posthumously published), *Religiöse und profane Welterfahrung* (1973).

maybe no particular object should be specified, for philosophy in its erotic frenzy does not and cannot limit itself in the scope of its investigation.

Krüger's other obvious disagreement with Heidegger is the most important. For Heidegger, Plato gives birth to the "logical prejudice" by insisting that the intelligibility of the world be expressed in λόγοι and that these λόγοι be criticized according to the criterion of logical consistency.⁵⁴ From this perspective, the requirement of λόγον δίδοναι at the heart of Socratic dialectic is in fact the first reduction of thinking to logic. What Krüger's interpretation suggests directly confronts this picture: Plato instead wished to show that the λόγος is in each and every instance fundamentally situated in a certain action, which itself unfolds according to a pre-reflexive atmospheric attunement. If we follow Heidegger, one can find Plato's thoughts expressed in certain speeches that we can abstract from the dialogical context. But is that method not already presupposing that the dialogues are governed by the "logical prejudice" and that its truth lies in the *adaequatio* of the prevalent λόγος with the thing under investigation? If we instead follow Krüger's response, it is only possible to operate such abstractions if we ignore the way in which the *personae* who express the λόγοι of the dialogues are always already gripped by a certain *Stimmung* that gives them access to what they are trying to understand, and thereby dismissing Plato's attempt to capture these tonalities in writing his imitations. For Heidegger, registering the inescapable mediation of *Stimmungen* is a solution to the problem that emerges with Plato; for Krüger, the solution is already at work in Plato's thought and importantly manifest in his way of writing.

⁵⁴ On Plato as the father of the logical prejudice, see for instance *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (GA 40, 128-129).

4.3.2 *Ἀληθεια ἄτοπος?* Dialogues and the Locus of Truth

This brings us to the question of the relation between philosophical truth and dialogical composition. If the previous observations about the *Stimmung* of dialogue are right, Plato's works cannot provide a set of doctrines. And, in fact, Krüger repeatedly insists that the literary dimension of Plato's writing should *not* be thought of as a clothing (*Einkleidung*) of scientific results or of an alleged doctrine (EPWA, xi and xxi; cf. EL, 68). When he asks in the most direct way the question of the meaning of the Platonic dialogue,⁵⁵ his answer builds upon his considerations about *eros* as *Stimmung*:

The essence of Eros, by which we orient ourselves here, makes clear the sense in which Plato repeats the Socratic dialogue: if all self-sufficiency of research as a whole is again subject to a religious dependence, and if therefore all grasping and all action controlled by him is again as a whole sustained by a passion which gives the research and *technē* its meaning, then Plato too is one who in an essential way "knows nothing" and who therefore can also not "teach." There the decisive contents of all thinking do not stand in his power, and neither can he pass them on at will. He does not "possess" the truth. Like Socrates, he must therefore limit himself to let speak other people – be it genuinely or purportedly – who have something available to say.⁵⁶ (EL, 67-68)

Like Strauss and Gadamer, Krüger closely ties the dialogical form with Plato's skepticism or anti-dogmatism. Plato does not possess (*besitzt*) a truth which he attempts to teach through his writings. As such, the *Dichtung* of Plato's dialogues presents not a triumphant reason, but a *searching* reason (*forschende Vernunft* – EL, 62). A hint of this is that when Plato mentions himself in the dialogues, he is always relatively unimportant (70). To be sure, Plato speaks and must speak, but he does not do so either directly, or indirectly by clothing his own thought in individual characters

⁵⁵ EL, 67: "Welchen Sinn hat der platonische Dialog *in sich*?"

⁵⁶ "Das Wesen des Eros, an dem wir uns hier orientieren, macht deutlich, in welchem Sinne Plato die Form des sokratischen Dialogs wiederholt: wenn alle Selbständigkeit des Forschens im Ganzen wieder einer religiösen Abhängigkeit unterliegt, und wenn daher alles Begreifen und alles von ihm geleitete Handeln im Ganzen wieder von einer Leidenschaft getragen ist, die dem Forschen und der *Technē* erst ihren Sinn gibt, dann ist auch Plato einer, der im wesentlichen ‚nichts weiß‘, und der daher auch nichts ‚lehren‘ kann. Da die entscheidenden Inhalte alles Denkens nicht in seiner Macht stehen, kann er sie auch nicht beliebig weitergeben. Er ‚besitzt‘ die Wahrheit nicht. Wie Sokrates muß er sich darauf beschränken, andere reden zu lassen, die – sei es wirklich oder nur angeblich – etwas Verfügbares zu sagen haben."

(68): “it is really not a ‘disguise’ of his own thoughts when Plato lets speak the characters of the dialogues.” This includes Socrates and the other prominent interlocutors like Parmenides, Timaeus, the Eleatic Stranger or the Athenian Stranger: “like all real dramatist, for him too *no* character is just his mask” (EPWA, xxii; cf. EL, 67 and 72).

So where must we look for truth in Plato? If Plato does not speak through his characters, he speaks insofar as he *portrays* (EL, 70). It is the portrait as a whole that intimates a truth, first and foremost the truth of philosophical ignorance from which dialogical writing itself stems. At most, Plato reveals truth through the way in which he portrays his characters in interaction: Platonic *Dichtung* has its law in “what is necessary to a true being-human [was zum wahren Menschsein nötig ist]” (72). This is why the characters of the dialogues are not mere replicate of historical people. Plato does not limit himself to picturing these people as they “really were” but rather tries to show them “in the whole range of their possibilities”; he “lets them be brought to ideal perfection,” that is, “to the full truth that was perhaps anticipated [geähnt] in their actual thinking” (68).

This Platonic idealizing picture is not revealed merely by what the characters say, but by the action and context through which they say what they say, by the ἔργον of the dialogue and its *Stimmungen*. Like Strauss, Krüger notes that an important artistic device (*Kunstmittel*) through which Plato presents this ἔργον is the indirect narration, which introduces a mediation between the reader and the dialogue and allows Plato to introduce “stage directions,” so to speak (EL, 71). Krüger calls our attention to this by underlying the significance of the conversation which sets the framework of the whole dialogue, what he calls the *Rahmengespräch*. The meaning of this *Rahmengespräch* is to present the “genuine [*eigentliche*] dialogue” (72). For instance, the setting of the *Symposium* shows, through a sharp dramatic contrast between the philosophic and non-philosophic life (especially in

the strangeness of both Socrates and Apollodorus), that philosophy occupies within the world a position that is “not unproblematic” (77). But this is not revealed *strictu sensu* by what the characters say and is rather revealed by the action. Socrates’s problematic or strange position in the world is also made manifest in his attempt to transform the “Dionysian *Stimmung*” into a properly erotic *Stimmung*, which is quite a “paradoxical” *Aufhebung* of the traditional customs (EL, 87-89). Thus, Krüger tries to show that what we can learn from the dialogues is irreducible to propositions. Platonic truths, insofar as they are dialogical truths, are therefore not to be found in isolated speeches abstracted from Plato’s dialogues. Again, Krüger’s understanding of dialogue is an alternative to Heidegger’s reduction of dialectic to λόγος. Truth is the disclosure performed by the whole motion of the dialogue and cannot be located at this or that point of the text. It is, a bit like Socrates according to Alcibiades and Agathon, ἄτοπος (cf. *Symp.* 215a2 and 175a10)).

4.3.3 *On Non-Romantic Irony*

According to Alcibiades, Socrates’ being ἄτοπος is closely related to his irony. And it seems in fact difficult, if not impossible to explore the meaning of the Platonic dialogue without paying attention to the problem of irony. A point that Krüger attempts to make is that irony does not arise at will (EL, 42: *nicht willkürlich*; EPWA, xxvi: *unfreiwillig*). This is allegedly true of both Socratic and Platonic irony (EL, 42). Here, Krüger seems to be fiercely opposed to the way Strauss understands irony as a rhetoric allowing selective dissimulation. In what sense is irony not willfull? Krüger certainly does *not* mean that Socrates is ironic *unwittingly*.⁵⁷ It is perhaps helpful to recall here that for him,

⁵⁷ An example of unwitting irony would possibly be found in Paul De Man’s understanding of language – see Behler (1990, 103): “De Man’s irony practically coincides with every linguistic articulation and is, so to speak, an involuntary, yet at the same time absolutely deliberate and conscious.” For a similar radically involuntary dimension of irony in Derrida’s thought, see esp. Dostal (2008).

philosophy, as essentially gripped by its erotic *Stimmung*, is also not willful or truly independent. In a similar sense, irony is not entirely willful because it “grows out of the real situation of the mind [erwächst aus der wirklichen Situation des Geistes]” (42). Krüger explains a bit further this “unwilful” character of irony in his introduction to Plato’s *Werke des Aufstiegs*:

The famous irony thus emerges through the conflict between the necessity and the absence of result of the inquiry. With Socrates, it is not, like in modern Romanticism, a form of sovereign freedom which playfully withdraws itself from all commitments, but really an involuntary expression of the situation, that what Socrates takes seriously has been taken only seemingly seriously by the others. This is also why the ironic inquiry of Socrates ends in that he makes himself hated by the embarrassed many and falls victim to a judicial murder.⁵⁸ (EPWA, xxvi)

In short, Socrates would prefer not to be ironic, but this is not entirely under his control. This is what the contrast with Romantic irony is meant to convene.⁵⁹ Romantic irony is a poetic device by means of which an author at once objectifies herself and puts herself at a playful distance from that objectification in order to transcend it – as Schlegel puts it, it is a “constant alternation of self-creation and self-annihilation.”⁶⁰ After all, the ultimate ground of Romantic irony is the absolute self-position of the ego, in the form of Fichte’s *Ich bin Ich*, which is exactly the kind of autarchic autonomous subjectivity that Krüger criticizes.⁶¹ Krüger instead emphasizes the finitude of the philosopher’s situation that prompts the irony. In that respect, irony as a feature of dialogue testifies

⁵⁸ “Durch den Widerstreit zwischen der Notwendigkeit und der Ergebnislosigkeit des Anfragens bei den anderen entsteht dabei die berühmte Ironie. Sie ist bei Sokrates nicht, wie in der modernen Romantik, eine Form der souveränen Freiheit, die sich allen Festlegungen spielend entzieht, sondern gerade ein unfreiwilliger Ausdruck der Situation, daß das, was Sokrates ernst nimmt, von der anderen nur scheinbar ernst genommen worden ist. So endet denn auch das ironische Forschen des Sokrates damit, daß er sich bei den vielen Blamierten verhaßt macht und einem Justizmord zum Opfer fällt.”

⁵⁹ It should be noted that Krüger’s contrast between Socratic and Romantic irony goes directly against Schlegel’s own self-understanding, for Schlegel thought of himself as reviving the Socratic attitude – see e.g. Behler (1990, 80-83).

⁶⁰ Friedrich Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Richow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 167 quoted in Behler (1990, 84) and Wellbery (2000, 195).

⁶¹ See Wellbery (2000, 194). Bubner (2000, 202-205) acknowledges the Fichtean sources of Schlegel’s understanding of irony, but, *pace* Schlegel himself, disputes the compatibility between Fichte’s idealism and the “groundless floating” of Romantic irony, where the never-ending dialectic finds no “secure basis” in an “absolute ego” – on this alleged incompatibility, see Bubner (2000, 207-213). Interestingly, Bubner (2000, 213-215) suggests that Schlegel’s irony is closer to Hegelian dialectic, despite Hegel’s (misleading) criticism of Romantic irony. For more standard accounts of a genuine opposition between Hegel and Romantic irony, see e.g. Behler (1990, 85-91) and, especially, Reid (2014).

to the Platonic awareness of the limits of philosophical λόγος, which is built in the very expression of that λόγος. The contrast with Romantic irony signals the distance, *pace* Heidegger, between Plato's mode of philosophizing and a metaphysics of subjectivity.

Another important feature of Romantic irony is that it permeates the work as a whole and not merely individual utterances or specific moments.⁶² This all-encompassing and diffuse character of irony recalls what Gadamer says when he insists that “the continuous and general boundedness to the situation [*Situationsgebundenheit*] of everything that is said makes it ironic” (GW 5, 227).⁶³ It even echoes Strauss' view that Plato's esotericism or irony, as distinct from Socrates', permeates the whole *corpus*, as well as the idea that the *kosmos* of the Platonic dialogues alludes from afar to the whole of being by signaling the partial or incomplete treatment of the parts of that whole. But Krüger never claims that *everything* that is said is said ironically. Neither does he clearly explain the way in which irony is an appropriate response to the conflict between Socrates and his embarrassed interlocutors. Strauss' account of irony proposed an explanation: irony speaks differently to those who understand it and those who do not. But there are degrees of understanding, and one may not understand what the irony conceals and still be perfectly aware that something was said ironically. And is irony thus perceived not an irritating feature of Socrates' dialogical companionship, for which some of Plato's characters (like Alcibiades and Thrasymachus) explicitly criticize him?⁶⁴ What is accomplished by Socrates' ironic response?

⁶² See Wellbery (2000, 196).

⁶³ Gadamer's attempt to tie the element of situatedness with irony also reflects something of Romantic irony – see Wellbery (2000, 197): “The notion that literary works as such are ironic implies that they are essentially historical. Literary texts are not historical merely because they are located in time; historicity is internal to their structure. The irony of the work, in other words, marks its imperfection and thereby situates the work within the historical dimension.”

⁶⁴ See *Symp.* 216d and *Rep.* 337a.

Krüger's rejection of the affinity between Romantic and Socratic irony is, to be sure, a way of distancing himself from Friedländer's position, whose account of irony in Plato's dialogues, as we have seen in the previous chapter, took its bearing directly on Schlegel's account of irony as the expression of the antagonism "between the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication."⁶⁵ According to Krüger, this antagonism is not the same as the conflict between what is serious according to Socrates and what is serious and to his embarrassed interlocutors. While the former conflict prompts the ironist to playfully undermine his work as a whole, the latter does not. Yet if Socrates does not simply withdraw his claims when he is ironic, he is certainly saying something which he does not hold as true. Krüger thinks that, unlike in Romantic self-annihilation, what is untrue does not need to be fully undermined by Socrates or Plato because, despite being ultimately false, they point toward something true.

Krüger's examples show this plainly. For instance, he claims that the "Idea of the bed" discussed in Book X of the *Republic* is ironic. It is ironic, we gather, because there would be no such thing as an Idea of a bed. At the same time, using the example of a Bed to illustrate the philosophical problem of poetic imitation is pedagogically effective: through the distortion of common understanding, Socrates (and Plato) can nonetheless articulate an important idea and communicate it, albeit imperfectly, to people who do not think of virtue and Ideas as seriously as he does (EL, 42-43).⁶⁶ Likewise, Krüger argues that the use of myths in Plato's dialogues are ironic: "Myths and Poetry cannot be 'serious' but can only be 'play'; Plato can *never* tell myths *without irony*. And yet he cannot do without them, especially when it is about a fundamental truth" (57). Like the Romantics, Krüger thinks that irony is playful, but myths are not annihilated as once as they are told, for they

⁶⁵ Friedrich Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 156 quoted in Behler (1990, 75).

⁶⁶ The passage through common understanding is allowed, Krüger says, by the linguistic fact that the poet (ποιητής) is a *maker* (EL, 43).

allude – again, playfully and imperfectly – to something important and attempt to direct the soul toward truth.⁶⁷ As we shall see in chapter 6, Krüger holds the whole construction of Kallipolis in the *Republic* as ironic, which is not to say, of course, that there is nothing that leads the interlocutors and readers to truth in the city in speech (EPS, 25 and 29). But the city in speech is not the political program that many take it to be.⁶⁸ These examples show the specific way in which, according to Krüger, Socrates displays the difference between him and his interlocutors, and Plato the difference between him and his readers. Unlike Strauss, Krüger does not think that Socratic-Platonic irony provides the “victims” of irony with mere politically-salutary-but-false opinions: there is a more harmonious relation between what is ironically said and the meaning behind the irony.⁶⁹ This, as it will become clear, prefigures the difference in their respective ironic readings of Plato’s political philosophy.

Conclusions

The interpretation of the meaning of the dialogical form of Plato’s writings is decisive for Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger. For the three thinkers, dialogues constantly prevent the reduction of the philosophical thinking they reflect to particular philosophical propositions and do so through various different means, notably authorial anonymity, the dramatic interrelation of speeches and action, and irony. This does not mean that the philosophical content of the dialogues should be disregarded or that its worth is overpowered by the formal aspects of the compositions.⁷⁰ However,

⁶⁷ Cf. EL, 59 about the “Doppelgesicht des neuen Mythos – ‘Dichtung’ und Wahrheit zugleich.”

⁶⁸ The *Republic* was criticized as a political blueprint by commentators and thinkers as different as, for instance, Karl Popper (1945), Hannah Arendt (1958) and Myles Burnyeat (1985).

⁶⁹ In this respect, Krüger would side, unlike Strauss, with Schleiermacher on the issue of the continuity or discontinuity between the unphilosophic and philosophic lives (cf. ET, 281).

⁷⁰ Although Strauss’ interpretations often leave that impression, we shall see, especially in chapter 7, that he does take the content – even the metaphysical content – of Plato’s thought seriously.

Strauss, Krüger, and Gadamer all think that Platonic contents should be understood in light of their form. In such light, Neo-Kantian and Heideggerian attempts to capture the essence of Plato's thought in formulations such as "Being = thought-positing" or "Being = presence" appear not just reductive, but implausible. For such formulations assume that truth in Plato is propositional and not dialogical.

Plato's way of writing philosophy reflects not just a way of presenting or communicating philosophical thought, but, more importantly, a way of *doing philosophy*. We may say that Plato's dialogues are reflections of a dialogical mode of philosophizing, of the idea that philosophy cannot escape the form of conversation. That dialogue as a *mode* of philosophy has precedence over dialogue as a means of philosophical communication is very important, for Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger all embrace this mode of philosophy but never wrote dialogues themselves. For them, this dialogical mode of philosophy is palpable not just in the form of Plato's writing, but also and perhaps most importantly in the fact that these writings display the great dialogues that philosophy must have with its "others," namely the other prominent human activities that have a claim on the nature of the good life. The Platonic philosopher is constantly in dialogue with poets and with the political community, and her striving to understand the truth of Being is constantly mediated by this dialogue.

Thus, the considerations about the dialogical form of Plato's writing we find in Strauss, Gadamer and Krüger already indicate the thematic focuses of philosophy as a dialogical activity. In Strauss, the question of Plato's dialogical writing naturally leads and ties together the question of the relationship between philosophy and politics and the ontological question. But since he emphasizes time and again that Plato's dialogues are creative imitations, Platonic writing first leads to the elucidation of the rivalry between philosophy and poetry. Gadamer's interpretation of the

dialogues also leads us from the communal facticity of philosophy to the question of truth. It thereby directs us to the question of the political existence of the philosopher – can the ideal of dialectical ethics succeed at the scale of the πόλις? – and to the question of Plato’s ontology, namely the question of the Forms. But the way in which we are transposed from the intra-dialogical level of dialogical ethics to the extra-dialogical level of interpretation where truth transcends the written work depends on the literary genius of Plato’s *Dichtung* and this artistic skill raises the question of Plato’s relation with the poets. Likewise, Krüger’s understanding of Plato’s erotic composition puts philosophy in a direct dialogue with poetry, and his reflections on the irony characteristic of Platonic and Socratic λόγος leads one to the tension between philosophy and politics. Because there is no *Einsicht* without *Leidenschaft*, the ontological inquiry cannot be separated from the conversational situatedness of philosophy.

We may now turn to the first of these dialogical encounters prompted by Plato’s own *Dichten*, namely the “old quarrel between philosophy and poetry.”

Chapter 5

PLATO AND THE POETS AND PLATO AS POET

The previous chapter has shown that the meaning of the dialogical form of Plato's philosophy is, for Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger, much more fundamental than the question of the formal presentation of philosophy. Properly understood, the question of the dialogue is not the question of the right way of communicating one's thought but rather the question of the right way of *philosophizing*. Once philosophy is conceived dialogically, the question that emerges is: who or what are the appropriate interlocutors for this dialogical encounter? As we have already seen in the introduction, Socrates' answer to this question in Plato's *Apology of Socrates* is twofold. On the one hand, he claims that his task is to converse with anyone whom he encounters in the city. On the other hand, Plato's dialogues as a whole show that he has a strong preference for debating with poets, politicians, or politically-inclined young men. As I have already argued, this preference is, according to Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger, not accidental. For all three, poetry and politics are human activities that claim to have a special authority over the good. Since this is also the case of philosophy, the Platonic philosopher must attempt to understand and come to terms with to live a genuine philosophic life. It is in this context of the recovery of a dialogical Platonism that the issue of the relation between philosophers and poets becomes prominent.

Plato is of course famous for his critique of the poets. On the surface, if there is an appropriation of Plato's quarrel with poetry by Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger, this would seem to imply that they too criticize or reject poetry. Yet this is not the case. Gadamer, for instance, has written

extensively on aesthetics in general, as well as on specific poets such as Goethe, Rilke, and Celan.¹ The relevance of aesthetic experience in his hermeneutic theory is indisputable. In his late career, Strauss devoted a whole book to an exhaustive study of Aristophanes' plays, and at the beginning of his course on Plato's *Symposium*, he expressed himself unambiguously on the importance of poetry: "Poetry is the capstone of wisdom. Poetry alone makes for the most comprehensive knowledge. [...] There is hardly anyone among you, I believe, who has not seen that a contemporary novelist with a reasonable degree of competence tells us much more about modern society than volumes of social science analysis" (OPS, 7). As for Krüger, he thinks that the genius of Plato's philosophy is inseparable from its being at the same time a work of poetry. Their explicit acknowledgment of the value of poetry is not to be understood as a departure from Plato, for they do not think that Plato simply opposes and rejects the poets. For all three, that would be a crude misunderstanding of his critique.

This brings us to their common starting point in the treatment of the "old quarrel between philosophy and poetry." Just as their starting point on the issue of the meaning of dialogical writing was the paradox of Plato's *written critique of writing* in the *Phaedrus*, their point of departure is now the paradox of Plato's *mimetic critique of mimesis* in the *Republic*. For while the critique of poetry in Book X of the *Republic*, being a critique of mimesis as such, seems to be an absolute critique of *any* imitative poetry, one must remind oneself that Plato's book as a whole is a mimetic composition and pay attention to the fact that the critique is followed by the Myth of Er, which is not only imitative but also a fiction that borrows extensively from the Greek poetic tradition, especially from

¹ Gadamer has also written on other forms of artistic production like painting and architecture (in GW 8 entitled *Kunst als Aussage*).

Homer. In the same vein, the fictive encounter with the tragedians in the edification of the city of the *Laws* ends up with an odd claim on the part of the new founders:

our whole constitution is constructed as the imitation of the most beautiful and best way of life (μίμησις τοῦ καλλίστου καὶ ἀρίστου βίου), which we at least assert to be really the truest tragedy (ὅντως εἶναι τραγωδίαν τὴν ἀληθεστάτην). Now you are poets, and we too are poets of the same things (ποιηταὶ δὲ καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐσμὲν τῶν αὐτῶν); we are your rivals as artists and performers of the most beautiful drama (ἀντίτεχνοί τε καὶ ἀνταγωνισταὶ τοῦ καλλίστου δράματος) (*Leg.* 817b2-8).

Plato's philosophical interlocutors in the *Laws* poeticize just as much as Socrates does with his myths and Plato with his works. If Plato at once displays a critique of imitative fiction and writes imitative fictions, the critique of poetry ought to be understood, like that of writing, with careful attention. It is from this complex perspective of a poetic Plato that Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger understand the difficult question of the relation between philosophy and poetry.

There is another peculiarity of their treatment of this problem that must be noted at the outset. While in the *Republic* Socrates mentions Homer explicitly as his opponent, there are important hints at the fact that philosophy's genuine enemy in the "Old quarrel" is *not* Homer or epic poetry. As Most has shown, the four anonymous citations that Socrates uses as testimonies of animosity against philosophers on the parts of the poets in Book X of the *Republic* (607b-c) are likely remnants of lost comedies, and plausibly from Aristophanes: "For all we know, what we find in this passage of Plato's *Republic* might be four fragments of the lost first version of Aristophanes' *Clouds*."² This is highly significant: perhaps the quarrel between philosophy and poetry is just as old as the portrait of Socrates in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, a portrait in which Plato's Socrates sees the origin of Meletus' charges against him (*Apol.* 18a ff.). Taken seriously, such indications have the effect of either shifting

² Most (2011, 12, cf. 7-11).

the emphasis or widening the scope of the question of poetry in Plato's thought. The confrontation with poetry must take into account the confrontation with comedy specifically. It is yet difficult to treat comedy independently from its alter ego, and the passage from the *Laws* quoted above also raises the question of philosophy's relation to tragedy.³ An important aspect of the treatment of the quarrel between philosophy and poetry by Strauss and Krüger is thus to draw our attention to the question of comedy and tragedy – a question that I will clarify below – instead of simply focusing on the (otherwise important) problem of mimesis.

In this chapter, I examine each of their interpretation of the quarrel and show how in all three cases, philosophy can only “win” the contest if it becomes aware of its dependence on poetry. By both criticizing and imitating poets, Plato shows philosophy's awareness of its limits. In the first section, I explain the three steps of Strauss's argument concerning philosophy's relation to poetry: 1) the presentation of poets as apparent ambassadors of νόμος and the πόλις; 2) Aristophanes' *friendly* critique of Socrates; 3) the overcoming of the tragedy-comedy dichotomy by a poetic philosophy. In the second section, I turn to Gadamer's understanding of the quarrel and show that for him, the target of Plato's critique is not mimesis as such, but rather the specific *content* of dominant poetry as well as the risk of losing one's self in what he calls the “subjectivization of aesthetic consciousness.” However, Gadamer sees in Plato's recurrent use of mythic speech and therewith its dependence on poetry the sign of philosophy's finitude. In the third section, I show that Krüger, much like Gadamer, understands the necessity of myths in Plato as a sign of the fundamental dependence of philosophy on the higher power of *eros*. Yet, Krüger's position is closer to Strauss's because he thinks that the core of the quarrel with poets has to do with a cosmological disagreement, namely a disagreement about how we proceed in our quest for

³ Cf. with *Leg.* 816d-e on the necessity of understanding the serious by contrast with the ridiculous and vice-versa.

knowledge of what truly is. Reflecting, much like Strauss did after him, on the important question of philosophy's relation to tragedy and comedy, Krüger concludes that philosophy cannot *overcome* the two genres and rather embodies the inescapable tension between the two: philosophy is at once comic and tragic.

For all three, the lesson to be drawn from the quarrel between poets and philosophers is that philosophy cannot *by itself* achieve what poetry can achieve. Therefore, the Platonic philosopher, being aware of this limit, can never escape the power of poetry and must instead learn to integrate this power and test her attempt to do so by remaining in a constant dialogue with poets. In this sense, the victory of philosophy over poetry is not and cannot be absolute.

5.1 Leo Strauss and the Hidden Friendship between Poets and Philosophers

While the core of Strauss' thoughts on the ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy concerns chiefly Plato's complex relation with Aristophanean comedy, his reflections on the famous critique of mimesis prepare the initial step in his argument about the conflict between Socrates and Aristophanes. The peculiarity of his argument about mimesis is that it downplays its ontological significance and emphasize instead its political dimension: the ultimate significance of mimesis for Strauss is that poets produce reflections of convention and law, of νόμος, and are thus spokesmen of the πόλις. Turning thereafter to the details of the critique of Socrates in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, he will claim that this highly conventional aspect of poetry is in fact the poet's facade. This mask hides a much more fundamental philosophical agreement between poetry and philosophy, an agreement on the basis of which the Platonic philosopher can then attempt to perform her appropriation of the poet's wisdom.

5.1.1 *The Politics of Mimesis*

While it is common to divide the critique of mimesis in the *Republic* into the moral-political critique of Books II and III and the ontological critique of Book X, it is important to remember that the ontological critique of imitative poetry as being “third remove from truth” becomes especially relevant once we are told by Socrates that the problem is to be far from the truth *about virtue* (599d2-3). Thus, the reproach to the effect that poetry excites the desiderative or passionate part of the soul to the expense of reason pervades the *Republic* as a whole.⁴ Given that Socrates’ criticism concerning virtue seems to be that poets encourage models of vicious (especially unreasonable, dishonorable, or coward) behaviors that are bad for the education of good citizens in a just city, how can Strauss claim that poets initially stand for the city against philosophy? While his argument will appear more clearly in his discussion of the *Clouds*, he thinks the same idea is latent in the *Republic*.

In Book II and III, what Socrates proposes is not a simple rejection of poetry but a radical *reform* of poetry concerning both its content and its form. The new poetic education will foster an *eros* for the noble or beautiful (τὸ κάλον, cf. 395c ff.). An important implication of the possibility of such a reform is that poetry has the power to shape the soul of citizens, for good or bad. In the context of the *Republic*, the reform of poetry puts poetic discourse under the rule of philosopher-rulers, and there is no tension anymore between poets and philosophers because Kallipolis is a city in which philosophy and politics are supposed to be in perfect harmony. Yet, as it will become evident in the next chapter, Strauss thinks that the perfect harmonization of philosophy and the city embodied in philosophical rulership is in fact impossible and is not meant by Plato as a serious political proposition. If the philosopher and the πόλις are not in harmony, likely, the philosopher

⁴ This is especially clear in Book II and III, but also in Book X (603a ff.).

and the poets, who consolidate the πόλις by shaping the character of its citizens, are not in harmony either.

In his lectures on “The Problem of Socrates,” Strauss tries to support this intuition by ingeniously connecting the ontological critique of mimesis in Book X to the allegory of the cave in Book VII. Puzzled by the demotion of poetry as mere imitators of artifacts (see *Rep.* 595c-598b), he asks: “What does this extreme and absurd description and denigration of poetry signify? It cannot be simply absurd, for the men who listen to Socrates or answer his somewhat leading questions are as intelligent as I or most of you, and not one of them protests” (RCPR, 176). Strauss points out that the other place in the *Republic* where artifacts play a somewhat guiding role is the allegory of the cave, where they are the originals, and the shadows are their imitations (*Rep.* 514b-515a). If we draw the parallel between the ontological critique of mimesis and the Divided Line and allegory of the cave taken together,⁵ we obtain the following:

Rep. X (595c-598b)			
God		Craftsmen	Poets
Ideas		Artifacts	Imitations of artifacts
Rep. VI-VII (509d-511e; 514a-515c; 533e-534a)			
Ideas	Mathematical objects	Artifacts	Reflections of artifact
Heavenly bodies	Natural beings		
Intellection	Thought	Belief	Imagination
= Intellection		= Opinion	

If this parallel is meant by Plato, as Strauss thinks it is, then the cognitive realm characteristic of poetic production is the realm of imagination, εἰκασία. At best, εἰκασία is a part of opinion, of

⁵ I take the parallel between the Line and Cave to be not just allowed but encouraged by the passage at 533e-534a.

δόξα (534a1-2). Strauss concludes that the subordination of poetry to artifacts is meant to emphasize that poets and poetry move in the sphere of the cave's opinions, of the authoritative opinions one encounters within the political community:

the poets do not possess knowledge of the nature of things. They imitate only opinions. [...] They imitate the human things as they appear in the light of opinion, of authoritative opinion. Or, to use a Platonic image, poetry lives in the world of artificiality because *it belongs entirely to the cave*, to the city. Poetry praises and blames what the city, what society, praises or blames. The city praises and blames what it has been taught to praise and blame by its legislator or founder [...] The poet remains within the boundaries drawn by the legislator. (RCPR, 176-77; my emphasis)

Poets are in this sense spokesmen of the city, its laws, and conventions. Only in the *Republic* are they thereby spokesmen of philosophers. But in any other city, where philosophy and political power do not coincide, poetry sides with the city. However, Strauss quickly notes that this picture becomes more complicated once we start to think about the practicality of this subordination of poets to legislators. In the *Laws*, for instance, "it is made clearer than in the *Republic* that morality is not the only criterion with which poetry must comply. There are standards of poetic excellence that must also be considered. Grace or pleasure in their way are as important as morality, and of this element the poets themselves are the best judges" (RCPR, 177-78). If the legislators do not take into account that aesthetic excellence is essential for good poetry to be what it is, the political function of poetry that they wish to exploit is seriously threatened. Therefore, the aesthetic freedom of poetry in the city is demanded by the city's needs. It is in the city's own interest to allow a breach in poetry's boundedness to the πόλις.

This breach, however, is more than a minor concession. For, the aesthetic excellence allowed by artistic freedom requires some knowledge of human psychology. The power that the legislator lacks and that urges him to turn to the help of the poets is nothing else than an understanding of the soul. Acknowledging this fact turns things upside down. Not only are poets *somewhat* freed from

the city's laws and conventions, but if they merely knew shadows or opinions of the human soul, their works could not have the power that truly excellent poetry has. The city's need for poetry turns out to be a need for a knowledge it does not possess:

If the legislator wishes then to legislate intelligently for human things, he must understand the human things, and he is helped in acquiring that understanding by *sitting at the feet of the poets*, for the poets, we may add, understand the human things not only as they appear in the light of the law, or established morality, but as they are in themselves. (RCPR, 179; my emphasis)

Why do we face such an inversion? Why does Strauss argue from the claim that poetry is politically bounded to the claim that the city is poetically bounded? It is important to note that Strauss does not treat the progression from the *Republic* to the *Laws* as if Plato had changed his views from one dialogue to the other. I suggest that the reason for this argumentative progression is that poetry is *apparently* subservient to the political, while in fact, it is of much higher status: “the discussion of poetry in the *Laws* leads us to realize that according to Plato the poets possess genuine knowledge of the soul, and therefore that poetry is *psychologia kai psychagogia*, understanding the soul and guiding the soul, just like philosophy itself” (RCPR, 179). Poets and philosophers are *apparently* opposed as the city and philosophy are opposed, but their genuine conflict comes from their similarity. To understand this twofold outlook of the poet and thus the real basis of the “old quarrel” according to Strauss, we need to turn to his interpretation of Aristophanes’ critique of Socrates.

5.1.2 Aristophanes' Critique of Socrates

Strauss notes several times that while the figure of the philosopher can hardly be depicted in a tragedy, it is quite well suited for comedy (e.g. RCPR, 108 and 206).⁶ As it was already mentioned, comedy's attack against philosophy as alluded to – albeit subtly – in Book X of the *Republic*, and especially Aristophanes' attack against Socrates in the *Clouds*, are at the heart of Plato's concern with poetry. This is why Strauss thought that the treatment of the quarrel between philosophy and poetry required a thorough study of Aristophanes' plays. To expose his understanding of the Aristophanean critique of Socrates, we should especially examine Strauss's interpretation of the *Clouds*.

The *Clouds* is the story of the role of Socrates and his philosophic school in the downfall of an old man, Strepsiades, through the corruption of that old man's son, Pheidippides. But what is most important is that Strepsiades' downfall urges him to avenge himself against Socrates and his Thinkery: because of Socratic corruption, Socrates is punished. It is no wonder that Plato's Socrates claims in the *Apology* that the new accusation is the shadow of Aristophanes' older accusation, for, in the *Clouds*, Socrates corrupts the youth, denies the existence of Zeus, and allows the Unjust argument to triumph over the Just argument (see *Clouds*, 368, 886-1100; cf. SA, 11).⁷

Strauss notes that the *Clouds* are quite different from the other plays in a most obvious yet very important way: "All Aristophanean comedies open with moanings or complaints. But in contradistinction to the other comedies, the *Clouds* does not end in gaiety" (SA, 12). Now, Aristophanes has not written a tragedy. This means that he cannot give the guilty Socrates the

⁶ Strauss here seems to rely on the factual evidence that no Greek tragedy pictures wise human beings, whereas Aristophanes comedies do. He also claims that the serenity of philosophy is closer to laughter than to the weeping of tragedy.

⁷ In fact, Socrates *leaves* so he cannot prevent the victory of the unjust or weaker argument (*Clouds*, 886). Note that Strauss takes "just" and "unjust" to be natural translations of κρείττον and ἥττον (literally "stronger" and "weaker"). On the problem that the translation of the terms poses in the *Clouds*, see Nussbaum (1981, 50n15).

punishment he should deserve according to the city's νόμος. Referring to the capital crime of denying Zeus' existence, Strauss writes: "what happens to him is too little for someone who has committed a capital crime, but it is the utmost that could befall him in a comedy" (SA, 11). This point is very simple but significant. Aristophanes' aesthetic excellence forbids him to mimic the city purely and simply; the artistic freedom required by comedy to fulfill its comic potential rather requires him to depart from the authority of politics. As we have already seen, poets cannot *fully* side with the city – they must be, to some extent at least, independent of its authority.

Another important peculiarity of the *Clouds* that proves essential to Strauss's argument is that the fate of the Socratic school is not the result of the city's action, as Plato appears to present it in his *Apology*. To be sure, in both cases, it is angry *fathers* worried about the effect of Socrates on their children who take action against him. But the peculiarity of the *Clouds* is that it is not just Pheidippides who has spent some time at the Thinkery; Strepsiades himself has too. Strauss emphasizes that the school is burned down by a *former disciple* (SA, 11). This brings the responsibility much closer to Socrates and his teaching. Aristophanes' point is not so much that Socrates' teaching is wrong and that he, therefore, deserves to be punished, but that there is something in Socrates' teaching that is likely to bring about his own downfall. If this is so, the critique is not a simple rebuttal; it could be understood as a corrective warning or advice. What is wrong with Socrates according to the *Clouds*?

Aristophanes' Socrates is a physiologist, a caricature of early Greek philosophers, who studies first and foremost the natural world and has little interest in human affairs. Thus, when Strepsiades arrives at the Thinkery, the disciples explain that Socrates, lift up in the air, measures fleas' jumps, study gnat's intestines, and gets shat on by lizards while he is investigating the paths and revolutions of the moon (*Clouds*, 144-174). Socrates' first line in the play expresses his alleged superiority to and

disinterest in human beings: “Why dost thou call me, thou creature of a day (ὠφήμερε) ?” (223; trans. Sommerstein). Strepsiades is eventually accepted in the Thinkery. Despite his brief stay, he is exposed to several teachings which explicitly undermine the authoritative conventions, most importantly to the view that there is no Zeus and that the natural phenomena are instead caused by the Clouds and Vortex. He is also allowed to hear a debate between the Just and Unjust speech in which the latter triumphantly “subverts the law and justice by raising the question regarding their foundation” (SA, 31).

A bad student, the old man is soon kicked out of the school and asked to bring his son in his place. But what Strepsiades has learned is enough for him to start causing trouble once he is back in the world. A key point is his initial motivation for learning from Socrates: he is overwhelmed by his debts and wants to learn rhetoric to get away from his creditors *regardless of whether this is just or not* (cf. *Clouds*, 95-99). Now he has learned how to undermine νόμος in general, and his new atheism regarding Zeus threatens the oaths on which the creditor-debtor relation is grounded. Strepsiades faces his creditors with hubristic arguments, denying publicly the existence of the gods (cf. SA, 36). Strauss thusly comments on the Clouds’ worried reaction to Strepsiades’ course of action: “Strepsiades must have been warned by the Socratics to keep certain things secret from everyone except pupils (104, 824), but this warning certainly was not given with the required force” (SA, 37). According to Strauss, the responsibility of Strepsiades’ dissolution of social conventions is far from being one-sided. On the one hand, Strepsiades is guilty of revealing secret teachings in broad daylight, but Socrates and his disciples must have made sure that he would not do so. Now there are two possibilities: either Socrates has failed to persuade Strepsiades to conceal certain teachings, or Strepsiades was too bad a student to understand Socrates’ warning, *in which case Strepsiades should*

not have been exposed to these teachings. In both cases, the conclusion is the same: Socrates lacks prudence.

This is, for Strauss, the entry point in Aristophanes' critique of Socrates. But the critique runs deeper once he reflects on what this lack of prudence means. Socrates is not prudent because, in order to be prudent, one needs to care about other human beings, and, ultimately, about the community that holds together human beings, that is, about the city. In the *Clouds*, Socrates cares very little for other human beings, and especially for whatever goes on outside of his school. This explains why he does not pay much attention to what could happen if someone like Strepsiades uses his teachings to undermine the social order or if a younger student like Pheidippides uses them to destroy the order of the family by praising incest, proving the justice of beating his father, and threatening to beat his mother (*Clouds*, 1361-76; 1403 ff.). Aristophane's Socrates potentially threatens the structure of the city and the structure of the family.

But why is that a problem from the vantage point of the ethereal theoretician? Why are prudence and concern for these aspects of practical life important from the strict point of view of the natural philosopher? Strauss' answer is: this lack of prudence and concern is tantamount to a lack of self-knowledge, and thus to a *defect in wisdom* (cf. RCPR, 125). He interestingly bridges φρόνησις and self-knowledge by explaining that Socrates "has not reflected on the conditions or the context of his own doing" and thus has "no awareness of his dependence on the city" (SA, 49). Strauss emphasizes two simple yet very important aspects of this dependence. On the one hand, Socrates and his pupils are wholly devoted to their theoretical pursuits but still need to be nourished to stay alive: going to the city to steal is one of their way of finding what is necessary to live (cf. *Clouds*, 175-79). Secondly, a school is only such if it has students, which will inevitably come from the city and be born into families. Strauss notes that Strepsiades and Pheidippides are two such

new students, but the lack of prudence in Socrates' teaching threatens the very conditions that allow the Thinkery to admit new pupils (SA, 49). This disregard for the family as the condition for human generation is a lack of self-knowledge, for it is blind to the fact that the self-sufficiency of the theoretical community is *radically* limited: "Being an all-male society, it must replenish itself from the general population, i.e., from men who may already have formed attachments to other ignoramuses. It is a society of friends and hence a society without *eros*. Only if Socrates and his pupils stemmed from oaks and rocks would his experiment be successful" (SA, 48-49).

Now we see that Socrates' lack of prudence in the *Clouds*, insofar as it is a lack of self-knowledge, is also a blindness to the importance of *eros* among human affairs, that is, of the most basic passion that makes possible human life as such. This is Aristophanes' deepest critique of Socrates: Socratic philosophy is unwise because it does not understand itself and it does not understand itself because it ultimately does not understand the *eros* that animates its pursuit and does not reflect on its erotic nature.⁸ But what is the intent behind this critique? Strauss thinks that Aristophanes, despite his important criticism, admired Socrates. Paraphrasing the analysis of the pleasure of laughter that we find in the *Philebus* (49d-50a), he writes:

The state of the soul at comedies is a mixture of being pleased by our friends' innocuous overestimation of their wisdom and being pained by envy [...] A friend's wisdom may not be as great as he thinks, and therefore may be somewhat ridiculous; but his wisdom may be sufficiently great to give one cause for envy. This thought can hardly be adequate as an analysis of comedy as such, but it makes sense as the explanation of the comedy par excellence, the *Clouds*: Far from being an enemy of Socrates, *Aristophanes was his friend*, but somewhat envious of his wisdom (SA, 5; my emphasis)

Strauss thinks that the critique of Socrates by Aristophanes should therefore be considered as some kind of friendly advice or warning.⁹ Aristophanes does not criticize Socrates in the name of

⁸ This is the sense in which Strauss means that Aristophanes' Socrates is "unerotic."

⁹ For a similar conclusion and further developments on *Socrates and Aristophanes* as a whole, see Menon (2016) and Baldwin (2015).

the city properly speaking – for his plays show how aware he is of the limits of νόμος in general –, but a piece of advice in how to behave in the political situatedness in which one necessarily lives. The poet and philosopher both know and agree about the limits of the city,¹⁰ but the poet teaches the philosopher how to properly navigate the political world. But by reorienting himself in his second sailing, Plato’s Socrates escapes the attack of the *Clouds*: in Plato’s dialogues, Socrates is concerned with the human affairs, with prudence and, most importantly, with *eros*.¹¹ Strauss thus concludes that “the Socrates presented by Plato and Xenophon agreed *entirely* with Aristophanes’ judgement on the Socrates presented by the comic poet” (SA, 4-5; my emphasis). The conflict between poetry and philosophy is not what it appears to be *prima facie*.

5.1.3 Tragedy, Comedy, and Philosophy as “transcomic three-dimensionality”?

In Strauss’ view, another hint at the kinship between Aristophanes and Socrates is the scene at the end of Plato’s *Symposium*, where Socrates compelled both Aristophanes and Agathon to agree (προσαναγκάζειν [...] ὁμολογεῖν) with the very puzzling claim that “it belongs to the same man to know how to produce comedy and tragedy, and the skilled tragic poet is also a comic poet (τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἀνδρὸς εἶναι κωμωδίαν καὶ τραγωδίαν ἐπίστασθαι ποιεῖν, καὶ τὸν τέχνη τραγωδοποιὸν ὄντα καὶ κωμωδοποιὸν εἶναι)” (223d3-6 cf. SA, 5). For Strauss, just as for Gadamer and Krüger, what is clear despite the opacity of the remark is that it is an enigmatic allusion to Plato’s written compositions. The end of the *Symposium* directs the reader to the important question of the status of Plato’s philosophical fictions regarding poetry, and more specifically, regarding tragedy and

¹⁰ See RCPR, 115 and CM, 138. On the awareness of the limits of νόμος and politics as the basis of the agreement and friendship between Aristophanes and Socrates, see also Sharpe (2014a, 21-26).

¹¹ Cf. the penultimate sentence of *Socrates and Aristophanes* (SA, 314): “It is almost equally difficult to say whether the profound differences between the Aristophanean Socrates and the Platonic-Xenophontic Socrates must not be traced to a profound change in Socrates himself: to his conversion from a youthful contempt for the political or moral things, for the human things or human beings, to mature concern with them.”

comedy. That the issue is Plato's art and not Socrates' is settled by the fact that Socrates never wrote anything. The dramatic contest between Aristophanes, Agathon, and Socrates is an imitation of the quarrel between comedy, tragedy, and Platonic philosophy. The victory of philosophy over poetry is, according to Strauss, unintelligible without understanding the position of philosophy vis-à-vis tragedy and comedy. Strauss will ultimately describe philosophy's achievement as "transcomic three-dimensionality" (SA, 51), a description that is perhaps as obscure as Socrates' claim concerning tragedy and comedy, and which requires thorough interpretation if Strauss' position is to be properly understood.

In contrast to the *Apology of Socrates*, the *Symposium* does not picture any *explicit* antagonism between Socrates and Aristophanes: the contest is between Agathon and Socrates and will be judged by Dionysus (175e). In the end, it is the Dionysiac Alcibiades who will crown Socrates (213e). Strauss keenly notes, however, that this way of setting up the competition is strongly reminiscent of Aristophanes' *Frogs*, in which Euripides and Aeschylus compete with Dionysus as their judge: "So you see how elegantly Plato pays Aristophanes back. The man who is made the point of reference in a contest between tragic poets decides at the *Symposium* in favor of Socrates, whom you, Aristophanes, so unfairly ridiculed and attacked in your comedy [i.e., the *Clouds*]. We can say that the *Symposium* is the reply of Plato to Aristophanes' *Frogs*" (OPS, 26). By organizing the drama thusly, Plato inserts Aristophanes in the contest, such that the *Symposium* is the "Platonic reply" to the "poets altogether" (26).

How does philosophy manage to win against both tragic and comic poets? Strauss thinks that the dramatic order of the speakers in the *Symposium* is meant as a progression from the lower to the higher: among uninspired speeches, the progression goes from Phaedrus to Eryximachus; among

inspired speeches, from Aristophanes to Socrates (*cf.* OPS, 89).¹² Aristophanes' speech is lower than Agathon's because the former claims that *eros* is, at the bottom, self-love or "love of one's own," whereas the latter asserts that *eros* is the love of the beautiful. Socrates's speech is superior because Diotima's ladder of love goes from the love of beauty to the love of the Good. More importantly, however, is Diotima's implicit critique of poetic *eros*: love of beauty is driven by a deeper force, namely the longing for immortality, which poets try to achieve by fame (*cf.* *Symp.* 205b-206a and 209d). But to love immortality is to love *one's own immortality*, and therefore to love oneself instead of beauty (OPS, 245). Agathon's speech is therefore incoherent or self-deluding. However, Diotima's critique of poets does not reach Aristophanes' speech as forcefully as it does Agathon's, since self-love is precisely at the heart of Aristophanes' conception of *eros*. At this stage of the argument, it is worth recalling that, according to Strauss, the core of Aristophanes' critique of Socrates in the *Clouds* was that the theoretical philosopher lacks self-knowledge. In Plato's presentation, Aristophanes does not seem to lack self-knowledge. If coherence is the standard, Aristophanes is better than Agathon.

There is another way in which Aristophanes' speech is superior to Agathon's. Strauss thinks that "there is nothing tragic about [Agathon's speech]," whereas "Aristophanes' speech shows both the comic and tragic elements in *eros*" (OPS, 172). It must be noted in passing that, in all likelihood, Strauss draws these observations from Krüger's interpretation of the *Symposium* (to which he refers several times in his own seminar), for an original claim made by Krüger is that Aristophanes' speech is a tragic comedy and Agathon's speech a comic tragedy. At any rate, if the tragedian cannot perform a genuine tragedy and if the comic poet can perform both comedy and tragedy, Aristophanes is superior. The comic elements of Aristophanes' speech are quite manifest: it is hard

¹² See Sharpe's helpful tables schematizing Strauss' understanding of each speech in Plato's *Symposium* (Sharpe 2014b, 574-75 and 578).

not to laugh when thinking that we are descendants of spheric beings rolling around blissfully and that our erotic longing is truly a longing to be spheric again. But what is the tragic element of Aristophanes' story? Separated from each other by the gods, lovers seek their original oneness. While they can reach the embrace that only imperfectly imitates their original unity, their genuine goal is not attainable (OPS, 145). According to Strauss, there is something even more tragic about it. Zeus cuts the original spheric beings into two pieces, and it is Apollo's task to sew up the side on which they are cut. Aristophanes claims that Apollo had to use a shoemaker's tool to smooth out the wrinkles due to the exceeding skin. Strauss puzzles as to why there was a surplus of skin:

Where did Apollo get the additional skin required so that there were even additional wrinkles which had to be smoothed out? He acts as if the skin of the whole man were now available for the half man, which of course was a mistake. Did he in each case discard one half; leaving it skinless and letting it perish? Did Apollo, in other words, behave like that Epimetheus of whom Protagoras speaks in the same story [*Prot.* 321b6-c3]? (OPS, 130)

If Strauss's suspicion turns out to be right,¹³ Aristophanes' speech not only shows that the lovers' ultimate desire is unfulfillable, but also that the embrace with the soulmate – “the other part of yourself” – is not only extremely unlikely but *impossible* – the original half, the *âme sœur* is no longer to be found anywhere because it has perished. Aristophanes thus appears as a skillful master of both tragedy and comedy. But this of course the case of the *Platonic* Aristophanes: through this portrait of Aristophanes, it is not so much Aristophanes who weaves together comedy and tragedy, but Plato. This is in perfect accord with Socrates' bold assertion at the end of the *Symposium*. For, as Strauss emphasizes, it is the skilled *tragedian* who can make both tragedies and comedies, and the claim is not reversible (223d5-6, *cf.* OPS, 285). This would put Plato in the place of a skilled

¹³ Strauss seems more confident about this suspicion in the next session: “we cannot find the other partner if Apollo was a blunderer, as I expect him to be, namely, if he left the other half skinless and it perished” (OPS, 149). I was convinced by Xinyue Zhang that the “surplus of skin” issue need not be explained as Strauss does: Apollo's intervention involves a stretching of the skin, which results in a surplus. This alternate explanation, of course, does not cancel out the tragic aspect of Aristophanes' speech.

tragedian, reminding us that, before his encounter with Socrates, Plato wrote tragedies (*cf.* OPS, 286).

Is Plato a tragedian? Are the dialogues tragedies? Commenting on his rather obscure description of philosophy as “transcomic three-dimensionality,” Strauss adds: “Transcomic does not mean tragic” (SA, 51). Yet, Strauss also claims that Plato’s compositions “are in the more subtle sense of the word tragedies” (OPS, 286). Everything looks like Strauss is contradicting himself or that he has changed his position between his interpretation of the *Symposium* (1959) and *Socrates and Aristophanes* (1966). Given the difficulty of the problem, neither of these hypotheses is entirely implausible. Yet, I would suggest that there is a way of finding coherence in Strauss’s various claims, a solution that has the advantage of being compatible with a claim he makes in his very last book, *The Argument and the Action of Plato’s Laws* (1975).¹⁴ For Strauss’s claims to be coherent, there should be such a thing as tragedies that are not properly speaking tragic. According to Strauss’s indications, that could be true of tragedies in a *subtle* sense of the word. This subtle sense is, I think, the sense we find in Book VII of the *Laws*, in a passage cited at the beginning of this chapter (817b2-5): “our whole constitution is constructed as the imitation of the most beautiful and best way of life (μίμησις τοῦ καλλίστου καὶ ἀρίστου βίου), which we at least assert to be really the truest tragedy (ὄντως εἶναι τραγωδίαν τὴν ἀληθεστάτην).” Strauss’ paraphrastic comment on the passage is revealing: “such an imitation they assert to be the truest tragedy (*tragedy as such meaning to be an imitation of the noblest and best life*)” (AAPL, 112; my emphasis). Now, if this is the subtle meaning of the word “tragedy” that Strauss has in mind, it is perfectly sensible to describe Plato’s dialogues as tragedies, since they certainly are imitations of the noblest and best life, namely the philosophic

¹⁴ The book was ready before Strauss’ death in 1973 but published posthumously in 1975.

life. It also makes sense to say that tragedy in this “subtle” sense is not “tragic,” at least in the sense that the dialogues need not have a terrible ending.

If my reading is correct, these non-tragic Platonic tragedies could correspond to Strauss’s notion of “transcomic three-dimensionality.” These tragedies “carry within themselves the comedy” (OPS, 286), but comedy remains “two-dimensional” if it is not supplemented by a philosophical reflection on its “laughable somersaults” (SA, 51). Such supplement or third dimension is provided by the Platonic way of integrating comedy in philosophical dialogues which are also “subtle tragedies.”¹⁵ Why must comedies be weaved in? Why are both tragedy and comedy necessary *for philosophy*? Strauss thinks that the two genres present the same things under different light and philosophy needs both perspectives on its own activity to present itself accurately:

The philosopher is a comic and not a tragic figure, and therefore he can be presented only in comedy. In the comedy, he is necessarily presented from the point of view of the common opinions, i.e., as ridiculous. [...] tragedy and comedy present both, the ridiculous and the solemn. Comedy presents the serious beneath the ridiculous. What meets the eye is the ridiculous. Tragedy, on the other hand, presents the ridiculous beneath the serious.¹⁶ The first impression is the solemn and serious, the dignified. Philosophy, however, must present itself, because it is the most serious, as dignified, if it is to fulfill its function and not destroy itself. (OPS, 170)

As we will see, Strauss’ position on the comic aspect of philosophy here is close to Krüger’s own interpretation. However, for Strauss, it is not only from the non-philosopher’s perspective that philosophy appears akin to comedy: “A slight bias in favor of laughing and against weeping seems to be essential to philosophy [...] Its spirit is not hope and fear and trembling, but serenity on the basis of resignation” (RCPR, 206). By combining the “comic” laughing serenity of philosophy with

¹⁵ Cf., OPS, 149: “Plato’s tacit claim is that his comedy is much more spiritual and much more refined than the rather crude, if still subtle, comedy of Aristophanes.”

¹⁶ Whereas his analysis of the *Symposium* shows evidence of the tragic element beneath comic speech, Strauss says nothing here to support his claim that tragedy shows the ridiculous beneath the serious and dignified. We may even say that if the latter claim was true, we could hardly see the superiority of comedy over tragedy. It would seem that comedy’s ability to represent and to cite tragic poets and thus to weave tragedy within its poetry, tragedy is not able to do so. The only tragic poetry that seems able to do this is Plato’s “subtle tragedies.”

its “tragic” solemn seriousness, Plato performs both a philosophical presentation of poetry and a poetic presentation of philosophy, that is, he achieves what “no poet has ever succeeded in doing” and thus wins the quarrel with poetry (OPS, 248).

One may say that in Strauss’ view, philosophy as “transcendent three-dimensionality” is only possible if poetry is “ministerial to the Platonic dialogue, which in turn is ministerial to the life of understanding” (RCPR, 183). If “autonomous poetry is blind” because it “does not know the end for the sake of which the purification of passion is required,” Plato’s philosophy is radically dependent on the resources of poetry. This means that an “autonomous” philosophy is, in a sense, just as blind as autonomous poetry is. The superiority of the philosopher against the poet is not so much a final victory as a continuous and somewhat friendly *Auseinandersetzung*.

5.2 Mimesis and Poetry in Gadamer’s Plato

The fact that Plato composed tragedies before meeting Socrates is the starting point of Gadamer’s analysis in “Plato and the Poets.” Gadamer tells us that Plato’s shift from poetry to philosophy should not be understood as the discovery of “his own true talent”: “the truth of it is not that Plato recognized that he did not have the *ability* to be a great poet but that he recognized that he did not have the *desire*. For the encounter with Socrates as a very epiphany of philosophy had brought home to him that being a poet was no longer worthwhile” (DD, 40). This is not to say that Plato abandoned his poetic talents, far from it. Like Strauss, Gadamer highlights that Plato is the “only one who satisfies the requirement established at the end of the *Symposium* to the effect that the true tragedian is also the true comic poet. Gadamer’s Plato, following the hermeneutic path initiated by Friedländer, has written works that represent the “wonderfully artful synthesis of all the elements

of form which had defined the development of literature from Homer through Attic tragedy and comedy.” Thus, to reject the life of a poet is not to reject poetry altogether.

Gadamer reminds us that Plato’s rejection of the poetic life for the sake of Socratic philosophy finds a strong parallel in Socrates’ encounter with the poets as pictured in Plato’s *Apology*. For the German philosopher, poets have a special status among people whom Socrates cross-examines: “Although the poets themselves can give no answer to Socrates’ question about what true virtue is, their *works* might contain a valid answer” (DD, 41). The genuine dialogue with poets must therefore become a dialogical encounter with poetry. And Plato famously criticizes not just poets but the content of their works.

5.2.1 Platonic Education and the Limits of Poetry

Thus, Gadamer’s first step in his account of the quarrel between poetry and philosophy deals with the critique of Homer that we find in Plato’s *Republic*. Plato reproves Homer for providing wrong images of the gods and for arousing the fear of death (DD, 43). Gadamer distinguishes between two different charges against these two aspects of Homeric poetry. First, there is the issue of truth and falsehood. From a philosophical perspective, anthropomorphic gods are nonsensical, and thus we are provided in the *Republic* with what Adeimantus calls a “theology (θεολογία),” a proper account of the divine (*Rep.* 379a5-6). As for the fear of death, it is simply unreasonable since we do not know what death is like (cf. *Apol.* 40b-41c). But second and perhaps more importantly, Plato rejects what is false “not just because it is false but for *pedagogical* reasons” (DD, 44). Since the poets are teachers of the youth, the contest between poets and philosophers is a competition about their respective status as educators (cf. *Apol.* 22b-c and 24d-25c). Plato’s attack in that respect consists in showing that the poet “ruins the soul by stirring up in it the whole range of its passions” (DD, 46).

The attack on the role of poets as educators is not to be understood as a critique of a “degenerate contemporary form” of poetry, but of poetry *as such* (DD, 47). Thus is the choice of Homer as a proper target anything but accidental. Homer is the poet *par excellence* and the educator of the Greeks (cf. DD, 61). “To that extent his [Plato’s] criticism becomes an attack on the foundations of Greek culture and on the inheritance bequeathed to us by Greek history” (DD, 46).¹⁷ This brings us to a crucial point of Gadamer’s understanding of the opposition between Platonic philosophy and poetry, namely its political significance. The critique of poetry, he claims, “can be understood only within the setting of this [i.e. the *Republic*’s] total refounding of a new state in words of philosophy, only understood as a radical turning away from the existing state” (DD, 48). As we will see in chapter 6, the question of politics is for Gadamer’s Plato the question of the proper educational program (a thesis he elaborates fully and clearly in his 1942 essay entitled “Platos Staat der Erziehung”). This is why the problem of poetic education is for him imminently political. In addition to teaching the youth with wrong models for the development of civic virtue, poets do not attempt to properly *educate* the souls they mold and rather confines them to the realm of convention and commonly accepted opinion, for they present things “only as it appears beautiful to the *polloi*, who themselves know nothing” (DD, 61).

Yet, for Gadamer, just like for Strauss and Krüger, the purification of politics in the *Republic* is *not to be interpreted literally*, and neither is the purification of poetry (DD, 49). While Gadamer’s Plato does not genuinely wish for the rule of philosopher-kings, true education to virtue is philosophical education. Therefore, he does not wish to expel poets but to produce works that could eventually take up their educative role: “the poetry of Plato’s dialogues is certainly not the model for that

¹⁷ On the importance of challenging the *authority* of Homer in Gadamer’s Platonic critique of poetry, see Thaning (2021, 183)

poetry which would be allowed in the ideal state. But it is the real poetry which is able to say what is educational in actual political life” (DD, 67).

Yet, to reintegrate poetry in his pedagogical vocation, Gadamer’s Plato must find a way to take into account the ontological aspect of the critique of mimesis in Book X of the *Republic* and to circumvent the difficulties it poses for this political reading of the critique of poetry.

5.2.2 *Mimesis and the Problem of Aesthetic Consciousness*

Gadamer is perfectly aware of this problem and admits that, once it becomes a critique of imitation as such, the critique of poetry goes much further than the critique of its moral and political effects in the youth’s education (DD, 44; 63). What is required is not just a remodeling of poetic contents for the Platonic reappropriation of poetry, but a radically new understanding of the problem of mimesis that will allow for a kind of imitation that overcomes its problems. Gadamer attempts to take up this task by framing the Platonic critique of mimesis in the problem of aesthetic consciousness (*ästhetisches Bewußtsein*).

In Book X of the *Republic*, the critique of poetic mimesis as being “third remove from truth” is based on the assumption that to imitate is to produce a mere copy (*Abbild*) of an original (*Urbild*) (RB, 116-17; cf. 120-21). Gadamer thinks that “this Platonic doctrine is intended in a dialectical and extremely ironic sense” (RB, 99). Referring to Aristotle’s remark in the *Metaphysics* (987b12) according to which Plato takes “participation” (μέθεξις) and “imitation” (μίμησις) as equivalent terms, he explains that “the word ‘imitation’ cannot rightly stand for what *mimēsis* means here. Better would be “re-presentation [*Darstellung*]” (PP, 261). While Plato emphasizes polemically the

distance between the represented and the representation,¹⁸ he knows too well that the power of poetry specifically resides in the poet's ability to reduce this distance and thereby allow for the pleasure of recognition: "A representation intends to be so true and convincing that we do not advert to the fact that what is so represented is not 'real.' Recognition as cognition of the true occurs through an act of identification in which we do not differentiate between the representation and the represented" (RB, 99; cf. 35).¹⁹ Plato allegedly acknowledged the importance of recognition by emphasizing the role of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) in knowledge.²⁰

Gadamer also likes to recall that for the Pythagoreans, mimesis referred broadly to the representation of the cosmic order (RB, 36, 103; PP, 261). This is why, he claims, all art imitates in the sense that it re-presents something, makes something present anew through the triadic structure of beauty, namely through order, symmetry, and determinacy (GW1, 483; cf. WI, 205). This making-present of mimesis understood as *Darstellen* is neither a distortion (as it seems to be on a straightforward reading of *Republic X*),²¹ nor a faithful replica of the original model, but a presentation of the thing itself such that it reveals itself, through recognition or recollection (ἀνάμνησις), as what it truly is.²² In that sense, mimesis reveals the truth of the represented in the Heideggerian sense of truth as un-concealedness, *Unverborgenheit*.²³ In his essay entitled *Wort und Bild*, Gadamer connects this revealing character of imitative art to Goethe's word about the power

¹⁸ See Dostal (2004, 38)

¹⁹ Thereby, Gadamer explicitly tries to bring Plato's position close to Aristotle's thoughts on the children's pleasure of learning through imitation (e.g. *RB*, 119. Cf. *Poet.* IV 1448b5-17). With the exception of Dostal's brief remarks (2004, 43-44), Gadamer's interpretive effort to reconcile Platonic and Aristotelian "aesthetics" has, to my knowledge, not been discussed. By contrast, his reconciliation of Plato and Aristotle on the ethical, political and ontological levels have been examined by Fruchon (1994, 333-398), Gonzalez (2017), Renaud (2019), and Pageau-St-Hilaire (2019).

²⁰ See Dostal (2004, 40) and Zarader (2016, 87-88).

²¹ For such a reading of mimesis in *Republic X*, see Moss (2007).

²² See Zarader (2016, 87): "imiter, ce n'est pas faire venir à nouveau à la présence cela même qui était déjà présent, et comme il était présent. Imiter, c'est faire venir davantage et autre chose que ce qui était là auparavant." Cf. Zuckert (1996, 87-88).

²³ See Dostal (2004, 40, 48).

of art: “so wahr, so seiend!”. There, he attempts to show the “closeness between the experience of contemplating the beautiful and knowing the true” (WI, 203). If Plato’s understanding of mimesis is not that of a relation between *Abbild* and *Urbild* (GW1, 145), why then does his Socrates articulate a critique that rests on such an understanding? What is wrong with mimesis, after all?

Gadamer’s answer to this question is that Plato criticizes mimesis because it runs the risk of inducing a “subjectivation of the aesthetic experience,” one in which the truth-revealing potential of art becomes subjectivized and loses its force. In other words, Plato’s critique of imitative poetry has the same purpose as Gadamer’s critique of Kantian aesthetics and its aftermath. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer criticizes Kant’s Third Critique in two ways. First, Kant makes a separation between the realm of knowledge and the realm of beauty. With this separation, aesthetic judgment is essentially a subjective judgment and has no substantial relation with knowledge and truth, for, according to Gadamer, Kant’s idea of a “purposefulness without purpose” (*Zweckmässigkeit ohne Zweck*) is but the result of the free play of a *subject’s* imagination and is thus a “purposive-subjective relation” (*zweckmässig-subjektive Verhältnis*, GW 1, 49).²⁴ The separation between knowledge and aesthetics will only be radicalized after Kant, with the emergence of the notion of “lived experience” (*Erlebnis*) as the central category through which the aesthetic experience is to be understood (GW 1, 66-87). Second, with the separation from the realm of knowledge and the rise of *Erlebniskunst*, artistic production does not look beyond itself anymore and becomes its own purpose: it becomes “art for art’s sake.”²⁵

²⁴ On this separation, see especially Dostal (2004, 34) and Zarader (2016, 55). This is not to say that Gadamer is blind to the function of aesthetics in the Kantian system as a whole, and more precisely as a bridge between reason and understanding (see GW1, 60). In this sense, one might say that Kant’s aesthetic judgement is not *completely* foreign to knowledge and truth.

²⁵ Cf. Dostal (2004, 34) : “Un autre mode de cette subjectivation [de l’esthétique] est ‘l’art pour l’art’.”

In *Truth and Method*, the critique of these two modes of subjectivation of aesthetics leads Gadamer first to a rehabilitation of allegoric art, and then to a “recovery” (*Wiedergewinnung*) of the question of the truth of art. Retrieving a mimetic conception of art is important for this recovery. But such conception, Gadamer thinks, is not the notion of mimesis as it is *criticized* by Plato but rather as it is *preserved* despite and through his critique. How then, does Plato’s critique of the poets parallel Gadamer’s critique of subjective aesthetics? In “Plato and the Poets,” Gadamer’s explanation starts from the critique of imitation as a split within one’s own deeds: “he who really imitates and only imitates, in mime, is no longer himself. He gives himself an alien character. But even so he only *imitates* the other, which is to say that while he is not himself, he is not the other either. This imitation thus implies a split in the self” (DD, 63-64; cf. *Rep.* 397d10-e2). In this self-alienation, Plato allegedly sees a danger of self-forgetfulness, and one that threatens both imitators and spectators alike because the latter identify themselves with the former in sympathy (DD, 64). Gadamer’s point seems to be that the pleasure experienced in imitative poetry is the pleasure of one’s complete absorption in passion and the self-forgetfulness of passion. Prior to any problems related to the content of imitative poetry, the problem of mimesis as such is its power to make one lose oneself in the aesthetic experience. In losing itself thusly, the soul is not and cannot be aware of anything else than its highly immersive experience; it can hardly think through what is going on in the imitation and how it is affected by it. Contact with truth or reality is lost and the aesthetic experience becomes wholly subjective, and it becomes wholly subjective precisely because the subject’s ability to relate its experience to reality is blurred:

Thus the critique of mimetic poetry cuts much deeper than it had at first appeared. It not only criticizes the false and dangerous contents of mimetic art or the choice of an unseemly mode of representation. *It is at the same time a critique of the moral consequences of “aesthetic consciousness.”* The very experience which it had in delusory imitation is in itself already the ruination of the soul. (DD, 65)

While we may object to Gadamer that the conceptualization he uses is quite foreign to Plato's understanding of the problem of mimesis, the important question for our purposes is whether it adequately captures the phenomenon we see in Plato's dialogues. Gadamer does indeed think that Plato's critique of poetry and his own critique of Kantian aesthetics have the same ultimate target, namely the dissociation of aesthetic experience and the question of truth. Whether his critique of Kant is right or not is irrelevant here: he is quite right that Plato is worried about the effects that the experience of poetry has on the human soul, and especially about how poets prefer to stir passions than pointing toward truth. This is not to say that poetry must necessarily be thus: as we shall shortly see, poetry can produce an aesthetic experience that enables an experience of truth instead of obstructing it. But this is not what the poets that Plato criticizes do.

The self-forgetting immersion that Gadamer's Plato criticizes is more obvious in poetic uses of direct speech. Sullivan has elegantly summed up that Plato's own artistic production overcomes the self-forgetfulness of aesthetic experience not just by changing poetry's content but also by shifting its poetic language:

Indirect speech, because it is so much more devoid of immediate emotional content, facilitates thinking what we are doing. I am not saying that rendering an action in indirect speech is the same as thinking what we are doing but rather that it is the condition of the possibility of such thought. Thus indirect speech is necessary to the emergence of philosophy insofar as philosophy is a matter of reasoned rather than impassioned argument. That Plato is aware of this is clear from many of his best writings. [...] For the key to understanding language in Plato is the effect language has in returning us to ourselves, more accurately, to an authentic vision of the philosophic self in us.²⁶

Now if Plato's critique of direct speech in poetry leads to a new poetic language, his ontological critique of mimesis may also lead to a new way of understanding poetry. In fact, Gadamer thinks that the critique of imitation in the sphere of ontology is meant precisely to relate imitative poetry

²⁶ Sullivan (1989, 150-51).

and reality.²⁷ As we have already seen, his own rereading of mimesis as *Darstellen* indicates “no mere ontological diminution” (*keine bloße Minderung des Seins*) but rather an “increase in being” (*Zuwachs an Sein*) (GW 1, 145). Hence, we can sum up Gadamer’s reinterpretation of Plato’s critique of mimesis as follows: the target of Plato’s critique is aesthetic consciousness, and mimesis, far from being ontologically defective, is rather ontologically productive. But if this is so, new questions arise: in what sense is mimetic art productive? Does it reveal truth in a different way than philosophic discourse does? How does that affect the relation between poetry and philosophy?

5.2.3 Mythic Allusiveness and the Limits of Philosophy

Toward the end of “Plato and the Poets,” Gadamer reflects on Plato’s use of myths in the dialogues. An important aspect of his argument is that the Platonic reappropriation of mimesis in the dialogical form of writing and his introduction of indirect speech for the sake of philosophic reflexivity are insufficient ways for philosophy to make use of the power of poetry. A supplement is needed and Gadamer thinks that myths are such a supplement. For him, by contrast to Strauss and Krüger, it is through mythic allusiveness rather than tragedy and comedy that Plato’s philosophy becomes poetic.²⁸

²⁷ I agree with Zarader (2016, 91) about the strategy behind Gadamer’s interpretation: “s’il passe ainsi par Platon, c’est en raison de son projet général de réinscrire l’art sur le terrain de la connaissance et de la vérité.”

²⁸ Be that as it may, Gadamer seems to think of Plato’s poetic dialogues more in terms of comedy than tragedy. In “Plato as Portraitist,” he claims that Plato’s admiration for Aristophanes is evident from the *Symposium* and from the fact that his dialogues are “descendants of Attic comedy” (*PP*, 247; *GW* 7, 230). He also claims that “Plato’s thinking in utopias [Platos Denken in Utopien] would be impossible without it.” This is quite significant because in his lecture entitled “Platos Denken in Utopien,” Gadamer argues that this *Denkweise*, which consists in the incompletable (*nie vollendbar*) dialogue of the soul with the unhypothetical and in learning to play in *Vernunftspielen*, is characteristic of *all of Platonic dialogues* and not just the political utopias (*GW* 7, 283 and 288). So, assuming that Gadamer, in the 1988 essay, intended with this unique formula to echo his own 1983 piece, we would have to draw the following conclusion about his interpretation of Plato: Plato’s dialogues as a whole would have been impossible without comedy, and in particular without Aristophanes. While this is a strong claim, Gadamer – unlike Strauss and Krüger – unfortunately fails to further develop his thoughts on the meaning of comedy for Plato’s poetic philosophy.

The Platonic myths avoid the problem of aesthetic consciousness, for they do not provoke the subject's self-forgetfulness and they are not meant to: they "are not conjured so that they might cast their own spell" (DD, 68). For Gadamer's Plato, it is *bad* mimesis that induces a subjectivation of the aesthetic experience. Hence his myths are not instances of bad mimesis: "these myths are in no way representation and theater whose mere charm delight us and the mere viewing of which could satisfy us." Instead, they "are linked to the truth which the soul discovers in philosophizing." Gadamer also insists that Plato's myths do not tell the soul new truths from outside. One could then reasonably expect that myths are poetic translations of philosophical discourse. Yet Gadamer most interestingly rejects this interpretation: "one cannot say that the sole function of such myth is to make Socratic truth understandable by expressing it allegorically" (DD, 69). That would amount to a complete subordination of poetry to philosophy. Yet if these myths escape Gadamer's critique of aesthetic consciousness, they must not cast themselves out of the realm of knowledge and truth. Gadamer's position – very close to Krüger's interpretation on this important point – is that the use of myth tells us something about the kind of rationalism that is embodied by Plato's Socrates:

But the fact that this Socratic knowledge of one's own self is expressed in the form of a play of mythical images tells us something *about the kind of certainty which this knowledge has*. Socrates encounter in his soul *something inexplicable which resists illumination by the enlightenment* that had succeeded in clearing up and destroying mythology. (DD, 69; my emphasis)

Gadamer is careful not to hastily reduce this recourse to mythical allusiveness to an irrational leap of faith in the face of not-yet-rationally-explained phenomena. According to him, the problem is not that these phenomena have not been rationally accounted for, but rather that the rationalistic interpretations are unsuccessful because their rational explanation of what the soul itself is fails to account for the genuine yet mysterious experiences of the subject's individual soul. Plato's Socrates

surely provides accounts of the soul as such,²⁹ but finds important to complement these accounts by mythic images of the soul:

When the enlightenment tries to explain the soul itself and to eliminate the mystery which surrounds the powers of justice and love by reducing them to clever (or weak) contrivances or infirmities [Erfindungen oder Erkrankungen], Socrates emerges opposite its so readily understandable accounts as the visionary who sees his own soul [vor dieser Verständigkeit wird Sokrates zum Seher in seiner eigenen Seele, und über dir kritische Zertrümmerung solcher Verständigkeit hinaus entdeckt]. And in images of the judgement of the dead and the hierarchy of worlds and with the open eye of the seer and the wry smile of the man of irony he proclaims an inexplicable certainty which the soul has – *a certainty which establishes the limits of philosophizing as well as its dimensions and horizons.* (DD, 69; trans. modif.)

Plato's myths thus express an awareness of the limits of rational discourse, of λόγος, and thereby of philosophy. But a philosophy that incorporates myths, on Gadamer's account, is not simply giving up its task. For once philosophy becomes hermeneutics, its task is not to *explain* but to *understand*, and while myth cannot provide explanations, it can surely help one to understand.³⁰ Likewise, a philosopher who recognizes the finitude of philosophy is not less philosophical, but perhaps even more so: being aware of the limits of self-knowledge is an essential aspect of self-knowledge. This dependence of Platonic philosophy upon poetic discourse, and especially upon mythic allusions, does not represent a triumphant victory of philosophy but neither does it reflect the failure of philosophy in the face of poetry. For Gadamer's Plato, the philosopher is only superior to the poet insofar as he learns to express poetically the limits of philosophic discourse: the quarrel between philosophy and poetry is only resolvable in the form of a partial reconciliation.

²⁹ In support of Gadamer's point, it could also be said that the multiple accounts of the soul in Plato differ and that scholars have found difficult to show that they are all compatible with each other. This multiplicity of these psychologies could corroborate the view that Plato's Socrates is reticent to account for the mystery of the soul once and for all.

³⁰ The difference between *Erklären* and *Verstehen* is at work in the hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer. Paul Ricoeur famously attempts to reconcile both tasks (*expliquer* and *comprendre*) in his own hermeneutics – see for instance Ricoeur 1986. On this distinction in Gadamer, see my remarks on Gonzalez (2006, 438; 2012, 190-91) in Pageau-St-Hilaire (2019, 196). For further discussion of the relevance of this distinction in Gadamer's ontology, see chapter 7 of the present work.

5.3 The Metaphysics of Krüger's Poetic Plato

The “Old Quarrel” between philosophy and poetry plays a decisive role in the structure of *Einsicht und Leidenschaft*. Yet, as much as Krüger thinks we should take Plato's critique of the poets with great seriousness, he also claims – like Strauss did after him – that the *Republic's* picture of poets as imitators of craftsmen appears to us as a kind of nonsensical (*sinnlose*) caricature (EL, 42). In the vein of Gadamer's interpretation of the conflict, Krüger thinks that the irony of that critique nonetheless indicates something serious, namely that the question of poetry and imitation must be judged by the standards of knowledge and truth. At the same time, he thinks that there is a truth of poetic and mythic composition, a truth that Plato recognizes and appropriates for his own purposes. For Krüger, Platonic philosophy *cannot* avoid expressing itself mythically. After showing why myth is necessary for Plato, Krüger explains how he nonetheless breaks with the poets by disagreeing about the content of these myths. This disagreement concerns cosmo-theological issues, and it is thus with a view to metaphysics that Krüger finally addresses the complicated problem of the relation between Platonic philosophy, tragedy, and comedy.

5.3.1 *Eros and the Necessity of Myth*

At the beginning of his *Platonbuch*, Krüger contrasts Platonic and Modern rationalism (or “enlightenment”) on the question of the relation between philosophy and religion.³¹ About this relation, he writes that since Kant at least, “we are used to seeing here an essential *opposition*: it is really for us a dogma, that freedom of research and religious boundedness exclude each other” (EL, 6). This modern rationalism claims that human thought ought to be independent and

³¹ It should be noted that the contrast between an *alte* and *moderne Aufklärung* as well as the relation between philosophy and religion is a theme commonly cherished by Leo Strauss and Gerhard Krüger. It features prominently in their correspondence in the 1930s.

sovereign, and, at best, it proposes a “deeper” understanding of religion which aims at replacing it by an almighty philosophy:

Leibniz and Kant may have respected religion, Schelling and Hegel may have understood it in its profound meaning (*tiefsinnig*), – such pious appreciation changes nothing to the fact that philosophy is conceptualized as a matter of *sovereign* thought and that, at any rate, religion remains relevant only “within the limits” that are thusly indicated. The internal unity of religion and the philosophy that comprehends it (*der sie begreifenden Philosophie*), as it subsists in Hegel, only shows with particular clarity (*Deutlichkeit*) that modern philosophy, where it does not doubt itself, takes itself the place of religion: where it does not identify “God” with itself like in Hegel’s outstanding hubris, it at least does not tolerate (*duldet*) any gods above itself. (EL, 6-7)³²

This diagnosis of the situation of modern philosophy is quite important, for Krüger will argue that Plato’s understanding of the status of religion turns the Kantian-Hegelian position upside down: “The relation of philosophy toward religion is here [in Plato] ostensibly the reversal of ours: religion is not philosophically understood; rather, philosophy is religiously understood” (EL, 7). Understanding this central claim of Krüger’s interpretation allows us to see why he thinks that Plato *must* use poetic myths.

To understand what it could mean for Plato to conceive of philosophy “religiously,” we must recall what has been shown in the previous chapter about the role of *Stimmung* and in particular of *eros* as fundamental attunement in Krüger’s approach to Platonic philosophy. Krüger argues that philosophy platonically understood recognizes its full dependence upon the *Stimmung* of *eros*. The “grippedness” (*Ergriffenheit*) of *eros*, insofar as it opens up the wondrous possibility of philosophy, must be understood as something *good*.³³ The combination of this goodness with the inescapability of the power with which *eros* rules the soul turns the erotic experience into a religious experience.

³² Krüger adds that *Lebensphilosophie* and existentialism have not changed this situation despite their proclamation that the modern sovereignty of human freedom is a *historical* and not an *eternal* truth (EL, 7).

³³ To be sure, *eros* has bad effects too. In general, the speakers of the *Symposium* silence these less desirable effects since they are supposed to give speeches in *praise* of *eros*. However, as Strauss and Krüger’s insistence on the tragedy and comedy of philosophy shows, Plato manages to let the goodness and badness of *erotic* madness emerge.

Coming from without, exercising such an influence and producing good effects, *eros* must be somewhat divine: “The decisive step toward the understanding of *eros* as a god is made when once recognizes his effects simply as goods (*wenn man seine Wirkungen schlechthin als Güter anerkennt*)” (EL, 13). If philosophy depends upon the power of *eros* and if it is a supra-human force (divine or demonic), we have reached what Krüger calls a “religious philosophy.”³⁴

By describing *eros* as a religious power and philosophy as a religious endeavor, Krüger does not wish to turn Plato into a religious believer in the common sense of the expression. Rather, he means to emphasize that, in contrast to modern enlightenment, Platonic rationalism recognizes the limits of the spontaneity and sovereignty of the human mind. Although the *Phaedrus* explains the nature of the soul as a “self-mover” and “thus as spontaneity” (EL, 15; see *Phdr.* 245c-e, cf. *Leg.* 895e10-896a2), receptivity and dependence are characteristic of the human condition. Krüger’s point is that Plato understands these human and divine characteristics in each other’s light:

Because Plato determines the nature of the soul – beyond all subhuman life – through spontaneity, because he, therefore, envisions its *freedom*, and thus its spiritual, personal character, he at once finds that the *human* soul manifests a deficiency (*eine Mangelhaftigkeit aufweist*), which can as such only be conceived with regard to complete *divine* souls. (EL, 15)

The “essential dependence” of human reason, which is truly made visible by contrast with divine perfection, situates philosophy religiously. It is because Plato wishes to express this relation and the mystery of the erotic experience that reveals this state of affairs that he must speak through myths. For myths can *show* such mystery whereas philosophic discourse can only reach its limits and thereupon fail to convene what the thinker, as a whole person, understands. Here, the positions of Krüger and Gadamer on Platonic myths are quite similar. Myth expresses the awareness of the

³⁴ Krüger emphasizes that for Plato, *eros* is demonic and not properly divine. For him, that does not make philosophy less “religious” because the demonic remains supra-human.

limits of philosophical λόγος: “just as Platonic thinking knows itself to be borne by a higher power, so it urges itself to express its limitedness in myth” (EL, 59). Religious or mythic philosophy is not the abdication of philosophy but the expression of the philosopher’s awareness of human finitude.

5.3.2 *Plato’s Critique of Ancient Mythology*

Now, as Krüger warns us, to say that Platonic philosophy necessarily makes use of mythic speech is not to say that he does so without irony (EL, 57): “Plato can never tell myths *without irony*. And yet he cannot do without them.” For Plato is not a mythologist and certainly not a poet in the style of Homer and Hesiod, and he thus attempts to distance himself from this tradition. There are two aspects to Krüger’s understanding of the Platonic critique of ancient mythology. The first one makes him close to Strauss’ position and has to do with the theological content of poetry. The second one is similar to Gadamer’s critique of aesthetic consciousness.

The reason for the first aspect of Plato’s critique lies in the *content* of poetic discourse. For, as Krüger notes, Plato, unlike Aristotle after him, does not consider the poet as an artist (*Künstler*) but as a seer (*Seher*) (EL, 39). Since poetry is the production of a seer, its crux is mythological theology and not “aesthetics” (EL, 33). There are two premises to Krüger’s argument concerning the theology of the poets. First, the gods of Hesiod and Homer are cosmological divinities. By this, Krüger does not mean that they are impersonal cosmic forces (like Aristotle’s unmoved mover), but that they nonetheless represent different cosmic forces and their actions have effects on the natural world. Second, these cosmic gods *also* structure the civic religion of Greek cities. From these premises, Krüger argues that the turn from these gods toward *eros* constitutes Plato’s attack against poetic theology.

The first argument is fairly straightforward. *Eros* is a religious power – a demon, according to Diotima’s speech – that has no bearing on Greek civic religion: “Eros is not a god of the political cult [*staatlichen Kultus*]. Love as the divinity of the public, binding religion was not Eros but his ‘mother’ *Aphrodite*” (EL, 20). Krüger cites a passage of Euripides’ *Hippolytus* where Eros is vehemently criticized, called a tyrant, and denied worship (535-540) to support his point that the theological shift made by Plato in the *Symposium* represents a *new* emphasis.³⁵ What he calls “Platonic religion” thus transcends the limits of politics.

The second argument is that *eros* as a religious power runs against the cosmological gods of the poetic tradition. When poets write about the gods, they are picturing cosmic forces in the first place, and only thereafter do they tell stories about the gods’ relation to human beings. This path from the gods and the cosmos to human beings, Krüger claims, is what Plato rejects. We can shed light on this point if we recall how Plato’s Socrates describes his second sailing in the *Phaedo* (99d-e). His turn from Anaxagoras’ cosmic principle toward human λόγοι results from the idea that direct access to the highest principles of the cosmos is not granted to human beings. We must instead begin with human speech, start with the human affairs. Hence Krüger writes that “Plato himself cannot make the old gods *immediately* intelligible anymore: he can only interpret them in the way they protrude into the world of Eros”³⁶ (EL, 25; my emphasis). The world of *eros* is not the cosmic world, but the human world. In fact, as we have seen in the previous chapter, a crucial point of Krüger’s argument is that *eros* as *Stimmung* is responsible for the *givenness of the world* (*Gegebenheit der Welt*), that is, the human world is the world such as it appears and is made manifest

³⁵ EL, 20: “Die Hervorberung des Eros ist neu, und sie ist aufschlußreich für die geistige Luft, in der die *Philosophie* erwächst.”

³⁶ “Plato selbst kann die alten Götter nicht mehr unmittelbar verständlich machen: er kann sie nur so interpretieren, wie sie in die Welt des Eros noch hineinragen.”

to us through the passion of *eros* (cf. EL, 22-23).³⁷ Krüger elegantly sums up Plato's position by using a typically Heideggerian phrase, which suggests that Plato's shift from the cosmic gods to *eros* is some kind of *phenomenological turn*: "Plato proceeds always already [*immer schon*] from the human, not from the world."

The rejection of poetic theology thus brings to light two important points: the cult of *eros* situates philosophy beyond the limits of the city, and it reflects a shift in the methodology of the philosophical inquiry and establishes a new method that starts with what is primarily accessible to us, human beings.

Krüger's claim that immediate access to the old cosmological gods does not appear available to Plato foreshadows another critique of mythology. For in response to the Platonic philosopher who asserts that no direct access to cosmic powers is available to the human mind, the poet may very well answer that he has such access because she is *inspired*: it is the gods themselves that speak through the poet; the poet is *enthusiastic*, literally filled with gods. To this Krüger's Plato responds that a poetic inspiration of this kind is dangerous: "The poet is filled with gods [gotterfüllt] in that he lives drunken with the world and self-forgetting [welttrunken und selbstvergessen lebt]" (EL, 36). Imitation, Krüger continues, is "the essence of pagan being-outside-of-oneself [Außersichsein]" (EL, 37). Plato opposes to self-forgetfulness and ecstasy (in the etymological sense of *ek-stasis*) the erotic *πάθεια* of philosophy, which redirects the soul toward itself in its striving for self-knowledge and moderation.³⁸ We may put the point of the critique in the polarity that structures the dialectic of Krüger's book: while inspired poets abandon themselves fully to the

³⁷ See also EL, 29: "Aber das ändert nichts daran, daß im Reiche des Eros nicht mehr die Welt das Erste ist, sondern die menschliche Leidenschaft."

³⁸ Krüger may have in mind the opposition between knowledge and being-outside-oneself (ἐξέριμι) at *Symp.*, 208a4.

receptivity of *Leidenschaft* (cf. EL, 48), modern *Aufklärer* rely solely on the spontaneity of *Einsicht*.³⁹ The Platonic position is that philosophical rationalism must be in-between these two poles: “the standpoint of Socrates is not the already essentially freed and methodically secured rationality, but a reason *fighting* for freedom, a reason of a life driven by passion”⁴⁰ (EL, 46). In his criticism of poetic inspiration, Krüger’s Plato – like Gadamer’s Plato – rejects not passion altogether but its tendency toward self-forgetfulness (*Selbstvergessenheit*; EL, 48). Thus, what is at stake in the quarrel of philosophy and poetry is not an opposition between reason and passion; the quarrel is a “fight about the *meaning* of passion [Kampf um den *Sinn* der Leidenschaft]” (EL, 32).

5.3.3 *The Tragedy and Comedy of Philosophy*

In summarizing his position about Plato’s critique of ancient mythology, Krüger reminds us that Plato does not reject “poetry simply [die Dichtung schlechthin]” (EL, 48). Recognizing the necessity of dialogical writing and the necessity of mythic expression for a philosophy that acknowledges its dependence on *eros*, Krüger thinks that Plato’s compositions are a kind of poetry (a Platonic *Dichtung*). He further claims that the articulation of a properly philosophical poetry requires a reflection about the relation between philosophy, tragedy, and comedy. A decisive aspect of Krüger’s interpretation of Plato’s *Symposium* is the attention given to the speech of Aristophanes, of Agathon, as well as the final scene about the convergence of comedy and tragedy in the skillful

³⁹ These are of course extreme positions. Krüger does not give examples of poets or rationalist thinkers that would fit these either side of this dichotomy, and his interpretation of Kant clearly situates Kantian philosophy somewhere in-between these two poles. However, could it not be granted that *most* poets and thinkers tend to lean more toward one side of this polarity than to the other? If so, Krüger points still holds despite its exaggerate presentation: Plato, for him, does *not* lean more toward receptivity or spontaneity.

⁴⁰ “Nicht die schon grundsätzlich frei gewordene, methodisch gesicherte Vernünftigkeit der Wissenschaft ist der Standort des Sokrates, sondern die um die Freiheit *kämpfende* Vernunft des von der Leidenschaft umgetriebenen Lebens.”

tragedian. Krüger argues that Aristophanes' speech is a tragic comedy, Agathon's speech is a comic tragedy, and philosophy is both comic and tragic.

In interpreting Aristophanes' myth, Krüger emphasizes that the story is about the gods' punitive response to human hubris. He notes that the "tragic motive of hubris" is paradoxical in the speech of a comic poet (EL, 125). Aristophanes further implies that we humans still suffer from the tragic hubris of our ancestors' fundamental religious outrage (*Urfrevel gegen die Götter*; EL, 129): we indeed still long for an erotic unity that we can never find. Despite this tragic truth, Krüger acknowledges that Aristophanes' speech does not end tragically. Instead, there is a note of optimism in the thought that we may piously turn to the gods in the hope that they amend our tragic condition (*Symp.* 193a-d). Yet despite this alleged optimism,⁴¹ the fundamental insight behind it remains tragic in kind: Aristophanes "has seen that the moral problem is unresolvable when one emancipates oneself from religion" (EL, 130). Because it recognizes the fundamental deficiencies of the human situation, his comedy "loses the triumphing maliciousness of mockery [das Triumphierend-Schadenfrohe des 'Spottischen']" and must be tragic (EL, 130). As for Agathon's speech, Krüger emphasizes its naïve vanity (EL, 133, 137). Instead of working his way through the tragic motives of the dreadful or terrible (*das Furchtbare*, cf. δεινός), Agathon glorifies *eros* as a bringer of peace (*als Friedensbringer*). What is distinctive about Agathon's speech is the refined arrangement of the sounds and rhythms, producing a melodiousness or euphony (*Wohlklang*) that can make a charming impression (EL, 137). By focusing on the musicality of poetic speech *to the detriment of* its content, what Agathon produces is a parody that gets rid of anything really tragic except the sound. In that

⁴¹ Krüger, unlike Strauss, does not ask whether this turn to piety could be ironic. Contrast with Strauss' comment on the same passage in Aristophanes' speech (OPS, 149): "We have, then, no *techné*, no art for finding the truly other half, and the only way out is piety. In other words, what Plato suggests is, 'However ironical you, Aristophanes, might have been regarding piety, if you had been consistent you would have been seriously pious.' To summarize: Plato comedizes".

respect, it is laughable and is thus a *comic* tragedy (EL, 138). Krüger shows through his interpretation of these two speeches that Aristophanes and Agathon unwittingly let see a potential unity of tragedy and comedy (EL, 308).

This unity is precisely what Socrates hints at in the last scene of the *Symposium*. For Krüger, just like for Strauss and Gadamer, this unity is to be found in Platonic philosophy. Krüger suggests that it is not sufficient to see that some poets –Shakespeare, for instance – wrote both comedies and tragedies or to argue in this way that Plato satisfies the conditions of the skillful tragedian by writing tragic dialogues (like the *Phaedo*) and comic dialogues (like the *Symposium*). Instead, one must try to see how Plato interweaves tragedy and comedy within each dialogue (EL, 294). This is possible if we can see in what sense Platonic philosophy is, as such, this weaving. Finding textual support in the *Laws* (816d-e, where it is argued that one cannot understand the serious without the laughable) and the *Philebus* (the comment about the tragedy and comedy of life at 50b), Krüger claims that “who philosophizes ‘poeticizes’ [dichtet] both genres in one” (EL, 296).

We can distinguish two aspects of the tragicomedy of Platonic philosophy in Krüger’s argument. The first aspect may be called “external.” Externally, philosophy is comic from an unphilosophical perspective, that is, in the eyes of non-philosophers. This incomprehensibility of the philosophic life, however, leads to tragedy from the philosopher’s perspective: there is something comic (for the Thracian maid) *and* tragic (for Thales) about Thales falling in a well (EL, 305). Likewise, many Athenians may find Socrates laughable, but this state of affairs leads to the tragic fate of Socrates, condemned to death by his city. The fate of philosophy is comic for the non-philosophers and tragic for its philosophical spectators (EL, 296).

The “internal” aspect of philosophy’s tragicomedy is less evident but more important. The Platonic *Dichtung*, Krüger claims, must have “truth as its content” (EL, 295). It must therefore find

a way to imitate “non-perceptible truth [unsinnlich Wahre]” or “noetic being [einsichtig Seiende]”. Yet, from a perspective internal to philosophy, the real fate of philosophy is not persecution or death penalty but the *failure of λόγος* in the philosopher’s attempt to grasp eternal being and assimilates herself to the divine (EL, 299). This failure, Krüger argues, is essentially tied to the *power of time* over the human soul, which Diotima emphasizes in her speech (EL, 302). Our temporality is in tension with the ultimate object of philosophical *eros*: “The threat and lure of time [Drohung und Lockung der Zeit] is so great that the human being has always already [immer schon] forgotten eternity” (EL, 303). Again, it is worth noting the typically Heideggerian locution and considering how Krüger reverses Heidegger’s position. Heidegger thinks that temporality and finitude are forgotten and unduly replaced by the primacy of presence (understood as an eternal *nunc stans*), and this as early as Plato; Krüger argues that Plato has fully appreciated the problem of temporality and finitude for philosophy and thinks that the genuine issue is not the forgetfulness of temporality – whose power we always experience, and, for philosophers, consciously and reflectively – but the forgetfulness of *eternity*.⁴²

Thus, philosophy’s internal tragedy consists in its finitude, namely the impossibility to reach its goal: “The love of wisdom cannot get to wisdom, for the winged soul only attains a prospective view of the supernatural place [Ausblick auf den überweltlichen Ort], only an ascent as an ever-recurring course [als einem immer wiederholten Gange]” (EL, 304). But such a tragedy is also a comedy, the comedy of the contrast between the high aspirations of the philosophical life and its situational limitations and embodied existence. The finitude of philosophy is both tragic and comic. The last sentence of *Einsicht und Leidenschaft* expresses this tragicomedy as the inevitable result of the

⁴² What Krüger means by eternity, noetic being, non-perceptible truths, etc. and the role of these metaphysical notions in his interpretation is discussed in chapter 7. The expression “oblivion of eternity” also occurs in Strauss (e.g. WIPP, 55).

tension between philosophy's temporal, embodied, and situated existence on the one hand, and its desire to grasp what is eternal on the other hand: "where the 'domination' of the temporal world appears in the corporal and public life, there the inward quest for the eternal-supernatural can only be tragic and comic" (EL, 309).⁴³

For Krüger, the Platonic position is unique in that it fully acknowledges the finitude of human reason *without* abandoning its ultimate desideratum. Plato rejects the theological content of poetry but learns from poets the radical dependence and deficiencies of philosophy. The Platonic poetic philosopher unifies comedy and tragedy because she leaves cosmological metaphysics behind and, in her striving toward self-knowledge, orients herself toward a metaphysics of human finitude.

Conclusions

The interpretations I have provided above have revealed two things. First, the quarrel between philosophy and poetry plays a very special role in the Plato of Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger. Second, all three agree that Plato acknowledges that there is poetic wisdom from which the philosopher must learn in her *Auseinandersetzung* with poets. Specifically, poetry can show the limits of philosophical discourse, that is, the limits of an autonomous and non-poetic philosophical discourse. Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger slightly disagree on what these limits are. For Strauss, poets – and prominently Aristophanes – teach the *political* limits of philosophy. For Gadamer and Krüger, the philosopher learns from poetry to acknowledge the finitude of human λόγος. In each case, however, the only way in which philosophy can act according to what it has learned from

⁴³ "wo im leiblich-öffentlichen Leben die 'Herrlichkeit' der zeitlichen Welt erschienen ist, da kann die innere Suche nach dem Ewig-Überweltlichen nur Tragödie und Komödie sein."

poetry is to become itself poetic. It is by being a poet-philosopher that Plato can win the quarrel, and this shows that philosophy's victory is but a partial, somewhat humble victory.

Yet, if the readings of Plato by Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger are more than scholarly interpretations and if, as I argue, they intend to appropriate Plato's thought for their own philosophical projects, we ought to ask: what is the contemporary relevance of the quarrel between philosophy and poetry? To be sure, in the *philosophical* context of Marburg at the beginning of the 20th century, the relation between philosophic and poetic discourse is not an issue.⁴⁴ As I have already shown, the question of the poetic form of Plato's writings completely eludes the Platonic interpretations of Cohen, Natorp, Cassirer, and Heidegger. Poetry will indeed become increasingly important in the development of Heidegger's thought as early as the 1930s, but Heidegger has never addressed this question within the framework of the Platonic quarrel between philosophers and poets.⁴⁵ By way of conclusion, I would like to suggest that Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger precisely chose to reopen this quarrel to respond to insufficiencies they find in Neo-Kantians and Heidegger.

That Marburg Neo-Kantians were uninterested in the challenge that poetry poses to philosophy is an uncontroversial proposition. But why should such disinterest be a problem from the viewpoint of epistemology? Why bother with poets? Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger would argue, I think, that their indifference is the symptom of a broader indifference to the human affairs in their lived, embodied reality. Natorp's Plato appears as an isolated epistemologist; Cohen's Plato might articulate a moral philosophy, but only a disembodied – formalist in the Kantian fashion – one. In

⁴⁴ It is true that Paul Friedländer and the George-Kreis are exceptions to this rule, but, as I have argued in chapter 3, these exceptions are part of the *philological* – and not *philosophical* – context.

⁴⁵ In fact, in the *Nietzsche* lectures, Heidegger addresses the critique of poetry in Book X of the *Republic* (GA 6.1, 190-201) but he does so only with a view the question of Being and does not address the importance of the good life, of the "truth about *virtue*" (*Rep.*, 599d2-3).

brief, their Plato has no interest in the concrete lived experience, in what Heidegger calls “facticity.” Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger agree with Heidegger that a philosophical inquiry that abstracts from the situatedness of the philosopher is blind. *Pace* Natorp, Cohen, and Cassirer, Plato did not make this abstraction. And it is because he considered the existential situation of philosophy that the challenge of poetry becomes important.

But if this is so, what did Heidegger miss? What could he have found by thinking about poetry and philosophy in the Platonic framework of the quarrel? As I have argued in chapters 2 and 4, Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger think that Heidegger’s emphasis on the facticity of philosophy is crucial but importantly misguided because of its overly ontological orientation. Specifically, Heidegger’s ontic-ontological distinction leads him to dismiss the social, political, and cultural dimensions of facticity as mere ontic content. There is no concrete πόλις, no fellow citizens or political friendship in *Mitsein*, and once Heidegger starts thinking the πόλις in the 1940s, he considers it exclusively as the site of Being.⁴⁶ Similarly, when he begins to think about poetry, it is with a view to the potentiality of poetic saying to evoke Being, and when he considers the political role of poets, it is strictly from the perspective of Being and its history.⁴⁷ In short, Heidegger blinds himself to the social and political dimension of philosophy’s facticity. But the Platonic quarrel of poets and philosophers is a rivalry between competing fellow citizens regarding the question of the good life and, as such, it is only intelligible within this political dimension. Krüger and Strauss would add that Heidegger’s blindness to the political character of the quarrel between poetry and philosophy prevented him from seeing the comic aspect of the tragicomedy of philosophy.

⁴⁶ On these problems, see respectively sections 2.1.3 and 2.2.3 in chapter 2.

⁴⁷ Of course, the interpretation of Hölderlin plays a crucial role in the elucidation of the alleged onto-historical (*seinsgeschichtlich*) responsibility of poets (see, e.g., GA 39).

Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger not only disagree with *how* Heidegger has posed the question of poetry, but also with his *answer* to the problem of philosophy's relation to poetry. In an article on Strauss and Heidegger, O'Mahoney has made the compelling suggestion that Strauss' treatment of the quarrel between philosophy and poetry is a response to Heidegger's proclamation of the victory of poetry. Strauss, he argues, was worried by "the prospect of the displacement of usurpation of traditional philosophy by literature."⁴⁸ While I am sympathetic to O'Mahoney's suggestion, I am skeptical that Strauss simply wished to proclaim the triumph of philosophy over poetry against Heidegger. For, as my interpretations have shown, Strauss recognizes that philosophy must learn from poetry and must become itself poetic to be victorious. This is also the case for Gadamer and Krüger. If I am right, their response to Heidegger is much more nuanced: they reject the self-abdication of philosophy in favor of poetry and *Denken*, but they think they are entitled to reject it *because* philosophy can itself become poetic and thereby avoid the pitfalls of autonomous rational discourse. Furthermore, this poetic transformation of philosophy is the expression of what philosophy learns from poets, namely an awareness of the philosopher's fundamental limits, of her finitude. We may call this philosophy's poetic finitude.

Plato was able to respond to the challenge of poetry by producing a new kind of poetic philosophy. Gadamer, Strauss and Krüger did not possess his artistic genius. What they could do and what they did, however, was to recover the meaning of the Platonic treatment of the quarrel between philosophy and poetry. This recovery leads them to recognize how the quarrel cannot be resolved in the final victory of one of the opponents. In this sense, keeping the tension alive by

⁴⁸ O'Mahoney (2001, 87). In particular, he argues that Strauss is worried that the *modern novel* takes precedence over philosophical thought. Strauss's preference for the sobriety of Jane Austen over Russian novelists notwithstanding (*OT*, 185), this strikes me as an implausible response to Heidegger since Heidegger's literary champions are not novelists and since he certainly admired Sophocles more than Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky.

insisting on the necessity of an unending dialogue between poetry and philosophy is their way of imitating Plato's own treatment of the issue.

Chapter 6

PHILOSOPHY, POLITICS AND THE IRONIES OF PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the quarrel between philosophy and poetry can only be understood platonically if one acknowledges the properly political character of the philosopher's existence. Since philosophers and poets disagree about the nature of the good human life, their opposition unfolds on the soil of the city. Plato's pretension to be victorious in this quarrel by transfiguring philosophy through poetry is tantamount to the self-proclamation of philosophy as the authoritative reference concerning the good life. It is no wonder, then, that, in her dialogical journey, the philosopher must come to terms with politicians and the city. For the city and its rulers can hardly admit that philosophy has such authority. Following the path of Socrates' second sailing, the dialogical Platonism of Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger cannot avoid a dialogical encounter with politics.

To speak of a dialogue with politics can appear oddly abstract. To be sure, the philosopher's political situatedness is determined: Socrates does not live in just any city, but in Athens, and he does not interact with abstract politicians but with specific individuals who either exercise or will come to exercise political power in the Athenian πόλις. But Socrates does not simply speak for himself; he defends philosophy and the philosophic life as such, that is, philosophy as he thinks it should be lived regardless of time and place. Likewise, he does not simply speak to particular representatives of the Athenian city. For instance, his dialogue with Meletus in the *Apology* is followed by a fictional dialogue between himself and the personified Athenian Laws in the *Crito*.¹

¹ Note that, in light of the fact that all of Plato's dialogues are fictions (as discussed in chapters 3 and 4), the prosopopoeia of the Laws in the *Crito* is hyperfictional, a fiction in a fiction.

This abstraction from a conversation with specific political actors to a dialogue with the laws does not contradict the rootedness of philosophy in its existential context. Rather, it shows that Plato's thought can move from a highly specific-existential context to a fairly abstract discussion while remaining dialogical. The *Apology-Crito* sequel reveals that what is truly at stake in the dialogue between Socrates and Meletus is Socrates's general relation with Athens. Likewise, the *Republic* proceeds from a conversation in a particular setting with specific individuals whose personal histories are deeply tied with Athens' political history to a broader investigation about justice in which the protagonists are not particular people but abstract and anonymous figures and institutions like the Craftspeople, Auxiliaries, Philosopher-rulers, and the Kallipolis. Insofar as it examines the proper relation between the philosopher as such and the city as such, Plato's *Republic* displays the dialogical encounter between philosophy and politics.

This chapter examines the interpretation of the relation between the philosopher and the political community in Strauss', Gadamer's, and Krüger's approaches to the *Republic*. We can explain in the following terms the problem that their treatment of this dialogue attempts to solve: if philosophy replaces poetry's authority on the question of the good life, it should have a social-political status that matches its authoritative position and enables it to have *actual* authority. In other words, if philosophy is truly authoritative about the good and happy life, it should rule the city. While this is explicit in the proposition of philosophical rulership, there are several reasons why both the city and philosophers are reluctant to embrace this solution. Because of this resistance and the problems it raises, the *Republic's* harmonization of philosophy and politics appears *ironic* to Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger alike. This is to say that this harmony is not what is truly intended by the dialogue, that this non-commitment to Kallipolis is supposed to be understood,² and that it

² See Schaerer cited in Hyland (1995, 89n86): "[L'ironie] n'existe que pour être démasquée... L'ironiste ne trompe pas pour tromper mais pour qu'on devine qu'il trompe."

is meant to signify something else. The question is: what did Plato mean to show us through an ironic picture of a city ruled by philosophers?

If we admit that the *Republic* is ironic, we are left with two general remaining hermeneutic approaches, which, I suggest, are exhausted by the directions taken by Strauss on the one hand, and Krüger and Gadamer on the other hand. The first approach may be entitled, following Gadamer's critique of Strauss, the negative reading. The negative reading turns the literal meaning of the *Republic* upside down: from the harmony of philosophy and politics, Strauss ultimately deduces the irresolvable antithesis of philosophy and politics; the Kallipolis is not just an ironic fiction, it is *hyper-ironic*. In the first section of this chapter, I analyze Strauss' argument for this hyper-ironic interpretation, focusing on the problems of truth and falsehood, the problem of Eros and constraint, and the relation between philosophy and democracy. The second approach is intimated by Krüger and fully articulated by Gadamer. In the second section, I expose Krüger's argument for the case that through an ironic utopia, Plato shows both the crucial importance of politics for philosophy and the role of the philosopher as political critique. In the third section, I turn to Gadamer's own understanding of utopia, which ascribes to philosophy a critical and educative role in the city. For Krüger and Gadamer, philosophy and politics are not completely at odds, and the philosopher can make a genuine political contribution.

As we shall see, both approaches and each of these readings ultimately suggest and suppose a certain understanding of Plato's metaphysics. However, the phenomenological Platonism of Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger is radically different from Neo-Kantian and Heideggerian interpretations of Plato in that it does not consider metaphysics abstract from the political problem to which it responds and which it informs in return. Circumventing the dialogical character of Platonic philosophy, and thereby the dialogue that philosophy must have with the city, Neo-

Kantians never addressed the central importance of politics in Plato's thought. And, as we have seen in chapter 2, while Heidegger provided the phenomenological tools for his philosophical heirs to articulate the tension between philosophy and politics, his ontologized politics blinded him to this tension and led him to try to act as the philosopher-*Führer* of a disastrous tyranny. In both of its versions, the ironic Kallipolis is an antidote to Heidegger's politics around and beyond 1933.

6.1 Strauss's Hyper-Ironic Kallipolis and the Conflict Between Philosophy and Politics

The *leitmotiv* of Strauss' interpretation of the *Republic* is that the city in speech is bound to fail. There is an apparent circular dimension to the general structure of his argument in chapter 2 of the *City and Man*. We can express this seeming circularity thusly:

P1: The city of the *Republic* stands or falls by the unity of philosophy and political power

P2: but philosophy and politics repel each other,

C1: so Kallipolis is impossible.

And since

(P3) the city of the *Republic* is supposed to show how philosophy and politics can be harmonized

(C1) and this city is impossible,

(C2) the *Republic* shows the fundamental tension between philosophy and politics and thereby reveals the essential limits of the city.

Of course, the problem is that the second and ultimate conclusion that Strauss draws from his analysis of Plato's dialogue is already considered as a premise of his argument.³ Strauss' analysis is sound if and only if it can provide further support for this premise. As we shall see, he does provide further reasons to establish the truth of this antithesis of philosophy and politics. These reasons revolve around the oppositions between truth and falsehood, the private and the public, persuasion and compulsion, which all relate to the fundamental problem of *eros* at the core of his analysis. Thus, Strauss' argument is not truly circular; its soundness depends on the soundness of his interpretation of *eros* in the *Republic*. In what follows, I will examine this analysis and the implications of the meaning of Strauss' hyper-ironic Kallipolis for Platonic politics.

6.1.1 Truth, Falsehood, and Communism

Strauss's analysis of Book I of the *Republic* attempts to show that the major features of the ideal city are already implicit at the very beginning of the dialogue. Cephalus' defines justice as "truthfulness and restoring what one has taken or received from someone" (CM, 67). Strauss notes that Cephalus may very well have in mind one's debts to the gods for all the good we owe them, but Socrates "disregards" his sacrifices and reinterprets the definition in a strictly human frame, thereby distinguishing piety and justice (67-68). It is through this limitation that Socrates can contradict

³ See esp. CM, 125: "This is the *true reason* why the coincidence of philosophy and political power is extremely improbable: philosophy and the city tend away from one another in opposite directions" (my emphasis). I further discuss this passage in connection with the apparent circularity of Strauss's argument in section 6.2.2. Ferrari (1997) points to another much broader and less apparent circularity in Strauss' interpretation of the *Republic*, namely that Strauss presupposes that Plato writes politically in order to prove that he does. This point has also been objected to Strauss concerning his interpretation of Xenophon (see Dorion 2013). *Pace* Dorion, I agree with Ferrari that this is not so much a *petition principii* as a hermeneutic circularity in a Gadamerian sense: one cannot approach a text without any hermeneutic supposition concerning the meaning and intent of this text, and thinking that Plato cannot be ironic in the *Republic* is just as much an assumption as the opposite. See Ferrari (1997, 62): "But in any case, given the state of our sources, there is in fact no other way to establish that Plato is a politic writer than to produce a politic reading of him that convinces. If this procedure is circular, it is a hermeneutic rather than a vicious circle. And those who find Plato not to be a politic writer perform in the very same ring."

Cephalus' view: one is not just if one returns a weapon to a person who has become mad.⁴ Socrates adds that one should not be willing to "say nothing but the truth to a madman" (68). Strauss observes that when Polemarchus takes the place of his father, he "inherits only a half, perhaps even less than a half, of his father's intellectual property" because he "no longer maintains that saying the truth is unqualifiedly required by justice" (68).⁵ There, Strauss observes that Polemarchus unwittingly "lays down one the principles of the teaching of the *Republic*," namely that justice requires to tell some kinds of untruths "to children and even to the grown-up subjects." Socrates' partial refutation and Polemarchus' partial inheritance of Cephalus' definition point to the notion of the noble lie, which will only be developed at the end of Book II (382a ff.).

So far, Strauss' analysis points to the tension between justice and truth. It is worth reflecting on this tension in light of his broader argument concerning the antithesis between politics and philosophy. Strauss is subtle in his paraphrase of Cephalus' view. What Cephalus actually agrees with is that justice is "truth [τὴν ἀλήθειαν] and giving back what a man has taken from another (331c2-3)," and Socrates rephrases this as "*speaking* the truth [ἀληθῆ τε λέγειν] and giving back what one takes (331d2-3)". By rephrasing the first half of Cephalus' position as "truthfulness," Strauss keeps this ambiguity. What is refuted by Socrates is that justice is not *telling the truth*, but it may still have something to do with truth. This nuance is relevant because the notion of the noble lie discussed in Book II supposes a distinction between "true lies" – falsehood in one's soul about the most important things (τὰ κυριώτατα) – and lies in speech, which are only the imitations of an affection in the soul (382a-d). This distinction also explains how philosophers can tell lies in speech and still live and think in the light of the truth. In other words, the ambivalence of Strauss' notion

⁴ The restriction to the human realm and the exclusion of piety as a part of justice is quite important: gods do not change from saneness to madness, especially not the Gods of the later "theology" of Book II.

⁵ Allegedly, Strauss claims that Polemarchus inherits "perhaps even less than a half" of Cephalus' definition because the problem of piety has been dropped at the very outset.

of “truthfulness” captures the ambivalence of the philosopher’s relation to truth in the *Republic*. What appears in this ambivalent relation is that philosophy is attached to truth and justice requires falsehood. According to Strauss, then, the transition between Cephalus and Polemarchus already reveals the tension between philosophy and politics as a tension between truth and falsehood.

The question of whether the lies in speech in Kallipolis will produce “true lies” in the soul of the citizens who are lied to is not explicitly settled in the *Republic*. Yet one may oppose to Strauss’ argument that, according to the image of the city as a cave, even the unenlightened prisoners have opinion (δόξα), and since opinion is *in-between* ignorance and knowledge (478c10-11), the non-philosophers do not live in complete darkness and somehow have glimmers of truth. However, the image of the cave still conveys the idea that philosophy is closest to, and the world of politics is farthest to truth.

There is another clever feature of Strauss’ analysis of the transition between Cephalus and Polemarchus that is worth noting: he calls Cephalus’ argument his “intellectual property.” By doing so, he subtly refers to one of the very first things Socrates says to Cephalus about his wealth in the *Republic*. There, Socrates makes a distinction between what we own through inheritance and what we own through our own earning, and Cephalus agrees with him when he claims:

For the most part, those who do not make money themselves are that way [not overly fond of it]. Those who make it are twice as attached to it as the others. For just as poets are fond of their poems and fathers of their children, so money-makers too are serious about money – as their own product (330c; trans. Bloom)

In calling Cephalus’ argument an intellectual property, Strauss indicates that Polemarchus inherits it without being too fond of it – he is not as attached to it as if it was an argument of his own making. Indeed, he will soon abandon it by refining it radically. But more generally and perhaps more importantly, he directs our attention to the problem of human attachments to things,

opinions and people, and especially to the fact that humans tend to be especially attached to what is *their own*. In this passage, Socrates highlights two reasons for people to care about their possession: 1) because it is our “own product”; 2) for its use. While Polemarchus’ inheritance of his father’s argument corroborates the truth of the first reason, his own argument, according to Strauss, deals with the problem of the use of property.

Polemarchus heavily rephrases Cephalus’ argument and claims that justice is “to give to each what is owed” (331e3-4). For this definition to escape the madman objection, by “what is owed (τὸ ὀφειλόμενον),” Polemarchus must mean something else than mere property. And if we push further the idea in the madman objection and “judge very strictly, we might be driven to say that very few people make a wise use of their property” (CM, 69). “What is owed” to each must be interpreted as “what is fitting” for each. At this point, Strauss gives two textual references. The first reference is, precisely, Simonides’ interpretation of “what is owed” as “what is fitting” (τὸ προσήκον, 332c2-3). The second is a famous story of Cyrus’ childhood from Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* (I.3.17): “The case was like this: A big boy with a little tunic took off the big tunic of a little boy, and he dressed him in his own tunic, while he himself put on that of the other. Now I [Cyrus], in judging for them, recognized that it was better for both that each have the fitting (ἄρμόττοντα) tunic” (trans. W. Ambler). This example is relevant for it is one in which what is fitting is explicitly opposed to property. From this tension between the fitting use of possessions and property conventionally understood, Strauss draws two conclusions that also prefigure important institutions in Kallipolis. First, since possessions are usually only fitting for specific people for a certain time, they should not be considered as one’s rightful property: “we might be compelled to demand the abolition of private property” (69). Second, the determination of what is fitting for each individual can only be

the work of “men of exceptional wisdom”: “we shall then be compelled to demand that society be ruled by simply wise men, by philosophers in the strict sense” (69).

To be sure, Strauss does not claim that Polemarchus advocates for communism and philosopher-rulers. His contention is rather that his refinement of Cephalus’ definition of justice could easily lead to these measures. And, if we take a synoptic look at the *Republic*, that is where it is going to lead. What does the problem of property reveal about the relation between philosophy and politics? Private property is in tension with the fitting, and insofar as the fitting is determined by wisdom, private property and philosophy are in tension. What do philosophy and communism have in common? Strauss later claims that philosophy is “the most common”: “the common *par excellence* is the mind, the pure mind, rather than the soul in general, for only pure thoughts can be simply identical and known to be simply identical in different individuals” (CM, 115).⁶ To put this in terms of the problem of truth and falsehood, we may say that truth is never a private possession, and thus the philosopher’s attachment to truth is never an attachment to something which is one’s own property or one’s own production. But if philosophy is ultimately in harmony with the abolition of private property, it would *not* be in tension with politics as long as communism prevails in the city. This may be right, but the extension of communism from material possessions to women and children complicates the picture.

As Socrates’ remarks about peoples’ degrees of attachment to what is their own suggest, the scope of what is our “own” is certainly not limited to material possessions. It especially includes what is of our own *making*, and Socrates explicitly mentions fathers’ attachment for their children: “to the extent to which there is a connection between private property and the family, Strauss says, one would even be compelled to demand in addition the abolition of the family” (CM, 69). Because

⁶ Notions such as “the pure mind” and “pure thoughts” in Strauss’ interpretation of Plato are discussed in chapter 7.

of the various degrees of attachment to different people, because, for instance, we tend to cherish our own children more than other children, family is at least as much a threat to justice as material property is. Strauss thus claims that communism is just insofar as it “removes the opportunity for injustice” (CM, 103). But the communism of women and children is especially problematic. According to Strauss’ interpretation, this institution raises both structural and psychological issues.

The structural issue concerns the application of the community of women and children to all three classes of Kallipolis. As Strauss notes, Socrates seems to wish to limit communism to the upper class.⁷ But if this is the case, there would be families in the lower class, which would prevent philosophers to select the best of them and move them to the upper classes and thereby impede social mobility. This is no small issue: a hereditary reproduction of social status is against the foundational principle of justice upon which the ideal city is built, namely that each person performs their *natural* function (CM, 114). To avoid this injustice, Socrates would have to concede something he seems unwilling to concede.⁸

The psychological problem, more fundamental for Strauss, is that the communism of children and women amounts to an abstraction of the body, which is, in turn, a misunderstanding of *eros*. “That which is by nature private [...] is the body and only the body” (CM, 114-15). Communism therefore tries to control and regulate the needs and desires of the body. Yet given the strength of these desires, even the warriors “will not accept absolute communism if they are not subject to philosophers” (115). Now, it seems that the *Republic* resolves this psychological problem in the following way: only bodily *eros* or *eros* of the appetitive part of the soul is controlled, and it is done

⁷ Strauss provides 3 textual references (398b2-4, 415e ff., 431b4-d3), which all support the view that the musical education and abolition of private material property are restricted to the higher class. Since these are allegedly preconditions of the community of women and children, Strauss may be right.

⁸ Speaking of Aristotle’s complaint about this imprecision in the *Republic*, Strauss comments: “To leave this question undecided would be in agreement with Socrates’ professed low opinion of the importance of the lower class (421a, 434a).”

so despotically by a higher *eros*, the philosophical *eros* of the rulers. Thus communism is not a misunderstanding of *eros*; it is a subsumption of bodily *eros* under the higher *eros* of the mind. In other words, psychologically, communism is not a problem if philosophical rulership follows from, or is at least compatible with philosophical *eros*. But this is precisely the claim that Strauss will attempt to refute.

6.1.2 *Eros, Persuasion, and Compulsion*

Strauss notes that the parallel between the city and the individual by which Kallipolis stands or falls also abstracts from the body: the city is not compared to a full human being, but to the human *soul* (CM, 109). Yet following the parallelism between city and soul, a just person is one in which the rational part (τὸ λογιστικόν) is ruling the appetitive part (τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν) with the help of its spirited part (τὸ θυμοειδές). In the strict sense, this implies that only the wise “can be truly just,” and, as Strauss notes, it is “no wonder” that the “just man eventually proves to be identical with the philosopher (580d-583b).” This raises several issues. First, the parallel between city and soul only obtains for one type of human being. Second, since philosophers grow naturally in both good and bad regimes (cf. 520b), the very type of human being for which the parallel obtains “can be just without being a member of the just city.” If the city was supposed to reveal justice in the soul by showing justice writ large, it seems that it has instead revealed the identity of philosophy and justice and the irrelevance of the just city for the possibility of this just soul. In the title *The City and Man*, the “and” has a disjunctive meaning.

Now Strauss admits that citizens with non-philosophical natures “would act much more justly” in Kallipolis “than they do as members of the actual cities” (CM, 109). In other words, while their own souls cannot be just in the strict sense, they can, in a looser sense, follow the rule of reason –

not of their *own* λογιστικόν, but, indirectly, follow the λογιστικόν of the wise rulers through obedience. Because they are obeying another person's rational part and not their own, the relative or derivative justice of the non-philosophers does not save or restore the parallel between city and soul. However, it ties back the philosophical souls to the just city, for the relative justice of non-philosophical souls depends on philosophical rulership. In other words, while the correspondence between the city and philosophical souls is *not necessary*, the derivative justice of the two lower classes wholly depends on the *possibility* of this correspondence.

Strauss agrees with the superiority of the auxiliaries over the money-makers in the ideal city, but is skeptical of the implication of this hierarchy inside the soul: "it is much less plausible that spiritedness as such should be higher in rank than desire as such" (CM, 110). The reason for his skepticism is that he interprets *eros* as a type of desire (ἐπιθυμία) and recalls the hierarchy of forms of erotic longing in the *Symposium*: "one kind of desire is *eros*, which ranges in its healthy forms from the longing for immortality through offspring via the longing for immortality through fame to the longing for immortality through participation by knowledge in the things which are unchangeable in every respect." Strauss concludes: "while there is a philosophic *eros*, there is no philosophic indignation, desire for victory or anger," in other words, there is no philosophic θύμος (110-11). This is an important interpretive step in his argument: because philosophic *eros* is understood here as a sub-kind of ἐπιθυμία and flowing from the ἐπιθυμητικόν, the "abstraction from the body" and the "blow struck at *eros*" in Kallipolis must *also* be understood as an abstraction from or attack against philosophical *eros* (111-12).

One may object that Strauss' summary of Diotima's speech in the *Symposium* indicates a different relation between *eros* and ἐπιθυμία than what Strauss himself claims. It rather seems that the three steps on the ladder of love map unto the three parts of the soul according to the *Republic*:

reproduction is *eros* at the level of the ἐπιθυμητικόν, honor-loving (φιλοτιμία) is the *eros* of the θυμοειδές, and philosophy *eros* of the λογιστικόν.⁹ If this is right, ἐπιθυμία is a type or mode of *eros* and not the other way around, and thus the attack against the ἐπιθυμητικόν is *not* an attack against philosophical *eros*. Rather, it simply points to the moderation of the appetitive desires to the advantage of the higher, rational desires.

Be that as it may, Strauss has another argument concerning Kallipolis' abstraction from philosophical *eros*. The chief characteristic of *eros*, it seems, is that it naturally "obeys its *own* laws," while in the just city, it is "simply subjected to the requirements of the city" (CM, 111). While the example he states to support this point is the regulation of sexual desire toward the production of the kind of offspring suited to the ideal city, Strauss claims that there is an analogous regulation of the philosophical desire. A crucial passage in this respect is Glaucon's indignation when Socrates says that philosophers will not be allowed "what is now permitted" and instead be compelled (ἀναγκάσαι) to go back to the cave and rule (519c-d). Socrates' response is twofold: 1) the care for the whole must prevail over one particular class; 2) each citizen must be brought to contribute to the whole through persuasion and compulsion (πειθοῖ τε καὶ ἀνάγκη, 519e). Strauss argues, however, that because they are "dominated" by their *eros* for knowledge, philosophers are completely unwilling to rule, and "only compulsion could induce them to take part in public life in the just city" (124-25).

Persuasion and compulsion are different. Strauss thinks that the non-philosophers will have to be persuaded to be ruled by philosophers (CM, 123). This persuasion will be achieved if someone with the rhetorical art of a Thrasymachus is "directed by the philosopher and in the service of

⁹ In his lectures on the "Problem of Socrates," Strauss explicitly opposes *eros* and θύμος as opposite forces, one ultimately directed toward life, the other toward death (RCPR, 166). But this characterization of θύμος runs directly against what we find in both Plato and Xenophon about θύμος as a longing for immortality and as deriving from or being itself a form of *eros* (Plato's *Symp.* 208c-e; Xenophon's *Symp.* VIII.10-11).

philosophy.” Thus, Strauss’ emphasis on the otherwise slightly enigmatic “friendship” between Socrates and Thrasymachus at 498c9-d1: “without ‘Thrasymachus’ there will never be a just city” (note Strauss’ quotation marks here: what is needed is someone with Thrasymachus’ art, what Thrasymachus represents).¹⁰ By contrast, Strauss claims, “philosophers cannot be persuaded, they can only be compelled to rule” (124). Why is persuasion ineffective?¹¹ Strauss does not explain this explicitly and instead provides five references (499b-c; 500d4-5, 520a-d, 521b7, 539e2-3). These passages highlight the role of force or compulsion (ἀνάγκη) and oppose the compulsion of philosophers to their own willingness: in fact, Socrates explicitly asserts that the philosophers’ unwillingness to rule is a good safeguard against political corruption (520d). Philosophers are precisely *not lovers of ruling* (μη ἐραστὰς τοῦ ἄρχειν, 521b4). What these passages intimate is that persuasion is ineffective because persuasion goes hand in hand with *eros*: the philosophers’ *eros* is inextricably tied to their being persuaded that philosophy is the highest way of life; they could not have such a longing for wisdom if they were persuaded that wisdom is not the best. Conversely, to persuade them that political rule is better than philosophical contemplation would amount to changing the object of their desire. *Eros* resists persuasion; it must be crushed by compulsion.

But who will crush philosophical *eros* and force philosophers to rule? Non-philosophers will only compel philosophers if they are persuaded that they should be ruled by them, but such persuasion will not occur without the work of philosophers.¹² In order to solve this circularity problem, there must be a first mover which moves without being moved by something else. Thus Strauss writes: “it should not be necessary but it is necessary to add that compulsion does not cease to be

¹⁰ The role of the friendship between Socrates and Thrasymachus has now become a *locus classicus* of Strauss’ Plato. For good discussions, see Zuckert (1996, 115 and 152-53), Tanguay (2003, 175-182), and, especially, Rabieh (2015).

¹¹ For a good account of Strauss *contra* Burnyeat (1985) on this point, see Ferrari (1997, 39 ff.).

¹² If it occurs at all. In light of the full image of the cave, Strauss writes: “the multitude is not as persuadable by the philosophers as we sanguinely assumed in an earlier part of the argument” (CM, 125).

compulsion if it is self-compulsion” (CM, 128). At this point in his commentary, Strauss refers in a footnote to Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals* and uses the words “compulsion” and “duty” interchangeably.¹³ Of course, according to Kant, we do not obey the moral law by following our own inclinations, but the moral law is nonetheless one which *we give to ourselves*. The autonomous character of obedience to the law is entirely compatible with its compulsory character. Likewise, the Platonic philosopher can compel herself to rule against her own desire without obeying a law coming from another authority. However, one must add the important caveat that the Platonic philosopher gives more credit to *eros* than Kant does.¹⁴

In short, the establishment of philosophical kingship ultimately relies on compulsion as opposed to persuasion and desire. The inner tendency of philosophy is to avoid politics and the philosopher will only rule if she forces herself to. In light of the problem of *eros*, philosophy and politics are at odds, and the ideal city that requires their harmony will not come into being.¹⁵

6.1.3 Kallipolis, Democracy, and Athens

Examining the downfall of Kallipolis and the decline of the regimes in Book VIII, Strauss pays special attention to democracy. He claims that “the descending order of the regimes is modeled on Hesiod’s descending order of the five races of men” – gold, silver, bronze, heroes, iron (CM, 130). If this is right, we ought to ask why “the Platonic equivalent of Hesiod’s divine race of heroes is

¹³ Specifically, he refers to *Metaphysik der Sitten*, Einleitung zur Tugendlehre I and II. As far as I know, the role of Kant’s reference in Strauss’ argument has only been discussed by Ferrari (1997, 48-51). In this text, Kant argues that the doctrine of duty, in contrast to the doctrine of right, is not submitted to external laws (VI, 379), and that since human beings are free beings, the notion of duty cannot include any other compulsion than self-compulsion (VI, 380, 383).

¹⁴ Ferrari (1997, 51) is right to note this other important difference: while Kantian self-compulsion is relation “strictly between oneself and oneself,” in the Platonic picture, there is the mediation of the multitude.

¹⁵ In fact, Strauss concludes from his *eros* argument that Kallipolis is “extremely improbable” (CM, 125). Examining the conditions for its *practical* establishment (expelling everyone older than ten) leads him to conclude that it is impossible (127).

democracy.”¹⁶ The first answer to this question is that the principle of democracy in Book VIII is freedom, and with freedom comes an accepted variety of ways of life: as Socrates says, it is the regime that comprises all the regimes (557d). However, in democracy, no way of life or no regime prevails or has authority over the others; democracy’s diversity comes without hierarchy. While in each of the first three regimes – aristocracy, timocracy, and oligarchy – a certain type of psychic constitution is authoritative, in democracy, philosophers, honor-loving souls, and greedy people can live their lives as they wish provided that they do not pretend to represent the authoritative way of life. This means that philosophy, which is possible in every regime (cf. cf. 520b), enjoys more freedom in democracy than it does in timocracy or oligarchy. Strictly speaking, philosophers in democratic regimes are even freer than in Kallipolis: “in a democracy the citizen who is a philosopher is *under no compulsion* to participate in political life or to hold office” (131). Not only is philosophy freer in democracy, but democracy is also more likely to provoke philosophical inquiry: since it is “both bad and permissive, it is that regime in which the frank quest for the best regime is at home.” Strauss adds: “the action of the *Republic* takes place under a democracy.”

From the standpoint of philosophy, democracy is better than timocracy and oligarchy; yet, it is ranked as worse than these regimes, and, overall, as the second-worst regime, leading eventually to tyranny. Strauss notes that the treatment of democracy in the *Republic* is ambivalent in two different ways. On the one hand, Socrates presents democracy as favorable to philosophy as though the Athenian democracy had not sentenced him to death (CM, 132). On the other hand, Socrates presents the democratic person as immoderation and business incarnate, as one who has no ordering principle guiding one’s life – in short, as the antithesis of the just individual according to the definition of the *Republic*. The ambivalence resides in that both the praise and blame of

¹⁶ Referring to the *Seventh Letter* (324d7-8), Strauss adds: “Plato himself called the Athenian democracy, looking back on it from the rule of the thirty Tyrants, ‘golden’.”

democracy are exaggerations. According to Strauss, the exaggerated praise of the democratic regime echoes Socrates' relative satisfaction with Athens as displayed through his *deeds* (131-32), while the exaggerated blame of democracy has two purposes: 1) "lend words to Adeimantus' 'dream' of democracy," that is, his austere resistance to its licentious spirit; 2) recall the opposition between the *demos* and philosophy (133).

What the analysis of the regime reveals, according to Strauss, is once more an antinomy between philosophy and politics. While in the best regime in speech, philosophy and politics are at odds because their unity supposes a violence against philosophy's vital principle, its *erotic* longing for knowledge – the best regime in deed (democracy) is the regime that both allows *and condemns* the freedom to philosophize. Where philosophy is authoritative, its *eros* is crushed; where philosophy is free, it is persecuted by the many. By showing the impossibility of the city to accommodate the "highest need of man," that is, philosophy, the *Republic*, Strauss contends, shows the "essential limits" of the city (CM, 138). In the same vein, the *Republic* is not a project of political reform, but rather "supplies the most magnificent cure ever devised for every form of political ambition" (65). Strauss claims that, according to Xenophon (*Mem.* III.6), this cure was effective in the case of Glaucon. Allegedly, it should also cure the political hopes of its careful readers. But to be a careful reader in Strauss' sense means to read the *Republic* as the most extreme irony. It means to turn its apparent meaning upside down.

6.2 Interlude: Gerhard Krüger on the Irony and Seriousness of Kallipolis

Gerhard Krüger's thoughts on Plato's *political* philosophy are not as developed as his interpretations of Platonic poetics and metaphysics, and certainly not as elaborated as Strauss' work on the topic. Yet, his reflections provide a good transition between Strauss and Gadamer for several reasons.

Like Strauss and Gadamer, Krüger thinks that the *Republic* – or at least its “political propositions” – is ironic in the sense that it cannot be understood literally. This should not be surprising as we have seen in chapter 4 that irony is an essential component of Plato’s dialogical writing for all three philosophers, and the *Republic* is a Platonic dialogue. Like Strauss, Krüger thinks that there is a phenomenological character to the political inquiry of Plato. Political philosophy is necessary for the philosopher’s facticity is always already political: the philosophical existence is thrown not just in a world but in the social-political world of the πόλις. While this phenomenological approach leads Strauss to articulate the superiority of philosophy over the political life and an antagonism between philosophy and politics, Krüger acknowledges the superiority of philosophy without accepting Strauss’ antithesis as a conclusion. For Krüger thinks that the irony at play in Plato’s political philosophy is the irony of provocation. While political life is unfortunate and even “tragic,” there are still potential contributions of philosophy to politics through provocative critiques: the politics of the *Republic* are at once ironic and serious. In this respect, Krüger is closer to Gadamer’s position, which further develops this possibility of a critical standpoint between literal readings and hyper-ironic readings of the *Republic*.

6.2.1 *Philosophy and Politics Phenomenologically Understood*

Already in *Einsicht und Leidenschaft*, Krüger has acknowledged that the human being is an “embodied-social being [leibhaft-geselliges Wesen]” (EL, 77). In his introduction to Plato’s early works, he makes two claims that follow from this recognition. In light of this political situatedness (and especially of Plato’s own *Befindlichkeit*), “to think philosophically always also means to think politically” (EPWA, xv). This concurrence of philosophical and political thought is clarified when Krüger comments on the methodological orientation of Plato’s Socratic philosophy: “The Platonic

Socrates does not orient himself primarily according to the non-human living beings, but according to the human and the State” (xxxv). Because we are political beings, to think about philosophical human beings is to think politically, to *orient ourselves* according to the political phenomena. But is this orientation not significantly limited? Are not human beings more than just political beings? For Krüger, the Platonic orientation is a methodological point of departure for an adequate inquiry, not a restriction of its scope:

According to Plato, the human being is not merely there for the State. – But Plato would certainly not have been a Greek if, to the contrary, he had, to the profit of the inner life [dem Inneren] of the individual human being, forgotten the community that makes the individual human being a citizen. The hidden and perceptually inaccessible inner life [Das sinnlich nicht anschauliche, verborgene Innere] of the human being is in Greek philosophy and especially since Socrates a guiding concern of the research, but something that first needs to be discovered [eine Hauptaufgabe des Forschens: etwas erst zu Entdeckendes]. The public, embodied belonging [leibhaftige Zugehörigkeit] of the human being to the political community is what is known [das Bekannte] and self-evident. (EPS, 12)

Krüger then claims that this is the genuine reason for the whole “methodology” of the philosophical inquiry in the *Republic*, that is, to investigate justice in the city in order to find justice in the soul. Socrates claims that the reason for this is that justice in the city is “writ large” and thus easier to see. But in what sense is it writ larger? Just because the city is in fact “bigger” than the soul? Krüger originally interprets the way from πόλις to ψύχη in light of the phenomenological method, or, more accurately, *as* a phenomenological methodology. The guiding principle of such methodology is that the research must begin with what is accessible in the first place, what is first for us and is given through its appearance – as Heidegger puts it in *Sein und Zeit*, the phenomenon as “that which shows itself, the self-showing, the manifest [das, was sich zeigt, das Sichzeigende, das Offenbare]” (*SZ* §7, 28). In Heidegger’s fundamental ontology, the question of Being requires a phenomenological detour through an analysis of the being for which Being is a question, namely

human *Dasein*. Likewise, in Plato's *Republic*, the city is a detour, "albeit a very natural detour [Umweg] prompted by the thing itself [durch die Sache selbst nahegelegt]" (EPS, 12).

An obvious difficulty with such an interpretation of the parallelism between city and soul is that Socrates and his interlocutors do not simply start with the political phenomenon as it manifests itself in daily existence. On the opposite, they take upon themselves the task to construct a city in speech, a city which, in fact, has never appeared before human eyes and in all likelihood never will. Nor is the city in speech the product of an eidetic variation in the Husserlian sense, for it is not the sum of all the features common to each and every possible city brought to one single form.¹⁷ The Platonic methodology is only phenomenological insofar as it proceeds from the known to the unknown, and, for a Greek, this means to proceed from politics to psychology. But in the case of Plato, the inquiry about the political community must break free from the Greek political experience because this experience is too obviously disappointing: "After he has lost the absolute respect for the city of Athens, he [Socrates] (and with him Plato) looks for the true State in the whole world, wherever it is" (EPWA, xxvii).

It is precisely by freeing itself from the political "given" that Plato's method escapes another potential problem, namely the problem of seeing philosophy determined through and through by its political context. This is Krüger's oblique response to Kurt Hildebrandt, whose name he silences but whose National-Socialist *Platonbuch* he mentions: "But certainly this 'Kampf des Geistes um die Macht' should not be understood as if all philosophical thoughts were publicly or secretly controlled by a political agenda" (EPWA, xv-xvi). Politics is the phenomenological starting point, but philosophy, and not politics, "determines the law of the relation between these two magnitudes

¹⁷ See e.g. Husserl, *Phänomenologische Psychologie: Vorlesungen Sommersemester 1925*, Hua IX, I, §4.

[philosophical truth and political power]” (xvi). It is precisely because philosophy is the standard that Kallipolis is not a real but an ideal city.

6.2.2 *Kallipolis as Idea(l) and Philosophy as Political Critique*

The meaning of this ideal status of the city of the *Republic* is not self-evident. Krüger poses this question as an alternative: is Kallipolis “a seriously intended political program” or “merely a ‘utopia,’ and therefore a ‘sheer’ [‘bloßes’] ideal”? (EPS, 9) In framing the alternative thusly, he gives a strictly “negative” – to anticipate Gadamer’s terms – meaning to the notion of utopia, that is, he understands utopia as a *no-place* (οὐ-τόπος) rather than as a *good place* (εὖ-τόπος). Krüger then immediately asks what is “ideal” about a city with a strict social hierarchy, dominated by a military class educated in mathematics and philosophy, where the family is destroyed and private property is abolished. This could hardly be described as ideal if this State were to be realized or actualized (*zu verwirklichen*).

In the same spirit as Strauss and Gadamer, Krüger recalls that the λόγοι of the *Republic* are only meaningful in the situation of their dialogue, which is, as a whole, playful and ironic and therefore non-dogmatic:

Given how they come up in speech, in an entirely unsystematic and situated way, in the ironic-provocative play of the discussions [im provokatorisch-ironischen Spiel der Diskussionen, in einer durchaus unsystematischen, situationsbedingten] – sometimes like this and sometimes like that, the concrete institutions can impossibly be registered as characteristic traits of the true State and inscribed in a textbook of Platonic political philosophy. They mean something for [Sie haben ihren Sinn für] the discovery of the truth – to be sure, but only as starting points of a dialogical and progressing questioning, as presuppositions to be superseded over and over again [aber nur als Ansatzpunkte eines dialogischen, weilerschreitenden Fragens, als wiederaufzuhebende Voraussetzungen] or “hypotheses” in the sense of the scientific method developed later (cf. 511b). One who, on the contrary, understands them politically-dogmatically takes them with a lack of irony and therefore misunderstands the thoroughly critical spirit of

the Platonic research community [den durchaus kritischen Geist platonischer Forschungsgemeinschaft] (EPS, 29).

In light of the anti-dogmatic character of the dialogue, Krüger dismisses the first horn of the alternative: one should not see a political program in the outline of the State (EPS, 25). The institutions of this outline do not constitute a blueprint, but they are nonetheless essential for the pursuit of the truth, for they are “concrete critical provocations for reflection [Nachdenken]” (27). The radical character of the political propositions of the *Republic* are targeted at specific structural problems in the political life in Athens and beyond. Specifically, the “complete equality” of men and women is a provocative critique of the complete exclusion of women in Greek political life, the abolition of private property is an objection to the avarice of the ruling class, and the destruction of the family is meant to criticize nepotism. In each case, the measure is excessive – it is the strict opposite to the problematic situation – but does address the problem. Krüger’s point is that while these are not practical solutions, their provocative character has the merit of highlighting important issues and provoking serious reflection. The *Republic* is not a political program but it gives philosophy the role of critique. In this sense, while Krüger is highly skeptical that philosophical kingship is desirable, philosophers as social critics can still play an active role in the improvement of actual political life.

The passage cited above raises another question. Krüger speaks of the institutions of the outline of the State (*Staatsentwurf*) in terms of the “hypotheses” described in the discussion of the Divided Line. As our discussion of Neo-Kantian Platonism in chapter 1 has shown, the notion of hypothesis in Plato is ambiguous. On the one hand, Cohen and Natorp had argued that the Platonic Forms or Ideas (*ἰδέαι*, *Ideen*) are, precisely, hypotheses. As I indicated, these interpretations tend to conflate the hypothetical character of the Ideas with the *nature* of these hypothesized Ideas. At any rate, we must concede that, insofar as, in the *Republic*, only the Idea of the Good is unhypothetical, Ideas

are, at least in a sense, “hypotheses.” On the other hand, the Divided Line states that discursive thought (διάνοια) deals with hypotheses as principles (ἀρχαί), whereas intellect (νόησις) deals with the hypotheses as what they really are, namely “stepping stones and springboard” (ἐπιβάσεις τε καὶ ὀρμάς) (511b, cf. 511d). *Pace* the Neo-Kantian interpretation, it seems that the hypotheses in the sphere of νόησις are the same as those belonging to διάνοια, but treated differently. This would mean that the hypotheses are not Forms or Ideas (which are only accessible to the intellect), but rather numbers, the concepts of mathematics, and the like. Krüger interprets the political institutions of Kallipolis as such concepts. They are hypothetical notions that prompt reflection, and because the reflection will go beyond these notions, they are *wiederaufzuhebende Voraussetzungen*.

This is important in order to grasp the sense in which Kallipolis is an “ideal”. In 1948, Krüger speaks of the ideal in terms which seem characteristic of the Ideas: “The ‘real’ State is the lesser being [das minder Seiende] which only subsists through the ‘presence’ of the ideal, ‘real’ State in it. [...] The real State of the embodied experience exists *qua* State only insofar as it ‘participates’ in the ideal State, for which the philosophical Eros strives.” (EPWA, 1948) While Krüger explicitly connects this participatory relation to the existence of the *Ideen*, it is not clear that he treats the ideal city as an Idea in the strict sense. In his 1950 introduction to the *Republic*, he rather says that the political provocation that Kallipolis represents prompts the reflection (*Nachdenken*) “which first allows the education to the philosophical insight of the Ideas” (EPS, 27). The ironic propositions of Kallipolis are notions that are meant to lead the soul toward, for instance, the Idea of Justice and the Idea of the Good. They are ideal in this sense: like mathematical objects, they are in-between the empirical world of bodily experience and the Ideas.¹⁸

¹⁸ As Aristotle asserts in his *Metaphysics* (987b14-16). Recall that Hermann Cohen celebrates this as Aristotle’s one and only good insight on Plato in his “Platos Ideenlehre und die Mathematik” (PIM, 7).

For Krüger, it is precisely because of this gap between the real and the ideal, and eventually, the Ideas, that Plato's own political experience was unfortunate: "Plato's love for the State was an unhappy love because it was an outflow [Ausfluß] of his love of truth and justice" (EPWA, xvi). Most likely with Socrates' political fate in mind, Krüger even calls this "unfortunate" experience "tragic": "the political life is in fact a tragedy" (EPS, 24).¹⁹ But this tragedy "of the human being and the state", unlike and against the tragedies of the tragic poets, is not the workings of fate but of the human being's "own fault" (63). In other words, it is because the human soul aspires to the ideal that our political situatedness is tragic. In her longing for truth, the philosopher can put forward a critique of politics, but only to her own risk. As we shall now see, Gadamer's position is slightly different yet somewhat less pessimistic than Krüger's.

6.3 Gadamer on Utopia and the Educational State of the *Republic*

For Gadamer as much as for Strauss and Krüger, the *Republic* is a dialogue like all of Plato's dialogues. To treat it as such demands that we avoid any literal reading of its apparent political propositions. Already in his 1942 "Platos Staat der Erziehung," Gadamer argued that the dialogue was a "utopia which lies far removed from any reality" and that "doctrines regarding an actual structure of the state or its institutions" are not Plato's concern in this text (DD, 73). But what, then does, "utopia" mean?

¹⁹ Krüger must mean this in the "external" sense. As we have seen in chapter 5, social-political situatedness is rather the source of the comedy in the internal tragicomedy of philosophy.

6.3.1 Utopia, Allusiveness, and Dialectic²⁰

In 1983, in a lecture entitled “Platos Denken in Utopien” and delivered for an audience of philologists, Gadamer fiercely opposed Karl Popper’s reading of Plato’s political philosophy as totalitarianism (GW 7, 270-71). Gadamer does not intend to criticize or refute the details of Popper’s “errors,” but rather to put in question the presupposition or pre-understanding (*Vorverständnis*) on which they are based. Broadly speaking, the philological mistake of the Popperian reading is to take the *Republic* as a political proposal, or, to use Krüger’s words, a textbook collecting the Platonic political doctrines. Gadamer proposes to correct this mistake philologically, namely by understanding the work in light of its literary genre.²¹ Gadamer claims that the *Republic* belongs to the “utopian genre” (*Gattung der Utopie*).

Gadamer draws on Ferdinand Dümmler’s *Prolegomena zu Platos Staat* in order to establish a filiation between Plato’s *Republic* and a history and prehistory of utopian thinking represented by Aristophanes’ comedies, Euripides’ tragedies, and the “novel of Anacharsis” in Herodotus. To this utopian genre, Gadamer adds Zeno’s *Περὶ πολιτείας* and Aristotle’s treatment of legislation as literature and vice versa (*literarische Gesetzgebungen*) (GW 7, 276-77). While we would search in vain for any explicit mention of literary genre or of utopia in Plato’s time, as Goldhill puts it, we should avoid being “excessively nominalistic”: despite the non-existence of the name, there may still be utopian texts that display “all the marks of generic organization.”²² The question, then, is: what is characteristic of this utopian genre? Speaking of the *Anacharsisroman*, Gadamer calls it utopian

²⁰ Parts of this section have been published in a different form in my Pageau-St-Hilaire (2022a).

²¹ *Contra* Orozco (2004, 226n20), I do not think that Gadamer opposes Popper with a reading of Plato from an “atemporal standpoint.” A literary context is just as temporal and historical as a political context, and Gadamer’s hermeneutic notion of a fusion of horizons precludes explicitly the possibility of atemporal standpoints (see GW 1, 381 on the impossible “überstandpunktliche Standpunkt”).

²² Goldhill 2008, 191. Goldhill argues about the genre of the novel in Antiquity. Recent classicists have argued that Aristophanes, Euripides and Herodotus participate in a utopian genre. See e.g. Bertelli (2012), Sissa (2021) and Kidd (2021, 47-49) and Lockwood (2021, esp. 71-73).

insofar as it bears the “the form of the allusion from afar [die Form der Anzüglichkeit aus der Ferne]” (277). This allusive mode opens up a playful distance between what is said explicitly and what is really meant. Being allusive, utopias thus call for non-literal interpretations. Gadamer adds that “it is in the style of this literary genre” to prompt objections, for there is something essentially *provocative* in the Platonic utopia (281). Like Krüger, Gadamer does not think that Plato intends to provoke for the sake of provocation itself. Utopian thinking is decisively oriented toward the truth:

There too a claim to truth [Wahrheitsanspruch] is certainly raised, but not in the sense that what is thus told must be held for true, but in the sense that the seeking [das Suchen] which is underway to the true [unterwegs nach dem Wahren] in its thoughtful accountability [in denkender Rechenschaftsgabe], is attested through this as through a superior and transcendent reality. Thinking in utopias, which the Socratic-Platonic dialogue has the pretention to do, does not want to present what is utopian as what is real or to be realized, but to set out the never completable dialogue of the soul with itself into the unconditioned [sondern das nie vollendbare Gespräch der denkenden Seele mit sich ins Unbedingte hinein ausziehen]. (GW 7, 283)

The Platonic allusion here is an allusion to the unconditioned (*das Unbedingte*) – it is difficult here not to think of the Idea of the Good as ἀνυπόθετον. Yet it does not allude to the unconditioned as something to actualize but rather as something one ought to *think* about. The truth of utopia is not to be found in the institutional proposals themselves but in the thinking that they provoke. Gadamer emphasizes this toward the end of his lecture:

Thinking in utopias, this is the perspective according to which I see the Platonic political writings [Staatschriften] and according to which one must read them. [...] the reader may not simply register and develop an agreement or resistance vis-à-vis the utopian contents of these writings, like in a naïve approach. One must rather learn to think through these forms of rational play [Vernunftspielen]. (GW 7,288)

The problem with this account of utopia is that it does not seem to differ from dialogue or dialectic. In fact, Gadamer characterizes utopia as a way of thinking (*Denkweise*), which is, in turn, the infinite dialogue of the soul with itself. This seems to be a reference to the account of thought as the dialogue of the soul with itself in the *Theatetus* (189e4-190a1). It also reminds one of the typically

Gadamerian way of interpreting dialectic as an unending task (e.g. DD, 152; PTI, 10). Finally, that with which thought is in tension in the dialogue is *das Unbedingte*, which is a literal translation of the word used by Plato to describe the Idea of the Good. We must then ask: is there any difference between the utopian genre and the dialogical genre in Plato? While one may say that utopias must be intimately related to politics – and perhaps to the *whole* political regime and not just with specific political issues – whereas dialogues need not, Gadamer does not indicate how a utopian *reading* differs from a dialogical reading.²³ In fact, he even suggests in passing that it does not: “This [to grasp its own real thinking motive] is what each Platonic dialogue demands, and likewise, I think, with the political utopias like the *Republic*” (GW 7, 288).

The great proximity between dialogue and utopia in this essay suggests that there is a close relation between politics and dialectic for Gadamer. At the very end of the 1983 piece, Plato’s *Laws* are called both a “utopia” and an “educational state” (*Staat der Erziehung*). This is an implicit reference to Gadamer’s 1942 essay entitled “Platos Staat der Erziehung.” In this text, it is education that mediates between politics and dialectic.

6.3.2 *Kallipolis as Educational State*

As mentioned above, the 1942 essay asserts from the outset that the rules and laws of Kallipolis are not what matters in the *Republic*: the crux, Gadamer says, is education. While the institutions of the ideal city are not to be understood literally, that is, as a serious political program, the theme of

²³ Gonzalez (2021, 203) has recently drawn attention to this issue. I have elsewhere (Pageau-St-Hilaire, 2022a) developed an interpretation of Gadamer’s text and, in particular, of his motivation to articulate his understanding of dialogue in terms of utopia in 1983. I propose two main reasons: 1) rhetorically, the idea of a utopian genre was more likely to convince a philological audience than Gadamer’s unorthodox understanding of Platonic dialectic; 2) the linkage of Plato’s political philosophy to the notion of utopia suggests affinities between Plato’s utopias and Aristotle’s *Politics* (the harmonization of Plato and Aristotle is a *leitmotiv* of Gadamer’s late writings on Greek philosophy). On the similarities between Gadamer’s Kallipolis and Aristotle’s *πολιτεία*, see my Pageau-St-Hilaire (2019, 182-184).

education is not supposed to take the place of politics. Rather, education is here the bridge in the “essential correlation” between philosophy and politics (DD, 76). But here, what we are facing is nothing less than a shift in the interpretive paradigm. For while education in the *Republic* is first and foremost the education of the ruling class, and in this sense, education bridges between philosophy and politics *insofar as it produces apt philosopher-rulers*, Gadamer has something different in view. It is not education that bridges between philosophy and political power through the institution of philosophical rulership; rather, philosophy exercises power *through* education: “Plato tries *no other way to power (keinen anderen Weg zur Macht)* than that of philosophical education” (DD, 75).

Gadamer here interprets the rule of philosophers as indirect rulership. By educating rulers to philosophy, philosophy will rule. Plato himself attempts this “through his writings” instead of taking up a political career (75). Likewise, the “failure of the Sicilian project is the failure of the *education* of the young tyrant.” The attempt in Sicily was not to turn the tyrant into a philosopher in the restrictive sense of the *Republic* literally interpreted, but rather to improve the ruler’s soul through philosophical education. Following the *Seventh Letter*, Gadamer claims that the two principles of this education – and in fact of “the *whole* of Plato’s political philosophy” – are that “only justice can bring about a solid and enduring state and only he who is a friend to himself is able to win the solid friendship of others” (my emphasis). I contend that along with this very broad sense of philosophical education comes a wider range of its addressees. This is implicitly confirmed at the very end of the essay, where Gadamer’s boldly asserts that there is only *one* possible meaning²⁴ to the requirement that the state is only possible if its leadership (*Führertum*) is “educated by philosophy,” namely, that

²⁴ DD, 92; GW 5, 262: “This can mean only one thing, however [das aber heißt: es gibt hier überhaupt nur eines].”

this philosophical education in any given city is the “education which cultivates [...] the just political attitude of its citizens [der rechte Staatsgesinnung seiner Bürger]” (92).²⁵

Now, of course, this is certainly *not* the only possible meaning. Or, to put it in another way, the fact that Gadamer asserts that it is the only possible meaning reveals that he thinks there is an identity between leaders or rulers and citizens. As I have already argued elsewhere, the extension of philosophical education to all citizens radically transforms Kallipolis.²⁶ The identification of leadership with citizenship recalls Aristotle’s definition of citizenship (esp. *Pol.* 1275a22-23), and this may be why Sullivan has claimed that Gadamer’s reading conveys an “Aristotelian image” of the πόλις.²⁷ At any rate, what is decisive is the inclusive character of Gadamer’s understanding of Plato’s ideal city.²⁸ In short, the 1942 essay interprets the institution of philosophical kingship as an irony pointing at the necessity of a philosophical education of all citizens. This is how the gulf between philosophy and politics can be bridged.

Naturally, this raises the question: what has philosophy become through this interpretation? Is philosophy accessible to every citizen of a given society? Is philosophical education merely a shaping of the citizens’ *Staatsgesinnung*? That would imply, it seems, that Gadamer excises the properly philosophical elements of the guardians’ curriculum in the *Republic*: in the philosophers’ education of the citizens, it looks like dialectic is pointless. Gadamer is aware that this question will be on the reader’s mind upon examining his interpretation, for he concludes the essay by

²⁵ Orozco (2004) argues that “Platos Staat der Erziehung” is a Gadamerian compromise with National-Socialism. Against this position and rather supporting the idea of an oblique *critique* of the Nazi regime in Gadamer’s early, see e.g. Sullivan (1989), Zuckert (1996, 83-84 and 2004), Grondin (2011, 209-10). This is also fairly obvious from his 1935 review of Kurt Hildebrandt’s *Platon. Der Kampf des Geistes um die Macht* (GW 5, 331-338). Gadamer himself later corroborated by this strategy in his *Selbstdarstellung* (GW 2, 489).

²⁶ Pageau-St-Hilaire (2019, 182). Recently, Thakkar (2018, esp. 227-273) has proposed an appropriation of Plato’s *Republic* which, with the idea of “philosophical citizenship,” goes in a direction similar to Gadamer’s interpretation.

²⁷ Sullivan (1989, 169).

²⁸ An inclusiveness rightly highlighted by Fuyarchuk (2010, 188-190). More recently, Walhof (2016) has argued that Gadamer’s general philosophical position is deeply democratic.

mentioning dialectic as the *culmination* of philosophical education (DD, 92). Yet, he oddly mentions the science of dialectic to say that “this is not the place to discuss [it].” One wonders: why is an essay on “Platos Staat der Erziehung” not the proper place to discuss the core of Plato’s “philosophische Erziehung”? It seems that we have two interpretations or aspects of philosophical education: on the one hand, its aim is the just political attitudes of the community’s citizens; on the other hand, its aim are the Ideas, and ultimately the Idea of the Good.²⁹ It is not clear that Gadamer manages to harmonize these two understandings here, and he rather seems to suggest that dialectic exceeds the political scope of philosophy. Yet, if he concludes that these two interpretations of philosophical education are incompatible, we could hardly see how his reading of the *Republic* differs from Strauss’ hyper-ironic interpretation that asserts the irresolvable tension between philosophy and politics.³⁰ In 1978, Gadamer will directly take up this challenge and attempt to square dialectic with an ironic yet not “negative” reading of Plato’s ideal city.

6.3.3 Another Dialectical Reading

The tension between the two accounts of philosophical education in the 1942 essay becomes a “conflict” in Gadamer’s *Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles* (1978). The terms of the opposition are slightly changed: the conflict is between “knowledge of the truth” and “actual political life” (IG, 69). Through the institution of the philosopher-rulers, it seems, “Plato denies that there is any conflict here.” But that would again amount to a literal reading of the *Republic*’s proposal, a reading that leaves no space for Socratic-Platonic irony: “To my way of thinking,

²⁹ Gadamer indicates here that dialectic is not the *Ideenlehre* but presupposes it (GW, 262; DD, 92).

³⁰ In fact, Strauss would grant that philosophers must provide the citizens with a civic education to the political virtues while knowing that genuine virtue exceeds by far the education to justice, courage, and moderation. In short, the two understandings of education in Gadamer’s essay map well unto Strauss’ divide between the exoteric and the esoteric activities of philosophers.

Gadamer writes, there appears to be no doubt that Plato has this conflict in mind in all of its sharpness and that he *displays it negatively* by the very impossibility of his utopian ‘solution.’” Gadamer recalls the passage of the *Theaetetus* (176a) about the philosopher’s escape from the evils of our world – for we can never get rid of disorder –,³¹ and further claims that the *Republic* says the same thing “e contrario”: the impossibility of philosophical rulership is a “negative legitimation for retreating into the private realm.” Here, everything looks as if Gadamer is adopting the hyper-ironic reading of the kind proposed by Strauss: Plato means the exact opposite of what Socrates explicitly claims. The emphasis on this “negative” or *e contrario* method also points in that direction. Yet this is not Gadamer’s position – and he is perfectly aware that his previous statements could lead to assimilating his interpretation with Strauss’ reading:

Did Plato wish to characterize the conflict between a theoretical and a political existence as irresolvable [unauflösbar]? One thing is clear in any event: this ideal state cannot be actualized [verwirklicht]. All the preconditions for it – from the sharing of women and children to the rule by the philosophers to the exodus of all those older than ten years from the city to be reorganized – all these things demonstrate its impossibility. [...] But what is the whole point of Plato’s invention? That we see its absurdity? [...] Are we supposed to read this political utopia *only negatively* and be convinced by it only of the irreconcilability [Unvereinbarkeit] of theoretical and civic life? [...] Does Plato seek nothing more than to show that the conflict between theôria and politics is irresolvable [unlösbar]? (IG, 70; my emphasis)

The footnote at the end of this paragraph makes the target explicit: “Such is the understanding of Leo Strauss and Allan Bloom.” In response to Strauss, Gadamer claims that we should read the *Republic* “as one grand dialectical myth” and, therefore, the institutions of Kallipolis as “dialectical metaphors” (IG, 70-71). He then explains how reading dialectically differs from reading merely negatively: “reading dialectically demands relating these utopian demands in each instance to their

³¹ See IG, 73: “There is always human shortcoming.” Here, Gadamer relates this disorder to our finitude and historicity. Cf. Strauss’ interpolation on Kallipolis in light of the same passage from the *Theaetetus* (CM, 127): “The just city is then impossible. It is impossible because it is against nature. It is against nature that there should ever be a ‘cessation of evils’ [...]”

opposite, in order to find, *somewhere in between*, what is really meant – that is, in order to recognize what the circumstances are, and how they could be made better” (71; my emphasis). Here Gadamer comes closer to Krüger than to Strauss. The recognition of the impossibility of the union of political power and philosophy shows negatively the conflict between philosophy and politics, but, *pace* Strauss, it does not necessarily display this conflict as irresolvable. Like Krüger, Gadamer thinks that the extreme or radical character of the institutions in Kallipolis is meant to point at their opposite political corruptions, but that Plato does not wish to replace an extreme with another. In the case of the abolition of the family through the communism of women and children, he argues as Krüger did that it is “intended to display the ruinous role of family politics, nepotism, and the idea of dynastic power in the so-called democracy of Athens at that time (and not only there).” Dialectical reading opens up an in-between where a viable solution is to be found. This interpretation reflects Gadamer’s understanding of dialectic and dialogue as discussed in chapter 4: Plato writes dialectically, and dialectic does not provide us with answers but rather with the right questions.

However, if the conflict between politics and philosophy is not irresolvable, one must read dialectically the institution of philosophical rulership. Gadamer proposes such a reading. “Is the paradox of the philosopher-king not also meant to give us the *positive insight* that both aiming at the good and knowing reality pertain to the political actions of the true statesman as well as to the true theoretical life?” (71; my emphasis) Perhaps, but one immediately wonders whether “good” and “knowledge” mean the same things in politics and theoretical inquiry. In the present context, this question is not addressed by Gadamer (although it will be important at later stages of his broader argument). He rather brings another point: the philosophers’ disinterest in political power, which is a safeguard against the corruption of the rulers by the possession and exercise of power. In this

specific respect, it is not too difficult to imagine political institutions that stand in-between philosophical rulership and corrupted politicians aiming at an ever-increasing power:

The mean [die Mitte] to which Plato directs us here is a state so arranged that the exercise of the power of government will be carried out as a public office and not exploited as a chance to advance one's own interests. My contention is that there is more significance here than the merely negative insight into the incompatibility of philosophy and politics. And it is right when one sees the institution of modern civil service system [Berufsbeamtentum] and the ideal of incorruptibility [Unbestechlichkeit] in public officials in Plato's requirement (IG, 72; trans. modif.)

As it will become increasingly important, it should be noted here already that Gadamer identifies dialectic reading with a reading that attempts to find a mean or middle point between two extremes – a procedure that unmistakably reminds one of Aristotle's theory of virtue. While Gadamer may be right about the problem of political corruption and modern institutions as a Platonic accomplishment,³² it must be admitted that there is more than this in the institution of philosophical rulership. Specifically, what Gadamer must come to terms with is the function of knowledge in politics and the relationship between the knowledge of the dialectician and the knowledge of the politician. Speaking of the education of the guardians which culminates in "knowledge of the good," he writes that it "leaves us with a peculiarly ambiguous result" (IG, 84). At this point in Gadamer's discussion, it is clear that the ambiguity has to do with what the Idea of the Good is. While he points out that that "one must not only get used to the light" but "also get used to the dark," and that the guardians' "blindness passes quickly" when coming back into the cave (75), what would need to be shown is how dialectic can equip the guardians with a "superior insight" in the cave (cf. 77-78). Gadamer warns us that the problem here is not equivalent to the modern problem of theory and practice, that is, it is not about the issue of the technical application

³² In a footnote to this paragraph, Gadamer quotes Hegel, who says of the principle of the modern State: "Die Forderung des Plato ist so der Sache nach vorhanden" (*Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie II. Werke* 19, 36)

of a general theory to particular circumstances (78-79). His account of dialectic as an art of differentiating (*Unterscheidungskunst*) seems important insofar as the “abuse of power” in bad leaders allegedly follows from a lack of this art (95). But this is fairly elusive and, to use Gadamer’s own words, it will remain ambiguous as long as we do not get a clear view of his understanding of the Good.

Thus, in the *Idee des Guten zwischen Platon und Aristoteles*, Gadamer interprets Plato’s *Republic* as what one might call a “positive irony.” Kallipolis is not meant literally, but there is more to the mere reversal of its propositions. Specifically, Gadamer thinks that Plato both shows a tension between philosophy and politics but, against Strauss, pretends that this tension is resolvable. While we can already understand one aspect of the positive irony of philosophical rulership – safeguards against corruption by power – the most striking aspect of this paradoxical philosopher-ruler remains ambiguous. The harmony of politics and philosophy ultimately rests upon an interpretation of the Forms that will make the bridge between the two possible. Just like in the 1942 essay and the 1983 lecture, Gadamer leads us from politics to ontology.

Conclusions

The philosopher’s quarrel with the poets has taught philosophy its finitude and the limits of unaided philosophical discourse. While the victory of a philosophy which has become poetic leads the Platonic philosopher to dispute its worth with the city, we should now ask: what has the philosopher learned from this encounter? According to the interpretations of the *Republic* by Strauss, Krüger, and Gadamer examined in this chapter, we can conclude that there are two general lessons to be drawn.

First, the philosopher's dialogue with politics reveals the inherent limits of the city itself, that is, of the autonomy of politics. Left to itself, the political community can hardly be just, and this for several reasons. As Strauss emphasizes, the city is unjust in that it cannot properly accommodate the philosophical existence – namely the justest existence: it either persecutes philosophers or compels them to rule against their will and desire. But, as Krüger and Gadamer indicate, a city without philosophy's guidance is likely to fall prey to unjust inequalities, family politics, nepotism, and other kinds of political corruption and power abuses. The city's need for philosophical leadership shows the superiority of philosophy over politics.

The second lesson, however, complicates the first. The *Republic* reveals that the relation between philosophy and politics is essentially a tension. This tension not only reveals the limits of politics, but also, I contend, the limits of philosophy. For if philosophy was purely and simply superior to the city, why could it not simply lead it and make it just? Krüger and Gadamer argue that it can only do so indirectly, through critique, but this is an implicit acknowledgment of the incapacity of the philosopher to become a genuine political leader. More pessimistic, Strauss thinks that even social critique is scarcely possible without risking prosecution or worse. This represents, one might say, the practical limits of philosophy vis-à-vis politics.

However, I think that Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger help us see a deeper limit, a philosophical problem that more seriously indicates philosophy's finitude. As we have seen, philosophy can only show its true superiority to the πόλις if it can indeed leave the Cave. Yet what the allegory and the analysis of the political situatedness of the philosopher shows is that such an ascent is only possible as the result of a dialectical examination of opinions, and opinion really is the backbone of the city. Since dialectic then requires the city for its own philosophical impetus, the city is not disposable at all. The superiority of philosophy is a qualified one for it is rooted in a dependence upon the city;

its transcendence is in this sense, to speak like Hyland, finite transcendence. I call this philosophical limitation vis-à-vis the city the political finitude of philosophy.

We could argue that the political limits of philosophy and the philosophical limits of politics are just the two sides of the same coin, namely two symptoms of the same tension between the political and philosophical lives. That may very well be the case, but it is significant that the dialogical Platonism of Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger acknowledge both perspectives, for it is certainly possible to see one side without the other. And this is the point where dialogue and irony become increasingly significant. For non-ironic readings of the *Republic* only grasp the philosophical limits of politics. From this point of view, Plato seems to argue that given the city's limits, philosophy ought to shape it. This is the one and same perspective rejected by anti-Platonic liberals like Popper and embraced by Heidegger, whose 1933 *Rektoratsrede* triumphantly announced the reign of philosopher-rulers under National-Socialism. Only if one reads the institution of philosophical rulership ironically can one recognize that philosophy is also limited and that the rule of philosophers is neither desirable nor possible according to Plato. This ironic approach recognizes, in short, the perspective of the city and not just the perspective of philosophy: in this sense, the ironic reading concurs with or leads to the idea of a genuine dialogue, namely an encounter in which each side has a voice. Heidegger's 1933 political "Platonism" is in this respect deeply unilateral as it could not appreciate the limits of philosophy vis-à-vis politics. Conversely, ironic and dialogic interpretations of the *Republic* are antidotes to the kind of reading Heidegger fell prey to: if philosophical rulership is not a practical proposition, then the Platonic philosopher should not try to rule the community from the heights of theoretical wisdom.

We must finally note that these two lessons drawn from the dialogue between philosophy and politics converge on an important point. The limits of the city are known to the philosopher insofar

as she acquires a perspective that is broader, higher than the city. According to the image of the cave, this perspective is beyond the merely human world and it is inseparable from a knowledge of the Forms and the Good. This is why Strauss identifies philosophical *eros* with the desire to know “the things which are unchangeable in every respect,” Krüger interprets Kallipolis as a paracletic Ideal preparing the soul to the “insight into the Ideas,” and Gadamer admits that the philosophical contribution of philosophy to politics is, albeit ambiguously, tied to the dialectic ascent to the Forms and the Good. In each case, the dialogical encounter with politics opens up and leads to an ontological inquiry. What remains to be examined is what these post-Heideggerian Platonists think Platonic Forms are, and how it again reflects their understanding of the finitude of philosophy.

Chapter 7

THE FORMS BETWEEN TRANSCENDENCE AND IMMANENCE: ON THE ELUSIVENESS OF BEING

We live and think in the derivative and ascend to some extent, but not to the origin of things.

- Leo Strauss to Alexandre Kojève, May 28 1957

Platonism is the name that has been given throughout the history of philosophy to a specific doctrine, the so-called “doctrine of the Forms.” According to an orthodox understanding of this doctrine, Plato stipulates that the true being of perceptible entities are immaterial, unchanging Forms (εἰδή) or Ideas (ἰδέαι).¹ The Forms transcend the perceptible realm insofar as they don’t inhere to perceptible entities but rather exist or are independently, themselves by themselves (αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό), that is, separately. Despite this separation or χωρισμός, particular perceptible entities are what they are by virtue of their participation in the Forms. Plato uses several terms to express this participatory relation: μέθεξις, συμπλοκή, μίξις, etc. This separation-participation dynamic is supposed to explain each thing according to both their temporal-material existence and their essence or “whatness.” For instance, a just person is just insofar as she participates in justice itself or in the Idea or Form of the Just. Yet, because justice itself exceeds the multiplicity of just persons or just acts, its true being cannot be found in the perceptible manifold and so transcends it.

Naturally, such an astonishing doctrine has been severely criticized from different perspectives. Much of this criticism has targeted the problem of the ontological separation of Forms. This very criticism began with Aristotle. Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger all learned from Marburg Neo-

¹ Following Gadamer, Strauss and Krüger, I use these terms interchangeably (with the exception of the Idea of the Good, which Plato never calls an εἶδος). In German, the common translation is *Idee*, not *Form*.

Kantian Platonists to reject Aristotle's reading of the separation of Forms as a misunderstanding. Many philosophers have also wondered what Ideas *are*: are they immaterial entities? Are they concepts? Are they projections of the human mind? Categories of human understanding? Do perceptibles and Forms constitute two separate "worlds"? What is the status and function of the Good as an Idea "beyond Being"? Such questions and similar problems can hardly be avoided by anyone who attempts to understand Platonic ontology.

Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger are not exceptions to this. Yet their treatment of the issue is somewhat exceptional in two respects. First, they understand the *Ideenlehre* as the natural unfolding of Socrates' second sailing and the broader dialogue – implied in the philosophical reorientation toward human speech and human affairs – that the philosopher must conduct with her "others." For them, Platonic metaphysics derives naturally from the philosopher's factical life and is not a doctrine superimposed on the human experience from without. Second, their interpretations of the Forms attempt to salvage Plato from Heidegger's criticism of Platonism. As I have shown in chapter 2, Heidegger's worry with the Forms is not that they are separate but rather that they are, in a way, not separate enough. For while the χωρισμός between particular entities and Forms may reflect Heidegger's own insistence on the ontological difference, Plato's alleged understanding of the Being of beings in terms of their *presence* (*Anwesenheit*) to the human sight rather reflects the tendency to restrict the meaning of Being to what is accessible to, intelligible for, and eventually controllable by human subjectivity. It is important to distinguish the three moments of this criticism, for each will play a part in the response we find in Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger. Heidegger's first concern has to do with temporality: the Idea betrays an unjustified primacy of presence over the other temporal ecstases. The second concern is that Plato allegedly identifies Being with intelligibility, an intelligibility that is rendered possible by the reduction of Being's

temporality to mere presence. The third concern is that this alleged obsession with intelligibility betrays the human tendency toward the mastery of Being. This threefold critique conveniently pictures Plato as the father of the metaphysics of subjectivity that allegedly dominated the Western philosophical tradition.

In the eyes of Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger, this picture is far too convenient. Each in their way, they interpret Plato's Forms such as to emphasize that the intelligibility of Being is at best a partial or relative intelligibility, that is, that Being remains for Plato fundamentally elusive. Strauss achieves this by understanding the Ideas in a thoroughly zetetic way, Gadamer by downplaying the transcendence of the Forms, and Krüger by articulating this transcendence as the flipside of human finitude and temporality. I shall argue that this attempt to respond to Heidegger is only partly successful. Specifically, Strauss's interpretation of Platonic Ideas as fundamental problems fails to solve the problem posed by "radical historicism" and Gadamer's rejection of the separation of the Forms temporalizes Being in such a way that we lose sight of transcendence, and perhaps thereby of the ontological difference between Being and beings. In this latter respect, Krüger's merit is to emphasize the difference between what Plato calls the noetic and dianoetic realms and to think of the separation-participation dynamic of the Forms in terms of the relation between these two realms. This has the advantage of preserving the transcendence of the Forms (which Gadamer fails to do) *and* the acknowledgment of human finitude (which Strauss is not eager to explicitly recognize). Krüger's position ultimately depends on a metaphysical argument that proceeds *via negativa* and we ought to wonder about the validity of such an argument in a post-Heideggerian context. Yet, the dialogue between these three highly unorthodox approaches to Platonic metaphysics intimate new and potentially fruitful ways for thinking about both Plato in particular and ontology more generally.

7.1 Leo Strauss' Zetetic Metaphysics

It is a common misunderstanding of Strauss to think that his emphasis on political philosophy amounts to a neglect of metaphysical issues.² But according to Strauss, the political and the metaphysical are closely intertwined. And while metaphysics does not occupy the same “space” as politics in his work, one must remind oneself that Strauss' hermeneutics hardly allows inferring philosophical disinterest from mere textual infrequency. In his lectures on “The Problem of Socrates,” he makes the following claim on the interdependence of politics and ontology:

He [Socrates] understands the political in its specific character. In fact, no one before him has done so. For he is the first to grasp the significance of the *idea*, of the fact that the whole is characterized by articulation into classes or kinds, whose character can be understood only by thought, and not by sense perception. (RCPR, 169)

The context of this striking affirmation is a remark on the Xenophontic and Platonic response to Aristophanes' accusation of Socrates as “unerotic and unpolitical.”³ Strauss contends that Plato's Socrates understands the importance of spirit and spiritedness, and that he does so because he understands the articulation of the whole into ἰδέαι or εἰδή. By that, Strauss could mean two things that are not mutually exclusive. First, he could mean that differences in kind is essential to understanding the heterogeneous composition of the political community, as well as that which transcends that community.⁴ This is what he seems to refer to when he says that θύμος is the “bond between the philosophers and the multitude.” Second, he could be referring to the fact that Plato calls the spirited part of the soul θυμοειδής, hinting at the possibility that this part of the soul is an εἶδος in its own right.⁵ In both cases, Strauss here seems to be giving a fairly loose and broad

² See e.g. Landy (2014, 65-74) and Zuckert & Zuckert (2014, 117-143).

³ Strauss's thoughts on this accusation are discussed in chapter 5.

⁴ Cf. RCPR, 143: “Only if there is essential heterogeneity can there be an essential difference between political things and things which are not political.”

⁵ To be sure, θυμοειδής is originally an adjective that does *not* mean “the form of spirit.” Yet Plato chooses to speak of spiritedness in this way by contrast to the “rational part” (τὸ λογιστικόν) and the “desiderative part” (τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν) of the soul, so perhaps he is playing with the ordinary Greek meaning.

meaning to the word ἰδέα. This broad sense, what Strauss calls “noetic heterogeneity,” arises from the social-political experience of everyday life and is sedimented in language.⁶ *Per* the phenomenological method, Strauss thinks that philosophical theory derives from this pre-theoretical or pre-scientific experience. Before elucidating the conceptual difficulties of the “theory of Forms,” one must acknowledge and examine its factitial origin.

7.1.1 The Turn to Λόγοι and Noetic Heterogeneity

As we have already seen in chapter 4, the Platonic digression in Strauss’ 1936 book on Hobbes contains the most explicit treatment of the relation between language and Platonic Forms. There, Strauss argues that the turn to the λόγοι as presented and advocated in the *Phaedo* is the “the only possible orientation, which is originally at the disposal of men” (PPH, 153). This orientation revealed two things: 1) the opinions of human beings contradict themselves and each other; 2) this contradiction reveals negatively the possibility of truth toward which the ideality of speech is intended, that is, it points to the true thing albeit unwittingly. For instance, when people speak about the good and the beautiful, their opinions might be misleading but what their speech really intends is the truly good and the truly beautiful (143-144). About everyday linguistic predication, Strauss thus writes: “whenever we speak of virtue – whether we attribute virtue to a man, a woman, a child, or a slave – whether we characterize temperance, courage or justice as virtue – we, in all these cases, use the same word virtue, we always *mean* the same thing” (141-142; my emphasis). There is an important connection between speech and Forms, for dialectic purifies speech of its

⁶ It should be emphasized that Strauss coins the notion of “noetic heterogeneity” himself (see RCPR, 132). This is significant insofar as Strauss was not fond of conceptual terminology and technical vocabulary. “Noetic heterogeneity” must then be important for him.

contradiction, but it thereby accomplishes the original intentionality of speech and does not suppress it.

Now, in everyday experience, the way we name and speak about things is inextricably tied to the way we perceive them. Any pre-theoretical human experience is an experience of the world as pre-articulated into different kinds of beings or entities. As Gadamer puts in *Truth and Method*, “seeing means articulating” (TM, 83). One can doubt the truth of such perceptual and linguistic articulation of the world and claim that the differentiation we experience is illusory. One can instead claim that Being is *one* (Parmenidian noetic homogeneity) or that beings are empirically, and not noetically, heterogeneous (reducible to a certain number of fundamental elements). This is not the Platonic path, Strauss claims. The Platonic approach rather embraces the articulation of the world as experienced by natural consciousness and attempts to make it philosophically consistent:

The discovery of noetic heterogeneity permits one to let things be what they are and takes away the compulsion to reduce essential differences to something common. The discovery of noetic heterogeneity means the vindication of what one could call common sense. Socrates called it a return from madness to sanity or sobriety, or, to use the Greek term, *sophrosynê*, which I would translate as moderation. Socrates discovered the paradoxical fact that, in a way, the most important truth is the most obvious truth, or the truth of the surface. (RCPR, 142)

If this is the case, then the discovery of the Ideas or Forms is nothing more than an acceptance and conceptual intensification, and justification of the differences perceived in the pre-theoretical world. Thomas Pangle has put this well:

The Socratic "method" thus begins from what is perfectly commonsensical, if not banal. What distinguishes the method according to Strauss is its intransigent adherence to the direction given by this original experience of wonder. That is, Socrates [...] resists or at least breaks the tendency of his philosophic predecessors to forsake the species experienced by common sense (and expressed in ordinary language) in the

name of a quest for hypothetical "elemental" causes from which the whole and every species in it is supposed to be generated.⁷

But this state of affairs immediately raises several issues. First, if there is such a strong continuity between the everyday experience of heterogeneity and noetic heterogeneity, why should Plato speak of Forms as separate from perceptible particulars? Second, if Platonic Forms or Ideas correspond to any essential differences as perceived by common sense, does this mean there is an Idea for virtually any kind of being?⁸ Third, if the commonsensical experience of heterogeneity must be purified by Platonic dialectic, what does this purification amount to? What *are* the Ideas, as distinguished from pre-theoretical perceptible differences? Strauss gets to these questions when he thematically addresses the "doctrine" of Forms in his commentaries on Plato's *Republic*.

7.1.2 *On the Likelihood and Unlikelihood of the Ideenlehre*

That Strauss thinks the issue is of enormous difficulty is undoubtful. Twice, he precedes his interpretation with the following cautionary remarks (HPP, 53; CM, 119): "The doctrine of ideas which Socrates expounds to Glaukon is very hard to understand; to begin with it is utterly incredible, not to say that it appears to be fantastic. [...] No one has ever succeeded in giving a satisfactory or clear account of this doctrine of ideas." One must wonder here: is Strauss implicitly claiming he can provide the yet-unfound "satisfactory or clear" account? Does he think that it is beyond his capacities? Or is it simply impossible? What Strauss explicitly claims he can do is to "define rather precisely the central difficulty." This difficulty is the problem of the separation of the Forms:

⁷ Pangle (1983, 3).

⁸ The extreme case is expressed in the *Parmenides*: is there an Idea of hair, mud, dirt (130b-c)?

Hitherto we have been given to understand that justice is fundamentally a certain character of the human soul, or of the city, *i.e.*, something which is not self-subsisting. Now we are asked to believe that it is self-subsisting, being at home as it were in an entirely different place than human beings and everything else that participates in justice. [...] the “idea” of the thing is that which we mean by trying to find out the “what” or the “nature” of a thing or a class of things. [...] This [the connection between “idea” and “nature”] does not explain, however, why the ideas are presented as “separated” from the things which are what they are by participating in an idea or, in other words, why “dogness” (the class character of dogs) should be the “the true dog.” (HPP, 53-54)

Strauss’ concern here does not seem very different than Aristotle’s: why can’t the Form simply inhere in the particular? Yet unlike Aristotle, Strauss goes on to concede the separation thesis for two kinds of phenomena, namely mathematical objects and virtues.⁹ It is fairly evident that the circle in itself transcends any perceptible circular entity or any attempt to materialize a circle. The point is not as obvious in the case of virtues, yet Strauss claims that *perfect* justice cannot be found in actual human beings or societies because perfect justice “transcends everything which men can ever achieve” (HPP, 54). This means that what he takes issue with is not ontological separation *per se*, but a universal application of that separation. Here, it is important to recall how Strauss conceives of Ideas as “noetic heterogeneity,” that is, very broadly as the natural articulation of things according to formal differences (because their forms are distinct, a tree is not a rock, a human not a dog, etc.). The separation is a problem for him *because* he claims that Plato thinks of virtually everything in terms of their Forms:

Socrates seems to say that what is patently true of mathematical things and of the virtues is true universally: there is an idea of the bed or the table just as of the circle and of justice. Now while it is obviously reasonable to say that a perfect circle or perfect justice transcends everything which can ever be seen, it is hard to say that the perfect bed is something on which no man can ever rest. (HPP, 54)

⁹ In his *Ethics*, Aristotle in fact disputes that there are virtues apart from virtuous actions or virtuous characters and in *Metaphysics* M-N, he argues that mathematical objects are abstractions from properties of perceptible beings. In both cases, he objects to some kind of Platonists.

Strauss tells us this is what Socrates *seems* to say. But is this really what Socrates says? The first and perhaps easiest point to examine is the case of mathematical objects. If we grant that *Republic* VI-VII is a good *locus* for thinking about the Forms, then the Divided Line informs us that Plato made a sharp distinction between Ideas as objects of intellection (νόησις) and mathematical entities as objects of discursive thought (διάνοια).¹⁰ So it is hardly possible to maintain that there are Ideas of mathematical objects without forsaking one of the most instructive passages on the Forms one can find in Plato's *corpus*. It is true that the philosophical passage of *Seventh Letter* (342b-d) seems to suggest that there could be such a thing as an Idea of the circle (αὐτὸς ὁ κύκλος), but the language here is not clearly that of Ideas or Forms. It is also very clear from the educational curriculum in the *Republic* that Plato thinks of mathematics as good preparation for dialectic: it has the pedagogical virtue of training the mind to think abstract things. Using the example of the circle itself or the perfect circle is helpful in making the distinction between images, names, definitions, and knowledge, but one cannot conclude from that that there is an Idea of the circle. This is of course not to say that there is no circle in itself or no concepts of mathematical objects for Plato, but simply that they might not be, after all, Ideas properly speaking. Like Ideas, mathematical objects are separate from perceptible particulars, but unlike Ideas, they are treated as "hypotheses" by discursive thought.

Now, if Plato thinks that there is no Idea of the circle properly speaking, how could he be claiming that there is an Idea for every kind of thing? This point must be emphasized. Strauss eventually claims that there is no Idea of Kallipolis (HPP, 55), and even implies that there is no Idea of the πόλις in general (cf. CM 138 and WIPP 39-40).¹¹ This means that Strauss acknowledges

¹⁰ See *Rep.* 511d.

¹¹ He also seems skeptical of the existence of an Idea of the human (HPP, 77) and, we gather, of the soul too (cf. WIPP, 39).

– albeit implicitly – that the separation of the Forms does not apply universally. One could object that there is no Idea of the city because the city is, in a sense at least, not a natural being, but the product of human doing. However, beds and tables of man-made artifacts too, and Strauss claims that what is true of justice is also true of beds and tables. The reference here is obviously the passage in Book X where poets are criticized for making images that are “third remove from truth” (595c-598b). There, Plato’s Socrates uses the example of a bed to explain the difference between Ideas, perceptible entities which partake in the Ideas, and poetic imitations of these entities. As I have already argued in chapter 2 in an objection to Heidegger’s reading of the passage, there is clear textual evidence that Socrates’ concern there is not about artifacts at all, but about *virtue* (599d2-3), and that he is most likely using the example of the bed because of its pedagogical efficiency. Therefore, there is no reason to think that Plato is committed to the view that there is an Idea of the bed, and, in fact, of any artifact.

What then are we left with from Strauss’ proposition? There would remain two kinds of Ideas, represented respectively by the examples of “dogness” and justice: natural beings and virtues.¹² I think Strauss is right to worry about the separation of the form or species of natural beings from their particular instantiations. Is not the being of a dog exhausted in each and every healthy dog? But it is important to note that this concern of Strauss corresponds to Aristotle’s thought on the enmattered form (ἔνυλον εἶδος) of a particular entity or a “this something” (τοδέ τι). More generally, Strauss’ use of words like “species” and “classes” to talk about Platonic Forms betrays some kind of Aristotelizing reading of Plato – and he often puts Plato and Aristotle together when thinking about this problem. But the question is: is he right to think of Platonic Forms in terms of

¹² In his 1957 Seminar on Plato’s *Republic*, Strauss seems to think these two kinds of Ideas are the only ones or at least the most relevant kinds – see PR, 153.

the Aristotelian doctrine of εἶδος? If Plato does not think that there are Ideas or Forms of living species, then the concern about the separation of these species from their corresponding particulars dissipates.

There are good reasons to think that Plato *might not* think that living species are Ideas or Forms.¹³ First, Plato usually talks about Ideas when he is talking about virtues, not living beings or other entities (with the exceptions discussed above). Second, it is highly plausible that, following the Divided Line, living species are dianoetic objects in a way analogous to mathematical beings, and not Forms or Ideas. There are two arguments that support the second reason. First, “number and the one” belong to the realm of διάνοια (524d). This implies that “the one” is not a number, which is a fundamental thesis of Greek mathematics.¹⁴ “The one” is not a number because a number is a definite plurality whose definiteness depends on “the one,” that is, on a unity or unit. In that sense, Greek arithmetic is grounded in the activity of counting: 5 is not just 5 units, but 5 determined units; 5 horses, 5 dogs, 5 chairs, etc. “The one” or “unit” here is thus not an abstract but a definite or determined unity. It is not possible to count 5 horses in a field without the unit “horse.” Hence, “the one” that is the object of dianoetic thought refers to any potentially determining unit through or with which one might count entities. In this sense, the notions of “dogness” or “horseness” are equivalent to that “one” that is constitutive of any number. By contrast, virtues cannot be counted in the same way. We cannot use the unit “justice” to count a multitude of “justices.” The oneness of Forms differs from the oneness of species, classes, or kinds.

¹³ This is, of course, a much-debated issue in Plato scholarship. For a survey of various approaches in interpreting the Divided Line, see Lafrance (1987). The hypothesis I am here sketching – concerning a distinction between dianoetic and noetic *objects* – in response to Strauss’ concern is meant to show that the central issue here is the issue of Forms of virtues and it remains as such a hypothesis (arguing that it is the right interpretation would be much beyond the scope of the present argument). On debates concerning dianoetic objects, see Lafrance (1987, 235-241).

¹⁴ See also section 7.2.1 below. Both Strauss and Gadamer were decisively influenced by Jacob Klein’s work on Greek mathematics.

The second argument supports the first. The Divided Line is divided in such a way that the second and third sections of the line, respectively the realm of belief (πίστις) and the realm of δίανοια, are of the same length. This is an odd feature of the Line and has been the source of many perplexities in Plato scholarship. Yet some indispensable light is shed on that proportion once we read the Divided Line in light of the Cave and vice versa. The realm of πίστις corresponds to the puppets (514b) in the Cave. These puppets imitate real entities like human beings, animals, and artifacts (514c-515a). The realm of δίανοια corresponds to the natural beings encountered outside the cave, the “human beings and the other things [...] and the things themselves” (516a). If we map the Line onto the Cave, it is obvious that these “things themselves” cannot be material, for the shift from πίστις to δίανοια marks the shift from the perceptible to the intelligible. It could be argued that the reason for the parallelism between these two realms or sections is that for each perceptible entity in the perceptible world, there is a corresponding “real thing,” namely a species, class, kind or concept which is not perceivable by the senses but which does not yet belong to the realm of Ideas. Following the Cave analogy, the puppet of a horse would find its true being in the real horse; following the Line analogy, the living horse would find its true being in something like “horseness” or the species “horse,” which could perhaps be a dianoetic object and not a Form or Idea.

If this hypothesis is right, Strauss’ concern with the ontological separation of Forms and his claim to the effect that the *Ideenlehre* is “utterly incredible” or “fantastic” lose their grip. Insofar as he accepts the separated character of the Ideas of virtues, he is accepting the “doctrine of Ideas.” Yet Strauss silences almost completely the most “fantastic” feature of that “doctrine”: the Idea of the Good “beyond Being.” For reasons that are entirely left to our speculation, he chose not to comment on the Good in his published remarks on the Forms. Thanks to his now published seminars on the *Republic* (1957, 1961), we now know that this is not an issue he left unthought in

his account. Somewhat surprisingly, Strauss does not take issue with it and rather thinks it is crucial that the Good is “beyond Being,” that is, beyond Ideas:

If the whole is to be intelligible, there must be an intelligible reason why there is such a harmony between the mind and the objects of the mind. In other words, there must be a bond between the mind and the ideas. This bond cannot be simply an idea, because it is a bond between the ideas as a whole and the mind. What follows from that? I think it is what Socrates literally says. The first idea, as the ground of both ideas and knowledge of ideas, is beyond the ideas. But since idea means to be true being, the first idea must be beyond true being (PR, 135).

He further claims that Plato is entitled to call this first principle “good” in virtue of the kind of “teleological explanation” one finds in the *Phaedo* (136). The goodness of intelligibility is not something Strauss seems willing to dispute. But what about this intelligibility? Can we really come to know Ideas? What do we know when we know Ideas? To be sure, Strauss’ relative acceptance of the “doctrine” still leaves several crucial questions unanswered. Among these, the most pressing one is, precisely, What *are* these Ideas? Strauss’s treatment of that question reveals the most original if not “fantastic” aspect of his understanding of Plato.

7.1.3 Parts, Wholes, and Permanent Problems: Strauss’ Insufficient Response to Heidegger

Here, we must recall something slightly odd that Strauss says about Platonic Forms: “the ‘idea’ of the thing is that which we mean *by trying to find out* the ‘what’ or the ‘nature’ of a thing or a class of things” (HPP, 54; my emphasis). Orthodox Platonism would rather expect something like: “the ‘idea’ of the thing is that which we mean by the ‘what’ or the ‘nature’ of a thing or class of things.” Strauss’s intervention is subtle but crucial: he does not suppose that we have found out or understood the Ideas that we are looking for or trying to understand. This is decisive in how Strauss thinks about the nature of the Platonic Forms. Let us consider the following passage from “What is Political Philosophy?”:

Socrates was so far from being committed to a specific cosmology that his knowledge was knowledge of ignorance. Knowledge of ignorance is not ignorance. It is knowledge of the elusive character of the truth, of the whole. Socrates views man in the light of the mysterious character of the whole. He held therefore that we are more familiar with the situation of man as man than with the ultimate causes of that situation. We may also say that he viewed man in light of the *unchanging ideas, i.e. of the fundamental and permanent problems*. (WIPP, 39)

Strauss understands the Ideas as *problems*.¹⁵ Through this interpretation, he attempts to accomplish two things: 1) protect Platonic ontology against accusations of metaphysical dogmatism; 2) find some ahistorical ground to reject the threats of historicism. Both should be understood as responses to Heidegger. Concerning the first point, it seems clear that if an Idea is a problem, it can hardly be the Being of an entity understood as its standing presence. In other words, Heidegger treats the Ideas as Plato's answer to the question of Being; Strauss responds that Plato did not provide such an answer. In that sense, Platonic ontology is not tied to an "antiquated cosmology" but only presupposes the "problem of cosmology" (WIPP, 38-39). This is something that Strauss emphasizes repeatedly: the whole is "mysterious," "elusive"; Plato intended to imitate the "riddle of being" (cf. ONIPP, 351). We will have to consider, however, whether this response to Heidegger's Plato is not ultimately a *concession* to Heidegger.

As for the second point, Strauss explains the unchanging character of the Ideas in terms of the permanence of these problems. One might object that this is not so much a response to historicism as an account of the timelessness and immutability of Platonic Forms. But a similar passage from *Natural Right and History* confirms that historicity is indeed the main target of his interpretation:

the "experience of history" does not make doubtful the view that the fundamental problems, such as the problem of justice, *persist or retain their identity in all historical change, however much they may be obscured by the temporary denial of their relevance and however variable or provisional all human solutions to these problems may be*. In grasping these problems as problems, the human mind *liberates itself from its historical limitations*. No more is needed to legitimize philosophy in its original, Socratic sense: philosophy is knowledge that

one does not know; that is to say, it is knowledge of what one does not know, or awareness of the fundamental problems and, therewith, of the fundamental alternatives regarding their solution that are *coeval with human thought*. (NRH, 32; my emphasis)

Strauss partially admits that the solutions to the fundamental problems vary historically; what he denies is that the problems themselves change. I say “partially” because he further claims that there are also “fundamental alternatives regarding their solution” which allegedly do not change as long as there are human minds. This would mean that all the historical solutions to the fundamental problems could potentially be reconducted to a limited set of potential solutions. So, the historical variation of answers to the immutable problems is also restricted. Strauss here mentions the example of the problem of justice. The thought seems to be that the Idea of the Just points to the problem of justice, which invariably poses itself to the human mind regardless of the historical situation and with which invariably comes a definite series of potential solutions. Justice may vary across epochs but the Idea of Justice or the problem of justice does not.

This odd interpretation is certainly controversial.¹⁶ But instead of delving into the details of Strauss’ unorthodoxy, let us consider briefly the likely source of his reasoning about permanent problems. I contend that this source is Neo-Kantian *Problemgeschichte*, and in particular Nicolai Hartmann’s version of it.¹⁷ The crux of Hartmann’s presentation of this doctrine can be summarized in five points. First, philosophy as such does not consist of philosophizing personalities

¹⁶ In particular, we may wonder whether this understanding of Ideas is not too loosely Platonic. For instance, while it is clear that Platonic Forms like Justice, Beauty, or the Idea of the Good are also fundamental philosophical problems, there also exist fundamental problems for which there are no corresponding Platonic Forms. An obvious example of that is, in Strauss’ own writings, the problem of natural right. Strauss calls it an idea, but it is not something one can find in Plato. Similarly and importantly, there is such a thing as the problem of the soul but there is no Idea of the soul in Plato (this is so because Ideas are known by the soul so they must differ in kind as knower and known differ). As I have shown in the previous section, Strauss has a broad understanding of Idea and thinks there are Ideas of several kind of beings of which Plato might very well think there are no Ideas. But this might simply be the result of his *appropriation* of Plato. Clearly, Strauss thinks that one can be a Platonist without restricting oneself to the strict letter of the text.

¹⁷ Hartmann exposes this doctrine in his pioneer article entitled “Zur Methode der Philosophgeschichte” (1910). This article was published in *Kant-Studien*, but I quote it from Hartmann’s *Kleinere Schriften* III – see Hartmann (1958).

but problems or *Philosophemen*.¹⁸ Second, thinkers do not and cannot change the philosophical problems, but only change the position (*Stellung*) of the problems by their different *Fragestellungen*.¹⁹ Third, while specific *Fragestellungen* call for determinate potential answers or solutions, philosophical problems remain problems.²⁰ Fourth, the objective nature of such problems and the fact that they remain problems indicate the eternal unity of reason (*Einheit der Vernunft in aller Zeit*) and the “infinite task of philosophy.”²¹ Finally, these permanent philosophical problems are the conditions of possibility of individual or specific philosophical questions, and thus *Problemgeschichte* is the transcendental background of *Philosophiegeschichte*.²² The similarities with Strauss’ treatment of “fundamental problems” are undeniable. The main difference is that Hartmann does not explicitly claim that *Problemgeschichte* is sound Platonism. (Yet we should recall that in 1910, Hartmann is still a Marburg Neo-Kantian and the Marburg school considered itself the true and legitimate heir of Platonism.) Strauss’ interpretation of Platonic Forms as problems thus attempts to challenge Heidegger by drawing on insights developed by Marburg Neo-Kantians: Forms, like problems, are beings or propositions but conditions of possibility of philosophy.

The relevance of a Hartmannian inspiration, or at the very least, a striking philosophical resemblance, resides, I think, in the fact that Gadamer formulated in *Truth and Method* a compelling critique of this conception of philosophical problems as fixed and permanent. Gadamer rejects the Neo-Kantian distinction between *Problem* and *Frage* as artificial and claims that there is no real understanding of a question apart from a genuine act of questioning: “to understand a question means to ask it” (GW 1, 381). In other words, problems apart from specific *Fragestellungen* are mere

¹⁸ Hartmann (1958, 6).

¹⁹ Hartmann (1958, 10).

²⁰ Hartmann (1958, 12 and 16).

²¹ Hartmann (1958, 15-16).

²² For a good presentation of Hartmann’s *Problemgeschichte*, see Kerber (2016, esp. 297-301).

abstractions.²³ The articulation of philosophical questions is constitutive of the questions. But this articulation is always historically situated and is by no means permanent. In an admirably illuminating article on *Natural Right and History*, Kennington has argued that Strauss' attempt to secure the "timeless validity" of philosophy and nature does not commit him to a dogmatic assumption of the thesis that "to be" means "to be always."²⁴ He points out that the third chapter of the book is entitled and discusses "the origin of the idea of natural right." Considering how meticulously Strauss uses the word "idea," we must conclude that Strauss admits that some Ideas, understood as fundamental problems, *emerge*. How is that emergence compatible with the permanence thesis? If some Ideas come to be, why can they not change? After all, is not coming to be one the most radical kind of change?

Strauss could respond to this kind of objection by making a distinction between necessary and contingent or accidental emergences. Insofar as Ideas necessarily emerge irrespective of historical conditions, some kind of permanence can be maintained.²⁵ Let us then consider the emergence of the "idea of natural right": "The discovery of nature or of the fundamental distinction between nature and convention is the necessary condition for the emergence of the idea of natural right." (NRH, 93). Now the discovery of nature is of Greek origin and Strauss claims, for instance, that the world of the Hebrew Bible was unable to make that discovery and thus had no word for "nature" (RCPR, 253).²⁶ This suggests that the emergence of that Idea depends on specific historical circumstances. To put it differently, what the problem of the emergence of Ideas reveals is that, in some cases at least, the existence of an Idea conceived as a fundamental problem depends

²³ For a defense of Gadamer's critique of "permanent problems" see my Pageau-St-Hilaire (2022a, 10-12).

²⁴ Kennington (1981, 71, 67).

²⁵ But *even then*, it is far from clear that we can establish the permanence of something which comes to be in the first place. At least, it is far from clear that Plato would accept that γένεσις and permanence are compatible (cf. e.g. *Rep.* VIII 546a2).

²⁶ However, this specific claim has been challenged by Hazony (2016, 194 and 204n36).

on a historically situated articulation of that problem. This seems to confirm Gadamer's objection to the effect that there is no problem apart from a specific act of questioning. And this, I contend, fragilizes Strauss' crucial point about the ahistorical character of Ideas. The only way to answer the challenge of temporality and historicity is to affirm some kind of eternity.²⁷ Strauss needs this eternity but cannot affirm it. His interpretation of Ideas as fundamental problems might succeed in answering the charge that Platonism is dogmatism, but it does not satisfactorily neutralize the threat of Heideggerian historicism.

* * *

Strauss' approach to Platonic Forms emphasizes the enigmatic or problematic character of the "doctrine." For Strauss' Plato, Being remains a problem, an aporia: Plato's "dialogues supply us not so much with an answer to the riddle of being as with a most articulate 'imitation' of that riddle" (ONIPP, 351). In that respect, his Platonism has been aptly called "zetetic".²⁸ Strauss clarifies the zetetic understanding of philosophy in his restatement of *On Tyranny*:

one cannot know that one does not know without knowing what one does not know. What Pascal said with antiphilosophic intent about the impotence of both dogmatism and skepticism, is the only possible justification of philosophy which as such is neither dogmatic nor skeptic, and still less "decisionist," but zetetic (or skeptic in the original sense of the term). Philosophy as such is nothing but genuine awareness of the problems, i.e., of the fundamental and comprehensive problems. It is impossible to think about these problems without becoming inclined toward a solution, toward one or the other of the very few typical solutions. Yet as long as there is no wisdom but only quest for wisdom, the evidence of all solutions is necessarily smaller than the evidence of the problems. (OT, 196)

To conclude these analyses, I would like to suggest that conceiving of Being as fundamentally elusive, as much as it might respond to Heidegger's interpretation of Plato as a dogmatic

²⁷ We know that Strauss rejected the view that the *visible* universe is eternal (see LHK, 24). I cannot think of any place where he would plainly affirm that some invisible realm of the universe (like the realm of Forms) is eternal.

²⁸ This is especially prominent in the interpretations of Tanguay (2003) and Velkley (2011). On Platonic Forms as problems, see also Pippin (2003, 350).

metaphysician, is not a challenge to Heidegger's own understanding of Being. As some of Strauss' statements quoted above already indicated, his way of thinking about this is through the hermeneutic circle of parts and whole. The whole of Being is constituted of parts, so a knowledge of the whole requires a knowledge of its parts. But knowledge of a part remains fundamentally incomplete without a knowledge of the function or status or position of that part in the whole. This means that knowledge of the parts in turn implies knowledge of the whole. Knowing the whole and knowing the parts are mutually dependent. Therefore, the whole of Being eludes us, or better put: Being shows itself through its withdrawal.²⁹ This is what Benardete has called Strauss' "metaphysical esotericism."³⁰

This position seems very sympathetic to Heidegger's treatment of the question of the meaning of Being. The difference, one is tempted to think, has to do with human finitude. The notion of finitude is foreign to Strauss' writings. For Strauss, man's position within the whole is not a mark of finitude. It would only be so if there could be a standpoint outside the whole. As he once puts it, finitude means something only by contrast with *infinitude* (TL, 313).³¹ This is not to say that Strauss did not recognize the existence of human limitations. The point is that, for him, the elusiveness of Being is not due to the imperfection or deficiency of the human mind but to the structure of Being itself. Be that as it may, Strauss' zetetic Platonism is closer to Heidegger than what most interpreters

²⁹ The *loci classici* for the elusiveness of the whole in Strauss are WIPP, 39-40 and HPP, 77, but see also Strauss' comment in his letter to Kojève of May 28, 1957 in *OT*, 279: "The problem of diaeresis is the problem of the organization of the realm of ideas, and in particular the problem of the knowability of that organization. If wisdom is not available but only philosophy, the diaeresis as descent from the One to all ideas is not available. We live and think in the derivative and ascend to some extent, but not to the origin of things."

³⁰ Benardete (2000, 409).

³¹ If I understand well, Strauss thinks that we cannot think finitude outside some kind of broad theological framework. Although this has the interesting implication that Heidegger is some kind of "theological" thinker – perhaps an "atheist theologian" of sorts –, I doubt that it is true. Thinking imperfection with respect to an idea of perfection does not require to commit oneself to the existence of a perfect being.

think.³² Not only does Strauss agree with the fundamental Heideggerian thesis about the aporia of Being, but his attempt to object to the thesis of the historicity of Being through “permanent problems” is inconclusive.

7.2 Radical Μέθεξις: Gadamer on the Forms

Gadamer is of course much more sympathetic to Heidegger than Strauss. In particular, he follows Heidegger in acknowledging and embracing the temporality and historicity of Being and truth. However, Gadamer thinks that *Plato too* acknowledges this historicity. In order to show this, he articulates an interpretation of Plato’s *Ideenlehre* that emphasizes the participation dynamic of Forms and goes as far as to reject the separation thesis. In fact, I argue that Gadamer downplays the transcendence of Forms up to a point where Ideas are fully understood in a plane of immanence. This “immanentist” reading is made possible by two interpretive gestures: 1) an interpretation of the structure of Forms in terms of the structure of numbers according to Greek arithmetic; 2) a fairly problematic interpretation of the relationship between the Good and the Beautiful. Several interpreters have seen in this second feature a Gadamerian appropriation of the Scholastic doctrine of the transcendentals (and of the convertibility of the transcendentals). While it is true that Gadamer’s account of the participation of Ideas in each other and his understanding of truth employ some Scholastic concepts and language, I contend that (a) his understanding of the immanence of the Forms is incompatible with this doctrine and (b) his account of truth is too

³² While I am very sympathetic to Vekley’s (2011) analysis of the affinities between Strauss and Heidegger, I think he too hastily concludes that Strauss efficiently responded to the fundamental ontologist. It should be said that Vekley’s analysis is much more instructive and nuanced than Zuckert (1996) treatment of Strauss’ response to Heidegger. Since then, several Strauss scholars have, to my view, hastily or insufficiently argued that Strauss refuted Heideggerian historicism, e.g., Melzer (2006), Burns (2015), McBrayer (2015), Ruderman (2015). None, to my view, have considered properly the challenge posed by the Gadamer-inspired criticism I proposed.

Heideggerian to be metaphysical in any classical sense. In other words, Gadamer's conclusions about Platonic ontology are decisively post-Kantian.

7.2.1 *The Arithmetic Structure of Forms*

The key to an understanding of Gadamer's interpretation of Platonic Forms is the mathematical paradigm Plato uses.³³ That paradigm is so important that Gadamer sometimes spoke of Plato's metaphysics as "metamathematics" (e.g. GW 7, 280). This arithmetic framework was provided to him by Jacob Klein's analyses in his *Die griechische Logistik und die Entstehung der Algebra* (1934).³⁴ What is crucial for Gadamer in Klein's work is his reading of the ontological concepts of the *Sophist* in light of Aristotle's criticism of the theory of ideal numbers (εἰδητικοὶ ἀριθμοί) as exposed in *Metaphysics* A, M and N. Klein's intuition is that these eidetic numbers – the One and the Indefinite Dyad – do not have a properly mathematical significance for Plato:

*For Plato, however, it is precisely this unmathematical use of the arithmos structure which is essential. For the arithmoi eidetikoí are intended to make intelligible not only the inner articulation of the realm of ideas but every possible articulation, every possible division and conjunction – in short, all counting.*³⁵

All articulation is made possible on the basis of both identity and difference, the One and the Dyad, which, according to Klein are, in the *Sophist*, reflected respectively by rest (στάσις) and self-sameness (ταύτον) on the one hand, and change (κίνησις) and otherness (θάτερον) on the other hand. This is why these four γένη are all attributes of Being (ὄν). Klein claims: "'otherness' turns

³³ Gadamer contends that Plato's characteristic approach to ontology is mathematical, whereas Aristotle's approach is biological (DD, 200).

³⁴ Gadamer insisted on the fact that his thoughts on the doctrine of the One and the Dyad and Plato's Forms preceded the birth of the Tübingen School and that it was not influenced by it. For an attestation of Klein's influence, see GW 5, 159. See also Dostal 2010, 27n16, Renaud (2019, p. 356-357). On Gadamer and the Tübingen School, see Grondin (2010) and Renaud (2019, p. 362-364).

³⁵ Klein (1992, 92).

out to be the ontological aspect of ‘non-being,’ which can never be separated from ‘being’.”³⁶ Gadamer agrees with this when in his “Mathematik und Dialektik bei Plato,” he writes: “Discerning is differentiating (*Erkennen ist Unterscheiden*). And further: differentiating is never merely knowing the one. It is also, necessarily, knowing the other that it is not. Being is also non-being.” (GW 7, 311; cf. GW 7, 361). For Klein and Gadamer, Being, according to Plato, is twofold: both same and different, both one and many.

Gadamer certainly thinks that the theory of Forms is supposed to articulate the problem of the One and the Many. As we have already seen, Gadamer does not think that the ontology of the “late dialogues” disavows the Ideas. Rather, he contends that these ontological notions are supposed to help us make sense of the theory by explaining the structure of an Idea. This structure, he claims, is arithmetic. Gadamer sees the One and the Dyad not just in the *Sophist* but also in the *Philebus*: “After all, there is not only Aristotle’s account in the *Metaphysics*, Alpha 6, of the two principles, the One and the indefinite Dyad, from which all numbers just as all beings in general are derived. The same thing is stated in the *Philebus*’s doctrine of the *peras* and *apeiron*” (GW 7, 215; IG, 156-7 [trans. modif.]). This reading of the Forms *in light* of the ontology developed in the late dialogues was already prepared by Natorp’s conviction that there is a strong continuity regarding Forms throughout Plato’s corpus. These ontological pairs have an arithmetic structure insofar as, for the Greeks, a number is a definite or limited plurality.³⁷ Definite plurality is not just plurality or a mere manifold. Its definiteness depends on a unit that delimits it. In the language of the *Philebus*, being is the mixture of *πέρας* and *ἄπειρον*. Ideas too delimit a plurality or manifold. It is in virtue of Forms that the manifold of perceptible entities is articulated as a manifold of *such*

³⁶ Klein (1992, 95).

³⁷ See Aristotle, *Met.* II.1035a30; I6.1056b23-24; N1.1088a5 as well as Klein (1992, 46-60).

and such entities, that is, as a definite manifold. It is important to see that if this is the arithmetic structure of the Idea, we can hardly see how Platonic and Aristotelian Forms differ: it looks like the unlimited and limit operate as matter and form in Aristotle.³⁸

But there is more to the arithmetic structure of Forms according to Gadamer. Specifically, he argues that Plato understands the Idea as a sum number (DD, 132-34, 146, 208-9). A sum is inseparable from the unities that compose it, but it always exceeds these units. $1+1+1 = 3$. Three cannot be predicated of any of these ones that make up the three. In this sense, the sum transcends its particular parts. Yet, it is crucial to observe that a sum is not what it is if the integrity of its parts is not preserved. If we take one “1” out of the sum 3, 3 is destroyed. If the sum number is Gadamer’s model for understanding the structure of the Platonic Idea, then it looks like the Forms are even more dependent on the particulars that participate in it than on the unit model. While the sum model seems to suggest some kind of “transcendence,” it in fact implies a radically immanentist understanding. For according to this arithmetic interpretation, particulars do not simply participate in Forms, but *constitute* them.

7.2.2 *From Participation to Transcendentals*

Gadamer relentlessly rejects the χωρισμός as non-Platonic: “Plato was no Platonist who professed the doctrine of the two worlds” (GW 7, 331; cf. PTI, 9). This doctrine, he thinks, is in fact of Aristotelian origin. For Gadamer, the introduction of notions such as “otherness” (θάτερον) and “motion” (κίνησις) is a proof that Plato understands becoming as an integral part of his ontological thinking. The Forms are not separate but are in or “with” the appearing world. This is indeed

³⁸ This has been aptly argued by Lynch (2013, 61).

how he interprets the meaning of the word “participation” (μέθεξις). Gadamer identifies three different kinds of participation: 1) the participation of the soul in the Idea through knowledge; 2) the participation of particulars in the Ideas; 3) the participation of the Ideas in each other (IG, 88). Let us here consider the two later kinds of participation and come to the problem of knowledge in the next section.

Contra Aristotle (cf. *Met.* A6 987b12), Gadamer thinks it is worth differentiating μέθεξις from the notion of μίμησις. We find his clearest discussion of that distinction in his “Plato as Portraitist”:

When the stars bring the numbers to representation through their paths, we call this representation “mimesis” and take it to be an approximation of the actual being [*Annäherung an das eigentlich Seiende*]. In contrast to this, “methexis” is a wholly formal relationship of participation, based on *mutuality* [*Gegenseitigkeit*]. “Mimesis” always points in the direction of that which one approaches, or towards which one is oriented, when one represents something. “Methexis”, however, as the Greek μετά already signifies, implies that one thing is there together with something else [*daß es mit dem anderen zusammen da ist*]. Participation, μεταλαμβάνειν, completes itself only in genuine being-together and belonging together [*Zusammensein und Zusammengehören*], μετέχειν. 47 (GW 7, 246; PP, 262; my emphasis)

The import of the discussion is twofold. First, Gadamer understands the relation between world and Ideas in terms of *mutuality or reciprocity*. Orthodox readings would rather emphasize the unidirectional character of the participatory relation of perceptible things with their Forms: while these things owe their being to the Forms, the Forms are independent of what participates in them. Second, the relation of things to their Forms is not one of having, as the conventional translation “Teilhabe” (literally to “have a part in...”) would suggest, but one of *being*. This is made even more explicit in his essay on the *Sophist*, where he translates μέθεξις as *Mitdasein*.³⁹ Perceptible and appearing things are always with their Forms and *vice versa*. This again seems to suggest that Gadamer understands Platonic Ideas as Aristotelian forms. But is that so?

³⁹ He explains: “‘Teilhabe’ und ‘Teilnahme’ bedeutet hier nicht ein Haben ode rein Nehmen, sondern ein Sein” (GW 7, 362).

In “Plato’s Unwritten Dialectic,” Gadamer claims that the real problem of participation is how the One can be Many and the Many can be One. He thinks that this problem is once again displayed in the “mystery” of numbers. As already mentioned, a number is constituted of many units and is, therefore, a manifold; at the same time, it is itself a unity that has properties that cannot be predicated of its constitutive units (DD, 132). For instance, the number 6 is even, but the six ones that compose it are odd. More generally, the six ones together constitute the number 6, but 6 could never be predicated of the ones (133). Gadamer claims that this is equally true of λόγος: “does not the unity of discourse also have certain determinate property and is that not exactly the point?” (132) This claim is somewhat puzzling. For while it is true that the meaning of the word exceeds that of its syllables, and, further, that syllables are meaningless apart from the words they can constitute (133), there is, on this model, a risk to elevate every speech to the status of an Idea, which would run against both the distinctions of the *Seventh Letter* and the Divided Line in the *Republic* (especially the difference between noetic and dianoetic objects discussed above). Later in the essay, Gadamer indicates that not just any speech, but more specifically “definition displays the role of the number” (149). His justification for this claim is that, through the method of division and collection, the definition the dialectician arrives at contains in a way “all the essential definitions which have been run through.” But this has to be a restricted claim, i.e., Gadamer must mean that definitional λόγος has the structure of number “*insofar as it is arrived at by the procedure of dividing*” (my emphasis). This is to say that the analogy between defining and counting is limited to the Platonic picture, which, according to Gadamer, considers the definition inseparable from the dialectical path leading to it. Thus, in assertions Platonically understood, “something, which *being* what it is, is *identical* to itself, is linked to something *different* from itself” (DD, 143). On this point, Gadamer is very un-Aristotelian. For if the definition of human beings as speech-possessing animals is arrived at through induction, we hardly see how it could contain other definitions. The

Aristotelian definition contains two parts, namely the genus and the specific difference but neither of these parts is itself a definition. Now, it is true that, in a sense, the definition, like the number, transcends its constitutive parts. What can be predicated of human beings cannot be predicated of animals in general or of the form “speech-possessing.” But this is different than saying that definitions are composed of other dialectically encountered definitions.

Gadamer’s insistence on the problem of the One and the Many is not just supposed to shed light on the classical problem of the participation of the particulars into the Forms. Rather, it is supposed to help us understand the participatory dynamic between Ideas themselves. This problem is the problem of “radical participation” (DD, 137). The sum number displays a participation of numbers in each other. 5 and 2 participate in 7, but 5 and 2 are themselves “eidetic units.” Conversely, 7 does *not* participate in 5 or 2, but, it participates in 14 along with 5 and 2. What the Aristotelian counterexample reveals, however, is that this participatory relation is far less evident when we look at Forms in the sense of species. “Animal” and “speech-possessing” may be said to participate in “human being,” but species themselves *do not and cannot* participate in other species. This, I believe, is a significant point insofar as, as I indicated above, Gadamer sometimes seems to think of Platonic Ideas in terms of Aristotelian forms (i.e., species). But if we take seriously Gadamer’s claim that the most important aspect of participation is the participation of Ideas in each other, that does not seem possible.⁴⁰ I think that if we take seriously that claim, the emphasis must be put on much different Ideas. The most prominent of these in Gadamer’s writings are the

⁴⁰ Unless, of course, we take the notion of “Idea” in an extremely loose sense, in which case we can consider the participation of species-forms into other Idea. One could then say, for instance, that the “Idea of human being” participates into the “Idea of nourishment” and into the “Idea of locomotion.” At one point (and, to my knowledge, *only once*), Gadamer does make a statement of that kind (DD, 148) “The universal idea of ‘man’ is implied in the name ‘Theaetetus,’ and that idea excludes the idea of flying. [...] These *two* ideas cannot be combined with each other.” I think Gadamer must be using a loose example for pedagogical purposes here; there surely is no such thing as a Platonic Idea of flying if there is not even an Idea of the triangle.

Good and the Beautiful. Now, it is striking that he treats these two Forms, alongside truth, as though these notions formed a triadic conceptual unity.

Wachterhauser has rightly pointed out that this triad features importantly in the Medieval doctrine of the transcendentals.⁴¹ These transcendental aspects of beings are called such because they are “not known like Ideas that we can analyze in terms of genera and species” (for Being is not a genus or species).⁴² According to this doctrine, Truth, Beauty and the Good are transcategorical notions, and, in fact, aspects through which Being manifests itself. To be sure, the Good and the Beautiful are indeed unlike Aristotelian Forms. Now, it appears that virtues like justice or courage are not graspable in terms of genus and species either. Yet it is sensible to claim that they participate in each other and into these “transcendentals” in different ways: justice and courage are both good and beautiful, one may argue that courage is a part of justice, etc. This is the kind of “radical” participation that Gadamer has in mind. For an Idea is never isolated and rather always exists in a nexus or web of Ideas.⁴³ At the highest level, however, the pressing question is the question of the participatory relations among the transcendentals themselves, that is, what Medieval philosophers called the “convertibility of transcendentals.” It is fair to say that Gadamer appropriates this doctrine *insofar as he is deeply concerned with the relation between truth, the Beautiful, and the Good*. Yet his analysis of that relation reveals that, despite this interrogative affinity, he has serious reserves about the transcendentals as they were traditionally understood. This analysis also illuminates what Gadamer means by the participation of the human soul in the Forms through knowledge.

⁴¹ See Wachterhauser (1999, 38, 86, 188) and Dostal (2022, 95-96). Dostal notes that Gadamer does not include *unum* and *res* as transcendentals but argues that the One is operative in Gadamer’s concern for unity and that *res* becomes *Sache* in his hermeneutic ontology. This seems to me clear indications that Gadamer *radically modifies* the Medieval doctrine, something that neither Wachterhauser nor Dostal explicitly admits.

⁴² Wachterhauser (1999, 86).

⁴³ I agree with Wachterhauser (1999, 67 ff.) on that crucial point.

7.2.3 Truth, Beauty, and The Immanence of the Good

It is fair to say that the most difficult aspect of Plato's "theory" of Forms is the nature and status of the Good "Beyond Being." We have also seen in the previous chapter that Gadamer's understanding of Platonic politics is ultimately dependent on an understanding of the dialectic training of the guardians as culminating in knowledge of the Idea of the Good. Barthold has argued forcefully that the "good-beyond-being" is crucial to Gadamer's understanding of Plato and to philosophical hermeneutics more broadly.⁴⁴ It is true that Gadamer sometimes speaks of the importance of the transcendence of the Good. But we must ask: what kind transcendence is he then referring to? There are several places where he talks about this transcendence to differentiate the Good from the other Ideas (e.g. IG, 24, 34, 124). Sometimes he also claims simply that the Good transcends all conventions or anything that just appears good (IG, 81; 116). He also refers to transcendence to say that the Good it is not merely *a* good, or a good thing (IG, 125 cf. CP, 39). Twice in the *Idea of the Good*, Gadamer interestingly puts the "transcendence of the Good" in scare quotes, as if to distance himself from the expression (IG, 89, 123); the second occurrence of this is right before the crucial passage, that I shall examine below, where he casts serious doubts on the literalness of the Good's ἐπέκεινα. Toward the end of this book, he claims that Aristotle misunderstood "Plato's mathematically oriented interpretation of the transcendence of the good" (IG, 158). But as I have shown in the previous sections, Gadamer's understanding of this arithmetic structure of Forms implies more immanence than transcendence. In his conversations with Riccardo Dottori, Gadamer speaks of the Good's transcendence in terms of its indefinability and of transcending what we already know (CP, 31 and 36), and when he is pressed on this question, he equivocates: "I would simply say that the good is transcendence or the beyond. *No one can say whether it is or is not, whether it has being or whether it is beyond being*" (CP, 36-37; my emphasis). So, what does the Good is supposed to transcend? Following Barthold's argument, it must transcend "the dictates of the immediate situation", "the immediate pleasure of any given situation", "the immediate moment", "what one individual can predict, control, or manipulate", "our parochial goals" and "our instrumental concerns".⁴⁵ I contend that none of these transcendences, as

⁴⁴ Barthold (2010, esp. chap. 1 and 5).

⁴⁵ Barthold (2010, 11, 13, 14, 120, 123, 126).

important as they are, mean “beyond *Being*”; to appropriate Husserl’s words, they are various instances of “transcendence within immanence.”

So what does “beyond Being” mean? And how can we know what is beyond Being? In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer’s answer to the second question is quite clear: the Good is *absolutely ungraspable* (*schlechthin ungreifbar*, GW 1, 484). Accordingly, or so it seems, we simply cannot know the Good. Yet the fact that Plato has Socrates describing the Good as “beyond Being” suggests that we can at least know something about it, namely, that it is beyond Being. In fact, Gadamer does not just claim that the Good is unknowable, but that it is unknowable precisely *because* it is beyond Being. One might say that we know something about the Good insofar as we are aware of our ignorance of the Good, so that there is some minimal understanding of the ἐπέκεινα in this self-knowledge. Gadamer explores this negative knowledge of the “beyond” further. Thus, in *The Idea of the Good between Plato and Aristotle*, he reads the ἐπέκεινα of the Good as a flight or withdrawal: “‘It itself, αὐτὸ τὸ ἀγαθόν, withdraws (*entzieht sich*).’” (GW 7, 198)

Where does the Good withdraw? To answer this question, Gadamer relies heavily on the *Philebus*, as well as on the mythical character of Plato’s writings:

[...] this [the ἐπέκεινα] is the mythical form in which Plato essentially expresses what he makes explicit in the *Philebus* when he says that the Good ‘appears’ in the Beautiful (*das Gute im Schönen ‘erscheint’*) [...] That is the meaning of the statement that the Good takes refuge in the Beautiful (*daß das Gute in dem Schönen seine Zuflucht nehme*).” (GW 7, 198)

And in the same breath, Gadamer affirms that this withdrawal of the Good in the Beautiful anticipates Aristotelian *analogia entis*, which confirms the affinity of his discussion with the later doctrine of the transcendentals. Before following Gadamer’s argument further, it is worth noting two issues.

First, Gadamer assumes that Socrates, at the end of *Republic* VI, speaks mythically, but there are no indications that Socrates is telling a myth.⁴⁶ (This turn to a mythic interpretation of the Good is already anticipated, as we have seen, in Natorp and Casirer). What Socrates is in fact using is an image to express what he thinks the Good is, but that is not the same as mythologizing. If Socrates has good reasons to claim that the Good is beyond Being, we should not reduce it to a mythical expression. Now, as we have seen, even Leo Strauss – whose hermeneutic esotericism often leans toward ironizing out metaphysical passages or claims in philosophical texts – provides reasons for accepting the view that the Good is indeed beyond Being. In fact, the point is not a very difficult one. If the Good is the cause of the intelligibility of Being (i.e., of the Ideas), it cannot itself be Being. And Being must be made intelligible if the soul can get to grasp the Ideas. Ergo, the Good must “be” and it must “be” beyond Being. This is to say that the argument of the Sun Analogy makes *logical sense*, not that it makes the Good easily graspable or that it answers all the potential problems that arise with this view. But this logical consistency should be enough to prevent the interpreter from rejecting the ἐπέκεινα as a mere mythical expression. I think that Gadamer chooses this interpretive path because the account of the Good that he finds in the *Philebus* is, as we shall see, much more easily compatible with his own hermeneutic ontology.

Second, Gadamer assumes that the Good as treated in the *Republic* and as treated in the *Philebus* is the same. Many interpreters of Plato think that they are not: the *Republic* discusses the Good in itself, and the *Philebus* discusses the *human* good.⁴⁷ As we have already seen multiple times, Gadamer does not endorse the developmentalist view of the Platonic *corpus*, so he does not admit that Plato’s

⁴⁶ To be sure, Glaucon is surprised by the grandiose expression “beyond Being,” but that is not an indication that Socrates speaks mythically (cf. 509c). It could simply express the bewildering puzzle that this account of the Good represents for Socrates’ interlocutors and for us, readers. Gonzalez (2017, 624-626) has rightly criticized the mythical reading of the ἐπέκεινα.

⁴⁷ For recent examples, see Vogt (2020, 19) and Moss (2019, 234).

ontology has *changed* – at best, its deepest intentions are expressed more and more clearly. The question of the Good is no exception for him: he thinks that the Good in the *Republic* is just as about the human good as it is in the *Philebus* (IG, 30).

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer had already claimed that the Good withdraws by appearing through the Beautiful. There, he also emphasized the special character of the Beautiful in Platonic metaphysics, namely that Beauty is, among all Forms, the most appearing one (*das am meisten Hervorleuchtende* [*ekphanestaton*], GW 1, 485; cf. *Phdr.* 250d7). He goes on to argue that this appearing function of the good expresses the mediation (*Vermittlung*) between Idea and appearance and claims: “This is the crux of Platonism. It condenses conceptually the participation (*methexis*) and pertains to both the relation of appearance and Idea and to the relation between Ideas.” This is very important in Gadamer’s argument. The appearance of the Good through the Beautiful is supposed to shed light on the appearance of Forms in the perceptible world. Let us look at how he understands the Beautiful:

Plato defines the Beautiful through measure, adequateness and proportionality; Aristotle states as the moments (*eidé*) of the Beautiful order (*taxis*), good proportionality (*summetria*) and definition (*hōrismenon*), and finds these given in an exemplary manner in mathematics [...] Conformity to measure, symmetry is the decisive condition of all beauty. 66 (GW 1, 482-483)

Gadamer’s potential textual supports for this account are Plato’s *Philebus* (64e5) and Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (M3.1078a31-b5).⁴⁸ In both cases, the fundamental notion is that of *measure*, which Gadamer sees in the proper mixture of *πέρας* and *ἄπειρον* in the constitution of the good life, but also extends to the art of measuring as discussed in Plato’s *Statesman*. This connection with the *Statesman* is important because there, the criteria for that art are the measure, the fitting, the right

⁴⁸ But note that these are only implicit references. I have argued elsewhere that the Aristotle reference is quite problematic – see Pageau-St-Hilaire (2019, 189.)

moment or occasion and what is required (τὸ μέτριον καὶ τὸ πρέπον καὶ τὸ καιρὸν καὶ τὸ δέον, 284e5). The uniting feature of these criteria is their *immanence*.⁴⁹ In a footnote to his comments on the Beautiful, Gadamer refers to a discussion in Krüger's *Einsicht und Leidenschaft* (GW 1, 484n121). In this section, Krüger claims that beauty in the *Philebus* is *temporal* beauty (EL, 236). This makes clear that the immanence of the Beautiful is importantly immanence in the sense of temporality.

The relevance of this transition from the ἐπέκεινα of the Good to the temporality of the Beautiful as the most appearing Form becomes obvious once Gadamer, in a Heideggerian gesture, claims that beauty has the mode of being of *light* (*die Seinsweise des Lichtes*) and that this is what Plato means by truth as manifestness (“Das ist die Offenbarkeit [*alêtheia*]”) (GW 1, 486). Gadamer finally explains his version of the “convertibility” of these three “Platonic transcendentals”: “Plato was the first to show that the essential moment in the Beautiful was *alêtheia*, and it is clear what he means by this. The Beautiful, the way in which the Good appears, makes itself manifest in its Being, presents itself.” The Good only appears through Beauty and truth, which designate the self-presentation of Being. Gadamer’s version of the doctrine of the transcendentals, therefore, gives precedence to Beauty and truth as the temporal disclosure of Being. In that decisive respect, Gadamer’s ontology is not Medieval at all, and this for at least two reasons. First, *pulchrum* (the beautiful) was not traditionally understood as one of the *transcendentalia*, but it is the *sine qua non* condition of Gadamer’s understanding of Platonic participation. Second, the notion of truth (*verum*) in the doctrine of the transcendentals refers ultimately to the correspondence between “what is” (*ens*) and God’s mind (*intellectus*), which is, for instance, the safeguard against a subjectivistic or relativistic account of truth in Aquinas’ argument: while God’s mind *never changes*,⁵⁰ truth is a

⁴⁹ This is why Gadamer says that the *Statesman* anticipates Aristotelian ethics (GW 7, 197).

⁵⁰ See e.g. *Questiones Disputatae de Veritate*, q1a2 in Aquinas (1993, 55-58).

temporal or event-like disclosure for Gadamer.⁵¹ For he in fact maintains that “Being is self-presentation, and understanding is an event” (TM, 500). This, he thinks is just another way of claiming that “All Being that can be understood is language” (TM, 502). Being and its coming to truth in language is temporal because the disclosure of Being through language is always circumscribed by the event of that disclosure.⁵² This is Gadamer’s sense in which the soul participates in Forms, namely, through temporal-linguistic disclosures.

This fundamental thesis, Gadamer thinks, is expressed in the second sailing, that is, in Socratic turn to the λόγοι: “seeking the truth in the logoi is not at all a second best way but in fact the *only way to true insight (Einsicht)*” (DD, 198). Gadamer tries to downplay the transcendence of the Good through its appearance in Beauty – and thereby cancels its ἐπέκεινα – because if the Good is beyond Being, that would mean that the highest principle of Platonic philosophy is beyond language. And Gadamer’s hermeneutic ontology cannot afford that.

* * *

Gadamer’s account of the Good, the Beautiful, and truth leads his appropriation of Plato to the same consequence as what we have previously observed in his analysis of the arithmetic structure of Forms and of Platonic participation. So far, I have argued that the general direction of this interpretation is one that transfers any claim to transcendence onto a plane of immanence. I would finally like to suggest another, perhaps more Platonic way of explaining what is at stake in that

⁵¹ Dostal (2022) notes that Gadamer does not include *unum* and *res* as transcendentals but argues that the One is operative in Gadamer’s concern for unity and that *res* becomes *Sache* in his hermeneutic ontology. This seems to me rather clear indications that Gadamer *radically modifies* the Medieval doctrine, something that neither Wachterhauser (1999) nor Dostal (2022) explicitly admits. More could be said about why the Medieval transcendentals do not map so well on Platonic metaphysics: for instance, the Scholastics thought that *bonum* and *verum* were of the transcendental aspects of Being among the others, while Plato thinks that the Good is beyond Being, and that truth yokes the intellect and its objects together (see *Rep.* 507e6-508a2), suggesting a kind of structural hierarchy among these so-called “Platonic transcendentals.” This is an important point that, to my knowledge, has not been signaled by any scholar.

⁵² On this point see Risser’s (2002, 228-229) excellent analysis.

hermeneutic gesture. Gadamer's rejection of the ἐπέκεινα of the Good has plainly revealed that he rejects any principle that would transcend *Sprachlichkeit*. This is so because he thinks that all understanding must be linguistic. An obvious problem with that view from a Platonic standpoint is that this does not allow any truth-claim to the last division of the Divided Line, that of νοήσις and noetic objects. Robert Dostal has recently argued that Gadamer is highly reticent to admit anything like what Aristotle later called νοῦς ἄνευ λόγου, speechless or non-discursive insight.⁵³ I think this is most certainly right. I would like to add the following suggestion: Gadamer's rejection of νοῦς is the counter-part of his rejection of noetic objects. But Plato undeniably thinks that Forms are such νοούμενα and not mere dianoetic objects. Still, Gadamer does not want and cannot credibly get rid of the Forms altogether. His appropriation of the *Ideenlehre* rather consists in what I would call a "dianoeticization" of the Ideas. As I have argued earlier, a similar kind of strategy seems operative in Strauss' interpretation of the Forms as species and kinds, as well as his claim that Ideas are permanent philosophical problems. Is it possible to maintain the integrity of the Divided Line in a post-Kantian context? Can we hold on to the significance of the noetic level of cognition and reality without relapsing into dogmatic metaphysics? Gerhard Krüger seems to think so.

7.3 Krüger on Platonic Ontology and Human Finitude

Krüger, very much like Strauss and Gadamer, emphasizes that Plato was non-dogmatic about the Forms. This is to say that, according to him, Plato was careful to avoid developing a fully articulated metaphysical system (EPWA, xii). Likewise, he thinks that the *Phaedrus* and *Seventh Letter* both speak

⁵³ See Dostal (2022, 180-89).

against any dogmatization (*Fixierung*) of philosophy through writing (xvii). A sign of this, he thinks, is that, in the dialogues, the Forms are either referred to as something already granted or presupposed or, as in the *Parmenides*, treated with a view to their problematic character. He also insists that, for Plato, the soul's knowledge of Ideas too is a problem (xxxvii). But, again like Strauss and Gadamer, this does not lead Krüger to diminish the importance of Forms or to remain silent about them. Krüger thinks that we can make our way to a better grasp of what Plato means if we explore negatively what Ideas *are not*. I contend that this is his distinctive "method" in his argument about Platonic metaphysics. I distinguish three moments of this negative approach. First, Krüger argues about the ontological status of the Forms by distinguishing Forms from thoughts or concepts, beings or "things," and kinds or species. Second, he claims that looking at Plato's path or way (*Weg*) to the Ideas reveals what I shall call the noetic-dianoetic difference, which also informs us about what Forms are *not* and the ways in which they are *not grasped* by the mind. Finally, Krüger argues negatively that the Ideas, and in fact in general Being for Plato, must be eternal. We shall finally ask what is the status of such negative arguments.

7.3.1 *Neither Thoughts, Nor Things, Nor Kinds*

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, much of what Plato's "theory of Forms" amounts to depends on how we understand their ontological status, namely, what they *are*. One traditional answer to this question consists in saying that Forms are eternal, self-subsisting and unchanging substances, transcendent beings or "things." German philosophers at the turn of the 20th Century witnessed what was perhaps the strongest opposition to this view in the Marburg Neo-Kantian crusade against any "ontological" reading of the *Ideenlehre*. As we have seen in chapter 1, Natorp, anticipated by Cohen and followed by Cassirer, argued that Ideas were not substances or beings

but rather “thought-positings” (*Denksetzungen*), that is, hypotheses that the human subject must formulate in order to allow knowledge of the perceptible world through modern natural science.

The question of the substantiality or “thinghood” of Ideas raises several difficult questions regarding their existence. If Forms are things or substances, they should exist. But where do they exist? And how can they exist in a “place” if they are immaterial? Such problems are prompted by Plato’s mythical allusion to a “sky of Ideas” (see *Phaedr.* 247c) or his evocation, in the *Republic*, of an “intelligible place” (νοητὸς τόπος, cf. *Rep.* 508c).⁵⁴ For Krüger, it is clear that such problems are artificial and should be ruled out if we consider that Plato was an “essentialist.” What he means by that is that the question that Plato’s “theory” is supposed to answer, or, more accurately, is supposed to bring to the fore, is not the “thatness” or existence of things but rather their “whatness”: “the Platonic Socrates thinks Being (*das Sein*) in the sense of the “whatness” (*Wasseins*), the “character” (*Wesens*) or the “essence” (*Essenz*), while the “that” of Being, the “being-there” (*Dasein*) or the “existence” (*Existenz*) remains secondary and is not really explained” (EPS, 30-31). This is an important point. If Plato were to answer the “what” question by referring to a “that,” he would be open to the criticism that has been leveled at him by Aristotle. For Aristotle precisely thinks that Plato’s ontology is flawed because it answers the question of the whatness of a substance by pointing to another substance. Aristotle contends that this “what-to-that” derivation begs the question and thus leads to an infinite regress – the famous “third man argument.” By emphasizing that Platonic Ideas are not “thats” but “whats,” not *beings* (*Seiende*) but the Being (*Sein*) of such beings (EL, 211), Krüger forecloses the Aristotelian critique: Plato’s Ideas do not occasion a “doubling of things” (*Verdoppelung der Dinge*; EPWA, xxxvi) precisely because they are not things.

⁵⁴ It should yet be noted that the “sky” of Forms in the *Phaedrus* is not so much a sky as a “place beyond the sky” (ὑπερουράνιον τόπον, 247c). Perhaps Plato’s myth thus intends something else than an actual “place.”

Denying that Forms are things or substances could be understood as an indication that they are not “objects” properly speaking. This could in turn motivate the thought that Ideas are, rather, “subjective.” And this is precisely the Neo-Kantian response. Like Neo-Kantians, Krüger rejects that Ideas are things or substances, but he also rejects the view that they are “thoughts” or “concepts,” that is, that they are projections or constructs of human subjectivity. Thus, Krüger writes in *Einsicht und Leidenschaft* that “the unity of thought is not due to thinking reason, but to what is intended in thought (*was in den Gedanken gemeint wird*)” (EL, 267). He explicitly takes issue with Paul Natorp’s interpretation of Ideas as “laws,” which betrays “the prevalence of *human autonomy* (*das Walten der menschlichen Selbständigkeit*)” (EL, 222; cf. EPWA, xxx). As we have seen, Krüger’s emphasis – especially through his interpretation of philosophical *eros* as a πάθος and *Stimmung* – on the *limits* of such autonomy and autarchy is incompatible with that subjective approach. Ideas are not *thoughts*, but objects of thought (EPWA, xxxii).

An alternative to these two approaches – Forms as things or as thoughts – is the Aristotelian ἔνυλον εἶδος. As we have seen, both Strauss and Gadamer are tempted by this interpretation of the Ideas when they consider Platonic Forms as species. Krüger explicitly mentions that discussions of Ideas in terms of “kind” and “genus” are misleading (cf. EPS, 44). The reason for his doubts about that strategy should become clear once we consider his insistence on the difference between νοήσις and διάνοια, but here it should still be stated that Krüger thinks that Ideas are neither substances, nor thoughts, nor kinds. What are they? On some rare occasions, Krüger ventures a positive characterization of what the Forms *are*. As mentioned above, he thinks that an Idea is not

a being, but the Being of that being (cf. GP, 73).⁵⁵ Further light on what Krüger thinks this means should be shed by examining his analysis of the noetic-dianoetic difference.

7.3.2 *The Noetic-Dianoetic Difference*

In a critique of Heidegger published in 1949 and 1950, Krüger takes issue with his Heidegger on a “methodological” point of his interpretation of Plato: “Unfortunately, we hear something about the Ideas, but not about the Platonic path to them [*nicht über den platonischen Weg zu ihnen*], a path on which they would perhaps show themselves differently, as it is the case” (MHH, 166, cf. EPWA, xxvii). I think this criticism is twofold. First, there is the general point to the effect that Heidegger does not pay proper attention to the dialogical structure of Plato’s thought in general and looks everywhere instead for a doctrine. As I have shown in chapter 4, Krüger’s interpretation of Plato’s dialogical writing and thinking is antithetic to that approach. Second, Krüger is referring to Heidegger’s failure to consider the Ideas in light of the dialectical ascent and the philosophical curriculum that lead the soul to grasp them.

With respect to the second point, Krüger follows very seriously the *Republic*’s invitation to read the allegory of the Cave alongside the Divided Line (cf. 533e-534a). The philosophical soul does not immediately get to the Forms. It must first go through images, perceptible beings, and dianoetic objects; cognitively, it has to proceed through εἰκασία, πίστις, and διάνοια. Krüger translates διάνοια as *Nachdenken* and *Verstand*, and νοήσις as *Einsicht* and *Vernunft* (e.g., GP, 92). As the title of his *Platonbuch* expresses, he thinks that noetic insight has priority for Plato (and Ancient philosophy in general). This is so because Plato treats discursive thought (*Nachdenken*) as a *mean* for coming to

⁵⁵ Krüger also writes that a Form is an *Urgestalt* (EPWA, xxix), but that is more a paraphrase than an explanatory characterization.

noetic insight (*ein Mittel [...] um zur Einsicht zu kommen*, 93). For him, this demarcates Ancient and Moderns: “das antike Denken ist primär einsichtig, das modern primär nachdenklich.” And it is clear to him that this distinction corresponds to a distinction in the objects of thought: “It is indeed essential for the objects of knowledge (Mathemata) that the matters (*Sache*) of ‘*Dianoia*,’ that is, progressive, discursive thought are not the matters of ‘*Noús*,’ that is, silent, genuine ‘in-sight’ (*Ein-Sicht*).”⁵⁶

The distinction between and hierarchy of νοῖσις and δίανοια thus mean two things. First, that we ought not to conflate these faculties or their proper objects; second, that there is a continuity between the two, such that understanding one without the other is misleading. The second of these two implications of the noetic-dianoetic difference may be said to challenge the Heideggerian approach. In fact, Heidegger attempts to understand what Plato meant with the Forms without paying attention to any dianoetic mediation.⁵⁷ The first implication rather challenges the kind of dianoeticization of Forms that we find in Strauss and Gadamer. For Krüger, both approaches – the reduction to the noetic and the reduction to the dianoetic – fail to capture Platonic thought. For while he undoubtedly thinks that Plato holds unto the primacy of the noetic, he does not think that *Einsicht* alone constitutes the “essence of Platonic thinking.” What role does *eros* play in that respect?

For us, the Idea cannot be pure divine being; it must at once be anything which is conceived of as self-subsistent (*sie muß zugleich alles selbständig Begriffene sein*), even when the tension does not prove so great. Eros, however, which bridges the gap in everything (*der die Kluft im All überbrückt*) and through which all dialogue (*Dialektikos*) between the divine and the human happens, strives toward a ‘dialectic’ overcoming of all tension: it effects that dialectic holds the hypotheses not as origins (*Ursprünge*), as Mathematics does, but truly as hypotheses, that is, as “springboards” (ἐπιβάσεις) and “starting

⁵⁶ Cf. GP, 93: “Die Weise des Verstehens entspricht der Weise des Seins.” See also the remarks on the importance of that distinction in EPS, 38. On the ineffable character of noetic insight, see *El*, 225 and 257

⁵⁷ I have shown in chapter 2 that Heidegger is highly critical of dialectic and prefers to consider Platonic doctrines about Forms and truth.

points” (ὄρμαι), in order to reach the “unhypothetical,” that which is not posited by us, but which is rather in itself the “cause of everything (*Rep.* 511b)” (EL, 224-25)

According to this argument, *eros* bridges between the dianoetic and the noetic. But as we have seen, for Krüger, Platonic philosophy is fundamentally and thoroughly erotic. This suggests that the proper locus of philosophical thinking is the *movement between* δίανοια and νοήσις. Thus, the distinction between the two is as essential as the continuity. This leads Krüger to an original and peculiar statement on the Forms: “to the demonic tensioned essence of Eros, by virtue of which it is at once immortal and mortal, corresponds a tension in the essence of its object: the *Idea is at once “mortal” concept and divine being*” (EL, 52). With this strange thought, Krüger is in fact providing an original answer to a puzzle that emerges with the Neo-Kantian interpretation of Platonic Ideas as hypotheses. As I have explained in chapter 1, there is an ambiguity in the interpretations of Cohen and Natorp, for it is one thing to claim that Socrates makes the hypothesis of the Ideas and it is another thing to say that Ideas are themselves hypotheses. And while Plato’s *Republic* clearly indicates that hypotheses are objects of δίανοια, it also only calls unhypothetical the Good. Yet if only the Good is unhypothetical, does it not follow from that that the other Forms are hypothetical or hypotheses? But if they are, would that not mean that they are objects of δίανοια? Krüger’s solution to that puzzle, it seems, is that Ideas or Forms (except the Idea of the Good) can be grasped both by δίανοια and νοήσις, albeit differently so. As objects of δίανοια, Ideas are “concepts” (*Begriffe*) and *temporal*; as objects of νοήσις, they are not merely concepts and are *atemporal* (cf. EL, 260, 276).⁵⁸ Allegedly, Ideas can only come to be known or grasped noetically once they have first been grasped dianoetically and once that initial dianoetic grasp has led to a noetic sight of the Good.

⁵⁸ We must be careful: Krüger thinks that Forms can – indeed, must – be thought both dianoetically and noetically, but it does not follow from that that every dianoetic object, every “mortal concept,” can be thought noetically in turn. As far as I can see, Krüger neither accepts nor rejects the latter view explicitly. As I mentioned above, the question of whether δίανοια and νοήσις have different *objects* is great perplexity of the scholarship on Plato. It is an inquiry of its own which goes much beyond the present arguments.

With this view, Krüger's interpretation challenges both Heidegger's understanding, which excludes the role of temporality in Plato's ontology, and the Straussian and Gadamerian attempts to dianoeticize the Forms in order to diminish the metaphysical weight of the "theory." But there remains in Krüger a claim to eternity in the *Ideenlehre*, and we ought now to consider what exactly is the nature of that claim in order to judge its persuasiveness.

7.3.3 *Via Negativa: Being, Time, Eternity*

Platonic Forms are identical to themselves. Since they do not admit change, and since time requires motion⁵⁹ they cannot be temporal: "we clearly see the togetherness of self-identity and time-transcendence (*Selbstsein und Zeitüberlegenheit*)" (EL, 250). According to the *Parmenides* (156d-e), νοῦς too is "in no time" (ἐν χρόνῳ οὐδενὶ οὐσα, EL, 278). Speaking of the supra-temporality of the Forms, Krüger at first glance holds the kind of view that Heidegger attacks:

The proper objects of knowledge are so by themselves (*sind so sehr bei sich selbst*) that they [...] have everything always present to them, without contingency and future. As necessary essences they do not need to wait for their fate (*Schicksal*): there is for them no other, future time (*Zeit*). Their time (*Dauer*), as pure presence without past or future (*als 'reine' vergangenheits- und zukunftslose Anwesenheit*), is that beyond which there can be no other [time]. Thus, if their "time" (*'Zeit'*) passes (*vergeht*), then all possible 'time' passes away (*vergeht*), and with this all "recollection" of temporality whatsoever. The lover, who dialectically lets go the "hypotheses" in order to finally "get a stable foothold," enters all of a sudden outside of time in the everlasting presence of the ineffable (*tritt plötzlich aus der Zeit in die unvergängliche Gegenwart des Unsagbaren ein*). The eternal in its eternity comes to her. (EL, 279)⁶⁰

Is that not an astonishing example of a "metaphysics of presence"? But if so, why, then, does Krüger later emphasize that through *eros* we always experience the "power of time," its "threat and

⁵⁹ This is not just so for Aristotle (*Phys.* 219a8; 219b1-2); in the *Timaeus*, time is called the "moving image of eternity according to number" (37d; my emphasis)

⁶⁰ It should be noted though that Krüger elsewhere (EL, 246) tells us that this supratemporal presence encompasses time as a whole (*die Zeit als Ganzes*). That formulation is much less like the *Anwesenheit* that Heidegger criticizes in metaphysics.

lure” (*Drohung und Lockung*) (EL, 302-303)? One aspect that does not appear prominent but which is in fact crucial in this discussion of the temporality of Forms is that noetic insight into the eternal happens “all of a sudden” (*plötzlich*). Earlier in his book, Krüger recalls that, according to the *Symposium*, the Form of the Beautiful “shows itself ...all of sudden (ἐξαίφνης)” (EL, 201). He further notes that the anticipation (*Erwartung*) of that seeing “has the character of uncanniness (*Unheimlichkeit*)” (EL, 203). There is therefore a radical discrepancy between the atemporality of Being and the temporality of our access to Being. The question is then, How can we come to grasp or access the eternal through such temporal mediations, if at all? And how can we know that Forms are not in time if we are? Krüger’s answer to this question is: negatively. This negative way, he thinks, is the erotic way:

The “via negativa” of knowledge here is not a logical and a methodological problem, in the “theoretical” sense of modern philosophy, but a way of understanding which is grounded in *love*. To grasp something by recognizing what it is *not*, this is the “Method” through which Eros naturally proceeds. (EL, 202)

Krüger also describes this as a “knowing *through deficiency*” (*ein Wissen aus der Mangel heraus*). This is to say that human beings can get a sense of the non-temporal through reflection on the experience of their temporality. Through erotic longing, we are made aware of what we do not possess. But this also means that in a decisive respect, if not *the* decisive respect, we cannot grasp Being itself. Yet, according to the *via negativa*, knowing that we cannot grasp Being is an indication of what Being is like. And insofar as we can understand negatively what Being is *not*, we have some kind of intimation of what Being is. In other words, we know negatively that the Ideas are “different than the relations that the finite understanding (*endliche Verstand*) recognizes” (EL, 227). As I have indicated above, the word *Verstand* must be understood here as *διάνοια*. Krüger thus argues there is, *via negativa*, a kind of dianoetic inkling at the noetic vision. Thus, he is not positing dogmatically the possibility of metaphysical knowledge, because, ultimately, we *cannot* know the atemporal that

we suspect: “The love of wisdom cannot get to wisdom, for the winged soul only attains a prospective view of the supernatural place (*Ausblick auf den überweltlichen Ort*), only an ascent as an ever-recurring course (*als einem immer wiederholten Gange*)” (304).

It should finally be noted that this emphasis on the erotic character of philosophy brings back the attention not so much on the Ideas but, *contra* Heidegger, on the *way* to the Ideas. Yet Krüger’s response to the Heideggerian attack on Platonism is significantly different than what we find in Strauss and Gadamer. For Strauss and Gadamer reduce the Forms to the dianoetic level, whereas Krüger, without assuming that noetic insight is accessible, acknowledges that the proper locus of Forms is at the noetic level. This is why he thinks that the Forms are both noetic and dianoetic objects. And while we humans most likely remain at the level of *διάνοια*, this experience of our finitude is indicative that there is something else that stands, so to speak, beyond our reach.

Conclusions

Understanding Plato’s Forms in light of the Socratic turn to *λόγοι* and dialogue as the only possible orientation for philosophy has a significant result which, I contend, is common to Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger: all three consider the Ideas as absolutely inseparable from the facticity of philosophy, that is, the concrete and existential character of the lived dialogue. For Strauss, the decisive feature of that character is the political, and therefore Ideas arise from a confrontation with the opinions one encounters in the *πόλις*. For Gadamer, what is crucial is the linguisticity (*Sprachlichkeit*) of that experience. For Krüger, the fundamental aspect of that lived dialogue is its erotic *Stimmung*. In these respects, all three of these attempts are far closer to a phenomenological approach to Plato than what Heidegger actually achieves in his interpretations of Platonic ontology.

Another common feature of their understanding of Platonic Forms is the view that Forms – that, is Being according to Plato – remain only partially accessible or partially intelligible to the human soul. This view, I think, adequately responds to the Heideggerian critique which stipulates that Platonic metaphysics is an attempt to reduce the meaning of Being to what can come under human mastery. At the same time, recognition that Being is only partially intelligible and ultimately elusive seems to bring Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger further from Heidegger’s Plato but closer to Heidegger himself. If this is the case, then this raises the question, What is the point of rescuing Plato from Heidegger’s criticism if it ultimately leads to a Platonism which is in tune – at least in that decisive respect – with Heideggerianism? In other words, what does the detour via Plato contribute that Heideggerian philosophy misses?

This very question supposes what Krüger’s critique of Heidegger’s Plato highlighted, namely that we can understand the endpoint of a philosopher’s thinking without consideration for the philosophical *Weg*. (To be sure, this is highly paradoxical, as Heidegger insisted that his own productions should be understood as *Wege, nicht Werke*). But that requires considering that philosophy is reducible to propositional thinking, and this picture is rejected by Heidegger, Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger alike. Following a more existentially rooted understanding of philosophy, one must concede that the same proposition can have different meanings depending on the ways in which one can arrive at that proposition. In the present case, the proposition “Being remains ultimately elusive” indeed has different undertones for each thinker. Strauss’ view that Ideas are unchanging philosophical problems is quite opposed to Gadamer’s understanding of the temporal appearance of the Good through the beautiful in a truth-event, and Krüger’s own insistence on the erotics of Socratic *docta ignorantia* is also very different from the interpretation of his interlocutors. Seeing that these three different views concur on the question of whether or not

Being is fully intelligible according to Plato is crucial, but summing up their positions to that “ultimate” proposition would be reductive.

This amounts to saying that besides the recognition of the fundamental elusiveness of Being, Heidegger misses virtually everything that the Platonism of Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger brings to the fore in making its way toward that recognition. I do not mean by that that Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger all provide equally good responses to the challenges that Heidegger pose to their own thinking. Specifically, I have argued that Strauss importantly *fails* to provide a satisfactory response to Heidegger’s emphasis on the *Zeitlichkeit* and *Geschichtlichkeit* of Being. And on this specific question, my discussion of Gadamer’s interpretation of Platonic Forms shows that Gadamer significantly endorses that *Zeitlichkeit* and thus temporalizes Platonic Forms. But he thereby eludes the problem of eternity, which seems to be quite central to Plato’s concern. We may sum up the chasm between the attempts of Strauss and Gadamer thusly: while the former emphasizes some version of eternity (the *ahistorical*, the unchanging) against temporality, the other emphasizes temporality against eternity. But despite this opposition, both strategies amount to a dianoeticization of the Ideas. Indeed, problems and questions are ineluctably discursive, and so is the *Sprachlichkeit* of the Beautiful in its appearance.

In that respect, I have tried to highlight the merit and originality of Krüger, who attempts to bridge the noetic and the dianoetic and manages to account for both temporality and eternity in his interpretation of the Forms. While his strategy in his attempt, the *via negativa*, may bring him closer to more traditionally metaphysical arguments, I contend that his insistence on the rootedness of negative reasoning in *eros* and therewith human finitude protects him from accusations of dogmatism. We are aware of eternity and changelessness in an allusive and uncertain mode, the only mode accessible to the limited beings we are. But to conclude the temporality of Being from

our own temporality seems to Krüger a dogmatic imposition of human subjectivity on the meaning of Being.⁶¹ In this respect, he turns Heidegger upside down.

While Krüger's position seems to me more fruitful in these regards, this chapter has more broadly tried to show that all three interpretations are remarkable in their philosophical intensity and their intellectual aim. Plato's philosophy is still nowadays too easily reduced to a doctrine that has very little appeal to philosophers living and thinking in a post-Kantian world. The fundamental attractiveness and interest of the interpretations of Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger lies in their capacity to help us think through these very difficult philosophical problems without concluding to dogmatic metaphysics. The spirit of their readings is thus fundamentally attuned to the lived dialogue which, they think, is the very soul of Platonic philosophy. Their writings on Platonic ontology are thus an invitation to philosophize with them without falling prey to the Sirens of inflexible positions and definitive verdicts. For such conclusions are dead, and Plato's speeches continue to live.

⁶¹ Cf. Grondin (2011, 166).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We should not, however, in accord with the maker of proverbs, “think human things, since you are human” or “think mortal things, since you are mortal” but, rather, we should as far as possible immortalize, and do everything to live in accord with the element in us that is most excellent.

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X 7, 1177b31-34¹

The second sailing is not a method in any technical sense of the term “method.” It is not a protocol, a series of rules to follow. It is not a collection of laws of thinking. It is not reproducible independently of that onto which it is “applied.” The second sailing is a method, however, in the ordinary sense of the Greek word μέθοδος, that is, if we hear and emphasize the ὁδός, the way, the path. For a second sailing is after all a journey. It is the journey of Socrates, the story of which he himself tells his friends on his deathbed in the *Phaedo*. It is the story of a reorientation that involved more than simply thinking differently. It involved a much more radical, existential change, a dedication – one is tempted to say a conversion, a περιαγωγή – of one’s own whole life, of one’s ψύχη. The fact that Socrates conceived this change as involving his whole way of life finds its expression in the *Apology of Socrates*, where Socrates, right before being condemned to death by Athens, recounts to his fellow Athenian citizens the story of his philosophical awaking as a Delphic mission. While we are entitled to doubt that this mission was truly Delphic, it is quite clear that it was a mission. The arc of this twofold autobiography is the image of the philosophic life as an existential journey.

This voyage is, as the image of the second sailing suggests, a kind of detour. This detour is necessary due to how things are. It is the only possible orientation that can lead the travelers to

¹ Trans. Reeve.

their destination. This destination, as is quite clear in the *Phaedo*, is a certain understanding, a certain grasp of the good. Those who attempted to reach this destination directly by taking their bearings on mere “facts” (ἔργα) are like sailors who try to sail on a windless day: they cannot reach it. Taking their bearings on speeches (λόγοι) instead, Socratic-Platonic philosophers are like sailors who resolve to use oars. A second sailing is more difficult than the unavailable alternative. The turn to λόγοι is a long and toilsome detour, but it is the only way. What I have proposed, we may say, is a heavily “existential” understanding of this demanding voyage, namely the reorientation toward λόγοι not just as a feature of philosophic discourse but as an embodied, lived imperative.

This imperious necessity of turning to speeches is importantly oriented by the purpose of the redirection. For with or without a detour, we can only navigate a path, a μέθοδος, if we know *where* we are trying to go. Without at least an imperfect idea of the destination, we are lost at sea. The destination of the second sailing is the good. If we are seeking the good, this is what should shape our turn to λόγοι. For all λόγοι are not equally likely to lead us to destination. I have argued that the second sailing thusly understood orients the philosopher toward privileged interlocutors whose speeches (and the questions that these speeches prompt) are more likely to guide us in the right direction. These privileged interlocutors are those whose discourse has a special and authoritative claim on the question of goodness: poets and politicians. I contend that the German second sailing of Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger, thinks of philosophy as dialogue and thinks of dialogue chiefly as the dialogue with poetry and politics to reach the good, that, is, the Forms and eventually the Idea of the Good. My further contention is that this kind of dialogical Platonism is meant to respond to Heidegger.

It should be asked: do these three post-Heideggerian Platonists reach their destination? I have argued that their articulation of the meaning of dialogue and the dialogical form in Plato, as well

as their treatment of the question of philosophy and poetry and of philosophy and politics, show not just a deeper understanding of Platonic philosophy than Heidegger, but also provide convincing critiques of Heidegger. Understanding λόγος as dialogue prevents the Platonist from giving way to the logical prejudice of metaphysics and transforming truth into mere correctness. Dialogues are, precisely, λόγοι that display their truth in their whole movement and not by “corresponding” to anything. The poetic finitude of philosophy is also an acknowledgment of the limits of mere rationality and of the disclosive power of language: it is not just as rational discourses that λόγοι can be images of the truth of beings. As for the political finitude of philosophy, it shows that Plato understood philosophy more phenomenologically than Heidegger had assumed and that proper attention to the political situatedness of philosophers reveals a tension between politics and philosophy that prevents any conflation of ontology and politics, which was the source of Heidegger’s disastrous politics in the 1930s. On the issues of dialogue, poetry, and politics, the dialogical Platonism of Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger *does* respond to Heidegger and to Heidegger’s critique of Platonism.

On each of these questions, the appropriations of Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger have their strengths and weaknesses. Strauss, for instance, is sensitive to Platonic political philosophy to a higher degree than Gadamer and Krüger, but he tends to hastily reduce many questions to political problems and his understanding of Socratic-Platonic irony seems one-sided. Gadamer’s analysis of the dialogical form of Plato’s philosophy is philosophically richer than Strauss, but his optimism – concerning politics, but also concerning the availability of communal understanding more generally – sometimes verges on naïveté. And while Krüger’s thoughts on *eros*, dialogue, and poetry are very illuminating, he probably should have paid more attention to political philosophy than he has. Throughout the preceding chapters, I have indicated these merits and shortcomings without

declaring any definitive victor. A reason for this is that several of these thinker's respective insights are compatible, and it seems perfectly possible to juxtapose them in trying to understand Plato and to philosophize Platonically. But perhaps most importantly, it is against the spirit of the dialogical Platonism that I have argued for and about to reduce a polyphonic argument to one voice and to turn a dialogue into a monologue.

The fundamental question that remains is whether Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger have reached the final destination. Has their dialogical journey led them to the Forms as it was supposed to? I have shown that the strategy of Gadamer and Strauss in answering Heidegger on the question of Platonic metaphysics is to downplay the transcendence of the Forms and have argued that this amounts to a form of concession to Heidegger's critique. The concession consists in rejecting Heidegger's understanding of Platonism as metaphysics but in affirming – with Heidegger – the elusiveness of Being. This concession, we may say, suggests that, at least for Gadamer and Strauss, the destination is not reached. The Good withdraws in the beautiful; Forms remain problems. For Krüger, things are somewhat different. Krüger thinks that, while we cannot dwell in pure νοήσις, we can have dianoetic inklings of what a noetic insight would be like. The contrast of Strauss, Gadamer, and Krüger reveals that post-Heideggerian dialogical Platonism may tend to emphasize the role of διάνοια at the *expense* of νοήσις. And in this regard, Krüger is a notable exception that deserves our serious attention. In spite of Heidegger's critique of metaphysics, Krüger does not forsake the transcendence of the Forms, and especially the ἐπέκεινα of the Good on the sole basis of our inability to set foot once and for all on the land that we are trying to reach.

This “once and for all” is the crucial nuance. The ἐπέκεινα is, as such, unreachable. We can understand it, but only negatively, and indirectly. This oblique seeing is the result of a painstaking voyage through λόγοι, of our dianoetic navigation. But despite the difficulties, it is *precisely* this

“beyond” that sustains us. It sustains us because, if it were fully graspable, we would no longer strive for it. As erotic beings, we do not desire what we fully possess. *Eros*, as the driving force of the second sailing, is the correlate of the transcendence of Being, and especially of the Good. Plato uses several images in his dialogues to picture the philosophical journey. The images of the Cave and of the second sailing do not show the erotic force at work and rather emphasize the toil and pain of dialogue and dialectic. The winged soul of the *Phaedrus* and Diotima’s ladder of love in the *Symposium* remind us that we are supported by *eros* in the difficulties of our inquiry.

A point that Krüger repeatedly emphasizes is that this driving force, *eros*, is by and large beyond human control. We can respond differently to *eros* but we cannot decide to experience *eros* or not at will. When we wonder about the goodness of the Good, we may reflect on the fact that the Good is said to bestow intelligibility upon what we attempt to understand and we would thus seem entitled to conclude that the goodness of the Good consists in its generosity.² I would like to suggest in conclusion that the Good finds similar goodness in its ἐπέκεινα, for it is precisely by being “beyond” that it generously bestows *eros* upon the human soul. Without *eros*, the second sailing would look very much like the toils of Sisyphus. Thanks to the ἐπέκεινα of the Good and the corresponding gift of *eros*, the philosophic journey is only tragic in the sense indicated in the non-tragic definition of tragedy by the Athenian Stranger of the *Laws*: ὁ καλλίστος καὶ ἀρίστος βίος, the most beautiful and best life (cf. *Leg.* 817b2-5).

² I find this suggestion of Hyland (2011, 167-168) very persuasive.

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