‘WHAT SIMPLE DESCRIPTION…CAN NEVER GRASP’:
HEIDEGGER AND THE PLATO OF MYTH

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by

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Abstract

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It is commonly taken to be the case that Heidegger is a bad reader of Plato. Calling his reading of Plato impatient, violent and coercive, critics argue that Heidegger’s caricature of Plato is driven by his life-long desire to deconstruct the tradition of western philosophy from Plato onward. I argue that this assessment of Heidegger’s unsympathetic Plato is itself a caricature. In an effort to mitigate this critique of Heidegger’s reading of Plato, I argue that Heidegger engages with two different Platos—one with whom he shares deep sympathies even as he is harshly critical of the other. I call the Plato who frequently evokes Heidegger’s ire the ‘logocentric’ Plato; this is the Plato who, in spite of his promising efforts, could never overcome logos or move beyond dialectic, and therefore sets the stage for the tradition’s overreliance on logos as syllogistic logic and propositional truth. But in his better moments as a reader of Plato, Heidegger shines a light on a very different Plato. I will call this Plato the ‘muthocentric’ Plato because this is the Plato who makes his points with myths, images, allegories and stories. This Plato erodes the preeminence of logos to make space for alternative
discourse and becomes Heidegger’s ally in his effort to re-describe hermeneutic
phenomenology as a descriptive method that allows beings to show themselves not
merely by means of the theoretical discourse of logos, but also by means of non-
theoretical, alternative discourse including myth and poetry.

In advancing this claim, I focus on Heidegger’s lectures on Plato which appear
from the 1920’s to the early 1940’s, including his lectures on Plato’s Sophist, the cave
allegory of the Republic, and the Theaetetus. In each of these lecture courses, I show that
the traditional reading of Heidegger’s Plato has obscured his sympathy to the Plato of
myth and allegory. These close readings lay the groundwork to view Heidegger’s later
move towards non-theoretical discourse as a continuation of his early attention to muthos
discourse in Plato, rather than as an abrupt transition.
To Jane Bishop Halteman, who twice altered her career for me—once to care for me as a child and once to care for my children.
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INTRODUCTION

It is commonly taken to be the case that insofar as Heidegger is a reader of Plato at all, he is not a good reader of Plato. One doesn’t have to look far for evidence that Heidegger unfairly cites Plato as the arch-villain at the beginning of the history of metaphysics. After all, Heidegger locates in Plato the moment when ‘already at the beginning of its history, Western philosophy takes off on an erroneous and fateful course.’¹ Heidegger elsewhere explicitly claims that ‘Metaphysics is Platonism,’² an oft-cited equation that is taken to disparage both metaphysics and Platonism, given Heidegger’s view that philosophy as metaphysics has failed to adequately address the question of being³ for more than two millennia.

Critics claim that Heidegger’s reading of Plato is ‘impatient,’ ‘violent’ and ‘coercive,’⁴ among other things. But though the word choice is varied, there is near consensus among those who despise and those who admire Heidegger alike: friend and

³ I will not capitalize ‘being’ in this project for the simple reason that the majority of textual citations I use throughout come from translations that do not capitalize ‘being.’ In citations from texts where the translations do capitalize ‘Being,’ I have reproduced quotations as they are found in the translation.
foe agree that, for whatever reason, Heidegger failed to adequately engage Plato with the result that his interpretations of Plato are really depictions of a caricature, driven by Heidegger’s life-long desire to deride and deconstruct the tradition of western philosophy from Plato onward. As the consensus view goes, Heidegger’s desire, for better or worse, to spin a history that spotlights the forgetfulness of being over two millennia clouded his engagement with Plato. Heidegger’s detractors use this as evidence of Heidegger’s irresponsible and coercive historical reconstructions. Heidegger’s supporters wistfully imagine what might have been if Heidegger had been willing or able to acknowledge the fertile soil of their common ground. Even Heidegger himself privately acknowledged his own failings as a reader of Plato later in life, once confessing in a later text that his earlier interpretation of Plato’s role in the transformation of truth was ‘untenable,’5 once writing to Hannah Arendt that he felt the need to read Plato ‘anew’ to revise and deepen his engagement with the great thinker.6

Given this near-universal view, perhaps endorsed even by Heidegger himself, that Heidegger’s engagement with Plato is deeply flawed, explanation is required to justify the argument of this project: namely, that a revisionary reading of Heidegger’s Plato is both possible and important, and that this re-reading can mitigate the criticisms against Heidegger as bad reader of Plato even as it presents positive possibilities for future engagements with Plato. I will not attempt to argue here that Heidegger is not, at times,

5 Martin Heidegger, ‘The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,’ in On Time and Being, 70. Most interpreters herald this admission as evidence of Heidegger’s own recognition of his flawed reading of Plato. However, this supposed retraction of his prior view on Plato is very complicated. For an illuminating commentary which suggests a compelling alternative interpretation, see Robert Bernasconi, The Question of Language in Heidegger’s History of Being (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press Inc., 1985), 17-26.

unfairly critical of Plato, for we shall soon see that that task would itself require violent and incomplete reading of Heidegger’s own texts. The criticisms of Plato are frequent and often include a vitriol that cannot be explained away. But there are at least as many instances, perhaps far more, in which Heidegger’s readings of Plato are sympathetic and insightful. The collective tendency to focus on Heidegger’s hyperbolic litany of Plato’s offenses has all but obscured the other side of Heidegger’s Plato interpretations—the rich and rewarding close readings that identify a Plato to whom Heidegger acknowledges his indebtedness and for whom Heidegger expresses his admiration.

But this sort of revisionary reading presents an interpretive problem. How can one reconcile Heidegger’s conflicting representations of Plato? Several possibilities emerge. One might suggest, as some have tried to do, that Heidegger’s attitude towards Plato evolves over time. However, this strategy runs into difficulties on account of the fact that Heidegger’s deeply ambivalent relationship with Plato can be identified at points throughout his career. Alternatively, one might try to claim that Heidegger’s ire is directed at ‘Platonism,’ or the history of effect of Plato scholarship, rather than at Plato’s own work independent of its historical interpretive apparatus. This is an initially appealing strategy because it proposes a resolution of the inconsistencies that both allows Heidegger’s well-known attack on the history of philosophy as metaphysics to stand, and manages to retrieve Plato himself from the fray. Unfortunately, to support this view, one would have to bracket Heidegger’s many direct attacks on Plato’s ‘confusion,’ ‘obscurity’ and personal responsibility for the direction philosophy has taken.7

7 For example, see Martin Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, trans., Rochard Rojcewicz and Andre Schuwer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 132 [190]. It is also worth noting that at times, when Heidegger wishes to distinguish between Plato and Platonism, he explicitly does so. For example, in
In an effort to understand Heidegger’s conflicting interpretations of Plato, I will suggest an alternative interpretive framework. I will argue that in fact, Heidegger can be taken to engage with two different Platos—one with whom he shares deep sympathies even as he is harshly critical of the other. I will call the Plato who frequently evokes Heidegger’s ire the ‘logocentric’ Plato, since it is no secret that logocentrism is a key target of Heidegger’s attacks. This logocentric Plato is the Plato who, in spite of his promising efforts, could never quite overcome logos, could never move beyond dialectic, and therefore sets the stage for the tradition’s overreliance on logos as syllogistic logic and propositional truth. But in his better moments as a reader of Plato, Heidegger shines a light on a very different Plato. I will call this Plato the ‘muthocentric’ Plato because often it is the Plato who makes his points with myths, images, allegories and stories. This Plato does not contribute to the forgetfulness of being that fuels a logos-driven history of philosophy, but rather quietly erodes the preeminence of logos to make space for alternative discourse. This Plato becomes Heidegger’s ally in his attempt to return to a mindset that doesn’t privilege the logos over all else, that experiences a more extended account of truth, that has access to beings themselves in their uncoveredness, and that recognizes that a familiarity with being is part of the essential groundstance of humans. To this Plato, I will argue, Heidegger remains sympathetic throughout his career.

his Nietzsche lectures, he begins his discussion of Plato with just this sort of clarification: ‘We say ‘Platonism’ and not Plato, because here we are dealing with the conception of knowledge that corresponds to that term, not by way of an original and detailed examination of Plato’s works, but only by setting in rough relief one particular aspect of his work.’ Martin Heidegger, Nietzsche Vol. 1, trans., David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 151. Given the fact that Heidegger is attentive to this distinction himself, it will not do to assume that he ignores it most of the time. Throughout this dissertation, pages numbers will be given for the English translations of Heidegger’s texts. Where possible, I will include page numbers from the German editions in brackets following the English page numbers.

Heidegger himself, as we will see, explicitly calls this sympathetic Plato ‘phenomenological’ at times, particularly when he credits Plato with insights to which Heidegger himself is sympathetic. I will frequently use the term ‘muthocentric’ rather than phenomenological because it encourages us to notice that the moments when Heidegger is most sympathetic to Plato are those moments in which Plato’s crucial insights are presented in Plato’s own myths or discussed by Heidegger in terms that gesture to the mythic. However, the fact that Heidegger often identifies this Plato as ‘phenomenological’ should not be ignored because it allows us to see that in his retrieval of a muthocentric Plato, Heidegger clarifies the ability of hermeneutic phenomenology to operate as a descriptive method that allows beings to show themselves not merely by means of the theoretical discourse of logos, but also by means of non-theoretical, alternative discourse including myth and poetry.9

9 Though a detailed discussion of the relationship between Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology and Husserl’s ‘pure’ phenomenology is beyond the scope of this project, it is worth at least gesturing to how my discussion of Heidegger’s muthocentric/phenomenological Plato maps onto Heidegger’s debts to and departures from Husserl. To do this, I merely want to make two points here. First, it should be clear that Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology is distinctly phenomenological, and therefore indebted to Husserl, in that it is a descriptive method that allows things to show themselves in their being. Heidegger is quite clear about this in Being and Time: ‘Thus “phenomenology” means ἀποφαίνεσθαι τα ψαίνομενα—to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself…But here we are expressing nothing else than the maxim formulated above: ‘To the things themselves!’’ (Heidegger, Being and Time, 58[34]). Second, I want to point out that Heidegger’s departure from Husserl’s phenomenology is linked to his critique of phenomenology as theoretical and his desire for hermeneutic phenomenology to enable a pre-theoretical or primordial, therefore fundamental, ontology. Heidegger’s 1919 lectures make this concern about theory clear. Responding to Natorp’s criticism that Husserl’s phenomenology objectifies lived experience in its attempt at ‘scientific disclosure,’ Heidegger asserts that Natorp’s method is not ‘different from that of objectification’ because it is guilty of ‘the most radical absolutization of the theoretical and logical, an absolutization that has not been proclaimed since Hegel’ (82 [107]). The commonality between Husserl and Natorp here, according to Heidegger, seems to be ‘the exclusively theoretical attitude.’ Theory runs into trouble because ‘if one wishes to make experience into an object of science, it is impossible to avoid theoretization. This means, however, that there is no immediate apprehension of experience’ (78 [101], and as a result one misses the fact that there is something ‘experienceable’ that is ‘not anything radically theoreticized and de-vivified, but [which] is to be regarded rather as a moment of essence of life in and for itself, which itself stands in a close relation with the character of the appropriating event of experiences’ (88 [116]). Furthermore, the overreliance on the theoretical, Heidegger thinks, creates the problem of circularity, which Heidegger calls ‘a theoretical and theoretically made difficulty.’ He claims that ‘the circularity cannot be removed as long
There are several reasons why I believe this interpretive framework—that of identifying the distinct logocentric and muthocentric Platos in Heidegger’s work—is promising and profitable. First, I believe it is the least strained way of explaining Heidegger’s peculiar and inconsistent engagement with Plato. It allows us to avoid domesticating or ignoring Heidegger’s attacks even as we do justice to the richness of his sympathetic interpretations. Thus, this strategy, I believe, gives us the most fair and complete view of Heidegger’s Plato by revising the longstanding and unfair assumption that Heidegger is simply a poor reader of Plato. Secondly, this strategy allows us to follow Heidegger as he uncovers elements of a phenomenological Plato who frequently has been missed by the tradition. Like all Heidegger’s non-traditional historical engagements, his sympathetic readings of the muthocentric Plato are novel and creative. In this particular case, that creativity can enrich our understanding of the relationship between muthos and logos in Plato and set the stage for alternative readings of the

as primordial science is theoretical’ and calls for ‘a science’ that is ‘non-theoretical, a genuinely primordial science from which the theoretical itself originates’ (75 [96-97]).

Having briefly made these two points, it is a short step to see that Heidegger’s early attention to Plato’s muthos discourse and later commitment to poiesis as an alternative way of thinking provide Heidegger with a way of rearticulating phenomenology beyond the theoretical logos discourse that bound his predecessors. This insight is important to keep in mind from the outset because it allows us to see that my claim is not that Heidegger’s critique of logos discourse amounts to a move towards rejecting theory entirely, but rather towards uncovering a phenomenological Plato who can be an ally in the effort to present alternative ways of thought beyond logos discourse understood as mere ahistorical propositions, syllogistic logic and representational theories of truth. As we will see, it is certainly not the case that logos discourse is rejected or abandoned, but rather that Heidegger wants to underscore the degree to which, as we have just seen in the 1919 lectures and will continue to see throughout this project, theoreticization, simple propositions and representational theories of truth are grounded in a more primordial hermeneutic phenomenology. Thus, it would be a mistake to assume that Heidegger wants to disassociate logos discourse from muthos discourse and dispense with the former, but rather that he sees a synthesis in which muthos discourse can help direct our attention to the ‘genuinely primordial science from which the theoretical itself originates.’ (75 [97]). Finally, I note that Being and Time will reiterate this strategy in articulating care as the structural totality of Dasein as part of its analysis of Dasein: ‘Care, as a primordial structural totality, lies ‘before’ [vor] every factual ‘attitude’ and ‘situation’ and it does so existentially a priori; this means that it always lies in them. So this phenomenon by no means expresses a priority of the ‘practical’ attitude over the theoretical.’ (238 [193]). References to Heidegger’s 1919 lecture course are found in Martin Heidegger, Toward the Definition of Philosophy, trans., Ted Sadler (London: Continuum, 2000). References to Being and Time are cited from Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans., John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1962), 41 [20].
relationship between myth and argument in Plato’s work. Thirdly, I believe that paying
special attention to Heidegger’s sustained engagement with the muthocentric Plato,
particularly in the first two decades of his career, can position us to contextualize and
anticipate his interest in alternatives to logos discourse which emerges most strikingly in
his later work. By following this itinerary we will be able to see in what way the later
Heidegger’s turn to poetics remains phenomenological.

The aim of this project will primarily be to argue for the view that Heidegger is
sympathetic to this muthocentric Plato even as he is critical of the logocentric Plato. This
argument will be made with particular reference to Heidegger’s writings on Plato from
the early 1920’s to the early 1940’s, but will gesture to similar themes in the later
Heidegger as well. In the course of this argument, we will set the stage for further
inquiry into the later Heidegger’s engagement with muthos discourse including poetry, as
well as position ourselves for future efforts to interpret Plato’s use of myths against the
backdrop of Heidegger’s novel readings. Though both of these tasks will receive some
attention, a complete inquiry into either is beyond the scope of the project.

In order to properly support the view this project will advance, several steps will
be necessary. In chapter one, I will lay some groundwork needed to understand why
Heidegger’s sympathetic reading of Plato is so novel and so important. This chapter
surveys the relationship between muthos and logos in Greek literature and philosophy up
to Plato, in Plato’s own work, and in more recent scholarship. The aim of this chapter
will be two-fold: first to show how the history of philosophy has conceived of the
relationship between myth and logos so that we are prepared to see the significance of
Heidegger’s engagement with both the logocentric and muthocentric Platos. Secondly,
this chapter aims to consider the peculiarities of Plato’s own comments on the relationship between myth and reason. As an example of a thinker’s conflicting interpretations, Plato’s ostensible inconsistency here prefigures Heidegger’s dual approach to Plato and sets the stage for a future effort to reassess our analysis of Plato’s use of myth, even if this particular project can offer little more than a promissory note on the subject.

Chapter two will lay the groundwork for Heidegger’s reading of Plato. Here I will pay close attention to common criticisms of Heidegger’s Plato, aiming to show that there is need of a revisionary reading. To this end, I will briefly detour through a discussion of historiography generally, for one cannot assess Heidegger as a good or bad reader of historical texts, if one is not clear on his purpose as a historian of philosophy. Finally, this chapter takes up the view of Heidegger’s student Hans Georg Gadamer on the subject of Heidegger’s historiography. This preparatory work will put us in position to engage directly with Heidegger’s texts on Plato.

Chapter three undertakes a close reading of Heidegger’s lectures on Plato’s *Sophist* from the winter semester of 1924-25. In this early text, we find evidence of the ‘two Plato’ model of interpretation. This chapter’s discussion of the *Sophist* course pays particular attention to 1) Plato’s use of ‘logos’ in the *Sophist*, 2) Heidegger’s discussion of the *Phaedrus* myth and 3) Heidegger’s explicit discussion of the ‘phenomenological orientation’ of the Plato of the *Sophist* dialogue. In this lecture course we see unmistakable sympathies alongside strident attacks and the profitability of our mythocentric/logocentric distinction begins to emerge.
Chapter four takes up Heidegger’s famous and novel reading of Plato’s cave allegory as it is found in two sources—a lecture course from the early 1930’s and an essay written and published in the early 1940’s. This interpretation of the cave allegory details a historical and philosophical transformation in the essence of truth, and is the most widely used evidence to support the view that Heidegger’s reading of Plato is deeply unfair. After surveying the objections to Heidegger’s reading of Plato’s cave allegory, I argue that this common view fails to acknowledge the differences between the allegory as it is interpreted in the lecture course and in the later essay. Here I argue that if we see the lecture course as primarily attentive to the muthos discourse of Plato’s allegory and the essay as largely focused on critique of the logocentric tradition, we can simultaneously understand the differences in the two texts and support our underlying argument. In the process, the problems with the common criticisms of Heidegger’s cave interpretation emerge.

Chapter five consists of a close reading of the second half of Heidegger’s 1931-32 lecture course on Plato in which Heidegger takes up Plato’s *Theaetetus* (the allegory of the cave interpretation mentioned above comprises the first half). In this investigation into the essence of untruth, we find perhaps the most consistently sympathetic reading of Plato by Heidegger. This chapter moves quickly through Heidegger’s entire discussion of the *Theaetetus*, highlighting points of sympathy between Heidegger and Plato that support the overarching argument of the project. This detailed reading of the *Theaetetus* lecture is made all the more important by the fact that very little secondary literature on these lectures exists, likely in part due the fact that the *Theaetetus* lectures do not support the dominant but disparaging view of Heidegger as a bad reader of Plato.
Finally, the conclusion aims to contextualize these close readings in the broader trajectory of Heidegger’s thought, particularly with reference to Heidegger’s later writings on poetry, muthos and the early Greek origin of logos. Here we will see Heidegger’s disillusionment with traditional philosophy become more pronounced and his retreat into alternative forms of discourse, particularly the muthos discourse of poetry, deepen. Having seen Heidegger’s early sympathy for the muthocentric Plato (the project of chapters three, four and five), we will be well positioned to view it as an anticipation of the later Heidegger’s focus on non-logos discourse, including myth and poetry.
CHAPTER 1:
A BRIEF HISTORY OF MUTHOS AND LOGOS

1.1. Introduction

Before I can argue that Heidegger has something unique to offer to the interpretation of Plato’s use of myth, I must lay some groundwork. The general aim of chapter one will be twofold. On one hand, we must look at the origin and evolution of the myth/reason distinction in Greek philosophy, both prior to Plato and in Plato’s own work. On the other hand, we will look at dominant trends in the scholarship concerned with this muthos/logos distinction. Undertaking this investigation will position us to see Heidegger’s double-edged approach to Plato as a reflection of the ambiguity in Plato’s own discussions of muthos and logos; it will also prepare us to recognize Heidegger’s muthocentric Plato as a novel alternative to the prevailing readings. Of course, we will not be able to achieve this twofold aim by bifurcating the chapter into tidy halves, since what we can know about the historical evolution of the muthos/logos distinction comes to us in the form of the very scholarship we mean to characterize. Instead, we will move chronologically through the history of the use of muthos and logos in early Greek philosophy and literature, stopping along the way to highlight interpretive trends as they apply to a particular era. The bulk of the chapter will focus on Plato’s use of the term muthos and two trends that dominate the current scholarship regarding Plato’s use of
1.2. A Brief History of the Terms Muthos and Logos prior to Plato

If we go back far enough in the history of the words muthos and logos, we will find that etymologically, they share considerable ground. Both muthos and logos are related to the verb *legein*, and both have semantic connotations. Muthos originally meant ‘formulated speech’ of any sort, and as such is not sharply contrasted with logos, for which the first dictionary definition is ‘that which is said or spoken.’ In their earliest usages, muthos and logos were basically interchangeable. Muthos did not connote fantasy or falsity; logos did not suggest a reasoned argument. Scholars agree that the earliest recorded uses of muthos and logos, found in Homer, suggest interchangeable meanings rather than opposing ones. They also agree that by the time of Plato, this is no longer true. However, there is a wide range of views about when in the etymological history this change begins to occur.

The two most common senses of muthos in Homer are 1) muthos as a speech, word, fact or anything delivered by word of mouth and 2) a tale, story or narrative. When used in the first sense, the muthos is the substance of what the character says—the speech or word itself. The relationship to truth or falsity of the speaker or what he speaks isn’t an issue in these cases since muthos refers to the verbal act itself and not the significance of what is said. For example, in the *Iliad*, book IX, the horseman Phoenix says he is sent

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to be a ‘speaker of words (muthon) and a doer of deeds (ergon).’\textsuperscript{12} Here muthon as word or speech is opposed to ergon as action, but there is no hint of falsity attached to muthon.\textsuperscript{13} At I.358 of the Odyssey, Telemachus tells his mother to busy herself with her other duties, for speech (muthos) shall be for men.\textsuperscript{14} At Odyssey IV.744 the nurse Eurycleia tells Penelope that no matter what Penelope might do to her, Eurycleia will not hide her ‘muthon’ (word) from her.\textsuperscript{15} At Odyssey VII.151, we are told of Echeneus, an elder, who speech is much anticipated because he excelled at muthoisi (speeches) and knowing things of old (palaia).\textsuperscript{16}

The second sense in which muthos is frequently used in Homer is to refer to a tale or narrative which may or may not be verifiable. Several times, when trying to get information about his father’s unknown fate, Telemachus asks to be told the tale (muthon) of Odysseus’ wanderings.\textsuperscript{17} In Book XI.492, the spirit of Achilles asks Odysseus to tell him the story (muthon) of Achilles’ son and what became of him.\textsuperscript{18} In each of these cases, someone asks to be told a narrative, expecting that it will be the truth. Falsity and legend have not yet been attached to muthos, and it is used in instances where logos might just as well have been chosen.


\textsuperscript{13} Homer, \textit{Iliad Vol. 2}, XVIII.252. Here, muthon is again opposed to ergon. Here the sense seems to be ‘mere’ word opposed to works.


\textsuperscript{15} Homer, \textit{Odyssey Vol. 1}, 29.

\textsuperscript{16} Homer, \textit{Odyssey Vol. 1}, 29.

\textsuperscript{17} Homer, \textit{Odyssey Vol. 1}, 75/143.

\textsuperscript{18} Homer, \textit{Odyssey Vol. 1}, 75.
In Hesiod we find a similar situation: muthos means the word or speech itself and it seems that logos and muthos are still interchangeable. At *Works and Days* 106 Hesiod tells the narrative of the ages of gold, silver, bronze and iron, calling this story a logos. At *Works and Days* 194 we see that the evil man will speak unjust words (*muthoisin*) against the worthy man, and at *Theogony* 890, Hesiod tells us that words (*logoi*) can be deceptive (*aimulioi*). In both cases, Hesiod warns us that language can be misleading, but in one case he uses muthos and in the other logos. But, though scholars tend to agree that Homer does not invest the word muthos with any sense of falsity, with respect to Hesiod, there is debate. The dominant view holds that in Hesiod as in Homer we still find no connotation of falsity or legend bound up with the term muthos. Gerard Naddaf supports this view, arguing that ‘in Hesiod as in Homer, *muthoi* and *logoi* are still interchangeable…the famous muthos/logos dichotomy is still non-existent.’ But others, most notably Marcel Detienne, believe that the opposition between muthos and logos that is so pronounced by the time of Plato has its origin all the way back in Hesiod. Detienne argues that though muthos and logos appear to be used interchangeably in Hesiod, it is already the case that Hesiod sets the stage for myth to come up short when compared to logos. He acknowledges that this is not obvious, saying it is a ‘deviation, perhaps the

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20 Liddell and Scott’s lexicon highlights various uses of muthos in a variety of ancient authors, claiming that Pindar is the first to introduce the idea of falsity to the term muthos.

first one, but so clandestine that it would appear accidental where it not perpetuated by
both Pindar and Herodotus in the first half of the fifth century.  

In the presocratic philosophers, it is still difficult to turn up a clear link between
the term muthos and falsity or a clear opposition between the terms muthos and logos.
Parmenides characterizes his ultimate truth as muthos at one point and at another point,
logos.  Empedocles exhorts the reader to ‘come, listen to my words (muthon), for
learning increases wisdom.’  Here the muthon are expected to promote wisdom and
learning, and there does not seem to be a connotation of falsity.  In Xenophanes we find
similar evidence that the terms muthos and logos themselves are not yet solidified in
opposition to each other.  Naddaf highlights Xenophanes’ rules for addressing the gods:
‘first it is necessary for men to praise god with auspicious stories (muthoi) and pure
words (logoi).’  Naddaf interprets this as follows: ‘Xenophanes, who is best known as the
first to vigorously denounce the old traditional theology, that is, the mythology, of Homer
and Hesiod and to replace it with a new ‘rational’ theology, uses the plurals muthoi and
logoi almost synonymously in the same phrase.’  Here Naddaf underscores a feature of
the contemporary literature on the presocratics’ view of the muthos/logos distinction.
Though it may be difficult to locate uses of the words muthos or logos in which muthos is

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22 Detienne, Marcel, *The Creation of Mythology*, trans., Margaret Cook (Chicago: University of
Chicago Press, 1981), 47.  Richard Mart in supports Detienne’s view in *The Language of Heroes* (Ithica:
Cornell University Press, 1989), 13. ‘As Detienne has shown, the meanings ‘tale, fiction, lie’ for the word
muthos appear to be as ancient as Hesiodic poetry.’


25 I was directed to the preceding two presocratic fragments by Gerard Nadaff’s ‘Translator’s
Introduction’ to *Plato the Myth Maker* by Luc Brisson.
clearly linked with falsity and logos with truth, a large body of scholarship suggests that
the presocratics’ growing interest in the opposition between the rational and the non-
rational sets the stage for the future linguistic opposition between logos and muthos. On
this view, the alignment of muthos with falsity/non-rationality and logos with
truth/rationality begins contemporaneously with the birth of European philosophy, where
‘philosophy’ is understood as rational thought. According to this line of thought, early
Greek thinkers from Thales through Heraclitus initiated a move away from polytheistic,
religion-based views of the world, characterized as muthos, and towards reasoned
explanations of primary causes, characterized as logos. 26

In his History of Greek Philosophy, W.K.C. Guthrie holds that the beginning of
philosophy consisted in the ‘abandonment, at the level of conscious thought, of
mythological solutions to problems concerning the origin and nature of the universe.’
This reliance on mythical explanations was replaced by ‘the faith that the visible world
conceals a rational and intelligible order…and that autonomous human reason is our sole
and sufficient instrument for the search.’ 27 Bruno Snell argues in The Discovery of the
Mind: The Greek Origins of European Thought that religious myths served the purpose
of providing a degree of certainty and stability that was otherwise elusive in the time

26 It may seem uneven that I will spend several pages discussing various views of the presocratics
on the muthos/logos distinction when I spend only sentences on views of the poets, historians and
tragedians. There are several reasons why I devote more time to this scholarship. First, philosophers seem
to be more interested in commenting on other philosophers and hence there is a great deal more
‘philosophical’ literature about the presocratics’ views of muthos and logos than there is about the view of
the poets, historians or tragedians. Second, philosophers seem particularly devoted to separating the
‘rational’ from everything else, making them prime candidates to focus on the muthos/logos distinction in
those terms, which is relevant for my project. Third, the literature which views the presocratics as
motivating the ‘progression’ from muthos to logos does a nice job of setting the stage for the discussion of
the literature on Plato’s use of myth which will be relevant below.

29. G.S. Kirk and J.E. Raven espouse a very similar reading of the presocratics in The Presocratic
Philosophers.

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preceding ‘rational’ thought processes. However, as these rational thought processes developed in Greece, interpretations of myth were revised, taking account of human intellect, and leading the interpreter towards rational thought. This rational thought, in turn, precipitates the secularization of myth, and a transformation from muthos to logos is effected.\textsuperscript{28} Snell summarizes the view that there was a pronounced movement from muthos discourse to logos discourse as follows: ‘Logic has been in existence ever since men have talked and thought…[but] it did not find expression in speech [because] it was implicit and understood. As soon as it is discovered and intrudes into consciousness, human thinking undergoes a radical change.’\textsuperscript{29} He acknowledges that that the words muthos and logos are related in a complicated way, but argues that they accurately describe two distinct stages of human thought: ‘as far as the enlightened intellect is concerned, myth is ‘unnatural’ and that means above all that it is not free of contradictions.’\textsuperscript{30}

Martin West espouses the same view in his article ‘Early Greek Philosophy.’ He locates the origin of philosophy in the ‘development of critical and constructive thought’\textsuperscript{31} by the presocratics and cites their movement from mythic cosmologies to those that appeal to principles in place of divinities (he calls these depersonalized cosmologies more ‘reasonable’) as indication that the presocratics are real ‘philosophers.’ He acknowledges that in spite of these strides towards reasonability, ‘the milesians were

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{28} Bruno Snell, \textit{The Discovery of the Mind} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 206.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Snell, \textit{The Discovery of the Mind}, 213
\item \textsuperscript{30} Snell, \textit{The Discovery of the Mind}, 224.
\end{itemize}
unable completely to free themselves from the preconceptions of the myth makers of the
pre-philosophical age.'\textsuperscript{32} As proof that the presocratics were interested in rationalizing
the mystical, West offers Parmenides’ comment that the goddess proves her claims to
him with arguments,\textsuperscript{33} she does not simply tell him.\textsuperscript{34}

With respect to the presocratics, though many argue that something has changed
in the mindset which makes way for the future linguistic opposition, it is hard to dispute
the fact that the words themselves are still interchangeable. But by the time of Pindar, in
the early part of the 5\textsuperscript{th} century, the changing mindset is reflected explicitly in the words
themselves. The word muthos is by now at times linked with falsity and opposed to
logos which is linked to historic truth. For example, in the \textit{Olympian Odes} Pindar says
‘as for the tale (\textit{phatis}) that is told among mortals, transgressing the language of truth
(\textit{alethe logon}), it may haply be that stories (\textit{muthoi}) deftly decked with glittering lies lead
them astray.’\textsuperscript{35} In the \textit{Nemean Odes}, Pindar talks specifically of Homer’s myths,
claiming that ‘the poet’s lore beguileth us, leading us astray with legends (\textit{muthoi}).’\textsuperscript{36} In
Herodotas, also in the first half of the 5\textsuperscript{th} century, we again find muthos disparaged for its

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} West, ‘Early Greek Philosophy,’ 116-117.
\item \textsuperscript{33} West, ‘Early Greek Philosophy,’ 121.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Although this view, represented by Guthrie, Snell and West, sees the presocratics as ushering in
a theoretical, if not linguistic, opposition between muthos and logos, this view is not uncontested. Detienne
explicitly opposes such views, saying ‘the scholarly work of philosophers from Xenophanes, around 530, to
Empedocles, around 450, belies the opinion of our contemporaries who attribute to ‘rational thinking’ the
purpose of eliminating any other form of thought such as ‘myth’ in the sense of sacred narrative or
discourse on the subject of the gods.’ Detienne cites the same Xenophanes’ fragment mentioned by
Naddaf. In Detienne’s translation, ‘men should sing ‘with auspicious texts (\textit{muthoi}) and pure words
(logoi).’ Detienne interprets this as follows: ‘Myths,’ combined with \textit{logoi}, are bearers of reverent
intentions in contradistinction to other irreverent tales in which the gods have disagreeable experiences
such as the wars against the Giants and the Titans.’ Detienne, \textit{The Creation of Mythology}, 46.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Pindar, \textit{The Odes of Pindar}, trans., Sir John Sandys (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,
1915), \textit{Olympian Odes} 1.29.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Pindar, \textit{The Odes of Pindar, Nemean Odes} 7.21-25.
\end{itemize}

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falsity—here both for being foolish and ‘ill-considered’: ‘But among the many ill-considered tales told by the Greeks, this is a very foolish story (muthos) which they related about Heracles.’

Later in the 5th century, we see a similar pattern emerge in the work of the tragic poets. In his Iphigeneia at Aulis, Euripides has Agamemnon use the word muthos to describe the Argive tale about Menelaus judging the Goddesses before the start of the Trojan war. Since Agamemnon himself is a part of the history of the Trojan war, we can take it that this use of muthos is not explicitly linked to falsity even though it is linked to an unverifiable past event involving the gods, a rumor of sorts. Sophocles also employs the term in this way, in the Ajax referring to a loud rumor as muthos. Later he cautions against the spreading of false stories (muthon), linking muthos and falsity. But clearly even by the end of the 5th century (405), it is not the case that muthos is automatically linked with falsity or even unverifiability. For example, in the Electra, Electra implores her husband not to be suspicious of her, for she promises to tell the truth (muthon).

Having surveyed these scattered examples, we should highlight a few points. First, we should note that various theories try to characterize the relationship between muthos and logos as undergoing a significant change at some particular point in history, keeping in mind that there is controversy as to when the shift occurred. But whether one

37 Herodotus 2.45.


argues that muthos is linked with falsity already in Hesiod,\textsuperscript{41} locates the origin of the move from muthos to logos in the presocratics, or contends that Plato is progenitor of the strict divide between muthos and logos,\textsuperscript{42} there are enough primary source examples to suggest that at least up to the time of Plato, there is a range of meanings for the terms logos and muthos, and this range of meanings exists across disciplines—meanings of muthos and logos are not firmly fixed in philosophy any more than they are in tragedy or poetry. It is also worth noting at this early point that there is a substantial body of scholarship that sees the move from myth to logos as evidence of philosophy’s great beginning. As we will later see, Heidegger agrees that a notable change comes to pass about this time, but he will strenuously disagree with this characterization of the relationship between muthos and logos, rejecting the view that the applauds philosophy for its rejection of myth in favor of logos, narrowly defined as ‘reason.’ Before we can consider Heidegger’s view on the relationship between muthos and logos in the early Greeks, we must turn to the study of Plato’s view of the same distinction.

1.3. Plato’s Use of Myth

In order support the claim that Heidegger finds an unlikely ally in the muthocentric Plato, we must acknowledge that there is something both curious and important about Plato’s use of myth. To get at what this is, we will have to start with the nuts and bolts—a study of the actual instances in which Plato uses a word derived from

\textsuperscript{41} This view is held by Richard Martin. See Richard P. Martin, \textit{The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the Iliad} (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1989).

\textsuperscript{42} This is Naddaf’s view.
‘muthos.’ Leonard Brandwood’s *A Word Index to Plato* gives us just this starting point.⁴³ According to Brandwood’s catalog, there are 87 instances where Plato uses a word form of muthos and these occur throughout 12 of the 26 unanimously accepted Platonic dialogues. Over half of these instances occur in the *Republic* and the *Laws*. Luc Brisson, in an Appendix to *Plato the Myth Maker*, further breaks down the findings: 69 of these occurrences are references to what we might broadly refer to as ‘Greek myth.’ 42 of these 69 are to myths commonly known in ancient Greece and the other 27 are to myths that appear to have been crafted by Plato himself. Put simply, when Plato talks about myth, most of the time he is referencing myths that would be common knowledge to his audience, but a sizable minority of the time, he is making his own myths.

If we look closely at some of these 69 occurrences of muthos, it quickly becomes clear why Plato’s use of myth is curious. For in certain instances, we are told clearly that myth, either generally or specifically, is childish, false, harmful, or worthy of being dismissed. Elsewhere Plato tells us that though myth is not the preferred method of discourse, there are times when it is useful. And in still other places, we are told clearly that we must believe in a myth in order to get at the truth of something. It will be worth looking briefly at several instances of each of these three general attitudes towards myth.

*The strong critique of muthos discourse*

In several dialogues we find Plato using the term muthos to describe some sort of discourse that he finds inadequate. In the *Cratylus*, Socrates is explaining the etymology of the name of Pan, the ‘double-formed son of Hermes.’ He asks: ‘Is not the truth that is

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in him the smooth or sacred form which dwells above among the gods, whereas
falsehood dwells among men below, and is rough like the goat of tragedy, for tales
(*muthon*) and falsehoods have generally to do with the tragic or goatish life, and tragedy
is the place of them.\(^{44}\) Here myth and falsehood are linked and ascribed to the false
speech of tragedy and the ‘goatish life’ and opposed to the true speech of the intelligible
realm.

In the *Sophist*, the stranger explains to Theaetetus that philosophers like
Parmenides who try to ‘determine how many real things there are and what they are like’
do not employ the right sort of discourse.\(^{45}\) ‘They each and all seem to treat us as
children to whom they are telling a story (*muthon*).’\(^{46}\) Slightly later, the stranger also
refers to the ‘Eleatic set’ going back to Xenophanes and calls their philosophy a *muthon*.
The stranger’s primary complaint with these sorts of tales becomes clear a bit later. He
acknowledges that it is hard to know whether any of these philosophers has ‘told the
truth’ but it is clear that all have erred by ‘show[ing] too little consideration for ordinary
people like ourselves in talking over our heads. Each school pursues its own argument to
the conclusion without caring whether we follow what they say or get left behind.’\(^{47}\) His
concern here is not so much that the philosophers have tried to convince us of something
false, but rather that we cannot tell if their theories are false or true. Furthermore,


\(^{46}\) Plato, *Sophist*, 242b.

\(^{47}\) Plato, *Sophist*, 243b.
regardless of whether these philosophies, here designated as muthoi, are false or true, the stranger disparages them for being presented irresponsibly.

In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates refers to several philosophical theories with which he himself disagrees, characterizing each as muthos. After presenting the view that the universe ‘really is motion and nothing else,’ he asks Theaetetus: ‘Now, what light does this muthon throw on what has gone before.’ Later, Protagoras’ view is referred to twice as a muthos shortly after Socrates has disparaged it for being inadequate or, in his own words, after he and Theaetetus have ‘trampled’ on Protagoras’ ‘orphaned’ theory.

But Plato’s most famous and most explicit condemnation of myth is found in Books II and X of the *Republic* where he takes aim, not at the stories of philosophers, but at the myths of poets since poetry is the oral tradition which transmits and preserves muthos. In Book II, when discussing the educational program for his city, Plato suggests that the stories told within the city should be chosen carefully so that children will not be exposed to the damaging effects of ‘chance stories fashioned by chance teachers’ which promote undesirable opinions. Socrates mentions specifically the stories of ‘Hesiod and Homer and the other poets related to us,’ claiming that they ‘composed false stories which they told and still tell to mankind.’ But before he disparages Homer and Hesiod, Plato has clarified for us what he means by ‘false.’ When he brings up ‘tales,’ he says that they are of two types: true and false. But though this seems like a clear taxonomy,
several lines later he blurs the issue. “We begin by telling children fables, and the fable is, taken as a whole, false, but there is truth in it.”

Here Plato makes a distinction that will matter for his entire view of myth: a story can be false in two ways. It can be superficially false (in that the narrated events never actually happened) or it can be fundamentally false (in that it conveys falsehoods about the deep structure of reality or the intelligible world). If we accept these two different sorts of falsity, it is possible to imagine something which is superficially false but fundamentally true. Fables told to children can fall in this category in that their events never happened as reported, but they promote a moral that conveys something about the true nature of reality and how we ought to live. When Socrates worries about the ‘chance stories fashioned by chance teachers,’ he is not worried about their superficial falsity, he is worried about their fundamental falsity. This is why at 377d, Socrates says he chiefly finds fault with the stories of Homer and Hesiod because ‘the lie is not a pretty one.’ By this he means that the stories paint a false picture, or badly imitate the true nature of the gods. Of the tale of Chronus, Uranus and Zeus, Socrates says that it should be carefully censored to avoid promoting false beliefs about the gods among the citizens of the city. Here it seems that traditional myths, in the form of poetry, are damaging not only because they are superficially false (though they most likely are) and because the poets who transmit them don’t know the truth (though they most likely don’t), but most importantly because they are fundamentally false. This becomes clear as Socrates quickly proceeds to try to prove to Adimantus that the stories about the gods which are prevalent in Homer are in fact fundamentally false in that they describe gods who are capable of deceit.

51 Plato, Republic, 377a.
wizardry, shape-shifting or telling falsehoods though god could do none of these things. Beneath the surface narrative of events, the story presents a view of god, and at the same time a view of the intelligible world, which is philosophically untenable. For example, because we are able to reason to the conclusion that god must be incapable of deceit, we cannot accept a story which paints an alternate picture. It seems for Socrates, if one tells a myth about god, it need not reflect particular incidents that have actually occurred, but it must reflect the true nature of god which according to Socrates is that ‘god is altogether simple and true in deed and word, and neither changes himself nor deceives other by visions or words or the sending of signs in waking or in dreams.’

In Book II, Plato’s attack on the myths of popular poetry looks mostly to be an attack on the falsity of the stories themselves, where this falsity is a sort of fundamental falsity about the truths of the intelligible world and not merely superficial falsity of events in the sensible world. He mentions that the poets themselves don’t know the truth of what they say, but the primary focus of the attack is on the falsity of the claims about the gods and the fact that we should know these claims are false because they are philosophically untenable. However, in Book X Plato picks back up the subject of censorship of the mythical stories preserved in poetry in the ideal city, here focusing more on the fact that poetry and also myth are imitations of the truth, three steps removed from reality. He also takes aim at the poets themselves for having the wrong relationship to truth. Plato begins the discussion of poetry in Book X by confiding to Glaucon that the art of the tragic poets, and all other imitators, ‘seems to be a corruption of the mind of all

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listeners who do not possess as an antidote a knowledge of its real nature. Socrates asks Glaucon to consider the three types of couch: the form of a couch created by god, the imitation of the form of the couch created by the craftsman and the imitation of the imitation of the form of the couch created by the painter. In this way, the painter’s product is no longer an imitation of the truth, but an imitation of a ‘phantasm’ (the craftsman’s artifact) which is already removed from truth. Thus, products of mimetic art like painting or tragedy or poetry, are so far removed from truth that they are damaging.

Socrates then takes up Homer, the most famous poet and purveyor of traditional myth, and aims to show that Homer must not know the truth of what he speaks about or he would devote himself to the truth rather than to the imitation and as a result, he would have followers who had learned from him and cities crediting him with good legislation. In fact, he has none of these accolades. Here it becomes clear that Homer, like all others of the ‘poetic tribe’

are imitators of images of excellence and of the other things that they ‘create,’ and do not lay hold on truth, but as we were just now saying, the painter will fashion, himself knowing nothing of the cobbler’s art, what appears to be a cobbler to him and likewise to those who know nothing but judge only by forms and colors…the poet himself knowing nothing but how to imitate, lays on with words and phrases the colors of the several arts in such fashion that other equally ignorant, who see things only through words, will deem his words most excellent…So mighty is the spell that these adornments naturally exercise.

The conclusion is that the poet and mythmaker, like the painter, will imitate even though he ‘will neither know nor opine rightly concerning the beauty or the badness of

53 Plato, Republic, 595b.
54 Plato, Republic, 600e-601b.
his imitations. But such a poet is not worrisome only for the reason that his creations are inferior and are not imitations of truth, but also for the fact that his poetry will have such an ability to lay hold of the inferior part of the soul, thereby corrupting those who do have the antidote, knowledge.

Thus, in Book X, we are reminded that poetry, and the mythic stories transmitted by poetry, are dangerous both because the poets who compose them do not know the truth of their subject matter and because poetry and myth as rhetorical devises are dangerously persuasive. Taken together, these criticisms lead us to believe that a persuasive rhetorical devise, like myth, is harmful when deployed by one who does not have the right relationship to truth. It is worth noting here that after condemning poetry for these reasons, Glaucon and Socrates acknowledge the magic of poetry and assert that if someone would defend her and prove that she ‘bestows not only pleasure but benefit,’ Socrates would gladly allow her back in the city. Here we glimpse Plato’s view that poetry, and therefore myth, might yet find its redemption in the right hands.

The conditional critique of muthos discourse

In the dialogues we also find instances in which a myth or muthos discourse is used in addition to a reasoned argument to illustrate the same point for a different audience or from a different angle. In these cases, myth is construed as a useful but inferior way to achieve a rhetorical goal. For example, in the Protagoras, Protagoras is asked by Socrates to explain why it is that he believes virtue can be taught. Protagoras

55 Plato, Republic, 602a.
56 Plato, Republic, 607e.
agrees but asks, ‘Now shall I, as an old man speaking to his juniors, put my explanation in the form of a story or give it as a reasoned argument?’ Later he gives an argument to supplement the earlier myth, and at the end of his speech he sums up by claiming ‘There, Socrates, you have both the muthos and the argument.’

In the *Statesman*, we find another occasion where myth is used as a supplement to achieve the same goal that logos might have. When trying to describe the statesman, the stranger and young Socrates worry that they cannot adequately present him until they have a complete description that separates him from the masses surrounding him. Worried that their prior arguments have not been sufficient, they decide to ‘begin all over again from another starting point and travel by another road,’ and this new starting point will include ‘pleasant stories’ (*muthos*). They agree to use part of ‘the mass of ancient legend’ for their own purposes after which they will go on with the argument as they had before—‘dividing always and choosing one part only, until we arrive at the summit of our climb and the object of our journey.’ However, after they have presented their myth, the Stranger thinks better of their approach:

> Supposing that where a king was concerned only large-scale illustrations could be suitable, we reared our massive myth and then had to use more myth material than the occasion warranted...Remember that a definition couched in words is a better description of a living creature than a drawing or an model of it can be—a better

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58 Plato, *Protagoras*, 324d6. The translations reads: ‘On this, Socrates, I will offer you a plain argument rather than a parable as I did before.’

59 Plato, *Protagoras*, 328c.


61 Plato, *Statesman*, 268e.
description, I mean, for those capable of following such a definition; for those who cannot do so the model or visible illustration is appropriate enough.  

The Stranger seems to think that myth, used properly might be an adequate model or illustration if need be, but that it is not to be preferred to logical argument.

*The endorsement of myth*

We have seen instances where myth is generally disparaged and instances where it is used, with a disclaimer, to achieve the same purpose as logos might. However, there are also several very prominent places in the dialogues where Socrates himself tells prolonged stories, calls them myths, and asserts that these stories point in the direction of conclusions which cannot be achieved with argument alone. In these cases myths are not merely illustrative models, like the myth in the *Statesmen*; rather, they provide important information that cannot be accessed through reasoned argument. It is in these instances—when myth seems to provide an inroad to truth where reason has hit a dead end—that the Plato who will become Heidegger’s ally in the attack on logocentrism begins to emerge.

In the *Phaedo*, Socrates’ last teaching before death comes in the form of a myth, as he himself calls it. Having convinced all his friends, by means of a series of arguments, that the soul must be immortal, Socrates takes up a different sort of discourse. Though Cebes and Simmias in particular claim that they are, for the most part, convinced by Socrates’ proofs for the immortality of the soul, Simmias expresses some lingering misgivings. Socrates assures Simmias that with careful, continued consideration, he will

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be able to arrive at the truth, ‘in so far as it is possible for the human mind to attain it,’ and that this will be sufficient. Then, having just expressed doubt that the human mind will be able to exhaustively understand the workings of the soul with argument, Socrates moves into muthos discourse, saying that ‘if the soul is immortal, it demands our care not only for that part of time which we call life but for all time.’ He then begins to tell of the soul’s journey after death, beginning with ‘this is how the story goes.’ Here he undertakes a description of ‘what he believes about the appearance of the earth and regions in it.’ The disclaimer that signals muthos discourse is again present: he claims that it would be too difficult to prove his belief and even if it could be done, it wouldn’t be possible in his short life. Interestingly, these conditions do not make Socrates hesitate to tell his story. In fact he says ‘there is no reason why I should not tell you what I believe about the appearance of the earth and regions in it.’

He goes on to explain that the earth we experience is not the surface of the earth but merely a hollow. As mortal humans we are too feeble to make our way out of the hollow to see the real surface of the earth. Socrates is willing to attempt an explanation of what the real surface of the earth is like, but he couches this description in the terms of myth: ‘If it is the right time for an imaginative description (muthos), Simmias, it will be worth your while to hear what it is really like upon the earth which lies beneath the heavens.’ Having told his ‘tale,’ Socrates closes by saying:


64 Plato, *Phaedo*, 107c.

65 Plato, *Phaedo*, 107d.

Of course, no reasonable man ought to insist that the facts are exactly as I have described them. But that either this or something very like it is a true account of our souls and their future habitations—since we have clear evidence that the soul is immortal—this, I think, is both a reasonable contention and a belief worth risking, for the risk is a noble one. We should use such accounts to inspire ourselves with confidence, and that is why I have already drawn out my tale (muthos) so long.\(^6\)

It is worth noting that in this passage, Socrates does not insist that his myth be superficially true—he admits that ‘the facts’ may not be as he describes them—in order for it to be important. He twice uses the term reasonable—once to emphasize that his account may not be superficially true, since no reasonable person would believe it must be, and once to suggest that though it isn’t superficially true, it is still worthy of being believed and in that sense ‘reasonable.’ These two uses of the term reasonable help clarify Socrates’ view here towards muthos discourse—it need not be superficially true in order to be fundamentally true, but it must be fundamentally true in order to be important, in this case, capable of inspiring us to noble beliefs.

The afterlife myth which concludes the *Gorgias* shares many features with the myth of the *Phaedo*. It is worth focusing on three specific features of this myth which make it interesting as an example of Plato’s endorsement of myth: 1) It is clearly marked out as a myth, not only because Socrates refers to it as such, but also because it contains many elements of traditional myth of which Plato is skeptical in the *Republic*, 2) Socrates claims that it is ‘true’ despite acknowledging that it is a myth, and 3) Socrates repeatedly blurs the distinction between the terms logos and muthos during the telling.

Though Plato clearly shapes the *Gorgias* afterlife myth to his specification, we can see many shared elements with traditional myth as well. Socrates begins the myth by

\(^6\) Plato, *Phaedo*, 114d.
saying ‘as Homer tells,’ lending the authenticity of at least 400 years of oral tradition to his story, and giving as a source, the most famous of all poet/mythmakers. According to E.R. Dodds, the rustic narrative style Socrates uses when telling the myth contributes to the traditional feel of the story. For Dodds, the Gorgias myth has ‘the directness and vividness of folktale, and keeps something of the folktale naïveté in its style.’ The characters—Zeus, Poseidon, Pluto, Prometheus—are also very familiar. Even the outline of the story comes from traditional mythology. Tartarus is the place for the wicked. Minos, Rhadamanthys and Aeacus are reputed to be the three judges of the underworld. Overall, the familiar elements of Plato’s Gorgias myth and the style in which he tells the myth play on the respect for tradition that his audience would have had.

Socrates’ repeated claims that he believes the truth of the afterlife myth also merit notice. Several times Socrates claims that he believes the myth is true. He sets up his story by billing it as a ‘tale’ that will ‘prove’ that it is the worst evil to arrive in the other world with a wicked soul. He then says ‘Give ear then, as they say, to a very fine story (muthos) which you, I suppose will consider fiction, but I consider fact, for what I am going to tell you I shall recount as the actual truth.’ After he has told the myth, he considers the fact that though Callicles might consider the myth to be an old woman’s

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69 Dodds calls this ‘literary reminiscence’ and argues that ‘the references [to the authority of Homer] are concerned with unessential details, and it looks as if Plato had introduced them merely to give an air of orthodoxy to a not wholly orthodox narrative.’ Plato, Gorgias, 372-376.

70 Plato, Gorgias, 372-376.

71 Plato, Gorgias, 523a.
‘tale’ (*muthos*), Socrates himself believes the myth to be true. In his final plea to his listeners to take seriously the need to care for their souls, Socrates makes a startling claim about his afterlife myth:

Now perhaps all this seems to you like an old wife’s tale and you despise it, and there would be nothing strange in despising it if our searches could discover anywhere a better and truer account, but as it is you see that you three, who are the wisest Greeks of the day, you and Polus and Gorgias, cannot demonstrate that we should live any other life then this, which is plainly of benefit also in the other world. But amid all these arguments, while others were refuted, this alone stands steadfast.

We are told two important things here: first, this ‘tale’ might be unsuitable if there were any better option but second, there is no other ‘argument’ as strong or persuasive as this myth. Here Socrates compares his myth to the relevant arguments but ultimately elevates it to a different status—it is provisional in that it can’t be proven but it is at the same time superlative as a justification for living the right sort of life.

Plato’s use of the words muthos and logos to describe the afterlife myth further highlights these conclusions. When Socrates introduces the myth, he says, ‘If you wish, I’d like to tell you an *account* (*logos*) of how this is so [i.e. how it is evil for the soul to arrive in Hades having done injustices].’ A few lines later he uses both words in the same sentence: ‘I suppose you’ll think it’s a tale (*muthos*) but I think it’s an account (*logos*).’ Later Socrates says, ‘this is what I have heard, Callicles, and believe to be...

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73 Plato, *Gorgias*, 527a-b.

74 Plato, *Gorgias*, 522c.

75 Plato, *Gorgias*, 523a.
true, and from these accounts (logoi) I infer…’76 Again, at the end of the myth he says, ‘I am persuaded by these accounts (logoi).’77 In fact, the only time he uses muthos to describe the afterlife myth is in the two instances cited above where he is anticipating how Callicles will interpret the story. As far as his own epistemic relation to the myth, he always cites it as a reasoned account or logos. Perhaps more than in any other place, Socrates’ telling of the afterlife myth in the Gorgias requires us to take note: there is some sense in which muthos discourse and logos discourse are defined against each other, but that sense might not be as straightforward as we think.

In the Phaedrus, Socrates refers to his analogy of the soul to a winged chariot as a muthos.78 When he introduces this discussion of the soul’s nature, he explains why it is that he will recourse to a story: ‘As to [the soul’s] nature there is this that must be said. What manner of thing it is would be a long tale to tell, and most assuredly a god alone could tell it. But what it resembles, that a man might tell in briefer compass. Let this therefore be our manner of discourse.’79 Here again when Socrates takes up mythic discourse, he makes a disclaimer about its insufficiency but uses it to make an important point.

The Republic, the very dialogue in which Socrates’ most damning discussion of myth is found, also ends with the telling of an afterlife myth. And here, as in the Phaedo and the Gorgias, the myth is introduced as muthos discourse that ought to be taken as true. Just before he begins to tell the afterlife myth of Er, Socrates has shown through

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76 Plato, Gorgias, 524b.
77 Plato, Gorgias, 526d.
79 Plato, Phaedrus, 246a.
argument that the just person’s life on earth will be the most blessed and happy. He now wants to illustrate that the just person’s life after death will also be the most blessed, but to do this, he must take up muthos discourse instead of the logos discourse that has brought the argument this far: ‘[The rewards of this life] are nothing in number and magnitude compared with those that await both [the just and the unjust person] after death. And we must listen to the tale of them in order that each may have received in full what is due to be said of him by our argument.’\textsuperscript{80} Here again, muthos discourse must pick up where logos discourse leaves off. The argument can only take Socrates and his interlocutors so far. After he has finished telling the myth of Er’s experience of the afterlife, Socrates ends the dialogue by making clear just how important it is not only to hear this myth, but to believe it. ‘And so, Glaucon, the tale (muthos) of Er was saved, as the saying is, and was not lost. And it will save us if we believe it, and we shall safely cross the River of Lethe and keep our soul unspotted from the world.’\textsuperscript{81}

1.4. A Survey of Scholarly Interpretations of Plato’s Use of Myth

Given this brief survey of three general attitudes towards myth in Plato’s dialogues (critique, conditional critique and endorsement, as I have called them), it should not come as a surprise that scholars engage in heated debate about Plato’s use of myth. For centuries readers of Plato have attempted to reconcile Plato’s own use of myth with his disparagement of myth as mimetic and the \textit{Republic’s} recommendation to bar

\textsuperscript{80} Plato, \textit{Republic}, 614a.

\textsuperscript{81} Plato, \textit{Republic}, 621c.
myth and poetry from the ideal city. Though the interpretations are copious and varied, I will argue that nearly all share a common starting assumption. Interpreters assume that for Plato, logos discourse—or reason in the form of arguments—is of primary importance; insofar as it is commented on at all, muthos discourse is analyzed using logos discourse as a benchmark. Within this general strategy, there are several different approaches. On one end of the spectrum, lies the view that myths are little more than play or literary adornment on Plato’s part. They are not to be taken seriously and do nothing to advance the philosophic goals put forth by the arguments. Much of the scholarship of the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} century fell into this category. L. Couturat’s 1896 monograph ‘De Platonis Mythis’ exemplifies this position. In it, Couturat argues that ‘myth was considered to be poetic [by Plato], as an example of the designing of stories for children, bereft of philosophic importance. For Couturat, myth was in direct

\footnotesize{82 For a good survey of literature on Plato’s and myth from the 19\textsuperscript{th} c. to 1978, see chapter one of Kent F. Moors, \textit{Platonic Myth: An Introductory Study} (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1982), 1-25.

83 There are certain notable exceptions to this characterization. See for example John Sallis, \textit{Being and Logos: The Way of The Platonic Dialogue} (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1975).

84 Moors, \textit{Platonic Myth}, 2. Moors writes: ‘Much of the scholarship on Platonic myth written during the latter period of the eighteenth century and during much of the nineteenth century centered about the identification and classifications of the myths. There was exhibited during this period a primary concern for the myth as an isolated aspect of Plato’s works. With only few exceptions, these studies also suggested that myth was essentially a poetic, rather than a philosophic device.’ One such exception is found in the 1892 dissertation of W. A. Harris entitled ‘Plato as a Narrator: A Study in the Myths.’ Harris’ dissertation simultaneously serves as an example of the prevailing attitude towards Plato’s myth (namely that it is primarily literary and not philosophical,) and gives a counter example to this attitude. In his introduction he writes: From one side the myths are a proof of [Plato’s] artistic ability, but from a scientific point of view they show a limitation of his methodical thought and are a sign of weakness rather than of strength. As Zeller says, they show the point at which it becomes evident that as yet he cannot be wholly a philosopher, because he is still too much of a poet.’ (9) Here he refers to Zeller, Eduard, \textit{Philosophie der Griechen, II}. (Leipzig, 1889). Zeller holds the ‘prevailing view’ that the myths are purely literary while the arguments alone are philosophical. However, later when Harris discusses the myths fashioned by Plato himself (‘Socratic myths’), he writes, ‘In the use of these myths we find the distinctive feature of Plato, for he uses them not simply as myths but as a part of his philosophy—they are a blending of muthos and logos. It is in the blending of these two, and not in the use of the myth, that Plato’s originality consists.’ (17) Unfortunately, Harris doesn’t say much more about the significance of this blending of muthos and logos, but he at least gestures to a view that was not mainstream at the time.
opposition to rational discourse and constituted a departure from, rather than a dimension
of, the basic philosophic endeavor of Platonic dialogue.\textsuperscript{85}

This position, though perhaps once dominant, is no longer considered tenable by
most scholars. Trying to find a more plausible way to make sense of the many instances
in which Plato tells his own myths, or argues for the importance of believing in a
particular myth, the vast majority of interpreters adopt a view of the myths in which myth
is somehow useful to the Platonic enterprise, whether as a persuasive rhetorical device or
a way to introduce or underscore an argument. The consensus among these accounts
seems to be that though reason always trumps myth in the final analysis, myth can be
used by Plato in certain circumstances to appeal to or persuade the intractable, non-
rational part of humans. Myths can also be deployed as preparatory exercises for the
main event: dialectical argument.

An exemplar of this position, Ludwig Edelstein (1948) argues that though Plato
was firmly opposed to traditional mythology, he is willing to create his own myths and
use them as ‘instruments of human intellect.’ Myths can persuade, but because they do
not have the certainty of dialectical knowledge, ‘they should never be considered as
anything more than probable...whoever finds in the Platonic myths the revelation of a
higher knowledge is not right.’\textsuperscript{86} Edelstein is clear that though Plato’s myths have a
place as persuasive devices, one must not forget that ‘reason to Plato is supreme; myth is
subservient to reason.’ Bruno Snell (1953) credits Plato with taking unclear,
unreasonable muthos discourse and transforming it, by means of his philosophy, into clar

\textsuperscript{85} Moors, \textit{Platonic Myth}, 5.

and rational logos discourse. According to Snell, ‘through [Plato’s] writings, we learn how those elements which in naïve speech are painlessly merged in images and similes, in metaphors and grammatical transformations, become separated by the catalyst of conscious reflection.’

M.D.C. Tait (1956) defends the view that though Plato’s myth has the negative function of ‘indicating the limits of conceptual thinking and knowledge strictly so called,’ it has the positive function of persuading listeners to live an ethical life. Tait claims that when confronted with questions of the relationship between the world of sense and the world of forms, Plato’s only answers are in the form of myths and metaphors. For Tait, ‘answers of this kind no doubt fail to satisfy,’ but they are understandable and save Plato from ‘self immuring intellectualism.’

The view that Plato’s myths are useful but subservient to his arguments remains dominant in scholarship of the last 50 years. For example, Julia Annas supports this view in her discussion of Plato’s eschatological myths. Annas begins her discussion of the importance of the myths in Plato by lamenting the fact that ‘the myths in Plato’s dialogues have been in general neglected by philosophers; when he moves from argument or exposition into the myth form there is a sharp switching-off of philosophical interest.’ Though she herself admits to being guilty of similar interpretations in the past, here Annas promises to give at least the eschatological myths of the Phaedo, Gorgias and Republic fair attention, since these are among the myths she now deems

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87 Snell, Discovery of the Mind, 223.
89 Tate, Plato’s Use of Myth, 177.
worthy of ‘non-literary study.’ These particular myths are important, according to Annas, because they appear in dialogues full of controversial arguments about the right way to live. ‘In this context an eschatological myth about the ultimate fate of the good and the bad can hardly fail to be relevant to the dialogue’s main moral argument, and may well be revealing about the form of that arguments, and any appeal to the agent’s interest.’ Throughout the article, Annas appeals to the myths to shed light on the important differences between the arguments in the dialogues, ‘for the difference between two myths may point to differences in what the dialogues are arguing.’ It is clear that for Annas, the myths are worth study insofar as they are able to clarify the arguments, and clarifying the arguments is the sought after goal. She readily admits that Plato ‘clearly believes that some mythoi stories, do have rational depth’ and that a fair interpreter of Plato must recognize this if he is to avoid a ‘passively uncritical reading of them.’ But for Annas, giving the myths their proper due involves assessing how much rational depth they have and then using them to shed light on the problems highlighted in the arguments—the myths are judged as important if they have rational depth; in other words, if they are able to clarify the logos discourse of a dialogue. For Annas, myth is not unimportant in the dialogues—it may be ‘philosophical’ or ‘rational’ rather than merely ‘literary’—but it must be approached from the standpoint of what it has to contribute to understanding Plato’s arguments which provide the real insight into his ‘thought.’

93 Annas, ‘Plato’s Myths of Judgment,’ 119.
95 Annas, ‘Plato’s Myths of Judgment,’ 121.
Annas may believe that certain Platonic myths help to clarify his arguments and therefore acknowledge that muthos has a certain significance for Plato, but she still judges myth by its relationship to logos, holding the rational arguments as the benchmark. Other interpreters who see myths as somehow useful for Plato focus more on muthos discourse’s ability to persuade the listener and less on its ability to offer real insight to an argument. Rosemary Wright sums up her view that myths are persuasive rhetorical devices in the concluding paragraph of her article ‘How Credible are Plato’s Myths?’:

Because of the nature of myth-making and its subject matter, myth could not be used as a means of approaching, attaining or relaying knowledge of truth, but Plato while recognizing its limitation and dangers, was ready to adopt it in a variety of circumstances as an instrument of moral education. Its entertainment value and peculiar attraction could be harnessed to advantage in moulding the minds of the young, and in persuading and encouraging the adult to adopt an appropriate way of life. A loss of dignity and freedom is the price to be paid.\textsuperscript{96}

Even the title of Wright’s article (‘How Credible are Plato’s Myths?’) suggests that her approach to Plato’s myths, from the outset, judges them by their credibility, which she measures by their relationship to truth and rationality. When she finds that myths cannot relay knowledge of truth, she concludes that they must be merely instruments of persuasion pulled from Plato’s bag of rhetorical tricks and deployed on the young and the immoral whose physical or moral immaturity makes them incapable of being persuaded by arguments alone.

Luc Brisson’s *Plato the Mythmaker* advances a more interesting and nuanced, but ultimately similar, view of Platonic myth.\(^{97}\) Throughout the book, Brisson underscores the opposition between logos discourse and muthos discourse, claiming even that Plato is the first to actually solidify this distinction. He makes the point that logos discourse is falsifiable, meaning that it can be proved to be either true or false, whereas muthos discourse is unfalsifiable. It is this unfalsifiability which prevents Plato from using myth as a vehicle to truth. And if myth cannot get at truth or knowledge (or at least, we cannot assess whether it does or doesn’t get at truth), then the only function left for myth is as persuasive device. Myth has two advantages which make it useful for Plato: first, it is the vehicle by which the knowledge held by Plato’s community is maintained and transmitted and second, it is a particularly persuasive rhetorical device for behavior modification. In this sense, if used by the right person, myth can even have a charm or spell-like effect.\(^{98}\) Brisson sums up his position in the conclusion: ‘Despite the inferior status with which he endows it, Plato recognizes that muthos has a particular usefulness in the realm of ethics and politics, where it constitutes, for the philosopher and the legislator, a remarkable instrument of persuasion.’\(^{99}\) It is clear elsewhere in Brisson’s book\(^{100}\) that those who most need this sort of persuasion are the young and immoral.

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\(^{97}\) For yet another (lower profile) example of the view that myth is persuasive device, see David Lancelot Hitchcock’s 1974 dissertation entitled ‘The role of myth and its relation to rational argument in Plato’s dialogues.’ He describes his view as follows: ‘Platonic myth is not an independent access to reality but a means of reinforcing what Plato’s hearers have already been persuaded by argument to believe.’ (iii).


\(^{100}\) Brisson writes: ‘Myth—whose communication arouses pleasure—is addressed to children and to the majority of adults in whom reason has not yet attained, or will never attain, the ultimate stage of its
Like Wright, Brisson takes Plato to use myths as rhetorical tools that can persuade the ‘untamed or wild in mankind.’

Thus, there is a substantial, traditional body of scholarship that explains Plato’s peculiar use of myth by deeming it subservient or preparatory to his use of reasoned argument. However, there also has emerged, in response to these ‘traditional’ views, a more recent trend that attempts to point out the interrelated features of mythos and logos discourse, claiming that the strict line of demarcation commonly drawn between the two is arbitrary and dismissive. Richard Buxton argues in his introduction to *From Myth to Reason?: Studies in the Development of Greek Thought* that the dominant view which marks a clear and striking movement from myth to reason in Greek thought generally fails to account for the evidence which shows myth and reason to be intertwined rather than set against each other. Penelope Murray takes aim at the ‘from myth to logos’ assumption as it pertains specifically to Plato, claiming that myth is ‘a kind of logos’ for Plato, rather than something set against reason. She also argues that the mythical element of Plato’s writing is evident throughout the texts, in his general mode of narration, and therefore it is arbitrary to single out his telling of myths as independent and contained examples of mythos discourse. And of course once Plato’s general style is described as mythic, it becomes even more difficult to maintain a strict opposition between mythos development...

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and logos discourses as they appear in the Platonic dialogues.\textsuperscript{103} Janet E. Smith also suggests that myth is a form of logos used by Plato and that muthos and logos discourse should be viewed alongside each other, rather than viewing myth as subservient or preparatory. She argues that the myths employed by Plato are true opinion composed by those who have some knowledge of the forms and are in accord with the best knowledge available on a topic. As such, they should foster further dialectical examination.\textsuperscript{104}

These views share in common the fact that they revise the more traditional view that Plato’s myths are secondary or subservient to reason and the fact that they elevate myth to the status of reason, even calling muthos discourse a form of logos. But there is an important sense in which the ‘revised’ views and the ‘traditional’ views are the same. Both use logos discourse as the standard by which to judge muthos discourse, and in doing so cannot help but elevate the argument over the myth, even in cases where the interpreter claims the two are equal. To say that muthos and logos are equally important because muthos is a type of logos, is essentially to say that myth is acceptable to the extent that it approximates the role of reason.

Having surveyed some of the views on the relationship of logos to muthos discourse generally, and Plato’s use of these types of discourse specifically, we have hopefully noticed several things. We have seen that myth and logos have had a complicated relationship as far back as they are found in philosophy and literature. We have also seen that a traditional view of the history of philosophy tends to see a


‘progression’ from irrational or mythical thought (muthos) to reasoned argument (logos) as one indicator of philosophy’s rise in the west. This view of the progress of thought from the mythical to the reasonable sets the stage for both ‘traditional’ and ‘revised’ interpretations of Plato’s complicated use of myth. Since it has long been taken for granted that muthos discourse lacks something ‘philosophical’ which is present in logos discourse, Plato’s myths are judged with respect to how the contribute to the reasoned arguments of his logos discourse.

Having arrived at this point, we are prepared to observe how Heidegger’s sympathetic reading of the Plato of myth and allegory—the muthocentric Plato—is different in a substantial and interesting way from both the ‘traditional’ view of Plato’s use of myth, where myth is subservient to or preparatory for reason, and the ‘revised’ view that elevates myth to the status of reason or sees it as a form of logos in Plato. I will argue that in Heidegger, Plato’s myths are not interpreted as subservient to reason nor are they measured against it. Rather, Heidegger wants us to see the positive possibilities of muthos discourse as an alternative to logos discourse rather than a preparation for it; in the process he will undermine the view that philosophy has ‘progressed’ from the irrationality of muthos to the rationality of logos. Having completed the preparatory inquiry into the prevailing interpretations of Plato’s myth in this chapter, we will next investigate the prevailing interpretations of Heidegger’s Plato. When this preliminary work has been done will we undertake close readings of Heidegger’s texts on Plato.
CHAPTER 2:
HEIDEGGER’S HISTORIOGRAPHY AND ITS CRITICS

2.1. Introduction

Because it is so commonly taken to be the case that Heidegger was a poor reader of Plato, it may initially seem strange that I would suggest we might learn something from Heidegger about how to read Plato’s texts. Though it is often remarked that Heidegger’s students went on to become excellent and sympathetic readers of Plato—Gadamer especially comes to mind—which is considered peculiar when viewed against the fact that their teacher was thought to be so harshly, and perhaps unfairly, critical of Plato—‘dogmatic’ is the term often used to describe Heidegger’s appropriation of Plato. Typically, these complaints about Heidegger’s use of Plato fall into two categories. First, there are complaints that Heidegger’s engagement with specific Platonic texts is unfair—that Heidegger misreads the dialogues according to his own agenda. Heidegger is faulted for promoting unfounded etymologies that suit his purposes, for focusing on one element in a Platonic text to the exclusion of another, for taking insignificant elements of the texts out of context and making too much of them. Such criticisms focus primarily on Heidegger’s close readings of Plato, finding fault when Heidegger offers an interpretation that seems less plausible than the prevailing one.

The other category of criticism of Heidegger’s appropriation of Plato focuses not so much on particular ‘misreadings’ of Platonic texts, but more generally claims that Heidegger unfairly villainizes Plato for his participation in the inaugural moment of ‘metaphysics.’ Such critics believe this ‘guilt by association’ approach on Heidegger’s part betrays a failure to adequately engage Platonic texts. Without having read Plato closely enough, Heidegger is instead content to offer Plato the dubious distinction of having ushered in an era of philosophy Heidegger himself constantly takes to task, and then Heidegger is happy to write him off for having done so. These critics seem to have no trouble finding pithy slogans to support their view; Heidegger does have a penchant for making hyperbolic claims about Plato’s complicity in the ‘fateful and erroneous course’ of metaphysics.106

One might briefly characterize the two sorts of criticism I have laid out in the following manner: there are complaints that Heidegger gets lost in the details of Plato’s work, failing to see that according to the big picture Plato cannot be appropriated in the way Heidegger wishes, when in fact Heidegger might have more sympathies with Plato than Heidegger is willing to notice. These criticisms fault Heidegger’s ‘myopia.’ But there are also those criticisms which accuse Heidegger of seeing nothing but the big picture: Plato is the father of Western philosophy, Western philosophy has gone down an unsatisfactory path of metaphysics, therefore, Plato must be the historical progenitor of this ‘fateful’ course, and is culpable. Such critiques fault Heidegger’s ‘overgeneralization.’

But it is not the case that critics fault *either* Heidegger’s myopia *or* his overgeneralization with respect to Plato—in fact, most commentators are happy to accuse Heidegger of both failings. And it seems likely that Heidegger’s alleged myopia and overgeneralization are related. For if one misappropriates the details of specific texts, one may well develop an inadequate generalization of how those details fit together to characterize the author’s position. Likewise, if one has an agenda that includes a particular, sweeping generalization about how the history of philosophy can be characterized, one is likely to interpret particular details of texts in that history to fit his own agenda. Thus the two types of criticism leveled at Heidegger’s reading of Plato are not distinct. However, I believe it is useful to point out these two general modes of critique so that we may note what it is that makes them, in fact, two versions of the very same criticism. For the claim that Heidegger is myopic and the claim that he overgeneralizes both accuse Heidegger of making the same interpretive mistake when he approaches the history of philosophy. Whether Heidegger is faulted for poor attention to historical detail on the small scale of a close reading or for a poor grasp of the trajectory taken by the history of philosophy generally, both types of criticism are rooted in a common assessment: Heidegger uses history to serve Heidegger’s purposes and misuses Plato to make Heidegger’s point. The assumption shared by all critics is that this is a dubious way to engage in historical scholarship. It becomes clear here that what is really under attack is Heidegger’s historiography. And before we can discuss the attacks themselves and assess whether they are warranted, we must diverge briefly to discuss issues of historiography generally.
2.2. Heidegger’s Historiography

In his article ‘The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres,’ Richard Rorty characterizes several genres of historiography that will be useful for our purposes. He claims that most historiography falls into one of four categories: rational reconstruction, historical reconstruction, *Geistesgeschichte* and doxography.

For Rorty, those engaged in rational reconstruction treat ‘great dead philosophers’ as contemporaries, ‘as colleagues with whom they can exchange views.’ \(^{107}\) Rational reconstruction tries to figure out how a historical figure would respond to a problem if she had the same sort of education as does the contemporary interlocutor. Rorty calls this ‘reeducating’ the historical figure. Rational reconstructionists run the risk of subjecting their (dead) partners in dialogue to anachronism by engaging them in debates which they would not have participated in or have been aware of in their own time. For Rorty, such anachronism is not bad, so long as we are aware of it as a by-product of this sort of scholarship. In fact, rational reconstruction, in spite of its tendency to anachronism, enables contemporary philosophers to better understand their own problems. \(^{108}\)

Historical reconstruction, by contrast, strives to find out what the historical figure would have said to his own contemporaries, rather than to our contemporaries. Rorty borrows a maxim from Quentin Skinner which sums up this enterprise: ‘No agent can eventually be said to have meant or done something which he could never be brought to accept as a correct description of what he had meant or done.’ \(^{109}\) To distinguish between

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historical reconstruction and rational reconstruction, Rorty gives the following explanation in terms of Skinner’s maxim:

When we respect Skinner’s maxim [and engage in historical reconstruction], we shall give an account of the dead thinker ‘in his own terms’ ignoring the fact that we should think ill of anyone who still used those terms today. When we ignore Skinner’s maxim [and engage in rational reconstruction], we give an account ‘in our terms’ ignoring the fact that the dead thinker, in his linguistic habits as he lived, would have repudiated these terms a foreign to his interest and intentions. ¹¹⁰

Historical reconstructions help us understand a thinker’s own context so that we can better understand the thinker herself.

Rorty calls the third genre in the history of philosophy Geistesgeschichte and points out that unlike historical or rational reconstruction, where figures are picked out of the history of philosophy’s well-worn canon, Geistesgeschichte has some effect on who makes it into the canon in the first place. As Rorty puts it: ‘The question of which problems are ‘the problems of philosophy,’ which questions are philosophical questions, are the questions to which geistesgeschichtlich histories of philosophy are principally devoted.’¹¹¹ When a thinker engaged in Geistesgeschichte answers for himself which problems or questions are philosophical, he will write out of the canon those who didn’t focus on such problems and questions. Similarly, his own Geistesgeschichte will include as part of the canon those who exemplify the take on history which he wishes to promote. Rorty summarizes the work of the Geisteshistoriker:

He [assembles] a cast of historical characters and a dramatic narrative that show how we have come to ask the questions we now think inescapable and profound. Where these characters left writing behind, those writings then form a canon, a


reading list that one must have gone through in order to justify being what one is.\textsuperscript{112}

Rorty offers Hegel, Heidegger and Nietzsche, among others, as examples of those who do \textit{Geistesgeschichte}.

Rorty identifies the fourth genre of historiography as doxography. By this he means the sort of history of philosophy one might find in an introductory philosophy text book. One can imagine such a book might start with, for example, Socrates and take the reader right through the history of philosophy up to Sartre or so. Rorty claims doxographical approaches are the first thing that comes to mind when one thinks generally about the history of philosophy. We are engaged in doxography when we ‘tick off what various figures traditionally called ‘philosophers’ had to say about problems traditionally called ‘philosophical.’\textsuperscript{113} In other words a doxographical history might take a problematic or question, such as ‘what is the good,’ and impose it on a familiar canon of thinkers ‘drawn up without reference to that problematic or, conversely, impose a canon on a problematic constructed without reference to that canon.’\textsuperscript{114} Unlike \textit{Geistesgeschichte}, doxography doesn’t arrange a canon according to a particular problematic. Unlike historical or rational reconstruction, doxography is not consciously aware that context determines which problems are picked out in the first place or what is said about them. Rorty calls such doxographical histories ‘calamitous’ because they assume both that the questions we ask now have been perennial and that we get a much better handle on these perennial questions as history progresses. Instead, he suggests

\textsuperscript{112} Rorty, ‘The Historiography of Philosophy,’ 260.

\textsuperscript{113} Rorty, ‘The Historiography of Philosophy,’ 261.

\textsuperscript{114} Rorty, ‘The Historiography of Philosophy,’ 261.
that we avoid doxography by offering better historical reconstructions and

*Geistesgeschichte*. These will prevent us from thinking the problems we focus on today are necessarily the problems that were focused on throughout time, opting instead to see our contemporary problematics as contingent on our circumstances. We might think that our questions are better than those asked by our predecessors, but good historiography will keep us from thinking they are the only questions.

Rorty acknowledges that historical reconstruction, rational reconstruction and

*Geistesgeschichte* are all indispensable to the history of philosophy:

Rational reconstructions are necessary to help us present-day philosophers think through our problems. Historical reconstructions are needed to remind us that these problems are historical products, by demonstrating that they were invisible to our ancestors. *Geistesgeschichte* is needed to justify our belief that we’re better off than those ancestors by virtue of having become aware of those problems.\(^{115}\)

We avoid the calamity of doxography when we are willing to make ‘experimental alterations’ to the familiar canon with *Geistesgeschichte*; when we learn, though historical reconstruction, what our predecessors really worried about even if those worries seem trivial to us now; and when we remind ourselves during rational reconstruction, that our enterprise, though worthwhile, is anachronistic.

2.3. Attacks on Heidegger’s Plato

In order to see how useful Rorty’s genre distinctions are to the project of understanding Heidegger’s Plato, let’s first look at an article that makes no such distinctions, and in the process offers a rather unhelpful critique of Heidegger’s approach

\(^{115}\) Rorty, ‘The Historiography of Philosophy,’ 267.
to the history of philosophy in general and Plato in particular. In his article ‘Heidegger’s Uses of Plato and the History of Philosophy’ Tom Rockmore aims to show that if one is to engage the history of philosophy, one ought to be aware of his interpretive approach for ‘all of us read other people’s writings, and all of us need, if challenged, to be able to justify why we approach philosophical texts as we do and not in some other way.’

Rockmore contends that Heidegger’s interpretive approach is one of metaphysical realism, meaning that Heidegger takes there to be a meaning which exists in a given text independent of any particular interpreter, and it is our job as readers to uncover that meaning. Rockmore’s complaint against Heidegger is that Heidegger cannot apply his own interpretive strategy to the history of philosophy because it is simply impossible to go back in time and uncover the meaning of a text. The fact that Heidegger attempts to do this, and then doesn’t see that he fails to accomplish his goal, suggests that Heidegger adopts an unrealistic interpretive strategy and is unreflective about this fact. Heidegger’s most grave error, according to Rockmore, is to insist that the history of philosophy should be organized around the question of the meaning of being. By telling a story about the history of philosophy which is so singularly focused on one problematic, Heidegger makes a serious interpretive mistake:

Heidegger seems to be suggesting that views come and go but the problem that interests him is intrinsically timeless and has remained the same beyond the meanders of the philosophical debate. Yet if this problem, indeed any problem, depends on the positions, theories, debates, or other contexts in which they arise,


it is implausible to suggest it remains or should remain unchanged, or again should or could plausibly be taken up as it originally arose.\footnote{118}

Rockmore claims that Heidegger’s attempts to look back to the ancients and uncover some primordial experience are dead ends. He reductively comments that when Heidegger goes back to Aristotle, for instance, ‘it looks very much as if Heidegger is trying to disqualify later views of Being in order to call attention to the merits of Aristotle’s view,’\footnote{119} but Rockmore does not think that this effort at ‘criticizing selected positions (in order to exhibit the merits of a prior alternative)’\footnote{120} will get Heidegger back to the primordial experience he desires.

In his final analysis, having offered few textual references on Heidegger’s use of Plato at all, Rockmore concludes that Heidegger was uninterested in Plato’s actual doctrines and simply used Plato’s writing as ‘a canonical source of the problem that concerned him.’ Rockmore finds Heidegger’s approach to Plato and the history of philosophy to be doomed because he has no way to recover this problem, namely the problem of being, as it was originally raised. This inability to recover the problem arises from his inability to ‘demonstrate that he in fact knows mind-independent reality as it is, in his case the ideas, problems, and concepts as they originally emerged in ancient Greek philosophy.’\footnote{121} Of course, this is damaging since Rockmore takes Heidegger to be a metaphysical realist with respect to interpretation, and it leads Rockmore to conclude that Heidegger ‘simply fails’ at his attempt to recover anything from Greek philosophy.

\footnote{118} Rockmore, ‘Heidegger’s Uses of Plato and the History of Philosophy,’ 199.
\footnote{119} Rockmore, ‘Heidegger’s Uses of Plato and the History of Philosophy,’ 204.
\footnote{120} Rockmore, ‘Heidegger’s Uses of Plato and the History of Philosophy,’ 204.
\footnote{121} Rockmore, ‘Heidegger’s Uses of Plato and the History of Philosophy,’ 210.
There are many points in Rockmore’s article where one might take issue with his interpretation of Heidegger. My purpose here is to use Rockmore to illustrate the helpfulness of Rorty’s genres and so I will limit myself to this task. To use Rorty’s terms, Rockmore accuses Heidegger of being a failed doxographer and an even more seriously failed historical reconstructionist. Rockmore worries that Heidegger paints a picture of the history of philosophy that is colored by Heidegger’s own attention to a particular problem. If Heidegger were engaged in doxography, Rockmore’s criticisms might hold a bit more water. But because Rockmore is intent on labeling Heidegger a metaphysical realist, and equally intent on showing that metaphysical realism is an implausible interpretive strategy, he ignores the fact that Heidegger isn’t doing standard doxography or even historical reconstruction. What Rockmore faults as inappropriate interpretation of history, Rorty refers to Geistesgeschichte. In fact, Rockmore’s litany of complaints looks remarkably similar to Rorty’s list of the features of Geistesgeschichte. Though I will not make a case here for the fact that Heidegger is engaged in Geistesgeschichte, or that Geistesgeschichte is useful, hopefully it will be obvious that we must get clear on what Heidegger is trying to do before we accuse him of doing something else badly. At the very least, we might learn from this example that Rorty’s categories are helpful to keep in mind, lest we, like Rockmore, dismiss Heidegger prematurely for failing at feats he might never have attempted at all. To engage in criticism of Heidegger like that of Rockmore, without reference to different genres of historiography, might by like faulting a house painter, on one hand, for his lack of artistic ingenuity or chastising an artistic painter, on the other, for his failure to cover the entire wall with his oil paints.
But Rockmore’s article is certainly not alone in its uncharitable assessment of Heidegger’s reading of Plato. There is much scholarship that is sharply critical of Heidegger’s Plato specifically even as it is not as dismissive of Heidegger’s approach to the history of philosophy generally. It will be useful to devote some time to considering these criticisms as they are particularly damaging to the argument that Heidegger stands to teach us something important about Plato. The details of these attacks will be best left until later chapters, but for now it will be enough to note critics’ discontent with Heidegger’s historical appropriation of Plato. As we consider these critics, it is worth keeping Rorty’s historiographical distinctions in mind.

One critique of Heidegger’s Plato comes from Heidegger’s colleague Paul Friedlander. In his chapter ‘Aletheia: A discussion with Martin Heidegger’ in Plato: An Introduction, Friedlander takes issue with several features of Heidegger’s interpretation of Plato’s allegory of the cave found in Heidegger’s 1942 essay Platons Lehre von der Warheit. Friedlander believes Heidegger is mistaken to claim that in Greek thought, truth had been understood as unhiddenness until Plato made the fateful equation of truth and correctness. To support his claim, Friedlander offers evidence of truth understood as correctness in thinkers prior to Plato. He also suggests that Heidegger’s etymology of the word ‘aletheia’ errrs by overstating the negative (privative) quality of the word. Friedlander then turns to exegesis of Heidegger’s treatment of the cave allegory to further prove that Heidegger is wrong to fault Plato for effecting the change from truth as unhiddenness to truth as correctness. Friedlander gives some credit to Heidegger,


123 Paul Friedlander, Plato: An Introduction, 222.
claiming that his interpretation is ‘admirable for its energy’ and conceding that it is
‘instructive’ even though it ‘overlooks important points,’ ‘uses oracular language,’ and
‘falsely relies upon real or alleged etymology.’ But the faint praise for Heidegger’s
energetic account is soon eclipsed by a harsher critique which takes Heidegger to task for
his unorthodox historiography. Friedlander sums up his criticism of Heidegger’s
interpretation as follows:

What stands unchanged is my criticism of Heidegger’s historical construction. For the result has become even more clear. It was not ‘first in Plato’ that truth became the correctness of perception and assertion. This meaning was present much earlier, i.e., in the old epic…Plato did not corrupt the concept of aletheia, as Heidegger claims. Plato sharpened the concept, systematized it, and heightened it.124

It is clear that Friedlander’s criticism of Heidegger stems from his worry that
Heidegger has failed as a historical reconstructionist. In addition to saying this explicitly, it is clear from the sort of counter examples Friedlander offers to Heidegger’s claims. Friedlander’s close study of pre-Platonic and post-Platonic historical texts which include the word aletheia suggest that he is interested in recreating Plato’s own context with the goal of finding out, in Rorty’s terms, what Plato would have meant when he said what he said to his own contemporaries. Rorty would characterize this as classic historical reconstruction, and Friedlander himself is clear that what he criticizes about Heidegger is his ‘historical construction.’ Friedlander is judging Heidegger according to the standard of good historical reconstruction and determining that he comes up short. Ample texts and examples offered as proof suggest that Friedlander may have a point. When confronted with a text, Heidegger misappropriates particular details, thereby ignoring the

fact that Plato is not really the villain Heidegger’s historical picture needs for him to be. This myopia on Heidegger’s part leads to the unfair overgeneralization that Plato initiated a harmful downward spiral in the history of philosophy.

Stanley Rosen, a student of Heidegger’s own student Leo Strauss, is another scholar with much to say about Heidegger’s Plato, devoting an entire book to reversing Heidegger’s claim that European philosophy from Plato to Nietzsche is the history of metaphysics or Platonism. Rosen sees much at stake in his effort to expose Heidegger’s bad readings of Plato: ‘Heidegger’s interpretation of Platonism, and so of metaphysics, is in my opinion the greatest obstacle to the contemporary understanding of the nature of metaphysics, and so too of philosophy.’

But Rosen is not strictly critical of Heidegger’s Plato. Echoing Friedlander, Rosen frequently pays Heidegger qualified compliments; in The Question of Being, Rosen writes that Heidegger’s influence is ‘due to the power of his intelligence and the extent of his learning, however perverse may be the use to which he puts these very considerable attributes.’ In an earlier article which focuses primarily on Heidegger’s interpretation of Plato’s cave allegory, Rosen aims ‘to suggest that Heidegger’s interpretation, for all its help in reading Plato, is a very serious misinterpretation.’ He does, however, promise to show Heidegger’s serious misinterpretation in a way ‘which


does justice to Heidegger’s intentions as well as those of Plato.’ In other words, like Friedlander, Rosen asserts that he has respect for Heidegger’s project and is not willing to dismiss him out of hand, but must offer significant qualifications to Heidegger’s interpretations of Platonic texts. In *The Question of Being*, Rosen offers the most comprehensive account of his reading of Heidegger’s Plato, but for our purposes it will be more helpful to look briefly at his views as they appear in condensed form in two shorter articles. The conclusion of all three publications is similar: Rosen’s most uncharitable indictments of Heidegger assert that Heidegger’s misinterpretations and misappropriations of Plato’s texts unfairly villainize Plato, betraying Heidegger as a bad reader of Plato who misrepresents the tradition of metaphysics from Plato on. His most charitable assessments suggest that Heidegger’s misreadings obscure points of commonality between Heidegger and Plato.

In ‘Heidegger’s Interpretation of Plato,’ after asserting that Heidegger’s reading of the cave is ‘a serious misinterpretation,’ Rosen goes on to say that traditional scholarship on Plato prevents us from seeing ‘important resemblances between Plato and Heidegger.’ Heidegger himself, Rosen speculates, was influenced enough by this traditional scholarship that he too was unable to see the resemblances. But Rosen lays them out for us, offering an extensive list of terms and concepts in Heidegger and Plato that suggest that the two ‘may be viewed within the horizon of a common endeavor.’

Heidegger’s error was not only failing to see these resemblances, but misrepresenting

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129 Stanley Rosen, ‘Heidegger’s Interpretation of Plato,’ 478.

130 Stanley Rosen, ‘Heidegger’s Interpretation of Plato,’ 478.
Plato’s philosophy in the process. Rosen’s explains Heidegger’s oversight by noting that Heidegger doesn’t pay attention to the ‘silence’ of Plato. This ‘silence’ is important because it makes clear the fact that Plato sought to avoid a speech which would temporalize, objectify, or rationalize Being itself…The dialogues becomes intelligible only when we perceive this unstated luminosity, which is directly present as the silence of Plato…Heidegger goes wrong because he is not sufficiently attentive to the silence of Plato. Still more specifically, he never confronts the significance of Socratic irony or the dramatic form of the dialogues.

Rosen’s specific complaint here about Heidegger missing Plato’s silence is related to a more general criticism that Heidegger picks and chooses elements in Plato to highlight according to his own preexisting agenda, missing other key elements of the Platonic dialogues in the process, and thereby skewing his overall view of Plato.

Robert J. Dostal expresses sympathy for the critiques of Heidegger offered by both Friedlander and Rosen in ‘Beyond Being: Heidegger’s Plato.’ Dostal’s general criticism is that ‘Heidegger’s unrelenting critique of Plato’ leads him to ignore key points of sympathy between himself and Plato, particularly in his treatment of Plato’s cave allegory. Dostal finds this particularly odd, claiming that Heidegger sets the stage for himself to engage in a sympathetic critique of Plato when, in *Metaphysical Principles*, he sets out six aspects of the transcendence of the Good. But much to Dostal’s dismay,

131 Stanley Rosen, ‘Heidegger’s Interpretation of Plato,’ 482-83.


133 For another, similar argument that Heidegger and Plato share more sympathies than Heidegger would allow, see Carol A. Kates, ‘Heidegger and the Myth of the Cave,’ *Personalist* 50 (1969), 532-548. Kates notes that Heidegger ‘uses the myth of the cave as the focal point of his attack on Plato,’ making the point that this attack obscures key points of commonality between the two.

Heidegger centers his reading of the cave around only one of his six aspects, and this wildly skews his interpretation such that Plato comes away looking like the villain who ushers in western metaphysics and Heidegger comes away looking like a bad reader of Plato. Dostal asks: ‘why should he have failed to provide such a [sympathetic] reading, for which he had laid such excellent groundwork?’ Dostal answers his own question by situating Heidegger’s view on Plato within a broader context of Plato interpretation during Heidegger’s time, suggesting that Heidegger’s own view of Plato developed in opposition to the prevailing interpretation of Plato among his contemporaries, an opposition which prevented him from fairly interpreting Plato.

Dostal offers other criticisms of Heidegger’s reading of Plato’s cave allegory, but those will be left until we are prepared to take up a close reading of Heidegger’s interpretation of Plato’s cave allegory. What we should take from Dostal’s critique now is the point, similar to that made by Rosen, that had Heidegger been more charitable to Plato, he would have seen that the two shared more sympathies than Heidegger thought. For Dostal, this explains why Heidegger, who had ‘such a short-sighted interpretation of Plato’ would have students who went on to perceptively correct his mistakes.

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136 For a discussion of how Heidegger’s views on Plato related to or may have been shaped in opposition to the neo-Kantian views of Natorp, see Dostal, ‘Beyond Being: Heidegger’s Plato,’ 74-78.

137 Dostal writes: ‘Had Heidegger hearkened less to Hegel and his demand for conceptual rigor and more to the irony of Plato, he might have recognized a proximity of his own thought to that of Plato which would have undermined his sharp critique.’ Dostal, ‘Beyond Being: Heidegger’s Plato,’ 95.

2.4. Gadamer on Heidegger’s Plato

One such student is Hans-Georg Gadamer. It is worth spending some time looking closely at Gadamer’s view of Heidegger’s reading of Plato since Gadamer’s education and career make his views on Heidegger’s Plato particularly relevant. The best-known student of Heidegger, Gadamer is self-avowedly indebted to his teacher for his own phenomenological approach to hermeneutics. Thus, we may expect that he will not unfairly attack Heidegger’s view on Plato for the sake of discrediting Heidegger. But Gadamer is not indebted only to Heidegger. Before studying with Heidegger, Gadamer studied under neo-Kantian Paul Natorp whose idealist interpretation of Plato held that the forms had no separate existence of their own—a view far a field from the prevailing interpretation that Plato believed the forms to exist eternally and immutably in the intelligible realm.\textsuperscript{139} Against standard views, this led Gadamer to develop a reading of Plato as a hermeneutic philosopher rather than as a systematic one. After Natorp’s retirement, Gadamer studied classical philology with Paul Friedlander who viewed Plato’s dialogues as literary works aimed at encouraging the reader to care for his own soul. With Friedlander, Gadamer honed the sympathetic, hermeneutical reading of Plato that was to persist throughout his career.\textsuperscript{140} Thus, from Gadamer we can expect clear sympathies with Heidegger but also with Plato and we can be sure that both exerted strong influence on Gadamer’s thought. It seems that Gadamer would not have an obvious agenda to exaggerate his criticisms of Heidegger or to let Heidegger’s unfair assessment of Plato go unnoted.


\textsuperscript{140} Coltman, \textit{The Language of Hermeneutics}, 26-27.
Interestingly, Gadamer’s first writings on Heidegger did not appear until four decades after Gadamer became Heidegger’s student. Gadamer himself explains that this time lapse should not be taken to indicate that he was not engaged with Heidegger’s thinking throughout this time: ‘Rather, I received impetuses for thinking from Heidegger very early on, and I attempted from the very beginning to follow such impetuses.’\textsuperscript{141} However, Gadamer is also explicit that he needed time to sort out his own views from those of Heidegger. ‘As is always the case when one is attempting to find one’s own position, some distance was needed before I was able to present Heidegger’s ways of thinking as his; I first had to distinguish my own search for my ways and paths from my companionship with Heidegger and his ways.’\textsuperscript{142} The two shared a strong commitment to the importance of history to the discipline of philosophy, and both gave a privileged position to the Greeks.

But despite these similarities, Gadamer distinguishes his own practices of engaging history from those of Heidegger. Claiming that Heidegger’s project with respect to the Greeks was to ‘think the Greeks more Greeklike,’ Gadamer is simultaneously grateful for Heidegger’s trailblazing approach to the Greeks and cautious about endorsing some of Heidegger’s interpretive practices. According to Gadamer, though Heidegger’s work engages diverse subject matter, there is a ‘unity’ to ‘the way that he has taken.’ And this unity ‘is apparent in his relationship to the Greeks as it is nowhere else.’\textsuperscript{143} Though Greek philosophy factored importantly in German philosophy

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\textsuperscript{142} Gadamer, \textit{Heidegger’s Ways}, vii.

even before Heidegger’s time, Gadamer credits Heidegger with offering something new: ‘There was a new nearness and a new critical inquiry concerning the Greek beginnings that directed his first independent steps and then accompanied him constantly up until his last years.’

But though Gadamer thinks Heidegger’s work on the Greeks was important and groundbreaking, he offers cautions about Heidegger’s interpretive practices. About Heidegger’s engagement with the history of philosophy in general, Gadamer warns:

When all is said and done, we are forced to admit that Heidegger’s thoughtful dealings with the history of philosophy are burdened with the violence of a thinker who was veritably driven by his own questions and desire to rediscover himself everywhere…Ultimately, this was to manifest itself in an almost painful deficiency in language, one that drove this thinker, in spite of his powerful language, in the most extreme enigmas.

With respect to the Greeks in particular, Gadamer worries that Heidegger fashioned his interpretations to fit his agenda rather than to do justice to the texts. For example, in his reconstruction of presocratic fragments, Gadamer writes that Heidegger ‘was using fragments when he attempted to erect his own building, fragments that he turned over and over again and assembled according to his own blueprint.’ Gadamer calls some of these interpretive acts ‘coercive’ and says that he ‘would not defend’ them, though he does later offer some suggestion that ‘Heidegger’s acts of violence’ might be in certain cases justified.

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144 Gadamer, ‘The Greeks,’ 140.
But what of Plato—the most famous Greek of all and Gadamer’s own favored philosopher? After praising some of Heidegger’s interpretations of the presocratics as ‘excellent’ and ‘methodical,’ Gadamer offers a general assessment of Heidegger’s Plato: ‘Only the thought event of the Platonic dialogues—the first philosophical text that we still have—remained inaccessible to this impatient questioner in spite of all the momentum behind his appropriations.’ Elsewhere, Gadamer’s criticisms of Heidegger’s reading of Plato are more specific. He asserts that Heidegger’s allegiance to Aristotle led him to read Plato through Aristotle’s eyes and to agree with Aristotle when he repudiates Plato’s form of the good. Of this alliance between Heidegger and Aristotle, Gadamer writes: ‘Of course, one cannot read Plato’s works through the eyes of the Aristotelian critique.’ Gadamer also makes clear his disappointment over Heidegger’s reading of Plato in *Plato’s Doctrine of Truth*. It is here that Heidegger points to Plato as initiating the movement from truth as unconcealment to truth as correctness—*aletheia* vs. *orthotos*. And it is here Heidegger suggests that this move ushered in the era of the ‘forgetfulness of Being’ which has plagued the history of philosophy ever since. By this interpretation, Gadamer is unconvinced. ‘It is far from obvious that this is the only way to read Plato.’ In fact, Gadamer goes on to argue, it is unfortunate that this questionable interpretation allows the later Heidegger to ignore all the aspects of Platonism that interested him in his earlier days. That Gadamer thought Heidegger to have unfairly ignored Plato becomes clear when Gadamer enumerates Heidegger’s

‘important philosophical interlocutors, that is Heraclitus, Parmenides, Aristotle, Hegel, and Nietzsche.’ Notably absent from the list is Plato, who Gadamer takes to have been dismissed by Heidegger before he was adequately engaged.

Plenty of critics have picked up on Heidegger and Gadamer’s different approaches to Plato and taken the opportunity to claim that Gadamer gets right what Heidegger got wrong. In fact, it is not uncommon to find some version of the argument that Gadamer’s interpretation of Plato is more Heideggerian than Heidegger’s own. In other words, if Heidegger had been a good enough Heideggerian, he might have seen in Plato what Gadamer saw. In P. Christopher Smith’s article ‘H.G. Gadamer’s Heideggerian Interpretation of Plato,’ Smith makes just this claim. Smith argues that Gadamer shares Heidegger’s view that Plato paves the way for philosophy as metaphysics. But Heidegger stops here, content to dismiss Plato for this failure. Gadamer, on the other hand, is not satisfied to reduce Plato in this manner, and goes on to hold that in spite of this ‘metaphysical’ side, Plato ‘remains true to the original experience of reality and truth generally. It is in emphasizing this point that Gadamer goes beyond Heidegger’s interpretation of Plato, but in a Heideggerian way.’ Smith claims that Gadamer sees two Platos—the metaphysical, or ‘critical’ Plato Heidegger represents in Plato’s Doctrine of Truth and the ‘dialogical,’ even Heideggerian, Plato of

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texts like the Seventh Letter. Unlike Gadamer, Heidegger failed to see this Heideggerian side to Plato, missing the fact that, as Smith claims, ‘far from being the first ‘metaphysical’ thinker, Plato, in understanding the original nature of language, the experience of its spokenness, is the philosopher who has found perhaps the best means to preserve the earlier pre-‘metaphysical’ experience of truth.’

Robert J. Dostal endorses a similar but revised version of the view that Gadamer’s reading of Heidegger is more Heideggarian than Heidegger’s own. In ‘Gadamer’s Continuous Challenge: Heidegger’s Plato Interpretation,’ Dostal acknowledges Gadamer’s indebtedness to his teacher: ‘Gadamer’s reading of Plato follows paths opened, though not followed, by Heidegger himself.’ But Dostal highlights the fact that Gadamer went farther than Heidegger, rejecting Heidegger’s ‘dogmatism.’ According to Dostal, ‘We might conclude simply that Gadamer delivers a Heideggerian reading of Plato and Aristotle that is much more interesting and telling than Heidegger’s own. In many ways this is the case…yet if we would attend more closely…we would see how in significant ways Gadamer’s path is not that of Heidegger.’ For Dostal, one can

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155 Smith, ‘H.G. Gadamer’s Heideggerian Interpretation of Plato,’ 217. ‘In the Seventh Letter we see a ‘dialogical’ Plato who knows that philosophy remains discursive, language bound, and that its truths are therefore not to be arrived at with methodical security and certainty.’ This idea of the ‘two Plato model’ should sound familiar, as it is similar to the reading of Plato I am trying to attribute to Heidegger. Hopefully, the close readings of chapters 3,4 and 5 will show that Gadamer’s acknowledgment of the ‘critical’ and ‘dialogical’ Platos, as Smith says, may share some common ground with Heidegger’s ‘muthocentric’ and ‘logocentric’ versions of Plato, as I have been calling them.


158 Dostal, ‘Gadamer’s Continual Challenge,’ 302. ‘Some of Gadamer’s insights which reject Heidegger’s dogmatism seem to have followed leads from Heidegger himself.’

159 Dostal, ‘Gadamer’s Continual Challenge,’ 297.
see the sense in which Gadamer’s reading of Plato is made possible by Gadamer’s Heideggerian roots, but this is not the whole picture—Gadamer’s Plato, unsurprisingly one might think, is more Gadamerian than Heideggerian after all.  

In these critics who applaud Gadamer for avoiding or correcting Heidegger’s mistakes we find still more examples of attacks on Heidegger’s Plato. And given what we have seen of Gadamer’s own criticism of Heidegger’s histories of the Greeks as ‘violent,’ self-serving, and ‘coercive,’ it is tempting to see Gadamer as faulting Heidegger for the same deficiencies almost everyone else does—bad readings and misappropriation. Indeed the case for Heidegger’s Plato begins to look even more grim. But if we are to fully understand what Gadamer says about Heidegger’s historiography, and if we are, at the same time, to stand a chance of softening the case against Heidegger’s use of Plato, we must see what Gadamer has to say about the kind of historiography in which Heidegger is engaged.

There are many places in Gadamer’s writings that give us reason to believe that though Gadamer faults Heidegger’s efforts as an historical reconstructionist, this does not amount to saying that Heidegger’s contributions on the Greeks are not useful as something other than historical reconstruction. Here Rorty’s terminology gives us a helpful way to characterize what it is about Heidegger’s history of philosophy that succeeds even when it fails as historical reconstruction. Gadamer sees that Heidegger is doing Geistesgeschichte well, even when he is doing historical reconstruction poorly.

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160 Walter Lammi discusses the differences between Gadamer’s appropriation of Plato and Heidegger’s. He acknowledges that Gadamer credits his own interest in Plato to Heidegger’s ‘philosophical stimulus,’ but characterizes Gadamer’s reading of Heidegger’s Plato as a ‘Destruktion.’ In the same way that Heidegger set out to dismantle the history of metaphysics to discover positive possibilities for reengagement, Gadamer (Lammi thinks) applies a similar ‘destruktion’ to the later Heidegger, showing the problems of his reading of Plato. Walter Lammi, ‘Hans Georg Gadamer’s Platonic Destruktion of the Later Heidegger,’ Philosophy Today 23 (1997): 394-395.
And furthermore, Gadamer is clear that the lackluster historical reconstruction doesn’t significantly undermine the compelling *Geistesgeschichte*. From Gadamer’s comments on Heidegger, we can make a case that these two different types of historiography ought not be measured against the same yardstick.

But first we must consider some of Gadamer’s comments on Heidegger’s *Geistesgeschichte*. It is clear that Gadamer recognizes in Heidegger the elements of *Geistesgeschichte* as Rorty lays them out: a cast of historical characters assembled to make a point about the persistent historical relevance of a philosophical problem that is of particular importance to the philosopher engaged in the *Geistesgeschichte*. Gadamer makes this particularly clear in his essay on Heidegger entitled ‘The History of Philosophy.’ Here Gadamer has his own story to tell about the way in which the history of philosophy prior to Heidegger was carried out. Gadamer asserts that with the advent of Romanticism, history took on a new importance that extended beyond the field of history even to the field of theoretical philosophy. Gadamer claims that before Romanticism, history of philosophy existed only as ‘a chronicling erudition’ or as doxography, to use Rorty’s term. Such doxography ‘was certainly dominated by definite, dogmatic presuppositions but did not serve the function of establishing philosophical foundations.’ But on Gadamer’s account, Hegel’s history of philosophy, the prototype of *Geistesgeschichte*, unlike any history of philosophy before it, attempted to uncover necessity in the historical progression of philosophical thought. As a response to Hegel’s *Geistesgeschichte*, those uncomfortable with the teleology presupposed by Hegel began

to develop a history of problems.\textsuperscript{163} This sort of history strove to uncover problems which were persistent in the progression of philosophical thought without claiming that there was some sort of necessity to this progression. Gadamer cites a textbook of this type, and characterizes it this way: ‘In the final analysis, it was based upon the assumption of a constancy of problems from which, depending upon the changing historical constellation, varying answers followed.’\textsuperscript{164} Done well, this sort of philosophy might look like rational reconstruction, to use Rorty’s terms. Done poorly, it cannot hope to be more than doxography.

According to Gadamer, Heidegger came on the scene as the history of problems approach was coming under attack, its dominance waning. Heidegger’s own approach to the history of philosophy, developed in part against the history of problems approach, was focused on the attempt to engage in a \textit{destruktions} \textsuperscript{165} of the tradition of metaphysics, a \textit{destruktions} made necessary by the tradition’s tendency to obscure the real question of the meaning of being. Heidegger considered the recovery of this question to be the priority of philosophical inquiry. At this point, Heidegger is engaging in history of philosophy as \textit{Geistesgeschichte}, singling out a problem which he sees as paramount and tracing its progression through a canon of his own devising. But Gadamer claims that this \textit{Geistesgeschichte} approach becomes even more pronounced after Heidegger’s turn:

\textsuperscript{163} Gadamer, ‘The History of Philosophy,’ 154. Gadamer attributes this development first to Dilthey, who he claims was ‘always in essence a cautious follower of Schleiermacher’ and therefore thought that ‘to bring philosophy into the investigation of the history of thought was not his affair; he saw himself as adhering to a purely historical method.’ Gadamer claims that this led to the development of a history of problems by the Neo-Kantians.

\textsuperscript{164} Gadamer, ‘The History of Philosophy,’ 154.

\textsuperscript{165} Where by \textit{destruktions} Heidegger means an authentic rethinking or dismantling of the stagnant vocabulary of the tradition. See Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 41 [20].
Later, when he began to formulate anew his own thought project in complete
detachment from Husserl’s model—and this is what we refer to as Heidegger’s
turn—metaphysics and its eminent representatives were to function only as the
backdrop against which he critically set off his own philosophical intentions.
From then on metaphysics no longer appeared as the question concerning Being;
rather, it was portrayed as the actual, fateful obscuring of the question of Being,
as the very history of the forgetfulness of Being that began with Greek thinking
and continues through more recent thought up to the fully developed world-view
and belief structures inherent in calculative and technical thinking, that is, up to
today.166

From this characterization, it is clear that Gadamer sees Heidegger’s portrayal of
the history of philosophy as a vehicle by which to make the points important to his own
philosophy, choosing figures and interpreting texts to suit his purposes. Gadamer goes
on to say that Heidegger took the ‘contributions of the eminent thinkers of the past’ and
‘forcibly arranged [them] in a fixed historical order.’167 He also notes the similarities
Heidegger’s project bears to Hegel’s Geistesgeschichte.

I have already noted above the problems Gadamer identifies in Heidegger’s
‘forcible arrangement’ of historical figures, including his tendency to do ‘violence’ to
texts in order to suit his purposes and his ‘desire to rediscover himself everywhere.’ I
have used these comments to suggest that Gadamer takes issue with Heidegger’s
historical constructions but have alluded to the fact that perhaps this isn’t the whole story.
Now, having seen that Gadamer takes Heidegger to be doing geistesgeschichtlich history,
not merely historical reconstruction, we are in a better position to argue the point that
Gadamer may fault Heidegger’s historical construction while still respecting his

Geistesgeschichte. It is this distinction which will eventually give us the tools to exonerate Heidegger from some of the criticisms that he is a bad reader of Plato.

But first we must consider Gadamer’s positive assessment of Heidegger’s Geistesgeschichte. In several essays in which Gadamer writes specifically about Heidegger’s interpretation of the history of philosophy, he cites at least four different benefits of Heidegger’s geistesgeschichtlich approach. Each of these four positive elements of Heidegger’s history of philosophy cast Heidegger as the gadfly, stirring up complacent, mainstream recent continental thought.

In his essay ‘The Greeks,’ Gadamer claims that whatever one may make of Heidegger’s project to overcome metaphysics or the specifics of his textual interpretations, ‘no one can deny that the challenge presented by Heidegger’s daring thought to the European philosophy of the last fifty years is simply unparalleled.’\textsuperscript{168} Gadamer’s first positive endorsement of Heidegger’s Geistesgeschichte suggests that there is something to be gained from a history of philosophy that exposes complacency and offers an alternative to the dominant trends in thought.

Second, Gadamer points out that Heidegger’s Geistesgeschichte doesn’t end with a challenge to the tradition—rather ‘the break with tradition that took place in Heidegger’s thought represented just as much an incomparable renewal of the tradition.’\textsuperscript{169} Gadamer makes this point by referencing Heidegger’s dynamic lectures on figures in the history of philosophy. In the manner of Geistesgeschichte, each ‘great figure from our classical philosophical tradition was completely transformed and seemed

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  \item \textsuperscript{168} Gadamer, ‘The Greeks,’ 141.
\end{itemize}
to proclaim a direct, compelling truth that was perfectly fused with the thought of its resolute interpreter. The distance separating our historical consciousness from the tradition seemed to be nonexistent. For Gadamer, this casting of the tradition both invigorated students and reinvigorated a tradition of philosophical figures who might have seemed irrelevant otherwise.

Third, Gadamer claims that Heidegger’s dynamic interpretation of the history of philosophy breaks our pre-understanding as interpreters, allowing us to engage with the text in a new way. Gadamer cites several examples of Heidegger’s unorthodox translations of words in Aristotle, claiming that these translations make ‘a semantic contribution…which works to justify Heidegger’s acts of violence.’ Heidegger’s translations make it clear to us that the customary translations of these same words ‘restrict the realm of meaning of the Greek terms used by Aristotle to their terminological function’ which Gadamer claims is a result of ‘the effective-historical determinedness of our pre-understanding which as been heavily influenced by the Roman-Latin and then more recent instrumentalistic translation of the Aristotelian world of concepts.’ In other words, there are elements of Aristotle’s text that we are unable to access if we approach it only from our familiar position. In Gadamer’s words, ‘it is certainly correct that…Heidegger consciously used force in an attempt to break the pre-understanding of words, a pre-understanding that seems so natural to us.’


us to break with that pre-understanding enough to gain access. Gadamer sums up the importance of Heidegger’s approach:

Erudition or historical learning certainly allows us to sense the otherness, but we are simply unable to think anything that does not correspond to something already found in our own thinking. The conceptual words of philosophy become estranged from themselves because they have nothing to say about beings; rather they enter into the compulsion of thought. This is what Heidegger called the language of metaphysics. It was first articulated in Aristotle’s thinking, and it now controls our whole world of concepts.174

According to Gadamer, Heidegger’s ‘violent remembrances against this control’ give us a sense of what it might mean for the words of philosophy to be less estranged from themselves, to have something to say about being, to think in a manner outside the control of the language of metaphysics.

Fourth, Gadamer claims that Heidegger’s view of history opens possibilities not only for understanding the past but for affecting the future. According to Gadamer, Heidegger recognized in metaphysics the fate of our world, a fate that is being fulfilled by the control of the world through science—and by the collapse toward which we are rushing. But then the question concerning the beginning is no longer an historical question, but rather a question posed to fate itself…That the answers given, which are ultimately our fate and history, could free us to pose the question anew—to which they wanted to be the answers—this constitutes our way of philosophizing.175

Though it is beyond the scope of this project to address just how much Gadamer shares Heidegger’s view of historiography, it is hard to dispute the fact that Gadamer recognizes in Heidegger’s histories of philosophy some goal other than historical reconstruction. Furthermore, though Gadamer has worries about some of Heidegger’s

interpretive strategies with respect to historical reconstruction, he is able to see positive possibilities for Heidegger’s distinct type of historiography, so long as it does not purport to be accurate historical reconstruction. In fact, when Gadamer weighs in on Heidegger’s *Geistesgeschichte*, his assessment is favorable: Heidegger’s approach to history challenges complacent interpretations, renews and reinvigorates the tradition, helps break entrenched pre-understandings and opens new possibilities for the future. From Gadamer, a student of Heidegger and of Plato, we must learn to judge Heidegger’s historiography for what it is, not only for what it is not.

In this chapter I have tried to make several points. First, by surveying some of the existing scholarship on Heidegger’s Plato I have hoped to show that Heidegger is frequently taken to be a bad reader of Plato, most interestingly, by those who take him to be a good philosopher, and even a good historian, in other respects. I have suggested that before we can adequately assess just what sort of reader of Plato Heidegger is, we should get clear on the type of historiography Heidegger is doing when he takes up Plato, and I have offered some categories of historiography to keep in mind with respect to Heidegger’s project. I have also offered Hans-Georg Gadamer as an example of a student of both Heidegger and Plato, who offers concerns about Heidegger’s historical reconstruction while simultaneously applauding elements of his *Geistesgeschichte*. My hope is that Gadamer’s example serves us in two ways. First, from Gadamer we can see clearly that Heidegger’s historiography must be judged according to an appropriate set of criteria, and that not just any set of criteria will do—it must be suitable to the sort of history in which Heidegger is engaging. Second, from Gadamer we get a glimpse of just
what Heidegger’s histories might open up for us if we are to take them seriously. This we should keep in mind as we move into Heidegger’s texts on Plato. But for all the help Gadamer’s example offers, it stops short of our goal, for though Gadamer is favorable in his assessment of many elements of Heidegger’s *Geistesgeschichte*, he remains unconvinced that Heidegger’s Plato interpretation has much to offer. Recall that according to Gadamer, of Heidegger’s many careful studies of history, ‘only the thought event of the Platonic dialogue…remained inaccessible’ to him. We will have to depart from Gadamer if we are to argue that Heidegger’s Plato has something helpful to say to us about both Heidegger and Plato.

In this chapter hopefully we have taken a second step on the path of our argument—we have concluded that Heidegger is not a bad historian of philosophy simply because he is not a historical reconstructionist. The next step will be to show that Heidegger’s reading of Plato, though it may be inadequate as historical reconstruction, can nonetheless provide us with positive possibilities for interpreting Plato even as it requires us to revise our assumptions about Heidegger as reader of Plato. This can best be achieved by undertaking close readings of Heidegger’s most sustained engagements with Plato.
CHAPTER 3:
HEIDEGGER’S SOPHIST LECTURES

3.1. Introduction

As we begin to look closely at Heidegger’s texts on Plato themselves, it will be helpful to first offer a brief orientation regarding the historical trajectory of Heidegger’s writings on Plato. In a career as lengthy and prolific as Heidegger’s, one can hardly help but feel that no sooner does one begin to get a handle on one element of Heidegger’s thought, than his views and priorities shift. Heidegger’s relationship to Plato is no exception. To the extent that commentators attempt to characterize Heidegger’s engagement with Plato, there are two general approaches. Some conclude that early on in his career, Heidegger considered Plato, like the other early Greeks, to be an ally in his project to clarify the question of the meaning of being. Later, when Heidegger abandoned the project of trying to establish metaphysics as a science of being and instead took up the project of dismantling metaphysics, he began to see a discontinuity between the earliest Greek philosophers and Plato and Aristotle, counting Plato particularly as the inaugural figure in the tradition of metaphysics which Heidegger was attempting to overcome.\(^\text{176}\) Others claim that throughout his career, Heidegger’s attitude towards Plato

\(^{176}\) For examples of this view, see Jacques Taminiaux, ‘The Interpretation of Greek Philosophy in Heidegger’s Ontology,’ *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 19 (1988), 3-14. Also Catalin
was one of unfair criticism, and there was no period prior to the ‘turn’ during which Plato was treated sympathetically by Heidegger. \(^\text{177}\) Almost all commentators agree that once Heidegger identified Plato as a villain, he then remained estranged from Plato until the end of his career. \(^\text{178}\)

I will argue, against both the ‘from appropriation to estrangement’ view and the ‘continual estrangement’ view, that the evidence does not bear out the claim that Heidegger was never sympathetic towards Plato, since the early texts we will consider suggest just the contrary; neither does it support the claim that at some particular point Heidegger stops seeing Plato as an ally and starts considering him an enemy.

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\(^{177}\) Partenie and Tom Rockmore’s introduction to *Heidegger and Plato: Toward Dialogue*. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005), xix-xxviii. Rockmore and Partenie characterize Heidegger’s relationship with Plato by saying ‘what began as an attempt to appropriate Plato (and through Plato a large portion of Western philosophy) finally ended in an estrangement from both Plato and Western philosophy.’ (xiv) Taminiaux argues that during the time when Heidegger was focused on fundamental ontology—before he was interested in overcoming metaphysics but rather when he was set on establishing metaphysics as a science of being—Heidegger ‘did not suspect any discontinuity whatsoever between pre-Socratic thought and Plato or Aristotle.’ (4) Whereas Taminiaux suggests that later Heidegger is widely taken to see Plato as the father of Western Metaphysics, a tradition responsible for the covering-over of the problem of being, Taminiaux argues that for Heidegger this commitment simply did not exist prior to about 1935. See also, Gunter Figal, ‘Refraining from Dialectic: Heidegger’s Interpretation of Plato in the Sophist Lectures’ in *Interrogating the Tradition: Hermeneutics and the History of Philosophy*, ed., Charles E. Scott and John Sallis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 95-110. Here Figal says ‘If one takes into account that Heidegger’s attitude towards Plato later on was definitely critical, his regarding Plato for some time as a philosophical ally is astonishing and interesting enough.’ (96)

\(^{178}\) For example, Robert J. Dostal claims that Heidegger’s ‘critique of Plato remains essentially the same throughout Heidegger’s work.’ Dostal, ‘Beyond Being: Heidegger’s Plato,’ 71-98.

Commentators who espouse this view of Heidegger’s evolving attitude towards Plato tend to mention Heidegger’s supposed ‘reversal’ of the view espoused in *Plato’s Doctrine of Truth* and *The Essence of Truth: On Plato’s Cave Allegory* among other texts, that Plato marks the beginning of the transformation from truth as aletheia, or unconcealment, to truth as orthotes, or correctness. The evidence for this ‘reversal’ amounts to the statement from ‘The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking’ discussed above. Here Heidegger admits that ‘We must acknowledge the fact that aletheia, unconcealment in the sense of the opening of presence, was originally only experienced as orthotes, as the correctness of representations and statements. But then the assertion about the essential transformation of truth, that is from unconcealment to correctness, is also untenable.’ Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, 70. In reference to this comment, Walter Lammi concludes: ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth’ made Plato the pivotal villain of this history. Even though the later Heidegger reconsidered this judgment he never substantially revised his critical reading of Plato.’ Lammi, ‘Hans-Georg Gadamer’s Platonic Destrucktion of the Later Heidegger,’ 395. Dostal holds that Heidegger’s ‘critique of Plato remains’ the same in spite of his later comment about the transformation of truth in Plato, which Dostal believes ‘does not alter Heidegger’s unrelenting critique of Plato.’ Dostal, ‘Beyond Being,’ 71.
What I hope will emerge in the process is an alternative characterization of Heidegger’s complicated relationship with Plato. I will aim to show that careful reading uncovers a certain consistency underlying Heidegger’s interpretations of Plato throughout his career: in both his early writings and his later writings, Heidegger remains sympathetic to the muthocentric Plato and critical of the logocentric Plato. It is certainly true that the focus of Heidegger’s attention shifts over time—early on he is perhaps more interested in undertaking sustained engagements with the sympathetic Plato; later on, he is apt to forego these careful readings for the caricature of the logocentric Plato who plays an inaugural role in his history of metaphysics. But in both early and late Heidegger, evidence of the sympathetic readings of a muthocentric Plato exist alongside strident critiques of the logocentric Plato.

Of course, it would be a daunting task to attempt to address any concept ‘throughout Heidegger’s career,’ a career that spans six decades and more than 70 published volumes. I will not aim at a comprehensive look at every comment Heidegger makes about Plato, for there are far too many, or claim that Heidegger holds a position on Plato at any given time that is clear and certain, for his references to Plato are as diverse as they are widespread. What I will do is look at several keys texts from the first two decades of Heidegger’s career, which present his most direct and sustained engagements with Plato. Then I will conclude the project by attempting to show that the later Heidegger’s preoccupations with poetry and myth generally suggest a continuation of his sympathy for the muthocentric Plato. I will also suggest that even though the sustained readings of Plato’s work are few and far between during this later period, when Heidegger does attend carefully to Plato’s muthos discourse in his later writings, the
same sympathies emerge, thereby suggesting that there is no radical shift in Heidegger’s attitude towards Plato.

To begin, it makes sense to jump right into the *Sophist* lectures which were delivered as a course at the University of Marburg during the winter semester of 1924-25. The *Sophist* lectures are particularly interesting for two reasons. First, they represent Heidegger’s most thorough engagement with an entire Platonic dialogue and therefore shed light on Heidegger’s general attitude towards Plato at this time. Second, the *Sophist* course was delivered during the time when Heidegger was working on *Being and Time* and the two works cover similar ground.\(^{179}\) Thus, it is not surprising that *Being and Time* opens with a quotation from Plato’s *Sophist*,\(^ {180}\) nor is it surprising that Heidegger defends the importance of the quotation later on. In *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Heidegger writes that ‘the fundamental-ontological laying of the ground for metaphysics in *Being and Time* must be understood as retrieval. The passage from Plato’s *Sophist* which opens the study serves not as decoration, but rather as an indication of the fact that in ancient metaphysics the gigantomachy over the Being of beings had broken out.’\(^ {181}\) Already it is clear that Heidegger believes that Plato’s *Sophist* can help us become

\(^{179}\) Richard Rojcewicz points this out in his translator’s forward to Heidegger’s *Sophist*. He writes: ‘*Being and Time* is closely connected to the lecture course, both temporally and thematically. They are both meditations on the matters at issue in the *Sophist* and shed light on each other…These lectures then show what Heidegger has always claimed, namely that the hermeneutic of Dasein has its roots in the philosophical tradition and is not a viewpoint foisted dogmatically on the problem of Being.’ Martin Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, trans., Richard Rojcewicz and Andre Schuwer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), xxvi.

\(^{180}\) ‘For manifestly you have long been aware of what you mean when you use the expression ‘being.’ We, however, who used to think we understood it have now become perplexed.’ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 1.

\(^{181}\) Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans., Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990),163. I was directed to this reference by Rojcewicz’s comment about it in the Translator’s Forward to Heidegger’s *Plato’s Sophist*. 
oriented to the problem of the obscurity of the question of the meaning of being, a problem which is Heidegger’s top priority during the period in which he focuses on fundamental ontology. I will not attempt an exhaustive look at the *Sophist* lectures, but will rather address three issues that highlight Heidegger’s general attitude towards Plato in this era. To this end, I will look closely at Heidegger’s introduction to the *Sophist* in which he takes up Plato’s use of logos (3.2), his interpretation of the *Phaedrus* dialogue in which he treats one of Plato’s myths (3.3), and his final chapter in which he clarifies Plato’s ‘phenomenological orientation’ as it shows itself in the *Sophist* (3.4).

3.2. Heidegger’s Discussion of Logos in Plato’s *Sophist*

Heidegger’s *Sophist* lectures do not immediately take up the line by line treatment of Plato’s dialogue which he promises. First, Heidegger spends over 200 pages preparing us for this interpretive effort. The bulk of this preparation Heidegger terms ‘Historiographical-hermeneutical preparation’ which offers primarily a lengthy treatment of Aristotle. Though Aristotle is of course chronologically later than Plato, Heidegger here believes that he should be treated as conceptually prior, claiming that this is necessitated by a ‘basic principle of hermeneutics.’ This basic principle, according to Heidegger, requires that one proceed ‘from the clear into the obscure.’ He explains this application of the principle to Plato interpretation by claiming that when we approach historical philosophical texts, we need a ‘guiding line.’ Aristotle is a natural choice

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insofar as he understood Plato and ‘should thus prepare us for Plato.’ Heidegger claims that if Aristotle had been followed by a ‘greater’ philosopher, we would have to approach Aristotle from this perspective, but since he was not, we must jump right into Aristotle ourselves. And so Heidegger spends the first two hundred pages of the Sophist lectures doing just this—preparing us for Plato by discussing Aristotle. Heidegger claims that approaching Plato through the lens of Aristotle ‘implies no value judgment on Plato,’ though critics of Heidegger’s reading of Plato cite this as an early indication that Heidegger is not willing to give Plato a fair assessment.

Later, Heidegger summarizes again his belief that Plato must be approached through Aristotle. In this second instance, Heidegger makes it more explicit that his use of Aristotle as a guiding line for Plato has more to do with general principles of historiography than it does with Aristotle’s clarity and Plato’s obscurity. Since we cannot avoid being historically ‘later’ than Aristotle and therefore having ‘issued from’ Aristotle in some sense, Aristotle ‘blocks’ our way to Plato. This seems initially uncontroversial—because we are historical people who cannot help but approach Plato

183 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 8 [11-12].

from the perspective of those living in a post-Aristotelian climate, we would do well to be explicit about this fact in our dealings with Plato. There is no sense in pretending we can access Plato as if we have immediate proximity to him historically. But no sooner does one begin to think that Heidegger might have something here, than he makes another inflammatory comment about Plato. Heidegger characterizes the move from Aristotle to Plato as a move from the ‘relatively developed back to the confused.’ He quickly adds that ‘confused must not be taken here as a denigration; it means rather that various direction of seeing and questioning intermingle in Plato, not on account of a personal intellectual incapacity but on account of the difficulty of the very problems themselves,’ but in the mind of many readers, the damage is done. Heidegger has dismissed Plato as confused and obscure one too many times and it is hard to believe that any subsequent interpretation of Plato himself will be charitable.

However, it is worth looking more closely at what Heidegger actually says here about Plato. After conceding that Plato does not suffer from ‘intellectual incapacity,’ but rather from confused and undeveloped ideas about difficult problems, Heidegger goes on to say:

The confused and undeveloped can only be understood if guiding lines are available to bring out the immanent intentions. These guidelines cannot be arbitrary philosophical questions, just as little as they can be all the possibilities of a system in a maximum of superficiality. On the contrary, the fundamental question of Greek philosophical research is the question of Being, the question of the meaning of Being, and characteristically, the question of truth.\(^\text{186}\)

\(^{185}\) Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, 132 [190-191].

\(^{186}\) Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, 132 [190-191].
Heidegger is willing to acknowledge that though Plato’s inquiries may be confused, they are directed fundamentally towards the question of the meaning of being. This itself is high praise coming from Heidegger who believes that our very first effort towards clarifying the question of the meaning of being should be to realize that the question itself has been thoroughly covered over by the history of philosophy. Plato, though accused of being confused, is not here accused of contributing to the covering over of the question of being but rather is still characterized as firmly belonging to the tradition of Greek philosophy that makes its priority the inquiry into being and the related question of truth.

Given Heidegger’s understanding here of Plato’s place in the tradition of Greeks, it does not come as a surprise that Heidegger opens *Being and Time* with the quotation from the *Sophist* about the perplexity of the meaning of being. In fact, for Heidegger, it is to Plato’s credit that he found such questions of fundamental ontology difficult and obscure, for in *Being and Time*, Heidegger chastises the contemporary philosophers who believe that the meaning of being is self-evident and therefore neglect the question of the meaning of being altogether. According to Heidegger, today ‘that which the ancient philosophers found continually disturbing as something obscure and hidden has taken on a clarity and self-evidence such that if anyone continues to ask about it he is charged with an error of method.’\(^{187}\)

Not only does Heidegger assert that he is not disparaging Plato for confused thinking, later he applauds Plato for effecting a ‘revolution’ in the meaning of being. During the course of the dialogue the *Sophist*, the discussion addresses what a sophist is

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\(^{187}\) Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 21 [2].
with the ultimate aim of deciding what a philosopher is. The sophistry engaged in by the
sophist is characterized as techne, and the sophist’s techne is a sort of know-how that
extends to speaking about anything. But in the discussion, it becomes clear that sophistry
includes not just speaking about what truly is, but also speaking deceptively. Heidegger
says of the sophist: ‘what he comports himself to, what he as a sophist deals with, is
involved in deception and trickery. But insofar as deception and trickery are things
which basically are not, things which present non-being as Being, the Being of non-
beings becomes clear on the basis of the very existence of the sophist.’ Sophistry
involves speaking about what is not, but insofar as we are able to speak about these non-
beings, they must have being of some sort. Heidegger considers this a ‘revolutionary’
insight into the meaning of being on Plato’s part:

This insight, that non-beings are, signifies at the same time a revolution in terms
of the previous conception, in terms of the previous meaning of Being adhered to
even by Plato himself. The interpretation of the mode of Being of the sophist
ultimately counts as a demonstration of the Being of non-beings. This
demonstration is nothing else than a more radical conception of the meaning of
Being itself and of the character of the ‘not’ enclosed therein. And that implies a
more original appropriation of the themes of philosophical research….This more
radical grasping and founding of research into Being entails at the same time a
more fundamental interpretation of this research itself, i.e. of philosophizing.

Having credited Plato with this revolutionary insight, Heidegger must consider
how the being of non-beings becomes ‘present and evident’ or how the beings become
disclosed in themselves (on alethinon) for Plato. According to Heidegger, the
characteristic way in which beings are disclosed in Plato is in dialogue or discussion
(dilegesthai), hence dialegesthai in Plato merits a closer look. Heidegger’s ensuing

188 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 133 [193].
189 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 133 [193].
discussion of dialogue and dialectic in Plato will be important for our purposes because it is here that Heidegger eschews logos as the proper place of truth, but still suggests that dialectic is important for pointing in the direction of truth. This insight will be important evidence for the argument that Heidegger is critical of logos discourse in Plato, and as such it will serve as preparation for the argument that in spite of this critique of logos, Heidegger is charitable towards Plato’s muthos.

Heidegger begins his discussion of dialegesthai in Plato by addressing the reason that Plato’s philosophy is written in dialogue form. Heidegger contends that it is not merely because Plato was an artist who preferred to present philosophical ideas with beautiful language. Rather, Plato’s mode of philosophizing was demanded by an ‘inner need of philosophy itself,’ a requirement passed down to Plato from Socrates. In Heidegger’s words, Plato’s dialogical philosophizing addresses his desire to pass from logos as prattle, from what is said idly and hastily about all things, through genuine speaking, to a logos which, as logos aleton, actually says something about that of which it speaks. Dialegesthai is a passing ‘through speech’ departing from what is idly said, with the goal of arriving at a genuine assertion, a logos, about beings themselves.

In Being and Time Heidegger gives us a more thorough account of the idle talk that dialegesthai allows us to overcome. He claims that idle talk (Gerede) is not a disparaging term, but rather one that describes the everyday way in which Dasein speaks and comprehends. When we communicate in this everyday way, we do not understand the entities themselves about which we are talking, we understand only the words that are

190 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 135 [195-196].
191 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 135 [195-196].
192 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 135 [195-196].
said about these entities. In this way, we are able to give the impression, even to ourselves, that we understand the entities themselves, when in fact we do not.\textsuperscript{193} According to Heidegger, the sort of understanding achieved in idle talk is superficial because it does not require the speaker or listener to have a ‘primary relationship-to-Being towards the entity talked about…it does not communicate in such a way as to let this entity be appropriated in a primordial manner.’\textsuperscript{194} In this way, idle chatter acts as an impediment to truth for one believes that understanding of a given entity has been achieved, and feels no need to seek the more primordial being of that entity. Thus, idle chatter not only fails to access truth itself, in fact it allows the being of the entity talked about to be covered over.

But in Heidegger’s discussion of logos in the \textit{Sophist}, it is important to notice that \textit{dialegesthai}, unlike idle talk, is disclosive in nature. \textit{Dialegesthai} allows one to move through the logos of everyday prattle to genuine logos. We have an instance here where Heidegger is critical of logos, but identifies Plato as getting something right—he avoids the pitfalls of idle chatter that are so common to Dasein on account of its reliance on logos. It is simply a fact of Dasein’s existence that it is bound up in logos. About this Heidegger writes:

Factually, however, it is precisely logos which ordinarily permeates all modes of uncovering, such that all the forms of \textit{aletheuein} we saw in Aristotle, with the exception of nous, are determined by the character of the \textit{meta logou}: they are carried out in discourse. Logos, addressing something in speech, is our most immediate mode of carrying out \textit{aletheuein}, whereas \textit{nous}, pure perception, is as

\textsuperscript{193} Heidegger writes ‘Idle talk is the possibility of understanding everything without previously making the thing one’s own.’ Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 213 [169].

\textsuperscript{194} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 213 [169].
such not possible for man, the *zoon logon exon*. For us, *noein* is initially and for the most part *dianoein*, because our dealing with things is dominated by *logos*.

Here we begin to see the actual critique of *logos* as it appears in Heidegger. Logos in its everyday sense remains idle chatter and therefore in not disclosive but rather concealing. However, since Dasein is bound to logos, insofar as Dasein ‘presses ahead’ to ‘the things themselves,’ it must use, or ‘pass through’ as Heidegger says, *logos*. This means that logos has a peculiar standing in Heidegger. It is concealing in its most common form, but it is also necessarily part of the pressing ahead which will allow Dasein to eventually overcome dialectic and see beings themselves. Logos is not disclosive of being in itself but it is a necessary instrument through which Dasein can ‘press on to the things themselves.’ For Heidegger, logos is suspect in that it is most commonly engaged in idle chatter, however, when used in dialectic, logos can be elevated beyond idle chatter and point in the direction of actual seeing.

In this sense, Plato is credited with moving beyond ‘what is merely said,’ but he is surely not off the hook. The same Plato who was earlier credited with effecting a revolution, is now disparaged for not having gone farther in the direction of uncovering being. Heidegger says:

The fact that Plato did not advance far enough so as ultimately to see beings themselves and in a certain sense to overcome dialectic is a deficiency included in his own dialectical procedure, and it determines certain moments of his dialectic…These characteristics are not merits and are not determinations of a superior philosophical method but are indications of a fundamental confusion and

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195 Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, 135 [196-197].
196 Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, 135 [196-197].
197 Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, 135 [196-197].
unclarity, which, as I have already said, is founded in the difficulty of the matters
themselves, the difficulty of such first foundational research.\textsuperscript{198}

This does indeed seem to be a grim assessment of Plato, and there is no denying
that Heidegger believes Plato’s reliance on dialectic was derived from confusion and
resulted in further confusion. The Plato here criticized is the logocentric Plato, the Plato
who was unable to ever overcome logos, the Plato who sets the stage for the future of
philosophy as metaphysics and its reliance on propositional truth in the form of logos.
There can be no question that Heidegger is staunchly critical of this Plato, but perhaps
this logocentric Plato is not the only Plato who emerges in Heidegger’s \textit{Sophist} lectures.
To make this case we will begin with Heidegger’s detour from the \textit{Sophist} through the
\textit{Phaedrus}.

3.3. The \textit{Phaedrus} Detour

Heidegger takes up his tangent on the \textit{Phaedrus} in an effort to get clear on Plato’s
position on logos. He intends to show that ‘logos resides in the central questions of
Plato’s thinking, indeed is even identical with them’ and he believes the way to show this
is to investigate Plato’s position on rhetoric, which Heidegger claims will clarify Plato’s
view on logos as well.\textsuperscript{199} Though the \textit{Phaedrus} deals explicitly with rhetoric, Heidegger
believes that the scope of what is entailed is far greater. Heidegger takes rhetoric here to
mean logos in a broad sense—the discussion of rhetoric does not merely pertain to the
speaking involved in public speech or oratory, but also to ‘speaking in the sense of self-

\textsuperscript{198} Heidegger, \textit{Plato’s Sophist}, 137 [198-199].

\textsuperscript{199} Heidegger, \textit{Plato’s Sophist}, 213 [306-307].
expression and communication, speaking as the mode of existence in which one person
expresses himself to another and both together seek the matter at issue. This broad
view of logos in the dialogue allows Heidegger to claim that the Phaedrus as a whole
does more than address Plato’s theories of the soul or love as some have claimed. For
Heidegger, ‘[Plato’s] concern is to expose the basic determination of the existence of
man...and human Dasein is seen specifically in its basic comportment to beings pure and
simple. And the love Socrates speaks of, both the natural and the purified, is nothing else
than the urge toward Being itself.’ Heidegger’s willingness to interpret the Phaedrus
in this way suggests that he is, at least at this point, willing to give Plato credit for
grappling with the right sort of question—namely the question of the meaning of being.
Though Heidegger takes the Phaedrus to be squarely about logos, he simultaneously
believes it deals with the most important questions confronting Dasein.

Heidegger characterizes Plato’s position towards rhetoric in the Phaedrus as
follows: rhetoric can only be adequately carried out as a techne if the speaker has insight
into truthful speech. Truth can only be accessed through the disclosive power of dialectic
and therefore, rhetoric can be genuine only if it is undertaken within the realm of
dialectic. Only then can we say that rhetoric is like a techne—a craft that guides the souls
of others by means of logos. Thus, Plato is concerned with rhetoric’s relationship to
logos and ‘for him legein concerns human existence itself.’

200 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 218 [314-315].
201 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 219 [315-316].
202 Plato, Phaedrus, 261a7. Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 221 [318-319].
203 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 221 [318-319].
It is important for Heidegger not only that Plato sees the logos as concerned with human experience itself, but also that Plato himself expresses skepticism regarding logos, namely its capacity for deception when employed by those who do not have the proper relationship to truth. Heidegger applauds Plato’s skepticism saying ‘it is not a matter of feebleness or exhaustion and is not the kind philosophers of today’s caliber could bear. On the contrary it requires a philosophy of quite a different level and orientation, precisely what Plato acquired in seeing the fundamental significance of logos for existence.’

But in spite of his skepticism regarding logos, there is no question that for Plato, logos remains the ground of dialectes than itself the ‘primary mode of disclosure of beings themselves.’ In this sense, though logos is suspect because of its potential for falsity, it is only capable of falsity because it is capable of truth. And the fact that logos has a truth disclosive capacity indicates that properly directed, rhetoric can influence or direct the soul (psychagogia).

According to Heidegger, the skepticism towards logos that arises in the Sophist from the realization that logos can foster idle chatter appears also in the Phaedrus. Here Plato takes up not only the truth disclosive power of logos employed by one with the right relationship to truth, he also treats the opposite role logos often plays in ‘factual existence.’ Heidegger notes this two-sided appraisal of logos and credits Plato for the awareness that ‘free-floating’ logos, which has no proper relationship to the things about

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204 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 222 [319-320].
205 When Heidegger talks about deception as a possibility of rhetoric, and therefore of logos, he says ‘And so it has become clear that genuinely convincing deception depends precisely on an antecedent knowledge of the truth.’ Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 227 [327-328].
206 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 235 [339-340].
which it speaks, is little more than idle chatter that ‘keeps man far from the access to beings.’ Interestingly, this skepticism about free-floating logos is expressed by Plato in the Egyptian legend of Theuth that Socrates relays to Phaedrus. Before we look specifically at Heidegger’s interpretation of the *Phaedrus* myth, it is worth looking briefly at Plato’s text itself, focusing particularly on the way in which Socrates introduces the myth, so that we can then better understand how it functions in the dialogue.

To this point, much of the *Phaedrus* dialogue has been spent discussing the specific conditions that must obtain if speech or rhetoric is going to qualify as a reliable revealer of truth, or an appropriate form of logos. In fact we are given a highly technical summary of these conditions at 277b:

The conditions to be fulfilled are these. First you must know the truth about the subject that you speak or write about, that is to say, you must be able to isolate its definition, and having so defined it you must next understand how to divide it into kinds, until you reach the limit of division; secondly, you must have a corresponding discernment of the nature of the soul, discover the type of speech appropriate to each nature, and order and arrange your discourse accordingly, addressing a variegated soul in a variegated style that ranges over the whole gamut of tones, and a simple soul in a simple style.  

It is only after the true art of speech has been distinguished from the false art that the dialogue then moves to the discussion of ‘the conditions that make writing proper or improper.’ Though we might expect an elaborate set of conditions similar to those that

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209 Socrates: ‘Then we may feel that we have said enough about the art of speech, both the true art and the false?’ Phaedrus: ‘Certainly.’ Socrates: ‘But there remains the question of propriety and impropriety in writing, that is to say the conditions which make it proper or improper. Isn’t that so?’ 274b.
give speech its pedigree,\textsuperscript{210} it is here that Socrates launches into a myth of writing’s origin instead. When asked explicitly by Phaedrus if he knows the proper conditions for writing, Socrates replies that he ‘can tell you the tradition that has come down from our forefathers, but they alone know the truth of it.’\textsuperscript{211} Here it is worth remembering Socrates’ first condition for appropriate speech: if one is to be a suitable author of rhetorical or written logos, one ‘must know the truth about the subject that [one] speak[s] or write[s] about.’ It is remarkable, then, that when he introduces the legend of Thamos and Theuth, Socrates claims that he himself is not sure of its truth before he goes on to relay the myth.

After making his disclaimer that the truth of the myth of Theuth cannot be verified, Socrates then makes a curious comment that merits notice: ‘However, if we could discover that [the conditions for proper/improper writing] for ourselves, should we still be concerned with the fancies of mankind?’ It seems that the obvious answer should be no. And this ‘no’ is so obvious that the question needn’t have been asked at all. After all, fancies are surely unverifiable, and can hardly hope to bear the right relationship to truth. Phaedrus seems to echo this certainty with his response: ‘What a ridiculous question.’ But significantly, it is not clear from Phaedrus’s response exactly why the question is ridiculous—because it is obvious that we ought not bother with legends, or

\textsuperscript{210}Though the statement of conditions for proper speech are stated as I have quoted them in 277e, after the discussion of writing, they are here given as a recap of an earlier discussion. Before reiterating the long series of conditions, Socrates says to Phaedrus, ‘Our intention was to examine the reproach leveled against Lysias on the score of speech writing, and therewith the general question of speech writing and what does and does not make it an art. Now I think we have pretty well cleared up the question of art.’ Phaedrus replies: ‘Yes we did so, but please remind me how we did it.’ It is at this point that Socrates recaps with the set of conditions I have quoted above. However, the initial statement of the conditions, which I did not cite because it is less succinct and clear, occurs at Plato, \textit{Phaedrus}, 270-273.

\textsuperscript{211}Plato, \textit{Phaedrus}, 274c.
because it is obvious that we should. For Phaedrus then goes on to say: ‘Tell me the
tradition you speak of.’ If the question is indeed so ridiculous because it is obvious
that legends are sub-par sources of knowledge, why is Phaedrus eager to hear the tale,
and why does Socrates bother to ask the question or then go ahead with the myth? We
might take this exchange as further proof for the argument in chapter one that under
certain conditions myth can in fact disclose truth, despite dubious sources.

After all, this is not the only spot in the Phaedrus where dubious sources are
given for legitimate knowledge. Phaedrus responds to Socrates’ myth by saying ‘It is
easy for you, Socrates, to make up tales from Egypt or anywhere else you fancy.’ His
dissmissive comment is met by ‘rebuke’ from Socrates. Socrates says that in the days
before young people were so ‘wise’ (and we can only imagine ‘wise’ to be in scare
quotes), they were content ‘in their simplicity to listen to trees or rocks, provided these
told the truth.’ Whereas Phaedrus wants to know exactly who his sources are and
where they get their information, Socrates suggests that he should care only whether what
they say is true or false. Socrates also tells us here that ‘the authorities of the temple of
Zeus at Dodona said that the first prophetic utterances came from an oak tree.’ Oak
trees and rocks are surely not the sort sources that we would expect to disclose truth.
However, the only criterion which these sources must meet in order to be reliable is that
of disclosing truth; Socrates is quite clear about that. Again we see that the ability to

212 Plato, Phaedrus, 274c.
213 Plato, Phaedrus, 275b.
214 Plato, Phaedrus, 275c.
215 Plato, Phaedrus, 275c.
disclose truth is a more important verification of a source’s credibility than accuracy of superficial facts.

This insight becomes crucial as we return to Heidegger’s reading of the *Phaedrus* myth, for in order to see the charity of Heidegger’s interpretation of the legend of Thamus and Theuth, we have to understand the way in which both Plato and Heidegger see ‘free-floating’ logos as inauthentic because it has ‘no relation to the things spoken of,’²¹⁶ but proper logos as discloseive of the truth about being. Heidegger’s interpretation helps us do just this, indicating common ground between himself and the Plato that deals in myth to make his points.

Heidegger first relays Socrates’ telling of the Egyptian myth about Theuth, the God of writing, in which Theuth comes to offer a variety of arts to King Thamus. Theuth sings the praises of each of his arts, and Thamus has the right to decide of which arts he approves. When Theuth presents writing, he argues that it is wonderful since it will help everyone to remember—writing will serve as a *pharmakon*, a remedy or recipe for memory and wisdom. However, Thamus is not convinced, for he argues that though writing may improve *hypomnesis* (reminder or recollection), it will erode *mneme*, the living, knowing memory. In other words, the sort of remembrance conjured by writing is too far removed from the truth which may be disclosed in logos. In this sense, Thamus sees writing not as the remedy Theuth heralds it to be, but as a poison which will corrupt the memory, the path to true knowledge.²¹⁷


²¹⁷ For a very useful discussion of the difference between pharmakon as remedy and pharmakon as poison, see Jacques Derrida, ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’ in *Dissemination*, trans., Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 73ff.
Heidegger’s novel interpretation claims that Thamus turns down Theuth’s offer of writing on the grounds that it will cause *lethe*, which is traditionally taken to mean ‘forgetfulness’ or ‘forgetting,’ but should more properly, according to Heidegger, be taken to mean

‘a concealing, a covering’ of themselves, in relation to what they have learned…Hence what the God is offering will cover over in people precisely that to which they related in their comportment towards the world and themselves, because the knowledge of writing entails *ameletesia mnemos*, an ‘unconcern with retention’, i.e. with the things themselves.\(^218\)

Thamus worries that relying on the written word will give those who use it the sense of having ‘knowledge,’ but since writing is so far removed from truth, this knowledge will not be wisdom but only ‘semblance.’ Socrates worries that writing is like painting in its remove from the truth and its inability to ‘defend or help itself’ in the way that living speech can.\(^219\) It is a short step to see resonances here of Heidegger’s own worry that the true question of the meaning of being has been covered over by the mistaken conviction that being is the most obvious of concepts and doesn’t require inquiry. When Heidegger translates the words Plato puts in Thamus’ mouth, one cannot help but see the concern shared by all three:

‘[those who rely on writing] hear much, but without the proper training, and so they fancy themselves to be familiar with many matters, whereas in fact they are quite unfamiliar with them; and it is difficult to be together with such persons,’ *suneinai*, because they cannot speak about anything. They have become *doxosophoi anti sophon*, ‘ones who merely look like those who are really striving for correct knowledge.’

\(^{218}\) Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, 236 [340-342].

\(^{219}\) Plato, *Phaedrus*, 275d.
On Heidegger’s reading of Plato, those who rely on rhetoric and writing which are unmoored from truth remain in the service of ‘free-floating’ logos, without moving on to the ‘genuinely substantive task of dialectic.’ Again we see that though Plato ultimately thinks logos has truth-disclosive properties, he, like Heidegger, is critical of the possibilities which lurk within logos to obscure the very truth one ought to strive for. One might argue that it is no coincidence that Plato chooses to criticize this form of logos using myth discourse, and one might also claim that Heidegger’s sympathy with the Plato of myth discourse is also no accident.

Indeed, Heidegger notes that the *Phaedrus* sums up the double nature of logos, distinguishing between the living logos and the logos of writing, or ‘in the broadest sense, the communicated one,’ which is merely an image, *eidolon*, or as Heidegger says the ‘mere outward look; it is not nothing but it is such that it merely appears to be so and so. The written logos is in fact a logos, but it merely looks like the living one.’

Heidegger summarizes and clarifies Plato’s position on logos: genuine, living logos presupposes the proper condition of the soul. In order to achieve this proper condition, one must undertake ‘a real labor’ or a ‘special task’ aimed at developing the soul so that it might see things themselves as they are. Heidegger says: ‘Therefore everything depends on this, that the *psuche*, the inner comportment, the Being of the existence of man, lies in the correct condition with regard to the world and to itself, i.e., in the correct *summetria*, in an adequacy to the things themselves which are to be grasped.

220 Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, 237 [342-343].

221 Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, 239 [345-346].
in their uncoveredness." Heidegger points out that Socrates summarizes this connection between living logos and the condition of the soul as the *Phaedrus* draws to a close. Notably, Heidegger also notes that the dialogue’s closing remarks are couched ‘not in an theoretical explication but in an invocation of the gods.’ After having summarized the gist of his position and having laid out the requirement that one’s soul must be properly cultivated if one is to adequately see things as they are, Plato puts aside the logos discourse of arguments and theoretical explications and has Socrates humbly take up muthos discourse to ask the gods that he ‘may become fair within, and that such outward things as I have may not war against the spirit within me.’

In Heidegger’s *Phaedrus* detour we catch a glimpse of the limitations of logos discourse noted by Heidegger and to some degree by Plato himself. Here, perhaps more than elsewhere in the *Sophist*, we see Heidegger not only sympathizing with Plato’s recognition of logos’ double nature, but also turning to Plato’s myths to make the point.

3.4. Plato’s Phenomenological Orientation

Having first set some of Heidegger’s oft-cited critical remarks regarding Plato in their proper context, and then having looked closely at Heidegger’s foray into Plato’s myth of the *Phaedrus*, we are now nearly prepared to look specifically at the more phenomenologically-oriented Plato that Heidegger promises lies concealed beneath the tradition’s caricature. However, as a last step before looking at this so-called

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222 Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, 241 [348-349].
223 Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, 241 [348-349].
224 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 279c.
phenomenological Plato, it is worth considering explicitly the points at which Heidegger himself makes a clear distinction between Plato’s own work and Platonism as it is appropriated by the tradition. Though Heidegger does make repeated comments, as we have seen, about Plato having failed to go far enough in a certain direction, or having seen something but failed to grasp it fully, these qualified criticisms (or qualified endorsements as they sometimes are) are rarely accompanied by the virulent reproach Heidegger reserves for the history of western metaphysics and the way it has appropriated Plato as a spokesperson. When we consider the nature of some of these venomous criticisms next to Heidegger’s cautious concerns about Plato’s own work, a striking picture appears: Heidegger’s critiques of Plato in the Sophist lectures are primarily the critiques of a caricature hijacked by a tradition, not critiques of Plato’s own insights. In fact, as we will see below, with Heidegger’s interpretive attention to the muthocentric Plato, the Sophist lectures allow a Plato with a decidedly phenomenological bent to emerge.

The lectures are peppered throughout with criticisms of the tradition of western metaphysics and the thought trajectory that took off from this tradition’s reading of Plato’s work. The reader is frequently cautioned against simply accepting the traditional interpretation as it comes down to us, and in the specific case of the term ‘dialectic,’ we are warned of the ‘determinations heaped on it in the course of history even to this very day.’

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225 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 396 [572-573].

226 In this case Heidegger is referring to the determinations heaped on the term ‘dialectic’ and claims that if we wanted to understand the term ‘in the Platonic sense, we must accordingly keep it completely free’ of all these determinations. Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 233 [337-338].
Earlier, Heidegger gives a thorough discussion of the problems associated with accepting the tradition’s notion of dialectic; it is worth looking at this discussion now so that we might use it as a helpful case study that clarifies the novelty of Heidegger’s alternative reading of Plato at the same time that it indicts the dominant reading. As we have seen above, Heidegger acknowledges that Plato’s dialectic is on the way to something but doesn’t go far enough. Though he worries that *dialegesthai* doesn’t ‘purely and simply disclose beings,’ which is its goal, he grants that ‘it need not be a mere game’ so long as it ‘cuts through idle talk, checks the prattle, and in the speeches lays its finger, as it were, on what is at issue.’ On Heidegger’s view here, though dialectic has an ‘intrinsic tendency towards seeing, disclosing,’ it is merely preparatory for the genuine intuition that allows us to see beings themselves. In other words, though Plato himself was headed in the right direction, his ‘confusion and unclarity’, owing in no small part to the difficulty of the subject matter and his situation at the beginning of the inquiry, prevented him from moving beyond dialectic. That task was left for Aristotle.

At least this is how Heidegger tells the story. However, this interpretation of Platonic dialectic has been completely missed by the tradition that has been quick to herald Platonic dialectic as the ‘first ideal…a superior kind of philosophizing.’ This

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227 Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, 136 [196-197].

228 Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, 136 [196-197].

229 Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, 136 [196-197].
view of dialectic is wedded to a view that defines logos primarily as ‘reason’ and deploys dialectic as a means to identify and transmit propositional truth. According to Heidegger, this kind of philosophizing has become a game, ‘a principle to play with,’ and one that runs directly opposite to Plato’s actual concern regarding dialectic, ‘namely to see the on alethinon, that which is.’

One damaging outcome of this view of dialectic is that Aristotle’s improvement (as Heidegger sees it) on Platonic dialectic is actually viewed by the history of philosophy to be a misunderstanding, and used to denigrate Aristotle. Says Heidegger:

Aristotle did deprive dialectic of its dignity, but not because he did not understand it. On the contrary, it was because he understood it more radically, because he saw Plato himself as being underway towards theorein in his dialectic, because he succeeded in making real what Plato was striving for. Aristotle could do this, of course, only because he understood the function of logos and of dialegesthai within scientific reflection and within human existence in general.

The not-so-subtle implication is that subsequent interpreters have failed to understand logos and dialegesthai in these ways. The consequences of such misinterpretations are huge—in this case we have come to think of dialectic as a ‘crafty operation of thinking’ instead of a noting that it is ‘always already wanting to see…[an art] of bringing one’s partner in the argument to open his eyes and see.’ This example gives us a thorough sense of just what is at stake in Heidegger’s revisions of the

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230 Heidegger writes ‘the circuitous path of this intermingling of phenomena leads eventually to the translation of logos as ‘reason.’ But logos does not mean reason.’ Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 139-140 [202-203].

231 Plato’s Sophist, 139-140 [202-203]. Notice here that Heidegger’s concern is not with all logos but with logos narrowly understood as the vehicle of propositional truth.

232 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 138 [199-200].

233 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 138 [199-200].
tradition’s appropriations of Plato. It also makes clear that though Plato is cautiously identified as having not gone far enough (for understandable reasons, no less), it is the tradition that is culpable for the fall out.

There are many other points at which Heidegger takes contemporary philosophy to task for misusing Plato, and occasionally Heidegger’s scathing critique takes on a particularly fierce quality. After discussing Plato’s use of techne early in the Sophist dialogue, Heidegger scolds with sarcasm: ‘The traditional interpretation of Plato left these matters out of account because they were obviously too primitive and too self-evident for such a lofty science as contemporary philosophy, and because our epistemology is much more advanced and takes Plato to be beating his brains over trivialities.’ 234 Here, as in the prior example, we take note that Plato’s own philosophy is not the object of the rebuke.

As Heidegger nears the end of his lecture course his critiques of the tradition come fast and furiously. One gets the strong sense that if students are to take one general principle from the course, it might well be to distrust the caricature of Plato peddled by contemporary philosophy. At several spots, Heidegger cautions that contrary to popular belief, dialectic is not an ‘idle game,’ not ‘the work of empty and blind conceptual hair-splitting,’ 235 not the ‘mere augmentation of the doctrinal content of the formal scholastic discipline called ‘logic.’' 236 To take it as such is to miss the fundamental insight that the

234 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 192 [278-279].
235 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 394 [569-570].
236 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 397 [573-574].
basic dialectical consideration is ‘the clarification of the basic structures which manifest themselves in regard to what is actually at issue here, namely human existence.’\textsuperscript{237}

Contemporary logic also finds itself an object of Heidegger’s condemnation. Repeatedly, Heidegger not only points out that logic in the contemporary sense does not get at logos in the Platonic sense,\textsuperscript{238} but also is careful to distinguish the Greek view of logic from its contemporary counterpart.\textsuperscript{239} In this way, Plato is firmly aligned with the Greek view and largely exonerated from the accusations that stick to contemporary logic.

In his strident fashion, Heidegger warns us that Plato interpretation is and will remain an ‘ungodly confusion from which we will never extricate ourselves as long as we have not learned to disregard the worn out categories of modern logic, i.e., as long as we have not learned that this disregard is the primary requirement for an objective understanding of historiographically pregiven phenomena.’\textsuperscript{240}

When compared to the language Heidegger reserves for contemporary philosophy’s reading of Plato, Plato himself fares reasonably well in Heidegger’s assessment, as we have seen above with Heidegger’s assessment that Plato’s approach to being and non-being was revolutionary. Though there are important criticisms of Plato’s efforts, they are continually for having failed to go far enough, rather than for having

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\textsuperscript{237} Heidegger, \textit{Plato’s Sophist}, 397 [573-574].

\textsuperscript{238} On 414, Heidegger scolds: ‘This history of philosophy, above all that of modern and contemporary logic, shows that this insight [that logos is logos of something], this triviality, has been forgotten long ago or is no longer used…Thus no one any longer makes us of the insight: logos is logos tinos.’ Heidegger, \textit{Plato’s Sophist}, 414[598-599].

\textsuperscript{239} On 400, he writes, ‘The anthropological question is thus ontological and vice versa, and both questions center in the “logical” pure and simple, provided “logical” is understood as that which properly concerns logos, thus not understood in the sense of formal logic but in the Greek sense.’ Heidegger, \textit{Plato’s Sophist}, 400 [577-578].

\textsuperscript{240} Heidegger, \textit{Plato’s Sophist}, 421 [608-609].
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made grave mistakes, as the history of philosophy has in its appropriation of Plato. For instance, when Plato is accused by Heidegger of ‘remarkable unclarity’ for failing to draw out the distinction between being and otherness, his confusion is ‘remarkable’ not so much for its gravity but for the fact that Plato did not make the distinction clear in spite of his having operated with it himself.\(^{241}\) Plato understood this distinction on some level, but did not make it explicit enough.

Most of Heidegger’s criticisms of Plato fall into this category—Plato’s philosophizing is seen in some sense as preliminary or naïve. One such example involves Plato’s failure to distinguish between the method of dealing with beings versus being. In order to understand a being, Plato is known to dissect it (\textit{temnein} or \textit{diairein}) until its ‘substantive contents, the \textit{eide}, are revealed.’\(^{242}\) According to Heidegger, this method is carried out ‘naively’ by Plato with the unfortunate result that the distinction between dealing with beings and being is missed. The way in which Plato understood the being of the ideas is a further consequence of this naïveté. But what is characterized as naïve in Plato himself can become downright sinister in the hands of interpreters who have made Plato’s dichotomizing the precursor to formal logic, and reduced Plato to his theory of ideas. Heidegger cautions readers who would make this mistake: ‘We must get unused to applying to Plato’s philosophy the scholastic horizon, as if for Plato in one box were sensibility, and in another the supersensible. Plato saw the world exactly as elementally as we do, but much more originally.\(^{243}\)

\(^{241}\) Heidegger, \textit{Plato’s Sophist}, 378 [546-547]. ‘He indeed operates with this distinction but does not genuinely expose it.’

\(^{242}\) Heidegger, \textit{Plato’s Sophist}, 198 [286-287].

\(^{243}\) Heidegger, \textit{Plato’s Sophist}, 402 [580-581].
In fact, if we look closely at Heidegger’s concern about dichotomization in Plato, we will see that here again he credits Plato with at least a preliminary understanding of ‘what is essential.’ According to Heidegger, we must remember that diairein (dissecting/taking apart) is ‘designated as legein and that logos for its part has the character of deloun, ‘revealing.’\(^{244}\) If this connection is kept in mind, we will not risk taking concept systematization as the essential insight of Plato’s approach. Instead we will realize that what is essential is the deloun, or the revealing of the being itself.

In these moments where Heidegger attempts to rescue something in Plato which the tradition has missed or misconstrued, an alternate version of Plato begins to emerge—a decidedly more ‘phenomenological’ Plato, to use Heidegger’s word, than the Plato whose primary goal is to categorize everything into the sensible and the intelligible. But in what ways is Heidegger’s Plato more phenomenological?

First, this is a Plato who is aware that being is fundamentally about human existence and that being-in-the-world is the context within which humans are. Heidegger takes the fundamental theme of Plato’s Sophist dialogue to be the ‘clarification of the existence of the sophist in its possibility.’\(^{245}\) By recognizing this, Heidegger aims to emphasize that Plato’s treatment of the fundamental dialectical consideration and of logos itself in the Sophist does not amount to the ‘conceptual hair splitting’ that it may appear, given the length and tedium (as critics point out) of some of Plato’s distinctions. More than just offering tiresome categorization, or contributing to the discipline of formal logic, in the Sophist Plato sets out to clarify the definition of the sophist and at the

\(^{244}\) Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 198 [286-287].

\(^{245}\) Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 397 [573-574].
same time the philosopher with regard to human existence, which Heidegger takes to be
the real issue in Plato’s dialogue. Indeed, Plato’s Stranger cautions Theaetetus: ‘The
attempt to separate everything from every other thing not only strikes a discordant note
but amounts to a crude defiance of the philosophical Muse ... The isolation of
everything from everything else means a complete abolition of all discourse ... To rob us
of discourse would be to rob us of philosophy.’ As Heidegger interprets this, ‘If there
is no philosophy, i.e. no legein in the genuine sense, there is also no human existence’
since to exist genuinely requires participation in the political life, the highest calling for
humans, and this requires the ability to philosophize. Heidegger goes on: ‘The
anthropological question is thus ontological and vice versa, and both questions center in
the ‘logical’ pure and simple, provided ‘logical’ is understood as that which properly
concerns logos, thus not understood in the sense of formal logic but in the Greek
sense.’ Heidegger admits that the context within which humans, ‘zoon logon ekon,’
are—a ‘context that is ultimately grounded in Being-in, in the antecedent uncoveredness
of the world’—was not ‘explicitly investigated’ by Plato, but insists that still it was
‘operative’ for him. Thus, though logos for Plato has a somewhat different role to play
than it does for Heidegger, the centrality of logos and the connection between logos and
existence ensures that issues of human existence are firmly at the center of the Plato’s

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246 Note that ‘the attempt to separate everything’ would fall into the category of logic in the sense
that I mean when I say ‘logos discourse.’ Interestingly, here it is mentioned that this would defy the
‘philosophical muse,’ an image that conjures the sense of the muthos discourse.

247 Plato, Sophist, 259e-260a.

248 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 400 [577-578].

249 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 405-406 [585-586].
concern, and Heidegger emphasizes this as evidence of a phenomenological Plato worth seeking out.

In a more explicit discussion of phenomenology and Plato, Heidegger makes a distinction between the formal idea of phenomenology and the methodology of research used in phenomenology. He claims that ‘phenomenology signifies nothing else than disclosing in speech, exhibiting beings, exhibiting the beings that show themselves, in their way of showing themselves, in the way they are ‘there.’’ He acknowledges that there is a methodology that accompanies the contemporary ‘science’ of phenomenology, but that in many cases the formal idea and the methodology are taken to be one and the same. This conflation, Heidegger believes, is a mistake, for to understand phenomenology in this confused way, as merely a science in which one ‘lies on the sofa smoking a pipe and intuiting essences’ is to miss the way in which the Greeks, including Plato, were already using phainetai as ‘to show itself’ rather than as ‘it seems.’

Heidegger then offers an example of the importance of recognizing this phenomenological bent in Plato—he treats Plato’s analysis of logos in three stages, in each stage highlighting elements of Plato’s thought that are missed by the traditional reading, but that can be profitably recovered if we follow Heidegger’s interpretation. It is worth making our way though this example, as it shows that at least the early Heidegger is interested in reading Plato charitably so as to recover elements of Plato lost in the traditional interpretations.

250 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 401 [579-580]: ‘Thus if kinesis is the theme of the dialectical consideration, that mean the theme is nothing else than human Dasein, life itself, insofar as it expresses itself and addresses the world in which it is.’

251 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 406 [586-587].

252 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 406 [586-587].
In the first stage of the analysis of logos, Heidegger argues that properly speaking we should understand a ‘logos’ as a ‘revealing’ in the phenomenological sense, rather than just as a proposition arising from the combination of noun and verb. In Plato’s text we are given several examples of word combinations that do not come together to form a logos: ‘walks runs sleeps,’ for instance, and ‘lion stag horse.’ As the Stranger explains this to Theaetetus (in one popular translation), in neither of these combinations of words ‘do the sounds uttered signify any action performed or not performed or nature of anything that exists or does not exist, until you combine verbs with names. The moment you do that, they fit together and the simplest combination becomes a statement.’\(^{253}\)

However, this translation is just the sort Heidegger condemns, on the grounds that it gives the impression that Plato thinks throwing together any words, so long as they are noun and verb combined, is sufficient to create a logos. Again Heidegger expresses contempt for this traditional view of language that has taken Plato to be a member of its camp:

That idea of an extrinsic shoving together still dominates the entire traditional categorical material of the grammar of the Indo-Germanic languages…If we wanted to see the original and phenomenal connection between the phenomenon of language and the Being of man, we would have to get rid, at the very outset, of the proposition as the point of departure for our orientation toward language.\(^{254}\)

In an effort to do just this, Heidegger offers an alternative reading that shows the formation of logos to be a phenomenological event, not merely a conjunction of noun and verb. Whereas standard translations render deloi as ‘signify’ or ‘indicate’ (‘for in neither case do the words uttered indicate (deloi) action or inaction or existence of anything that exists or doesn’t exist, until the verbs are mingled with the nouns’), Heidegger believes


\(^{254}\) Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, 411 [593-594].
this reading covers over an important feature of Plato’s text. Heidegger reads *de\(lo\)i* not as ‘signify’ or ‘indicate,’ but as ‘reveal.’ In order for a logos to occur, the utterance must *reveal*, not merely signify. The mere combination of noun and verb is not sufficient for a logos, rather, it is the revealing that occurs after the mixing together of noun and verb but before the logos is formed which constitutes a logos. In other words, the noun and verb are not simply stuck together to create a logos, they are revealed in a disclosive event that is the condition for the emergence of a logos. In Heidegger’s language, this revealing, on which the possibility of discourse is contingent, is called being-in-the-world.

But it is worth asking if this could possibly be going on in Plato’s text itself, or if this example serves as evidence of Heidegger violently reading his own agenda into a text, and staking this entire agenda on the translation of one little word? Heidegger admits that Plato ‘says nothing about this’ explicitly, but according to Heidegger, he may not have to. For if we truly understand what is at stake in Greek ontology, we will see that ‘logos and speech were for them given initially in this character,’\(^{255}\) Logos was understood as ‘a constitutive determination of Dasein itself,’ rather than in the propositional sense it has come to us today. It is contemporary philosophy, not Heidegger, which risks doing violence to the texts of Plato—by failing to mine the concepts Plato worked with for their original sense. If we are willing to follow Heidegger in this project, he promises us, we will find the more phenomenological Plato who is continually overlooked.

In the second stage of the analysis of logos, Heidegger looks at the Stranger’s remark that ‘whenever there is logos, it must be about something, it cannot be about

\(^{255}\) Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, 411 [593-594].
nothing’—as Heidegger says, ‘every addressing is an addressing of something.’ Heidegger considers this a ‘fundamental insight’ on Plato’s part, even if Plato does not ‘make full use of it phenomenologically.’ But, if Plato did not fully appreciate this insight, at least he is aware of it. Heidegger accuses contemporary philosophy of having lost sight of this ‘triviality’ completely; he claims that like other important insights which appear self-evident or trivial and are therefore neglected (of course, the importance of the question of the meaning of being comes to mind), this insight about the logos being a logos of something, is difficult to grasp but has massive implications:

It is thus not true that logos as speaking occurs initially in isolation and that an object then incidentally emerges, with which it can enter into alliance as the case may be, but not necessarily. On the contrary, all discourse according to its most proper sense, is a disclosure of something. This establishes a new koinonia [association], the koinonia of every logos with on [being].

The importance of the logos tinos [logos of something] is more clearly articulated when the Stranger asks Theaetetus to consider a sentence—‘Theaetetus sits,’ and explain both ‘what the sentence is about [peri ou] and what the subject [otou] is.’ We may be inclined to think that such a sentence is about Theaetetus and has Theaetetus as the subject (which is exactly what Theaetetus himself thinks), and that in order to understand the sentence we begin with the subject and move to the predicate. Heidegger cautions us that this would allow us to be ‘led astray by the tradition.’ Instead, we must think of the

256 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 413 [596-597].

257 On 414, Heidegger scolds: ‘This history of philosophy, above all that of modern and contemporary logic, shows that this insight [that logos is logos of something], this triviality, has been forgotten long ago or is no longer used…Thus no one any longer makes us of the insight: logos is logos tinos.’ Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 414 [598-599].

258 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 414 [598-599].

peri ou, the about which, (what the sentence is about) as a pregiven whole which will set the subject of the sentence (the otou) in relief. The point is that ‘the proper phenomenal carrying out of a setting in relief by deloun or legein, does not occur in such a way that two representation are linked with one another.’ Rather, the ‘as which,’ the whole of the sentence, first sets in relief the predicate and then the subject. Heidegger clarifies this interpretation with the example of a creaking wagon. When one hears a creaking wagon on the street, one doesn’t just hear the isolated noise. It is only after one experiences the creaking wagon as a whole that one can then grasp the creaking and finally the wagon as something determined by its creaking. We do not experience first a wagon as a subject and then move over to the predicate, the fact that this thing, the wagon, is creaking. Heidegger believes attention to this feature of our experience and its relationship to logos is further evidence that Plato was not merely interested in logos as simply propositional.

In the third stage of the analysis of logos, we see why the fact that logos is always logos of something is important for the Sophist’s overall theme—discovering whether logos pseudos, or a false logos, can have being. It becomes clear from the preceding section that logos is always logos of something, but it is this very feature of logos that allows it to be deceptive in certain cases. When a logos is presented, it discloses something, but the disclosure can be distorted: ‘it can pass something off as other than it is.’ Heidegger wants us to take note: ‘Deception, pseudos, is founded, according to its very possibility, in the intentional constitution of legein. It is legein as legein ti that can be a distortion.’ Thus, logos has two modes; it can be disclosive (alethes) or distortive (pseudes), but it is only because it is disclosive that it is able to be distortive.

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260 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 417 [602-603].
Throughout the *Sophist* lectures, Heidegger has shown that for Plato every ‘being’ (ον) or ‘something’ (τι) is in an association (κοινωνία) with both itself (ταυτόν) and the other (heteron), that which is not itself—in short, a being is disclosed not only through the revealing of what it is, but also the revealing of all the things it is not. Logos itself is a ‘something’ and is revealed through the spoken word; as a ‘something,’ logos is in association with both itself and the other. To the extent that logos reveals itself, it is a disclosive, or true, logos. To the extent that it conceals or distorts the ‘something,’ it is a false logos. Plato’s key insight is that even the false logos is a logos of something, it is not a logos of nothing. Therefore, even the false logos has being, and the existence of the sophist, who speaks without relationship to the truth, is shown to be possible.

Through Heidegger’s treatment of the structure of logos in the *Sophist*, and his identification of the ways in which it is starkly different than the ‘logos’ of contemporary logic and metaphysics, a more phenomenological Plato is allowed to emerge—one who is aware that being is fundamentally about human existence and that being-in-the-world is the context within which humans are. This is a Plato who has a more original sense of being and therefore still has access to the phenomenon itself. And for this Plato, the ‘trivial’ insight that logos is always a logos of something is not at all trivial—rather it gives evidence to the disclosive nature of language and the ability of language not only to reveal but also to conceal.

Our brief look at the *Sophist* lectures may not do justice to the richness of Heidegger’s extensive line-by-line commentary on Plato’s dialogue, but it is my hope that we have accomplished several things. First, we have seen some of Heidegger’s disparaging comments towards Plato placed in proper context and have noticed, in doing
so, that often comments which seem inflammatory out of context are softened by Heidegger’s acknowledgment that Plato was asking difficult but important questions. Secondly, we have explored a particular instance in which Plato’s muthos discourse is an important tool with which Heidegger begins to access a Plato who looks decidedly different than the traditional Plato. Third, we have seen that Heidegger’s criticisms of Plato himself must be carefully separated from his vitriol towards a tradition that has hijacked Plato and made him its spokesperson. And fourth, we have seen a non-traditional, or phenomenological, Plato emerge through Heidegger’s interpretation—and at the same time glimpsed of the profitability of reinterpreting Plato in light of Heidegger.
CHAPTER 4:
‘PLATO’S DOCTRINE OF TRUTH’ AND THE ESSENCE OF TRUTH
HEIDEGGER’S INCONSISTENT INTERPRETATIONS OF
PLATO’S CAVE ALLEGORY

4.1. Introduction

We now turn from Heidegger’s 1924-25 lecture course on the Sophist dialogue to Heidegger’s treatment of Plato’s famous allegory of the cave found in the Republic. Heidegger’s analysis of Plato’s cave allegory is particularly important to the question of how to understand Heidegger’s Plato for the simple reason that most of the literature which addresses Heidegger’s ‘unfair’ or ‘violent’ appropriation of Plato offers Heidegger’s reading of Plato’s cave allegory as the most damning piece of evidence in the case to convict Heidegger of poor Plato scholarship. Heidegger’s interpretation of the cave allegory is convenient for such critics both because it presents one of Heidegger’s few direct, sustained interpretations of a Platonic text, but also because it is here that Heidegger most explicitly identifies Plato as the progenitor of the ‘fateful and erroneous’ course taken by the history of metaphysics. In his discussion of the cave allegory, Heidegger explains the shift that occurred from understanding truth as unconcealment to understanding truth as correspondence; here he also claims that this shift is responsible for having led to the covering over of the question of the meaning of being. Culpability for this unfortunate transition, critics claim, is laid squarely at Plato’s feet.
But a discussion of Heidegger’s interpretation of the cave allegory cannot proceed without a discussion of the sources in which we find this interpretation. Until 1988, access to Heidegger’s interpretation of Plato’s cave allegory came to us in the form of an essay *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit* (‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth’), written in 1940 and published in 1942. This 1942 essay is comprised of Heidegger’s own translation of Plato’s cave allegory and a brief version of Heidegger’s unorthodox analysis of Plato’s text. Most of those who take Heidegger to task for his analysis of the cave allegory specifically, and his interpretation of Plato more broadly, rely upon the interpretation found in this brief essay published in 1942. However, as of 1988, a much lengthier version of Heidegger’s cave analysis has been published; this interpretation of the cave allegory was delivered as a series of lectures during Heidegger’s 1931/32 course on Plato, entitled *Vom wesen der Warheit* (*The Essence of Truth*). Though the 1942 essay and the 1931 lectures cover similar ground—Plato’s cave allegory and Plato’s position at the outset of the history of metaphysics—the two are different in substantial and important ways, not the least of which is simply that the lecture course is much lengthier and therefore more detailed in its analysis. Unfortunately, there is almost no scholarship that addresses the differences between these two texts; as an unfortunate consequence of this inattention to Heidegger’s lecture course on Plato, the issue of Heidegger’s interpretation of Plato has not been revisited in light of the publication of *The Essence of Truth* lectures, as it should be.

As we shall see below, when one considers both versions of Heidegger’s cave analysis as they appear in the respective readings, an interpretive difficulty arises.

Though Heidegger treats the same passage in both the essay and the lecture course and
many of the themes are similar, there are differences that change the tone of Heidegger’s assessment of Plato’s role in the history of metaphysics dramatically. If we are to use Heidegger’s cave analysis as evidence of the weakness or strength of Heidegger’s interpretation of Plato, the question becomes ‘on which of these two sources should we rely more heavily?’ Most of the existing secondary literature understandably relies on the brief essay, as this was the only interpretation published until relatively recently. However, one might think it obvious that a more thorough assessment of Heidegger’s Plato can be drawn from Heidegger’s lengthier engagement with the cave allegory.

However, untangling Heidegger’s Plato as it is found in his reading of the cave allegory is certainly not this simple. There are several problems with assuming that the more complete interpretation found in the recently published lecture course is more representative of Heidegger’s engagement with Plato than the brief essay. First, simple attention to chronology weakens this view. Though the essay was clearly drawn from material presented in the lecture course, it was published a full decade later. It is hard to imagine that Heidegger would choose to publish an essay that poorly or incompletely reflected his views. There is also the matter of publication itself; we know that many of Heidegger’s works were not published by him during his life. His Plato essay represents the only sustained engagement with Plato that Heidegger himself chose to publish. We might then, on the strength of this evidence, assume that the essay which Heidegger himself endorsed by publishing during his lifetime better represents his views on Plato than the earlier lecture course.

However, substantial concerns attend this analysis as well. For example, as we shall see when we directly engage the critics, much of the criticism centers around key
omissions on Heidegger’s part—his failures to acknowledge similarities between Plato’s view and Heidegger’s own and his simple misreadings of certain language in Plato. But I will show below that these omissions do not occur in the lengthier treatment of the allegory and therefore should not be relied heavily upon to convict Heidegger of poor Plato scholarship generally. If Heidegger was not, in fact, such a sloppy reader of Plato in 1930, it is unlikely that he would have become one by 1942. Specifically, for example, if Heidegger was attentive to the difference between the good and the other ideas in 1930, it becomes hard to argue that he simply misses this difference in 1942. Hence, as we shall see, the view that Heidegger’s published essay should be taken to best represent his reading of Plato’s allegory becomes similarly problematic.

So, it seems we will need an alternative interpretive strategy if we are to address this peculiarity of the differences between Heidegger’s two texts. I suggest that the overarching thesis of my project provides us with just such a strategy. I will argue that the way to best explain the inconsistencies in Heidegger’s two presentations of the very same Plato passage is to see that Heidegger is in fact talking about two different Platos—in one case Heidegger focuses on the logocentric Plato who, as we have seen in chapter three is frequently the target of his ire, and in the other case, he focuses more on the muthocentric Plato with whom he shares sympathies. In order to make this case, we will need several steps. In 4.2, we will undertake a close reading of ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ (PDT) the 1942 essay. Then we will consider the three primary criticisms of this essay which appear repeatedly in the secondary literature and taken together suggest that Heidegger is an unsympathetic reader of Plato. In 4.3 we will undertake a close reading of cave analysis we find in the lecture course, *The Essence of Truth* (TET), pointing out
differences and the way in which the differences address some of the critical concerns we reviewed in part one. I will also argue that here Heidegger presents a more sympathetic reading of Plato, contrary to the largely unsympathetic reading found in ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth.’ In 4.4, I will bring together the evidence from our close readings in order to show that the inconsistencies apparent in the divergent interpretations can best be explained with reference to the logocentric/muthocentric distinction I have been developing throughout this project. Here I will pay particular attention to the context in which ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth’ was published to lend support to my argument.

4.2. Heidegger’s Unsympathetic Plato: ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth’

Before we begin reading Heidegger interpretation of Plato’s cave allegory found in ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ it is worth pausing over the title. We cannot help but notice that Plato’s ‘doctrine’ is the concern of this essay. This should immediately seem peculiar, for if we remember Heidegger’s comments about Plato interpretation as it is carried out by the tradition of metaphysics, we will recall the worries that arise when a thinker is reduced to a doctrine. The history of metaphysics is taken to task time and again by Heidegger for its appropriation of Plato—an appropriation that has led to the contemporary reduction of Plato to ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Ideas.’ Heidegger thinks this reduction has had a catastrophic effect, not only for Plato himself whose views have had their ‘essence ripped out and made accessible for the superficiality of today’s Dasein,’

261 See Part III, of Chapter 3 in this project.

262 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 84 [115-116].

263 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 84 [115-116].
but also for the future of metaphysics which takes Plato as its starting point. Everything we have seen Heidegger say in the _Sophist_ lectures about the tradition’s misappropriation of Plato argues that in reducing a thinker to his doctrine, the tradition leaves us with a caricature whose views can then be used to support the agendas of contemporary philosophy as metaphysics, epistemology and logic.\(^{264}\) Given Heidegger’s concerns about caricaturing a thinker by reducing him to his doctrine, we might take the title of this essay to suggest that Heidegger himself could be aware that he is undertaking a caricature of Plato by aiming to set out his ‘doctrine of truth.’ Perhaps by structuring this essay around Plato’s doctrine, Heidegger gives us a clue that the interpretation which follows is a caricature of some kind. We will leave the discussion of why Heidegger might attempt to caricature Plato in this way for 4.4 of this chapter. For now, it is worth noticing that we should share Heidegger’s suspicion about reducing a figure to his doctrine.

Jumping into Heidegger’s brief article, we find that it comprises less than 30 pages, a third of which are devoted to Heidegger’s own translation of the cave allegory, a translation that he admits ‘includes phrases that go beyond the Greek in an effort to elucidate it.’\(^{265}\) This should come as no surprise to those familiar with Heidegger’s unusual etymologies and translations—hallmarks of his controversial interpretations of ancient texts. But before Heidegger gives us his own translation, he offers a very brief introduction which merits notice. He begins his interpretation of Plato’s doctrine of truth with an effort to get clear on just what a philosophical doctrine is. Given what we have

\(^{264}\) Heidegger, _Plato’s Sophist_, 192 [278] and 414 [598].

seen of Heidegger’s concerns about ‘doctrine,’ we must note the fact that Heidegger himself is working with a different understanding of doctrine. Unlike knowledge from the sciences, Heidegger alerts us that for him, a thinker’s doctrine is not ‘expressed in propositions’ or ‘laid before us in the form of conclusions we can grasp and put to use.’ On the contrary, Plato’s doctrine, what we are here trying to elucidate, ‘is that which, within what is said, remains unsaid, that to which we are exposed so that we might expend ourselves on it.’ This may mitigate the worry that Heidegger unfairly appropriates Plato by expositing his doctrine. However, I do not think we should assume that Heidegger’s unorthodox understanding of doctrine eliminates the peculiarity that attends his own efforts to reduce Plato here to his ‘doctrine’ of truth given Heidegger’s concerns about such interpretations elsewhere.

Heidegger goes on to admit that to adequately explore the ‘unsaid’ in one’s thought, an interpreter should exhaustively consider the thinker’s corpus. However, as this is clearly outside the scope of Heidegger’s project, he is willing to ‘let a different path guide us to the unsaid in Plato’s thinking.’ He then gives us a glimpse of just what this ‘unsaid’ doctrine entails, namely a transition in the determination of the essence of truth. According to Heidegger, given limitations of time and space, we can rely on the allegory of the cave to help us clarify this transition—how and when it occurs and the lasting consequences.

266 Heidegger, ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ 155.


After he has laid out the translation, Heidegger asks the ostensibly straightforward question, ‘What does this story mean?’ He then looks at Plato’s own philosophical interpretation, which Heidegger notes, follows the story itself. This interpretation is the one that most readers of the Republic will take at face value from Plato’s story. The shadows the prisoners perceive in the cave represent the everyday reality humans experience. The brightly illuminated objects outside the cave represent beings as they really are, the ideas. The highest idea, represented by the sun, is responsible for illuminating all the other ideas. As long as the prisoners are willing to take the shadowy figures they experience in the cave, illuminated by human-made light, as elements of reality, they will be unaware of and uninterested in reality as it truly is. Only having been wrested away from this complacency and dragged into the sunlight, do they stand to glimpse things as they really are, a revelation for which they will initially be unprepared.

But according to Heidegger, for Plato these ‘correspondences do not exhaust the allegory.’ 269 Particularly important to Heidegger’s interpretation of the allegory are the movements into and out of the cave, and the required adjustments in each case. The difficult process of adjustment to the world outside the cave and then again to the cave itself is a reorientation that ‘takes place in the very ground of one’s essence.’ 270 The reorientation process is referred to by Plato as paideia, which Heidegger interprets, more broadly than the typical rendering of ‘education,’ as ‘leading the whole human being in the turning around of his or her essence.’ 271 Heidegger takes it to be important to Plato

269 Heidegger, ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ 165.
270 Heidegger, ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ 165.
271 Heidegger, ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ 166.
that *paideia* in this sense not be understood simply as education, lest it connote ‘merely pouring knowledge into the unprepared soul as if it were some container held out empty and waiting.’ On the contrary, the difficulties encountered by the freed cave dweller, both on his ascent out of the cave and subsequent descent back into the cave, show the subject having an active role in the two-way process of *paideia*. Heidegger takes this to be Plato’s interpretation of the primary importance of the cave allegory.

However, Heidegger himself is not content to stop here, with Plato’s own explanation of the story, but wants to press on to the unspoken ‘Platonic doctrine of truth’ gestured to by the allegory. Heidegger confronts the worry that this might be interpretively irresponsible. ‘Are we not then burdening the ‘allegory’ with something foreign to it? The interpretation threatens to degenerate into a reinterpretation that does violence to the text.’ Heidegger answers this worry by arguing that the supposed ‘reinterpretation’ will not dismiss Plato’s own interpretation, but rather show that in addition to illustrating the essence of education, the allegory also ‘opens our eyes to a transformation in the essence of ‘truth.’’ He concludes if these two illustrations can be shown to exist side by side, then there must be an important relation between education and truth—namely that the transformation of truth evidenced by Heidegger’s interpretation of the allegory actually makes ‘education’ of the sort Plato refers to possible. The implication is that though Plato himself might only have implicitly understood the transformation he effected with respect to truth, the fact that it can be

272 Heidegger, ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ 166.

shown to be the ground for his explicitly-stated view of education validates Heidegger’s interpretation and exonerates it from the claim that it does violence to the text.

What is this connection between education and truth? Heidegger explains: education is considered to be a total transformation or reorientation of the human with respect to everything he experiences, or everything which has previously been unhidden to him. In Greek, unhiddenness is *aletheia*, commonly translated as truth. But if we are really to understand the connection between education and truth for Plato, it should come as no surprise that Heidegger wants us to further mine the concepts of *paideia* and *aletheia* for their more original Greek sense. In order to do this, Heidegger leads us to consider the allegory of the cave in four stages, characterized by the ‘different kinds of ‘truth’ that are dominant at each stage.’

In stage one, the prisoners remain chained in the cave, aware only of the shadows in front of them. They take these shadows to be ‘to alethes’ or the unhidden. In stage two, having been released from their chains, the prisoners are now able to see more of the cave. Now they can see the artifacts responsible for the shadows they previously took to be their only reality. This should allow the prisoners to experience something ‘more unhidden’ (*alethestera*) than the shadows, but because they are blinded by the glow of the fire, and not yet truly free, they are still only able to assess the shadows themselves as the truest reality.

The real freedom absent from stage two becomes possible only in stage three when one of the unchained prisoners is taken out of the cave and into the open. Now the

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‘unhidden’ are illuminated by the clear, bright light of the sun. These Plato characterizes as even more unhidden (alethesteron), and Heidegger notes that for Plato these are the ‘most unhidden’ (alethestata) of all—‘the most unhidden’ is so called because it is what appears antecedently in everything that appears, and it makes whatever appears be accessible.’

Here we see clearly the connection between education and truth. The prisoner has achieved liberation, but it has not been easy. Removing the shackles was insufficient; it was not until the prisoner was removed from the cave and taken to the arena in which the most true things present themselves that he can be considered truly free. His education with respect to reality required a total reorientation and this reorientation could ‘be achieved only in the region of, and on the basis of, the most unhidden, i.e., the alethestaton, i.e., the truest, i.e., truth in the proper sense. The essence of ‘education is grounded in the essence of ‘truth.’’

In stage four, we see the former prisoner return to the cave, eager to free those still trapped in the cave—through his own ‘paideia’ he has become able to see the threat of ‘apaideai,’ or a lack of education. Heidegger points out that his effort to overcome this lack of education makes the fourth stage of the allegory important, though it is often overshadowed by the triumph of the third stage. In stages one through three, it was quite clear how aletheia as unhiddenness manifested itself—the objects taken for reality became more and more unhidden as the cave-dweller attained freedom and emerged into the sunlight. However, in stage four, as he re-descends in to the arena of the most-hidden, the word alethes is not used. For Heidegger, this does not diminish the


significance of the Greek concept of unhiddenness and its relationship to truth in this final stage of the allegory. If we understand the Greek sense of aletheia, and take seriously the fact that the word is comprised of an alpha-privative and the word ‘lethe,’ then we will see truth in its more original sense—‘truth is thus a wrestling away in each case, in the form of a revealing...Stage four of the ‘allegory’ gives us a special glimpse into how ‘privation’—attaining the unhidden by wresting it away—belongs to the essence of truth.’

In spite of the fact that the word ‘alethes’ is not used in any of its forms in this stage of the allegory, truth in the sense of unhiddenness is nonetheless at work here too.

In addition to being at work in each of the four stages of the allegory, Heidegger is adamant that it is only this sense of truth as unhiddenness that makes the whole illustration of a cave useful at all. The cave itself is representative of a hiddenness, something enclosed and walled off, that has a proximate relationship to the unhiddenness that surrounds it, namely the above-ground area illuminated by the sun. Heidegger makes it quite clear:

Only the essence of truth understood in the original Greek sense of aletheia—the unhiddenness that is related to the hidden (to something dissembled and disguised)- has an essential relation to this image of an underground cave. Wherever truth has another essence, wherever it is not unhiddenness or at least is not co-determined by unhiddenness, there an ‘allegory of the cave’ has no basis as an illustration.

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278 Heidegger, ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ 171.

279 Heidegger, ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ 172.
But though Heidegger is willing to admit that unhiddenness maintains ‘a certain priority’ in the allegory, he worries that ‘another essence of truth pushes to the fore.’280 Heidegger shows that alongside unhiddenness, another sense of truth emerges, ‘yoking’ unhiddenness below it, and that this alternative sense of truth emerges from Plato’s emphasis on the ‘idea’ as ‘that which shows itself.’ The sun, the highest idea, is responsible, by its brightness, for making visible forms of things visible. Since it is the shining of the sun that makes it possible for the ‘whatness’ of things to become visible, the idea gains priority over unhiddenness. ‘Seeing’ becomes the most important feature of truth, and this seeing is facilitated by the shining of the sun; thus, access to the unhidden is granted only through the idea, and unhiddenness is yoked under the idea of the good.281

Heidegger then looks more closely at the term to agathon, used to denote the highest idea, represented in the allegory by the sun. Though we are inclined to translate this as ‘the good,’ and thus to think of it as moral good, Heidegger reminds us that ‘this interpretation falls outside Greek thought.’282 For the Greeks, the ideas illuminate a being’s ‘whatness,’ or make it possible for that being to be seen for what it is. As the highest idea, to agathon makes possible the ideas, which make possible the visibility of beings. In this sense it is ‘highest in the hierarchy of making possible.’


282 Heidegger, ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ 174. Specifically, Heidegger warns us not to be misled by the 19th century notion of value that ‘came into fashion…in the wake of the modern conception of truth’ or the modern philosophical view that the essence of the idea is subjective representation. Of this view he claims, there is absolutely nothing more to grasp of the original essence of Plato’s idea tou agathou.
According to Heidegger, though the cave allegory doesn’t explicitly attempt to address Plato’s doctrine of truth, once one understands the sun as the original source of visibility, the unspoken doctrine emerges:

When Plato’s says of the idea that she is the mistress that allows unhiddenness, he points to something unsaid, namely, that henceforth the essence of truth does not, as the essence of unhiddenness, unfold from its proper and essential fullness but rather shifts to the essence of the idea. The essence of truth gives up its fundamental trait of unhiddenness.²⁸³

Next we are told explicitly how this unsaid doctrine evidences a shifting understanding of truth. In the transitions between the cave and the above-ground world, what becomes important in Plato’s telling is the ability to see things more correctly (orthotes) and in order to see correctly, one must aim for correspondence between the ‘act of knowing’ and the thing itself. This unspoken alteration in the essence of truth, Heidegger claims, has substantial implications for understanding where truth is located as well: ‘As unhiddenness, truth is still a fundamental trait of beings themselves. But as the correctness of the ‘gaze,’ it becomes a characteristic of human comportment towards beings.’²⁸⁴

Heidegger then goes on to present some of the prominent players in the history of philosophy as evidence that the ‘correctness’ view of truth won out. Aquinas, Descartes and Nietzsche are held up as examples of a long history of metaphysicians who merely take for granted that truth must be understood as a correct correspondence between thought and beings. Nietzsche, though he took himself to be inverting the concept of truth, in fact functioned from the assumption that truth requires correctness, and therefore

²⁸³ Heidegger, ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ 176.
²⁸⁴ Heidegger, ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ 177.
represents the ‘last glimmer of the most extreme consequence of the change of truth from
the unhiddenness of beings to the correctness of the gaze.’\textsuperscript{285}

Make no mistake, on Heidegger’s reading here Plato is guilty of a substantial
crime—his excessive focus on the ‘idea’ led him to postulate the idea as the ground of
unhiddenness, the great shining that makes unhiddenness visible, rather than take the idea
as subordinate to unhiddenness ‘in the sense of serving what is unhidden by bringing it to
appearance.’\textsuperscript{286} This unspoken inversion sets up a worrisome ambiguity in the
determination of the essence of truth and opens the door for later philosophers to
downplay and ultimately ignore unhiddenness altogether, effecting a change in the
determination of the essence of truth that has persisted throughout the tradition to our
own day, a determination which obscures the important fact that truth is properly a
feature of beings, not our thought about beings.

Though Heidegger does not here claim that Plato alone decisively eradicates the
notion of truth as unhiddenness in favor of truth as correctness, it will not do to soft-
peddle Heidegger’s criticism of Plato as it appears in ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth.’ For as
the essay draws to a close, Heidegger not only locates the beginning of the tradition of
metaphysics in Plato’s unspoken doctrine, but also tradition of onto-theology in which
‘thinking about the being of beings has been metaphysical, and metaphysics has been
theological.’ This tradition, according to Heidegger, might be seen to stem from the fact
that the good, the first cause for Plato and Aristotle, is called divine, \textit{to theon}. This view

\textsuperscript{285} Heidegger, ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ 179.

\textsuperscript{286} Heidegger, ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ 179.
has evolved to consider the divine as the being with the most being, the cause of being in other things.

A further fall out of Plato’s unsaid doctrine is the way in which it set the stage for ‘humanism,’ or the view that humans ‘move into a central place among beings,’ below the divine being but above all other beings. For Heidegger, ‘what takes place in each instance [of humanism] is a metaphysically determined revolving around the human being, whether in narrower or wider orbits.’  

Taken together, these lasting effects of the implicit transition in Plato’s cave allegory comprise an all-dominating fundamental reality—long established and thus still in place—of the ever-advancing world history of the planet in this most modern of times....Through this decision the lines are always already drawn regarding what, in the light of the established essence of truth, is sought after and established as true and likewise what is thrown away and passed over as untrue.

It seems clear here that although Plato himself may have functioned with both understandings of truth simultaneously, truth as unhiddenness will never take hold until it is wrested out from under the dominion of truth as correctness, a subjugation made possible by Plato’s reliance on the idea. As long as unhiddenness is ‘harnessed in a relation to looking, apprehending, thinking and asserting,’ we will not properly understand its essence. Heidegger warns us that if we are to properly investigate the original sense of truth, we have to approach it in a way that is radically different than the way of the history of philosophy since Plato:  


288 Heidegger, ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ 182.

289 Heidegger, ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ 182.
No attempt to ground the essence of unhiddenness in ‘reason,’ ‘spirit,’ ‘thinking,’ ‘logos,’ or in any kind of ‘subjectivity,’ can ever rescue the essence of unhiddenness.’ Instead, a more original approach that takes account of *aletheia* in its ‘positive,’ not just ‘privative’ sense: ‘the positive must first be experienced as the fundamental trait of Being itself. First of all what must break in upon us is that exigency whereby we are compelled to question not just beings in their Being but first of all Being itself (that it, the difference).\(^{290}\)

Only then does Heidegger think we might stand a chance of clarifying the meaning of truth.

One can hardly come away from a reading of ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth’ without the sense that Heidegger has uncharitably taken Plato to task for his role in the mess that has become contemporary metaphysics. Indeed, this is why so many commentators use this text as the biggest gun in their arsenal against Heidegger’s Plato. Critics of Heidegger’s reading of the cave allegory as it appears in *PDT* have included Heidegger’s high-profile contemporaries, including Paul Friedlander, Karl Jaspers and Hans Georg Gadamer as well as numerous later commentators. We have seen the briefest versions of some of these critiques in chapter two, but now we turn to a more substantial survey of the three most common complaints.

Unsurprisingly, Heidegger’s assessment of Plato in *PDT* is subject to a common criticism that we have already seen raised against Heidegger’s general historical scholarship. This first charge accuses Heidegger of myopia—his tendency to single out passages that support his predetermined purposes, neglecting the larger context of which the passages are part—and leads to the concern that Heidegger is ‘violent’ or ‘coercive’

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\(^{290}\) Heidegger, ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ 182.
His attachment to a preconceived agenda fuels the worry that Heidegger’s reading of Plato’s cave allegory is deeply unfair. Gadamer specifically cites this worry in his discussion Heidegger as a historian of philosophy:

If like Heidegger, one understands metaphysics as the fate of being…then all further steps taken within his confrontation with the history of philosophy will appear peculiarly predetermined. This shows up in Plato’s case in the most astonishing way…in his first extensive treatment of Plato…Plato’s concept of the idea appeared from the outset under a foreboding auspice, one portending the subordination of *aletheia* to *orthotes* of truth to correctness.292

As Gadamer sees it, by interpreting Plato through the lens of his own agenda, Heidegger sees only what he wants to see. What he misses, according to Gadamer, is the possibility that the being of uncoveredness could be found in Plato’s dialectic.293

Karl Jaspers shares a similar concern about Heidegger’s caricature of Plato in PDT. In an unsent letter to Heidegger from October of 1942, Jaspers thanks Heidegger for sending him the Plato essay and offers a brief response. He compliments Heidegger’s admirable ‘gift for detecting something philosophical where no one else seems to perceive it,’ but goes on to express his concerns with Heidegger’s interpretation.

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291 The terms ‘violent’ and ‘coercive’ are from Gadamer’s essay ‘The Greeks’ found in *Heidegger’s Ways*, 140. See also David White’s comment that ‘Heidegger’s conversations with other philosophers are notorious for their apparently arbitrary stresses, omissions and random divinations…There is substantial evidence to indicate that a violence of sorts has been done to Plato as well.’ David White, ‘Truth and Being: A Critique of Heidegger on Plato,’ *Man and World: An International Philosophical Review* 7 (1974): 118. Also, Mark Wrathall says ‘Heidegger is a notoriously violent reader of other philosophers—he reads them to discover the ‘unsaid’ in their thoughts. The unsaid is the background assumptions, dispositions, conceptual systems, etc. which ground the actual views they accept.’ Mark Wrathall, ‘Heidegger on Plato, Truth and Unconcealment: The 1931-32 Lecture on The Essence of Truth,’ *Inquiry* 47 (2004): 445. See also William A. Galston’s less-than-glowing assessment of Heidegger’s reading of Plato’s cave allegory: ‘I have argued that his interpretation of Plato fails to support his intention…The outcome of Heidegger’s interpretation …verges on a reductio ad absurdum.’ William A. Galston, ‘Heidegger’s Plato: A Critique of Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ *Philosophical Forum* 13 (1982), 380.


Cloaking his criticisms in self-effacement, Jaspers suggests that ‘it is perhaps because of my weak ability that your substantial discourse seems to collaborate against your initial point of departure,’ but he then goes so far as to call Heidegger’s account ‘historically unbelievable.’ In the margins of his own copy, Jaspers is decidedly less conciliatory; here he pulls no punches:

H[eidegger] treats Plato like a man with ‘doctrines’—just like Zeller—a completely unplatonic frame of mind. No dialectic—no movement in actual participation—some kind of phantasma—nihil—takes the place of Existenz-Transzendenz—Plato falsely characterized. Rather laughable assertions of totality!

Stanley Rosen agrees that Heidegger mischaracterizes Plato as he tries support his own agenda, and locates this failure in his refusal to consider the context in which the passages he deals with are found. Rosen believes this occurs not only in Heidegger’s failure to take dialectic seriously, but also his inability to acknowledge the relationship between the dramatic, dialogue form in which Plato wrote and the views expressed therein. Rosen writes:

Like the most professorial of philologians, Heidegger normally ignores the dialectical context of those sentences which he abstracts for analysis, as though they were independent, technical propositions instead of the speech of irony…Even when Heidegger seems to be aware of the dramatic context…he

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296 Dostal shares this concern: ‘Heidegger’s failure or refusal to adequately place this allegory in the larger context of the dialogue frustrates any reader of the Republic.’ Dostal, ‘Beyond Being,’ 82.
refers only to those aspects of it which seem to serve his purpose. He ignores the
details even when insisting upon an individual nuance.\textsuperscript{297}

According to Rosen, the result of Heidegger’s misreading is that he ends up with
a Plato who ignores the ontological aspect of truth in favor of the epistemological.\textsuperscript{298} To
put this simply, the originary, ontological understanding of truth—truth as \textit{aletheia} or
uncoveredness—makes truth a feature of the things themselves; when something is
uncovered it is allowed to show itself as it really is and the phenomenon’s being is laid
bare. This ontological sense of truth roots truth in the being of phenomena themselves.
On the contrary, the epistemological understanding of truth—truth as \textit{orthotes} or
correctness—which Heidegger here claims comes to the fore in Plato, makes truth a
feature of our \textit{knowledge} about things. If truth denotes a correspondence between the
thing and our apprehension of the thing, if something is true when we see it correctly,
then truth is not in the being of the thing itself, it is in our understanding of the thing.
Such a view of truth loses its ontological aspect and takes on an exclusively
epistemological one. In Heidegger’s words, ‘truth is no longer, as it was qua
unhiddenness, the fundamental trait of \textit{Being} itself. Instead, as a consequence of getting
yoked under the idea, truth has become correctness, and henceforth it will be a

\textsuperscript{297} Rosen, \textit{The Question of Being: A Reversal of Heidegger}, 483. Rosen makes a similar criticism
of Heidegger in his recent article ‘Remarks on Heidegger’s Plato’ in \textit{Heidegger and Plato: Towards
Here Rosen discusses Heidegger’s interpretation of \textit{Republic}, Book X where Heidegger claims that Plato
speaks of ideas as blueprints produced by a divine craftsman and used by this craftsman to make natural,
material things which are then reproduced again by human craftsmen by \textit{techne}. Rosen takes issue with
many features of Heidegger’s interpretation here, referring to Heidegger’s ‘considerable confusion:’ ‘First,
he pays no attention to the dubious status in Socrates’ own doctrine of an Idea of an artifact…Second,
Heidegger misreads the actual text…Heidegger distorts the ancient doctrines in order to see in them the
prototype of modern, productionist metaphysics.’ 185-6.

\textsuperscript{298} Rosen, \textit{The Question of Being: A Reversal of Heidegger}, 483. ‘In Heidegger’s treatment, the
Platonic Idea becomes more radically an epistemological concept than in the work of the most ordinary of
analysts.’
characteristic of the knowing of beings. Here, Rosen gets at perhaps the most common criticism of PDT: that Heidegger unfairly chides Plato for favoring the epistemological over the ontological and thus inaugurating a trend in the history of philosophy to favor questions of epistemology over those of ontology, leading to the covering over of the question of being.

Friedlander refers to this feature of Heidegger’s cave interpretation as ‘particularly misleading.’ He claims that Heidegger would have us believe that Plato’s move away from aletheia as unhiddenness towards aletheia as correctness shows Plato to be giving up the ‘ontological side’ of truth in favor of the ‘epistemological side.’

Friedlander claims that this element of Heidegger’s reading of Plato constitutes his most significant mistake. ‘Heidegger’s false approach here appears most clearly: [Contrary to Heidegger’s claims] both aspects [ontological and epistemological] have equal status for Plato.’ In response to Heidegger’s claim that ‘the essence of truth surrenders its essential trait of “unhiddenness”’ and ‘truth becomes orthotes, i.e. correctness of apprehension and assertion,’ Friedlander asserts that Heidegger is simply ‘mistaken.’ He corrects Heidegger’s error: ‘Truth, in Plato’s system, is always both: reality of being and correctness of apprehension and assertion.’

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300 Friedlander, Plato: An Introduction, 225.
301 Friedlander, Plato: An Introduction, 228.
302 Friedlander, Plato: An Introduction, 227-8. On this criticism, Dostal goes a step further than Friedlander, claiming that Plato actually shares Heidegger’s emphasis on the ontological, contrary to Heidegger’s own flawed assessment of Plato: ‘Like Heidegger, Plato was concerned less with the epistemological criteria for truth than with the ontological conditions for truth.’ Dostal, ‘Beyond Being,’ 74.
A third frequently cited complaint against Heidegger’s reading of the cave allegory charges Heidegger with failing to recognize the distinction between the idea of the good and the other ideas, namely that the good is beyond being, according to Plato, rather than just another resident of the world of the forms. We must recall Heidegger’s argument here: Every idea is the ‘visible form of something…the ‘ideas’ enable something to appear in its whatness.’ The idea of the good empowers the ideas in the same way as the other ideas empower those things which participate in them. As Heidegger says, the idea of the good ‘brings about the shining of everything that can shine, and accordingly is itself that which properly appears by shining, that which is most able to shine in its shining.’ The ‘idea of the good,’ as Heidegger refers to it, certainly stands above the other ideas in a relationship of empowerment, but it basically performs the same task as do the other ideas and in the same way. Heidegger’s Plato tells us that the ideas, including the idea of the good, make it possible for us to see the ‘visible form’ and this requires correctness of vision, or orthotes. In apprehending something then, we should strive for agreement between our knowing and the thing itself. Truth now lies in this correspondence between our knowing and the thing that is known rather than in the being of the thing itself. The priority of the ideas for Plato, Heidegger tells us, cannot help but contribute to the emerging sense of truth as correctness, and the idea of the good seems to be classed among the other ideas in this interpretation.

Talking aim at Heidegger’s reading, William Galston claims that Heidegger errs when he reads the good as just another idea, albeit the most powerful idea:

The assertions that Plato equates Being and the good, that the good is thought of as an idea, and that ideas are the essence of particular beings viewed in their

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303 Heidegger, ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ 175.
outward form, constitute the basis of the charge which Heidegger has repeated from his early writings to the present and which is the core of his teaching: Western metaphysics has gone astray because it has interpreted Being in light of beings, as the Being of beings.\footnote{Galston, ‘Heidegger’s Plato,’ 381.}

Galston believes that Heidegger can only make this argument because he ignores Plato’s explicit claim at Republic 509b that ‘as for the objects of knowledge, not only is their being known due to the Good, but also their being, through the Good is not being but superior to and beyond being in dignity and power.’\footnote{Galston cites this quotation; the italics are his, not Plato’s. Galston, ‘Heidegger’s Plato,’ 381.}

Echoing Galston’s concern, Robert Dostal asserts that Heidegger’s reading of the cave allegory ‘does not adequately attend to the significant distinctiveness of the Good,’ simply ignoring the fact that Plato speaks of the sun as ἐπεκείνα τεσ οὐσίας (‘beyond being’) rather than οὐσία (being)—the designation reserved for the other ideas; neither does Plato refer to the Good as ‘eidos’ as he refers to the other ideas, a distinction Heidegger also seems to miss. Dostal finds this interpretive failing on Heidegger’s part especially peculiar given that, according to Dostal, ἐπεκείνα τεσ οὐσίας, Plato’s phrase from the Republic ‘is one of the most prominent and oft-repeated classical citations by Heidegger during his Marburg period.’\footnote{Dostal, ‘Beyond Being,’ 84.} Had Heidegger been attentive to Plato’s claim that the good is beyond being in his reading of ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ he would not be so quick to fault Plato for treating the good as just another resident of the world of the forms. And, as Dostal tells us, he would not use the status of the good to prove that as author of the world of the forms, Plato is also author of the unsatisfactory idealism/realism dilemma that persists through the history of metaphysics.
Though PDT is largely unsympathetic to Plato, as critics are quick to point out, there are hints that Heidegger’s assessment of Plato is not entirely uncharitable, even in this brief essay. For example, we should consider the extent of Plato’s culpability in the transformation of truth as Heidegger sees it. Heidegger tells us that a properly ‘Greek’ understanding takes truth to be a feature of beings themselves, an unhiddenness that allows the beings to be revealed as they are. Human access to truth emerges in the uncovering of beings which is brought about by proper investigation, but truth is not yet located in human comportment towards beings or in the correctness of the correspondence between human ‘seeing’ and the being itself. Heidegger claims that the emerging ‘correspondence’ view of truth is made possible by unspoken changes in Plato’s doctrine of truth as expressed in the cave allegory, and that this view takes precedence, moving the history of philosophy away from understanding truth as unhiddenness. But given that Heidegger admits that Plato’s emerging doctrine of truth is unspoken, exactly how culpable is Plato, on Heidegger’s account, for having crafted and perpetrated it throughout the history of western philosophy?

Heidegger is quite clear that both understandings of truth remain in Plato’s doctrine as it appears in the cave allegory. He acknowledges that the ambiguity has to do with the fact that though Plato himself speaks of truth as aletheia, referring to it in the sense of unhiddenness, his unspoken doctrine simultaneously paved the way for a new understanding of truth as well. But Heidegger does not let us miss the fact that for Plato, ‘the truth still is, at one and the same time, unhiddenness and correctness,’ though he does go on to say that already unhiddenness is under the yoke of correctness.307

Heidegger is even willing to admit that still at the time of Aristotle, this ambiguity in the determination of the essence of truth existed. It is not, actually, until after Aristotle that judgments made by the intellect are deemed true or false based on their correspondence to states of affairs. By this point, the ambiguity has been replaced by a certainty that takes truth to be a kind of correctness opposed to falseness (pseudos) and leaves truth as unhiddenness out of the picture altogether.308 There can be no doubt that Heidegger’s retelling of Plato’s cave allegory is intended to show an emerging ambiguity in the understanding of the essence of truth, but this does not amount to an acknowledgment that Plato is single-handedly responsible, or even primarily responsible, for effecting the dramatic change that has led the history of philosophy to view truth as correctness.

Perhaps Heidegger’s acknowledgment that Plato simultaneously functions with both understandings of truth seems at first to mitigate Heidegger’s ire towards Plato himself, and displace it to the tradition more broadly, but as we saw in the final pages of Heidegger’s essay, in which he is so critical of Plato for subjugating unhiddenness to the idea, it becomes harder to rely on our familiar strategy of redirecting Heidegger’s attack from Plato to subsequent interpreters of Plato, or ‘Platonism.’ It seems clear here that a substantial amount of Heidegger’s frustration is in fact directed at Plato himself and his excessive devotion to the idea. But I will argue that the Plato at whom this ire is directed is the caricature of the logocentric Plato who Heidegger employs as the scapegoat for the history of philosophy’s erroneous path. In support of this argument we need to consider the following strongly-worded passage found in PDT and cited above: ‘No attempt to ground the essence of unhiddenness in ‘reason,’ ‘spirit,’ ‘thinking,’ ‘logos,’ or in any

kind of ‘subjectivity,’ can ever rescue the essence of unhiddenness.’ In this comment
Heidegger himself directs us away from the grounds of reason and logos found to an
(admittedly) frustrating degree in the logocentric Plato. But this caution does not
preclude the possibility of finding non-logos resources in Plato to help us ‘rescue’
unhiddenness. Rather, Heidegger’s warning might direct us to ground the essence of
unhiddenness in an alternative sort of discourse. To do this, we have to look more
closely, not at the logos interpretation of Plato’s cave allegory that follows the telling of
the story, the interpretation that a critical Heidegger treats in his brief essay ‘Plato’s
Doctrine of Truth,’ but rather we must immerse ourselves in the muthos discourse of the
story itself, an enterprise that is more profitably undertaken with the lengthier ‘The
Essence of Truth’ as our guide.

4.3. Heidegger’s Sympathetic Plato: The Essence of Truth

In The Essence of Truth (TET), the lecture course delivered a decade prior to the
publication of ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ we find a more charitable reading of Plato’s
cave allegory, one that I will claim engages Plato’s muthos discourse rather than merely
his logos discourse, thereby allowing Heidegger to uncover a more sympathetic, or
muthocentric, Plato. As we make our way through these lectures, we will be attentive not
only to the way in which this Plato is muthocentric, but also to how this version of the
cave allegory interpretation in not subject to the common criticisms laid out above.

Though The Essence of Truth’s treatment of the cave allegory is far more
substantial than the condensed version found in ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ it is clear that
the focus is the same. Heidegger introduces the lecture course with ‘Preliminary
Considerations’ in which he first asserts that he will be dealing with the essence of truth and then begins by examining the contemporary notion of truth—that a proposition is true if it corresponds with the facts about the thing which it describes—‘truth is correspondence, grounded in correctness, between proposition and thing.’ Heidegger goes on to show us in greater detail why we should be skeptical of this view of truth: though at first blush it seems self-evident, upon further investigation, ‘the seemingly self-evident [becomes] incomprehensible.’ This, of course, should not surprise us since Heidegger frequently tells us that if something seems obvious to us, this is likely a clue that we have not investigated it properly.

In this case, proper investigation requires a return to the original Greek sense of the word truth (*aletheia*), where Heidegger enlists the venerable presocratics, particularly Heraclitus, as his allies to show that the original sense of truth as unhiddenness requires something to be wrested from hiddenness if it is to be seen for what it is, a fact made clear by the privative nature of the word itself. Here, like in ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ Heidegger is clear that though Plato and Aristotle were steeped in the original understanding of truth as unhiddenness, in their work another sense of truth begins to emerge and intertwine with the former sense. Heidegger expresses interest in dealing with this intertwining, and it is for this reason that Plato as the earliest philosopher of record to have a foot in both camps, serves as a good case study. By investigating the intertwining, Heidegger hopes that we will uncover not only a better sense of truth as unhiddenness, but also a better understanding of why subsequent figures in the history of philosophy have exclusively thought of truth as correctness, leaving out unhiddenness

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309 Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 5 [6-7].
altogether. It is worth noticing that already, the emphasis is on the ambiguity in Plato’s understanding of truth rather than on his culpability for effecting the change.

But though to this point, there is much overlap between what Heidegger does in the shorter article and what he does in the more substantial lecture course, the ‘Preliminary Considerations’ conclude with some striking descriptions of just why Heidegger has chosen Plato’s cave allegory for the subject of his investigation. Already here we are given an insight into the difference Heidegger sees between Plato’s logos discourse and his muthos discourse, which will be a key for differentiating between the criticism Heidegger heaps on Plato and the positive possibilities he sees emerge from Plato’s work. In the closing lines of this introduction, Heidegger explains that his investigation of the transition from truth as unhiddenness to truth as correctness in Plato will take place ‘not in the sense of concern for definition and conceptual analysis, but by presenting a story.’\(^{310}\) Here we are given a brief but helpful distinction between logos and muthos discourse: in the former, one attends to definition and conceptual analysis—the stuff of contemporary metaphysics and its obsession with theory and doctrine; in the latter, one can be attentive to elements missed by the tradition—the stuff of allegory, myth and poetry. In his attention to muthos discourse here, it seems Heidegger is taking his cue from Plato: ‘When Plato wants to say something fundamental and essential in philosophy, he always speaks in an allegory and places before us a sensory image.’\(^{311}\) These allegories serve as clues which point us in the right interpretive direction if we are attuned to the muthos discourse in which the clues are embedded. In Heidegger’s words:

\(^{310}\) Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 12 [17-18].

\(^{311}\) Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 12 [17-18].
Such a clue leads us to what simple description, be it ever so accurate and
rigorous, can never grasp...[the fact] that Plato speaks of aletheia in an allegory,
gives us the crucial clue as to where we must search, and where we must stand, if
we want to come closer to the essence of truth. This indescribable and
unprovable something, however, is crucial—and to come to this is what the whole
effort of philosophizing is about.\(^\text{312}\)

Heidegger alerts us to an alternative in Plato to ‘all description and proof,
however brilliantly scientific,’ and claims not only that we are directed to this alternative
by stories, but reminds us that when description and proof ‘fail and sink down into empty
business,’ the alternative made possible by stories will still enable us to see what is
‘crucial.’ Heidegger uses strong language here to remind us of what he never wants us to
forget: the reason simple descriptions, like simple proofs, are never sufficient is that they
fail to acknowledge that the given is always interpreted and reinterpreted. While the
simple proofs of science may ignore this hermeneutic at their own peril, here Heidegger
tells us that Plato’s allegory makes it explicit.\(^\text{313}\)

We now turn from the ‘Preliminary Considerations’ to Part I, entitled ‘The Clue
to the ‘Essence’ of Aletheia’ where Heidegger begins the discussion by taking us through
the four stages of the allegory. Though the stages mirror the description of the stages
presented in ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ there is an interesting difference in the
introduction to the discussion. Heidegger begins his discussion of the allegory in PDT by
treating Plato’s interpretation which follows the story (517a8-518d7), not the story itself.
However, here in TET, Heidegger introduces his discussion of the ‘story’ itself (514a-

\(^{312}\) Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 13 [18-19].

\(^{313}\) Heidegger expresses this idea earlier in the introduction to Being and Time, when explaining
why the meaning of being is so difficult to understand: ‘Because Being cannot be grasped except by taking
time into consideration, the answer to the question of Being cannot lie in any proposition that is blind and
isolated. The answer is not properly conceived if what it asserts propositionally is just passed along,
especially if it gets circulated as a free-floating result.’ Heidegger, Being and Time, 40 [19].
517a), not Plato’s subsequent interpretation of it, saying that we must ‘understand it as a clue to the essence of unhiddenness.’\textsuperscript{314} Since we have previously been told by Heidegger that the story-telling mode of allegory provides us with a clue to what ‘simple description’ can never uncover, we should not be surprised that here we are going to consider the allegory itself. In fact, in the following paragraph, Heidegger makes his concerns about interpretation of the allegory more explicit:

We could easily follow the common practice and briefly summarize the content of the allegory, likewise attaching a short explanation, without, however, being touched by anything essential, and without following up the clue to the decisive question. This usual hackneyed way of proceeding would not assist us at all. If we wish to avoid this, the first thing we must do is to give ourselves totally over to the text. Only in this way are we perhaps also moved by the power of Plato’s presentation—which in understanding philosophy is not at all incidental, not at all an aesthetic addition.\textsuperscript{315}

Here we respond on Heidegger’s behalf to the first criticism advanced against his reading of Plato in ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth.’ Though Rosen, Dostal and others fault Heidegger for failing to account for the context, form and dramatic power of Plato’s dialogues, here we see explicit evidence to the contrary. For Heidegger, it is quite important that Plato takes up the dramatic tool of myth to make his points; Plato’s mythmaking is not an ‘aesthetic addition,’ nor is it ‘incidental.’

In the first stage of The Essence of Truth, we again find the prisoners chained in the cave, taking the shadows, the only beings they have known, to be the unhidden. But

\textsuperscript{314} Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 17 [21-22].

\textsuperscript{315} Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 17 [21-22]. It is also worth noting that the translation Heidegger offers here is divided into sections and interspersed throughout the lectures. Unlike the translation in PDT, this translation is not offered complete at the outset and then commented upon. Perhaps this aids in the giving of ourselves over the text to which Heidegger exhorts us.
here Heidegger gives us considerably more to notice. He notes that Glaucon’s response to this stage of the allegory is one of incredulity. Glaucon remarks that the fact that these prisoners take shadows to be reality is ‘atopon’ or ‘extraordinary.’ What Plato must convince Glaucon of, and what Heidegger wants us to notice, is that as the shadows are the only standard for the prisoners, so our standards of everydayness dictate what seems to us ordinary or extraordinary, and our relationship to the essence of truth is no different. This stage of the allegory points us in the direction of what will later unfold—‘the essence of the truth of everydayness’—and alerts us that the unhiddenness of beings to which humans comport themselves ‘belongs to the being of man.’ In other words, at this stage of the allegory we are provided with the clue that here aletheia as unhiddenness, not as correctness, is the central issue.

In stage two, we find a description of a prisoner, now released from his shackles, who experiences the ‘more unhidden’ but is not yet truly liberated, evidenced by the fact that the prisoner is reluctant to leave and would prefer to return to his chains. This all reflects the same view expressed in PDT, but what’s missing from PDT is particularly telling. What comes strikingly to the fore in Heidegger’s reading of stage two as it appears in TET is that truth as correctness is founded on and grounded in truth as unhiddenness, the more original sense of truth. When the prisoner is unshackled and turned away from the wall on which the shadows appear and towards the brightness of the fire which illuminates the shadow-casting objects, he experiences the more unhidden. And this experience of the more unhidden allows him to see beings with more being.

316 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 22 [28-28].
Heidegger notes the revelation that as there are gradations of unhiddenness, there are also gradations of being. The more unknown something is, the closer we are brought to ‘beings that are more beingful.’ The implications of this for understanding the transformation of the essence of truth from unhiddenness to correctness are substantial: when the prisoner is able to see beings that are more beingful, he is described as being able to see more correctly. Here truth as unhiddenness and truth as correctness are linked in a way that makes it obvious not only how the transition was effected, but more importantly, that correctness is a derivative understanding of truth—one that makes no sense unless the originary sense is understood as well. About this, Heidegger is quite clear: ‘Truth as correctness of assertion is quite impossible without truth as the unhiddenness of beings. For that to which the assertion must direct itself, in order to be correct, must already be unhidden. So if one takes the essence of truth exclusively as correctness of assertion, one betrays a complete lack of understanding.’ Heidegger here acknowledges the relationship in which truth as unhiddenness and truth as correctness stand to each other, and it is one that anyone is expected to acknowledge based on the clarity with which it is illustrated by the allegory. To this point at least, it seems clear that Heidegger finds in the allegory itself the possibility for mining the original sense of truth and for understanding why this sense has since been obscured—in this way the allegory is truly a clue for seeing what is original and important, not merely a vehicle by which an important sense of truth was subjugated and subsequently dismissed.

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318 Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 26 [34-35].

319 Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 26 [34-35].
The third stage, as Heidegger identifies it, finds the former prisoner being forcibly removed from the cave and brought into the sunlight of the outside world. As in PDT, here Heidegger notes that the genuine freedom achieved in stage three, unlike the failed liberation of stage two, required force and a substantial reorientation of the former prisoner to the new surroundings—the place in which the things now taken to be unhidden, or the most unhidden, are illuminated by the sun. Now the prisoner is truly free, evidenced by the fact that he no longer wants to return to the confines of the cave; but the freedom was not easy to achieve or accept nor was the adaptation from relative darkness to bright, natural light a simple one. Heidegger claims that ‘all this is clear in the picture presented. But what does this picture point to?’

Heidegger then acknowledges that Plato gives his own interpretation of the cave allegory, the interpretation treated critically in PDT, but here Heidegger even more clearly expresses the view that Plato’s own logos interpretation may not do justice to the muthos discourse of the story: ‘Does the Platonic elucidation allow us to understand the essence of aletheia?...However clearly the allegory may be presented, however simple and clear the Platonic interpretation may appear—do we understand much, or even little, of all this? It does not help to ask how Plato himself interprets the allegory.’

It seems clear that Plato’s straightforward analysis that follows the story, ‘be it ever so accurate and rigorous’ does not fully exhaust the possibilities for understanding the essence of truth which emerge in the telling of the allegory itself. A different sort of analysis is called

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for—one in which Heidegger considers the interrelation of various concepts that come to the fore in the story.

First Heidegger takes up the question of the interrelatedness between idea and light, and here emerge some interesting, and decidedly different, views about Plato’s ideas from those views we saw in PDT. Recall that in PDT, Heidegger worried that Plato’s view of the good as the highest idea led him to an excessive reliance on the ideas in general as the conditions of possibility for unhiddenness, a relationship that ultimately ends up harnessing truth as unhiddenness under the yoke of truth as correctness. Here we see a similar theme with a very different emphasis. First, when Heidegger treats Plato’s ideas in TET, he notes at the outset that he is leaving aside the highest idea, the idea of the good, for the time being, since it does not figure prominently in the allegory itself. This already represents a switch from the earlier discussion in which concern about the role of the highest idea dominated. Here, however, Plato’s ‘discovery of the so-called ideas’ is characterized as ‘not some far-flung speculation on the part of Plato, but related to what everyone sees and grasps in comportment to beings. Plato just pointed this out with previously unknown power and assurance.’ In other words, when we see an object, our everyday interpretation is that we see it with our eyes, but of course our eyes only allow us to take in particular descriptive features of the object. In order to really see the thing for what it is, rather than just as a series of adjectives, we have to be able to organize these features according to something over and above the merely sensory experience of viewing the thing with our eyes. Plato described what is ‘over and above’ as the ideas, but Plato’s particular description is not different from the experience

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322 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 34 [45-47].
Heidegger claims we all have when we investigate the way in which we see and understand beings: ‘Understanding what such things mean is nothing else but seeing of the look, the idea. In the idea we see what every being is and how it is, in short the being of beings.’\textsuperscript{323} Interestingly, Heidegger distinguishes this understanding of idea as Plato uses it from the ‘historical interpretation’ due to which ‘we have long become suspicious of ‘ideas.’’\textsuperscript{324} If we didn’t see with respect to something like Plato’s idea, we would not recognize things for what they are from our everyday encounters with them. This is why it was so essential for the prisoner to be forcibly removed from his everyday experience of the shadows in the cave, in order to see beings as they are.

But though the idea allows us to see a being in its being, the being cannot present itself to us without light to illuminate it, and it is this connection between idea and light that Heidegger wants us to notice: ‘So the connection between light and the idea is clear. We see a being as a book only when we understand its sense of being in the light of its what-being, of the ‘idea.’’\textsuperscript{325} This brings Heidegger to his second question: what is the interrelation between freedom and light?

He takes it as notable that simply removing the prisoner’s shackles does not make the prisoner free; this only makes him free \textit{from} restraints, but it is not until he is brought into the natural light that he becomes genuinely free—free \textit{for} something, not just free \textit{from} something: ‘comportment to what gives freedom (the light) is itself a \textit{becoming}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{323} Heidegger, \textit{The Essence of Truth}, 38 [51-52].
\item \textsuperscript{324} Heidegger, \textit{The Essence of Truth}, 36 [48-49].
\item \textsuperscript{325} Heidegger, \textit{The Essence of Truth}, 42 [56-58].
\end{itemize}
free. Heidegger describes this comportment specifically as a kind of ‘self-binding’ to what is shown.

Understanding freedom as self-binding immediately leads to Heidegger’s third question in the investigation of the essence of truth: what is the interrelatedness between freedom and beings? When one binds oneself to the being that is illuminated, one is free to better understand beings, where understanding ‘first of all lets beings as beings be.’ Therefore, it is one’s freedom that determines how beings will be shown—whether ‘more beingful or less beingful,’ in Heidegger’s words. And freedom is determined by whether the self-binding entails ‘the individual grasping himself as being-there [Da-sein], set back into the isolation and thrownness of his historical past and future. The more primordial the binding, the greater the proximity to beings.’ In other words, freedom is freedom to commit oneself to seeing beings as they actually appear when illuminated, apart from the everyday awareness with which we are ordinarily inclined to see them. It is only with this sort of freedom, which must be accompanied by a keen awareness of our deeply historical situation and thrownness, that we are able to allow beings to be seen as they are. Plato’s cave makes this clear in the transitions of each of its first three stages—the imprisoned man is unable to see beings for what they are because he is confined to everydayness; he is not truly free from this everydayness until he has undergone a wrenching process by which he is removed from familiarity and confronted with illuminated beings. The illumination makes freedom possible but freedom requires the

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326 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 44 [59-60].

327 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 45 [60-62].
right sort of attitude towards the beings, which in turns allows the beings as they are to show themselves to the emancipated prisoner in the space outside the cave.

Heidegger illustrates the relationship between freedom and beings with an example that is telling for our purposes. He takes art, particularly poetry, using it as a case study of the way in which freely binding oneself to beings enables them to be shown in a way that is more ‘being-ful.’ In the case of poetry, the poet is not trying to reproduce reality as it initially appears to us or merely create something that will be enjoyable to observers. Rather, the ‘artist possesses essential insight for the possible, for bringing out the inner possibilities of beings, thus for making man see what it really is with which he so blindly busies himself…Poetry makes beings more beingful.’

When Heidegger makes it clear that this is the project of poetry, ‘not just any old writing!’, we see obvious evidence of the distinction between logos discourse and muthos discourse, as I have been calling them. Poetry, as muthos discourse, has access to beings in a way that logos discourse can at best achieve with difficulty. Thus, it should come as no surprise to us that Plato’s story of the cave, if we give ourselves over to it properly, would have more to offer than Plato’s own logos interpretation of it, or any subsequent logos interpretation for that matter, can uncover. Nor should it surprise us that as Heidegger’s career progresses, he moves further away from the logos of traditional philosophy and more towards thought as poetics.

This distrust of traditional logos also explains why when Heidegger next decides to confront the primary question—the question concerning the essence of truth as

328 Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 47 [64-65].

329 This will be treated in more detail in the conclusion to this project.
unhiddenness, he eschews the notion of approaching the question in typical logos discourse:

We said that we wanted to feel our way forward to the essence of truth as unhiddenness. This means: we are dispensing with a definition. Perhaps a definition is precisely what is least suitable for grasping an essence. It is not a matter of capturing this essence in sentences (or in a single sentence) that we can repeat and pass on.  

Instead, Heidegger comments on three insights that will be helpful. First, he shows that for Plato, the ideas are both ‘primordially unhidden’ and the ‘most beingful of beings.’ These two superlative characteristics are possible simultaneously because the ideas enable other beings to be seen in their true being. Without such beings which have an original connection to unhiddenness and therefore are ‘most beingful,’ other beings would not be illuminated by their light.

In his next insight, Heidegger is clear that he must leap beyond Plato: ‘we must be strict here, for this is a passage where our interpretation goes beyond Plato; more precisely, where Plato, for quite fundamental reasons could not go further, with the consequence that the whole problem of ideas was forced along a false track.’ But how exactly does Heidegger aim to avoid the same false track? By refusing to see the ideas or the beings the ideas illuminate as either objects or subjects. They are neither ‘hidden objects which one could lure out with a kind of hocus pocus’ nor are they something

330 Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 47 [64-65]. Notice here that Heidegger does not claim that a definition definitely can’t grasp an essence, for to do that would be to rely on the sort of binary oppositions that he criticizes in contemporary logic. Here qualifying his claim, he tells us that ‘perhaps’ a definition cannot grasp an essence.

331 Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 51 [69-71].

‘constituted and thought up by’ human subjects. Here Heidegger returns to his familiar tone of scolding the history of philosophy, for the reason that there is no adequate answer to the question ‘what are the ideas’ or to the broader question ‘what is the essence of truth as unhiddenness’ is that the questions themselves have never been properly asked. Philosophers since Plato, instead, have seized upon the categories of objective and subjective and attempted to fit the ideas into one box or the other, engendering a long and fruitless debate—a debate which, in part, leads Heidegger to conclude that there is ‘no progress in philosophy.’ Heidegger himself is not ready to answer the question as to what exactly the ideas are, only to show as preparation that they must not be consigned to the persistent but unhelpful categories of subject and object.

So far, Heidegger has guided us through Plato’s allegory in an effort to uncover the essence of truth as unhiddenness. Now Heidegger takes us a step further, asserting that the essence of unhiddenness is deconcealment. By deconcealment, Heidegger means ‘the removal of concealment, that which acts against concealing’ and that which overcomes hiddenness. Of course, it might seem unremarkable that deconcealment involves the removal of concealment—Heidegger himself recognizes this by saying that at first it seems about as radical as the thesis that ‘obeying is following’—but if we truly

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333 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 52 [71-72].

334 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 52 [71-72].

335 This discussion allows us to answer a criticism made by Robert Dostal against Heidegger’s portrayal of Plato in PDT. Dostal claims that Heidegger consigns Plato to the idealism/realism distinction that Heidegger himself wishes to avoid. However, here it seems clear that Heidegger sees that distinction as one solidified by the tradition and in fact wishes to rescue this Plato from being forced to one side or the other. Here again, Heidegger avoids the limited alternatives of a binary opposition, see footnote 331. Dostal, ‘Beyond Being,’ 74.

336 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 53 [72-73].
understand that character of deconcealing, we will see just how it is in fact remarkable. If we accept, with Heidegger, that the essence of truth as unhiddenness is deconcealment, the event by which something becomes unhidden for us, we then must acknowledge that deconcealment is an occurrence (i.e. ‘something that happens ‘with man’’). This leaves us with the radical thesis that truth is something human, not something over and above humans which we seek. Must this mean that truth depends on humans for existence? Heidegger acknowledges that such concerns, representative of the widespread fear of ‘relativism,’ are sure to accompany such a thesis.

But in order to understand why Heidegger thinks that the customary concerns about ‘relativism’ are misplaced, it helps to recall his previous dissatisfaction with the subjective/objective dichotomy to which Plato’s ideas are usually subjected. In the same way that the ideas should not properly be thought of as either objective entities floating about in the world or as merely subjective thoughts in the minds of individuals, neither must truth be thought of with respect to these familiar categories—either as direct correspondence between independently existing features of the world and the propositions which describe them, or as entirely constituted by the subjective thoughts of humans as ‘psychical subjects.’ In order to identify an alternative to this false dichotomy, Heidegger reminds us that we must adequately investigate the concept of ‘human,’ for if the charge of relativism hangs on the claim that truth should not reside within humans, we must be clear not only what sense of human is meant, but in what way truth is ‘in’ humans. Heidegger here claims that our journey though the cave allegory to this point

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337 It should be noted that Heidegger’s attention to truth as ‘occurrence’ is an earlier description of what he will later refer to as ‘ereignis,’ the event or occurrence of deconcealment. For a brief discussion of this later term, see the conclusion of this project, especially p. 232.
has prepared us to answer this question: what the allegory shows us in stages one and two is that ‘in the history of man’s essence it is precisely the occurrence of unhiddenness, i.e. of deconcealment, that is decisive. We first get to know what man is from the essence of unhiddenness; the essence of truth is what first allows the essence of man to be grasped.’ This relationship between truth and humans makes it clear that humans are not arbitrarily authoring ‘truth’ as the charge of relativism would assert—humans must rely upon truth as unhiddenness to disclose the essence of their own humanness. In this sense, ‘truth is something greater than man. The latter is in the truth only if, and only in so far as, he masters his nature, holds himself within the unhiddenness of beings, and comports himself to this unhiddenness.’ Here we see how Heidegger’s view that the essence of truth as unhiddenness is deconcealment straddles the subjective/objective divide. It doesn’t make sense to talk about truth in abstraction from the history of humans because truth is an event that discloses human existence; but neither does it make sense to make truth a subjective feature of any particular human mind, since in order to understand the mode of its own existence, Dasein must already be ‘set out into the truth.’

Thus we see that human existence cannot be understood by observing the many everyday humans we encounter, but rather only when we realize that the only way we can ‘understand man is as a being bound to his own possibilities, bound in a way that itself frees the space within which he pursues his own being in this or that manner.’ This makes it clear that the prisoner of the cave is not one who could possibly understand himself in this way. Liberation is necessary if humans are to understand their

338 Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 55 [75-76].

339 Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 55 [75-76].
possibilities and the way in which Dasein comports itself to beings and to itself, the being that asks about its own being. None of this is possible if Dasein has not experienced the deconcealment that reveals beings in their being, thus none of this is possible from the perspective of the prisoner in the cave, the perspective of humans in their everyday mode.

Heidegger admits that the truth that emerges from this sort of investigation is not the sort of truth that one might ascribe to ‘2+1=3’ or ‘the weather is good’ or ‘the essence of a table consists in its being an object of use.’ But this is of no concern to him, for the truth of the statement about the essence of man can never be scientifically proven. It cannot be established by reference to facts, nor can it be derived from principles in a formal-logical manner. This is not a deficiency, especially when one realizes that what is essential always remains unprovable, or more precisely, lies outside the sphere of provability and unprovability.

Again we see that the truth that is allowed to emerge from the muthos discourse of the cave allegory must not be subjected to the categories used to assess logos discourse—the categories of ‘facts,’ formal logic, and provability should not be mistakenly applied to questions concerning human existence—the question that, on Heidegger’s reading, can be seen to dominate the first three stages of the cave allegory.

Before transitioning to Heidegger’s treatment of the fourth stage of the allegory, it is worth noting just how different his lengthy treatment of the allegory thus far is in TET, compared to PDT. PDT also maintains that true liberation is achieved only in stage three, when the prisoner is forcibly removed to the outside world, but the focus here is on liberation as paideia—a turning around of the soul instigated by the liberator, much less than on the responsibility that the liberated person bears himself for investigating his own

340 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 56 [76-78].
341 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 56 [76-78].
existence and concluding, in the light of the unhidden, that ‘man is the being that understands being and exists on the basis of this understanding.’ This difference of emphasis underscores the worrisome connection between paideia and truth as correctness that Heidegger fears emerges from Plato’s interpretation following the cave allegory. Plato’s focus on paideia as a reorientation of the individual by the liberator so that he might see more correctly in the light of the highest idea has led to a fundamental relationship between truth and correctness which cannot be shaken by the history of philosophy. One can imagine that by submitting to the muthos discourse of Plato’s own allegory, as Heidegger would have us do, we might instead come away focusing on the human’s need to properly investigate his own being and the being of beings, wresting these beings from their everyday hiddenness.

As we turn to the fourth stage of the allegory as it is presented in TET—the stage in which the recently liberated prisoner returns to the cave as the liberator—we should be familiar with Heidegger’s argument since it appears very similar to the discussion in PDT. As we were told in PDT, though the word aletheia doesn’t occur itself in stage four, truth as unhiddenness is clearly at work in the fourth stage as the formerly liberated/now liberator risks death to return to the cave and attempt to liberate the current prisoners. Here in TET, we are given a more detailed presentation of Heidegger’s case that truth as unhiddenness in fact remains a prevalent theme despite any appearance to the contrary. One is able to see this if one recalls the revelation from stage three that truth as

342 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 57 [78-79].

343 As we begin discussion of the section in which Heidegger talks at length about freedom, liberation, the liberator and the violence that must occur between those who are liberated and those who have yet to be, it is worth noting that though one could no doubt draw connections between Heidegger’s political connections of the 1930’s and this discussion, it is outside the scope of this project to take up the issue of Heidegger’s politics at all.
unhiddenness or deconcealment—the act of wresting beings from hiddenness—is an occurrence of humans. To see the prevalence of this sort of truth in the fourth stage, Heidegger encourages us to notice that as the liberator returns to the cave to liberate others, he must face the danger of his own death at the hands of prisoners who are unwilling to leave their everyday environment of the cave. The return of the now-liberated cave dweller to the cave, and the violence he both must confront from the current prisoners and perpetrate himself as a liberator, according to Heidegger, is ‘the essential content of the allegory, is the occurrence of the liberated one and of the liberation itself.’

But Heidegger acknowledges that even the recognition of the return to the cave as an occurrence is not enough to convince us that aletheia as unhiddenness is still central to the fourth stage of the allegory. When the freed prisoner returns to the cave, he understands the being of beings in a new way, understanding also why the remaining prisoners are unable to accept his newfound view that the shadows they take to be beings are only images of beings. In the conflict between the view of the liberator and the views of the prisoners, Heidegger highlights the connection between unhiddenness and concealment: ‘Truth, therefore, is not just unhiddenness of beings such that the previous hiddenness is done away with, but the manifestness of beings is in itself necessarily an overcoming of a concealment. Concealment belongs essentially to unhiddenness, like the valley belongs to the mountain.’

It is now that we truly see the importance of the fourth stage, and can be sure that it is in fact essential to the theme of the entire allegory. Heidegger tells us that if the

344 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 63 [86-88].
prisoner were merely freed, ascended to the light of the sun and experienced the ideas as ‘just beings of a higher order,’ he would fundamentally miss the way in which the ideas ‘[wrench] beings from hiddenness and [overcome] their concealment.’ In other words, being liberated from the cave is not enough to understand the relationship between truth, unhiddenness and deconcealment. It is only when one becomes a liberator himself by descending back into the cave, that he truly understands the significances of the wresting free involved in the occurrence of deconcealment, and real freedom is achieved.

Now the significance of the difference between truth as unhiddenness and truth as correctness becomes even clearer. Truth is not just seeing beings more clearly, for this cuts truth off from its relationship to untruth and concealment. Neither does truth consist in the possession of correct but static propositions. Rather, ‘untruth belongs to the essence of truth’ and according to Heidegger’s own metaphor, the violent process of deconcealment is the bridge which allows and requires truth and untruth to remain connected.

Having made this connection, Heidegger again attempts to directly confront the familiar worry that such an interpretation has ‘violently inserted’ something into Plato’s text. He even anticipates the objection that ‘Plato was unaware that untruth is opposed to truth.’ However, giving Plato more credit than the hypothetical objector, Heidegger concludes: ‘Not only did he know this, but the great dialogues he wrote immediately after the Republic have nothing else but untruth as their theme.’ However, though Plato

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understands this opposition, and does not understand untruth to mean falsity, as the
history of philosophy subsequently has, Heidegger still worries that Plato is not yet or no
longer functioning with a sufficiently primordial understanding of *aletheia*, and suggests
that this indicates that ‘in Plato the fundamental experience from which the word *aletheia*
arose is already disappearing. The word and its semantic power is already on the road to
impoverishment.’ 348 Having made this assertion, though, Heidegger promises to consider
the highest idea before concluding that Plato has played such a role in the history of truth.

As Heidegger takes up the idea of the ultimate good, the highest idea, he reminds
us that Plato himself points out that the idea of the good can be seen only with great
difficulty (*mogis horasthai*). This, Heidegger claims, explains why when Plato speaks of
the highest idea it is symbolically—using the sun as a metaphor. But if Plato himself
must use symbols to discuss this idea, and acknowledges that this too is difficult,
Heidegger cautions that we must be careful not to ‘immediately demand a propositional
explanation of the highest idea’ if we want to proceed ‘in a truly Platonic manner.’ 349 To
do so would take us far afield from ‘authentic questioning’ by putting us in the company
of most Plato interpreters who ‘generally proceed along this false track.’ 350 When
confronted with something ‘unsayable’ like the idea of the good, our best method for
proceeding, both for Heidegger and Plato, is ‘through the method of stepwise


349 Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 70 [96-98]. Here again Heidegger references the concern
with which he introduces his novel reading of the cave allegory (see pg. 140): if we are to openly
acknowledge the hermeneutic that all givens are interpreted, we will avoid immediately demanding
propositional explanations, instead recognizing that such explanations are inadequate.

350 Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 70 [96-98].
philosophical questioning of beings (asking down into the essential depth of man).

Heidegger promises to proceed in this manner, clarifying the meaning of the idea of the
good by returning to the ascent of the allegory’s third stage and moving from the ideas to
the ultimate idea.

If we recall that the ideas are the most unhidden, enabling beings to show
themselves, we may move from here to the highest idea: ‘If there is a highest idea, which
can become visible over all ideas, then it must exist out beyond being (which is already
most beingful) and primordial unhiddenness.’ This idea which exists ‘out beyond’
being is most primordial and most authentic in the sense that it ‘empowers’ or ‘makes
possible’ both being and unhiddenness as occurrence. Heidegger wants us to note that
this understanding of the highest idea falls out of the understanding of the ideas. It does
not rely on any conception of the ‘good’ involving religious morality or any other
ethic.

Heidegger thinks that this understanding of the highest idea is confirmed by
Plato’s discussion of the highest idea in the allegory of the sun described in book VI.
Plato explains that in order for something to be seen, there must be the faculty of sight on
one hand (seeing) and the visible thing on the other hand (being seen). However,
something beyond seeing and that which is seen is required, a yoke (zugon) which
harnesses them together. In the case of seeing and being seen, the yoke is the light which
enables visibility—the seer is able to see the seen only because light enables the seer to

351 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 70 [96-98].

352 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 72 [99-100].

353 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 72 [99-100].
use her faculty of sight properly and illuminates the seen. In Plato’s allegory it is the sun that provides the light to enable seeing/being seen to occur. Plato uses the allegory of seeing by the light of the sun to illustrate the connection between a higher sort of sight—noein (perceiving) and noumena (the perceivable). In the same way that the ability to see and the visible thing are yoked together, or enabled, by light noein and noumena are yoked together by the ideas. The ideas as the most beingful and most unhidden enable the being of beings to show forth in aletheia. But just as light is sourced by the sun, the ideas must have a source. For Plato, the source of the ideas is the highest idea—the good.

For Heidegger, one misses the Platonic sense of the good completely if one does not see it as an empowering: ‘He [Plato] wants to say: when we ask about the essence of being and unhiddenness, our question goes out beyond these, so that we encounter something with the character of empowerment and nothing else. Empowerment is the limit of philosophy (i.e. of metaphysics).’ On Heidegger’s reading of Plato, the good is responsible not only for the fact that things are known, but also for the fact that they are—both their uncoveredness (aletheia) and their being (ousia) is made possible. The good ‘cannot be a being [nicht ein Sein sein kann], therefore also cannot be unhiddenness, but is beyond [epekeina], out beyond both being and unhiddenness.’

Rather, the good enables or empowers truth as unhiddenness and being.

In light of this section, it becomes clear that Heidegger is not here guilty of failing to distinguish between the good and the ideas as critics claim. Contrary to the accusation that Heidegger’s PDT simply ignores ‘the fact that Plato speaks of the sun as epekeina tes

354 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 77 [105-108].


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'ousias,' here Heidegger is quite explicit about the difference between the good and the other ideas and equally clear that the good is not merely another resident of the world of the forms. He is also explicit elsewhere that Plato’s good is beyond being: in *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* he explicitly refers to the good as both ‘mythical’ and ‘beyond being.’

Having described Plato’s view of the good this way, Heidegger notes that though Plato doesn’t say much about the good, he does ‘really ask the question concerning the essence of being and truth, [he grasps] and lays hold of the task inherent in such questioning, thus to follow this questioning to wherever it may lead.’ He cautions that the alternative to following this questioning through adequately is to choose ‘cheap solutions’ over authentic interrogation of being and truth, and to miss the fact that this authentic questioning was Plato’s goal. Heidegger supports this view by referencing the *Seventh Letter* and the *Sophist* in which he claims that Plato does just this, even in spite of the fact that the term ‘*agathon*’ doesn’t appear. It must be noted that here Heidegger explicitly identifies bad interpretations as responsible for failing to see that Plato’s *agathon* enables being on one hand and truth as unhiddenness on the other. Heidegger chides: ‘What this empowerment is and how it occurs has not been answered to the present day; indeed the question is no longer even asked in the original sense.’ But it is

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358 Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 79 [108-110]. Heidegger claims that in the Sophist ‘the essence of being is found in *dunamis*, i.e. is empowerment and nothing else’ (247 d-e). Never able to resist chiding the history of philosophy, Heidegger adds that ‘it was left to Plato’s contemporary interpreters to ‘prove’ (in the way they do prove) that Plato was not serious about this idea of the *dunamis* character of being.
clear that this is not due to Plato’s failure to set up the question. Rather, ‘for whoever asks in a philosophical manner, Plato says more than enough.’

We cannot help but notice immediately how different this description of the relationship between the idea of the good and truth seems from that found in PDT. In the shorter essay, we are told that it is Plato’s reliance on the idea (and the idea’s potential to allow us to see more correctly) which obscures the sense of unhiddenness originally at the forefront of aletheia. In PDT, the primary concern seems to be that through granting visibility, the highest idea allows seeing to become the most important feature of truth, setting the stage for truth to become seeing something ‘correctly’—or the correct correspondence between the subject’s sight and the object which is seen. There the highest idea makes possible the ideas which make possible the visibility of beings, and in that sense is the ‘highest in the hierarchy of making possible.’ But this description from PDT stops far short of getting at the significant fact that in TET, Heidegger clearly and decisively draws a line between the ideas and the highest idea, making much of the fact that though the highest idea enables being and truth, it is ‘out beyond’ being and truth. In TET, he makes much of the fact that the highest idea is nothing but empowerment and goes so far as to say that any other reading risks ‘triviality’ because it misses the fact that real interrogation of being and truth uncovers that the essence of being is found in empowerment alone.

In TET, we learn even more about what is at stake in the questioning regarding the essence of truth: it is in fact ‘a questioning down into the deepest perceiving possible

359 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 80 [110-112].

360 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 80 [110-112].
for man as an existing being, a questioning of the history of man’s essence that aims at understanding what empowers being and unhiddenness.\textsuperscript{361} Now we have arrived at the climax of Heidegger’s interpretation of the cave allegory. By clarifying our understanding of the highest idea as an empowerment which enables the yoking together of truth and being, we are now in a position to see just how this conclusion bears on the question of the history of Dasein’s essence: ‘What the cave allegory is all about, therefore, is the liberation and awakening of the innermost power of the essence of man.’ The cave allegory is to be understood as a liberation, a ‘turning around of the essence of man,’ from the inauthentic to authentic unhiddenness.

Heidegger asserts that this clarification tells us four important things about the essence of truth:

1. that truth itself is not ultimate, but stands under an empowerment;
2. and not just by itself, but together under the same yoke with being;
3. that in so far as man is the questioner, who inquires about what is prior to and for all being, what empowers truth to its essence itself occurs in the historical-spiritual Dasein of Man;
4. not in man as such, but only in so far as he continually transforms himself in his history and returns to the ground of essence.\textsuperscript{362}

If we understand these four points about truth, we will realize that truth cannot be merely correspondence between propositions and things. Rather truth is deconcealment; it is an occurrence. Heidegger puts it very explicitly: ‘understanding the whole interpretation is a matter of grasping again and again this one thing in its fundamental meaning: that the question of the essence of truth is the question of the history of man’s

\textsuperscript{361} Heidegger, \textit{The Essence of Truth}, 81 [112-112].

\textsuperscript{362} Heidegger, \textit{The Essence of Truth}, 82 [112-114].
essence, and vice versa.\textsuperscript{363} If properly understood, this will radically impact the understanding of what philosophy is. Philosophy will not be ‘a cultural phenomenon, or a ‘worldview,’ or a ‘science,’ but rather a questioning—a questioning that stands to fundamentally reorient or turn around Dasein. Here Heidegger returns to the question of \textit{paideia}, commonly translated as ‘education’ (\textit{Bildung}), though more properly understood, Heidegger thinks, as the ‘positionedness’ of humans. \textit{Paideia} in this sense is prior to pedagogy and the social sciences, which are possible only because they are preceded by the questioning of being and truth, yoked together under an empowerment.

It should be clear already that we are now prepared to reply on Heidegger’s behalf to the common criticism of PDT that Plato’s view of truth favors the epistemological over the ontological. Here as Heidegger shows the connection between the good, truth and unconcealment, it is clear that the question of being, the ontological concern, comes to the fore of his reading of Plato’s cave allegory, at least as it appears in \textit{The Essence of Truth}. Heidegger says as much himself:

Truth as \textit{aletheia} is therefore nothing that man can possess or fail to possess in certain propositions or formulas learned and repeated, and which ultimately correspond with things. Instead, it is something that empowers his ownmost essence to what it is, in so far as he comports himself to beings as such, and in so far as man, in the midst of beings, himself a being, exists.\textsuperscript{364}

But no sooner does Heidegger lay out this novel conclusion about the connection between being and truth than he takes another opportunity to show how completely the history of philosophy has missed it: ‘And we today! ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Ideas’ has its essence ripped out and made accessible for the superficiality of today’s Dasein: ideas as

\textsuperscript{363} Heidegger, \textit{The Essence of Truth}, 84 [115-116].

\textsuperscript{364} Heidegger, \textit{The Essence of Truth}, 82 [112-114].
values and *paideia* as culture and education, i.e. what is most pernicious from the
nineteenth century, but nothing from ‘antiquity’."\(^{365}\)

So, in sum, what have we learned from the allegory of the cave on Heidegger’s
alternative reading? Heidegger sums up his own conclusions: ‘truth is not thereby an
arbitrary property of man, but the ground of his existence; further that Plato regards the
enactment of this transformation of unhiddenness as the fundamental requirement of
*paideia* in its antagonism to *apaideusia*.\(^{366}\) We can also now return to the question
posed earlier as to why ‘true’ is used in two different senses—either a *thing* can be true
(‘true gold’ is Heidegger’s example) or a *proposition* can be true. Now that we
understand the relationship between primordial truth (unhiddenness) and truth as
correctness, we are in a position to answer this question. Primordial truth pertains to the
thing itself, not a proposition about a thing. A *thing* is true in this sense, unhidden, if it
shows itself to be what it is (true gold) rather than what it is not (false gold). True gold
uncovers or unconceals what it is, while false gold covers up what it is and shows what it
is not. A *proposition* can be true, or correct insofar as it corresponds to the truth of the
thing itself. The proposition ‘that gold is true gold’ is true only if it refers to gold which
has shown itself to be true. The proposition ‘that gold is false’ is true only if it refers to
the gold that has concealed what it is and presented what it isn’t. Notice in this example
that the proposition can only be true in the sense of correct if it corresponds to the
hiddenness or the unhiddenness of the being to which it refers. In other words, the
correctness of propositional truth is dependent upon truth as unhiddenness. Unless a

\(^{365}\) Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 84 [115-116].

\(^{366}\) Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 86 [118-119].
being shows itself as what it is or what it is not, no proposition can correctly characterize it. In Heidegger’s words, ‘truth in the sense of correctness presupposes unhiddenness.’\(^{367}\)

But if truth as correctness presupposes truth as unhiddenness, then how is it that truth as unhiddenness has been so long ignored by the history of philosophy? If the questioning of the essence of being and the essence of truth cannot be divorced from the questioning which Dasein must undertake to understand its own location in history, how has the original sense of \textit{aletheia}, with its power to ‘stir us,’ eroded so severely since Plato’s time that it no longer registers as a relevant concern for contemporary metaphysics? If philosophy itself should take up this questioning above all else, what is responsible for the fact that it hasn’t? Given what we’ve come to expect from Heidegger’s description of the history of philosophy, it should not surprise us that culpability lies, at least in part, with Plato.

Does Plato himself already detach \textit{aletheia} from its fundamental originating experience? Is he at least on the way towards doing this? Such is in fact the situation. What already happens in Plato is the waning of the fundamental experience, i.e. of a specific fundamental stance of man towards beings, and the weakening of the word \textit{aletheia} in its basic meaning. This is only the beginning of that history through which Western man lost his ground as an existing being, in order to end up in contemporary groundlessness.\(^{368}\)

But, as usual, the fault does not reside solely with Plato: ‘It is we as much as Plato who are responsible for the fact that \textit{aletheia} remains merely something from the past without becoming history.’\(^{369}\)

\(^{367}\) Heidegger, \textit{The Essence of Truth}, 86 [118-119].
\(^{368}\) Heidegger, \textit{The Essence of Truth}, 87 [119-120].
\(^{369}\) Heidegger, \textit{The Essence of Truth}, 88 [120-122].
Why is it that *aletheia* was already losing its fundamental sense of unhiddenness with Plato? Heidegger locates this in the fact that while Plato understands *aletheia* in the sense of unhiddenness, he is content to concern himself with the unhiddenness of beings, rather than interrogating *aletheia* in a way that makes clear its priority for Dasein as an occurrence. When Plato talks about *aletheia* as unhiddenness, he is talking about beings, particularly the ideas (‘the most beingful beings’). The being of these beings is disclosed by their unhiddenness, but though this recognition of the unhiddenness of the ideas represents Plato taking *aletheia* as unhiddenness, it stops short of interrogating the essence of truth *in itself*, opting instead to characterize truth as unhiddenness in beings. In Heidegger’s words: ‘Here *aletheia* already stands for that to which it pertains, but not for what it is in itself. Unhiddenness rules, and the attempt is made to attain it, but it is not as such further placed in question.’\(^{370}\) Plato’s failing here is evidenced, for Heidegger, by his related failure to address hiddenness as opposed to unhiddenness and untruth as opposed to truth. If unhiddenness occurs in the event of wresting beings from hiddenness, then one must also interrogate hiddenness.\(^{371}\) If truth as unhiddenness is a fundamental concept, then untruth as hiddenness must be adequately considered as well.

Having spent the majority of this lecture series laying out a sympathetic reading of the cave allegory which allows us to begin interrogating truth in its original sense, using the cave allegory as our guide, Heidegger now anticipates a question. If the cave allegory has resources to enable us to get close to the essence of truth, how can Plato now

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\(^{370}\) Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 90 [124-125].

\(^{371}\) ‘Just this neglect of the question of hiddenness as such is the decisive indication of the already beginning ineffectiveness of unhiddenness in the strict sense. We must therefore maintain, as the guiding proposition for what follows, that the way in which one inquires into and discusses hiddenness is the index for the degree of primordiality of the question concerning unhiddennes as such.’ Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 91 [125-127].
be faulted for stopping short in his interrogation of truth, and untruth, as it turns out? Has Heidegger not used Plato’s own words to make his case to this point? How can it now be appropriate to turn on Plato and accuse him of setting the stage for two millennia of failing to conceive of philosophy properly? Heidegger’s response to his own question gives us a very clear line on the sort of history Heidegger does when he undertakes the interpretation of an ancient text.

We must look more closely at what we have actually obtained. It is just this, that Plato does not specifically place \textit{aletheia} in question, but always treats only of what is involved in the unhiddenness of beings as such. It is we who, subsequently in our interpretation, have gathered together all these considerations about light, freedom, idea, beings, in order from the unity of these to assess what can be learned about the essential determination of unhiddenness itself.\footnote{Heidegger, \textit{The Essence of Truth}, 90 [124-125].}

In the end, here Plato is responsible, as he was in the \textit{Sophist} lectures, for failing to go far enough in the right direction, but he is not faulted for heading the wrong way altogether. That dubious distinction still belongs to the history of contemporary metaphysics and its appropriation of Plato.

4.4. Interpreting the Differences: How We Might Reconcile ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth’ and \textit{The Essence of Truth}

Having seen some of the dramatic and relevant ways in which these two accounts differ, we are now prepared to gather the evidence and ask what we might make of the apparent inconsistencies. In collecting and comparing the most significant differences, we cannot forget that PDT focuses on Plato’s own interpretation of the allegory while TET focuses on Heidegger’s interpretation of the allegory itself rather than Plato’s
explanation of it. We also must recall that although both texts acknowledge a persisting ambiguity in Plato’s thinking about truth—truth as unhiddenness remains to some degree even as truth as correspondence comes to the fore—PDT focuses on the ‘transition’ from one understanding of truth to the other, making Plato largely culpable for this troubling transition, while TET focuses on the ambiguity itself, highlighting the fact that Plato himself retains a foot in each camp. We have also seen more specific differences in the two texts—Heidegger’s attention (or lack thereof) to Plato’s context, his treatment of the good, his recognition of the ontological element in Plato. Each of these differences has led us to ask how we might account for such peculiarities.

As we have seen, we cannot explain away these differences by claiming that Heidegger over time became a less sympathetic reader of Plato, for this strategy requires us to accept that Heidegger noticed elements of Plato’s text in 1931 which he simply misses in 1942. Though this is of course possible, as one may become a less patient reader over time, I do not think it is the most compelling explanation. I have said above that I believe the most plausible way to resolve the substantial differences in these texts is to argue that the texts treat two different Platos—one who Heidegger caricatures and fiercely critiques and one with whom Heidegger shares sympathies. I have referred to these as logocentric and muthocentric respectively. I have further argued that if we are attentive to Heidegger’s portrayal of the muthocentric Plato, we can find positive possibilities for Plato interpretation almost universally missed by the cadre of critics quick to charge Heidegger with poor Plato scholarship.

In order to support this argument, that Heidegger’s reading of the muthocentric Plato is sympathetic and helpful, we must recall the historiographical categories surveyed in
chapter two. To advance the claim I have been making we need not show that Heidegger is an excellent historical reconstructionist—that he adequately reproduces what Plato meant to have said to his own contemporaries. If we were merely assessing Heidegger’s historical reconstruction, we might quite rightly have grounds to worry about the reading of Plato’s interpretation of the cave allegory put forward in PDT for all the reasons elaborated by Heidegger’s critics. However, having seen that Heidegger’s engagement with the history of philosophy never seems to aim at historical reconstruction, we would do well to judge it for what it is, rather than for what it isn’t. It seems quite clear that Heidegger in fact engages in Geistegeschichte; after all, like Rorty’s prototypical Geistehistoriker, Heidegger assembles ‘a cast of historical characters and a dramatic narrative that show how we have come to ask the questions we now think inescapable and profound.’ With these categories in mind, we don’t need to claim that Heidegger is simply a bad reader of Plato just because he assembles his cast of historical characters to make his point.

But though this observation doesn’t yet explain the two different Plato we find in Heidegger’s work, it gets us close. Once we acknowledge that Heidegger assembles a cast of characters to support his concerns, it will be short step to see that one character may play different roles at different times—now a logocentric adversary, then a muthocentric ally, depending on the story Heidegger is telling at the time and the point he aims to make. Those who want historians of philosophy to be judged for historical reconstruction will find this evidence of bad scholarship, but Heidegger is not in any


sense a historical reconstructionist. For the Geisteshistoriker, Plato is the perfect character: sometimes villain, sometimes hero, he is always a rich and familiar resource.

So we have seen that Heidegger uses Plato differently at different times—that he critiques one version of Plato even while sympathizing with another. Further support for this thesis can be found if we consider the fact that the second edition of ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth’ was published with 1947’s ‘Letter on Humanism.’ In PDT we saw the outline of Heidegger’s attack on humanism and its connection to his attack on the history of metaphysics. Here he writes: ‘the beginning of metaphysics in the thought of Plato is at the same time the beginning of ‘humanism.’ Heidegger faults humanism in both PDT and ‘Letter on Humanism’ for its subjectivism—or its ‘metaphysically determined revolving around the human being.’

Both metaphysics and humanism have dire consequences for our encounters with other beings. According to Heidegger in ‘Letter on Humanism:’

[L]anguage, under the dominance of the modern metaphysics of subjectivity almost irremediably falls out of its element…language surrenders itself to our mere willing and trafficking as an instrument of domination over beings…We encounter beings as actualities in a calculative businesslike way, but also scientifically and by way of philosophy, with explanations and proofs.

Here, also, Heidegger directs some degree of blame at Plato. But in ‘Letter on Humanism,’ it is even clearer that the object of Heidegger’s attack is the logocentric Plato. Trying to separate the original sense of logos from contemporary ‘logic,’ Heidegger claims that this sense was already ‘obfuscated and lost’ in Plato. The Plato

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Here faulted is one who overemphasized the wrong sort of logos and as a result firmly belongs in the tradition of logocentrism—a tradition that fails to inquire into the essence of logos. 377

Given the critical nature of ‘Letter on Humanism’ with respect to the tradition, it should not come as a surprise that ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth’ is published alongside it. As a history intended to highlight the forgetfulness of being, the logocentric Plato understandably figures prominently as both progenitor and scapegoat. But Heidegger makes a ‘passing’ comment in ‘Letter on Humanism’ that should alert us to the fact that this logocentric Plato of ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth’ may not be the only Plato of which we should take note: ‘Aristotle’s words in the Poetics, although they have scarcely been pondered, are still valid—that poetizing is truer than the exploration of beings.’ 378

Perhaps here we catch a glimpse of the promise of reading the muthocentric Plato of myth, allegory and poetry, the Plato who occupies Heidegger’s interpretive efforts in his earlier lecture course.

To recap, I have considered the substantial differences in Heidegger’s divergent readings of Plato’s cave allegory and attempted to advance the interpretation that Heidegger’s ostensible inconsistency on the matter of reading Plato’s allegory of the cave can best be understood with reference to the logocentric/muthocentric distinction I have been returning to throughout this project. To put it specifically, in ‘Plato’s Doctrine of

377 Here Heidegger has no shortage of sharp words for logic but he claims that his attack on logic should not be counted as an endorsement of the illogical: ‘Because we are speaking against ‘logic’ people believe we are demanding that the rigor of thinking be renounced and in its place the arbitrariness of drives and feelings be installed and thus that ‘irrationalism’ be proclaimed as truth. For what is more ‘logical’ than whoever speaks against the logical is defending the alogical?’ Heidegger, ‘Letter on Humanism,’ 263.

Truth,’ Heidegger’s goal is to critique the logocentric Plato who stands the beginning of the fateful history of western metaphysics. In The Essence of Truth, Heidegger’s goal is a different one. Here we see glimpses of a sustained engagement with a muthocentric Plato who opens up positive possibilities for an alternative to the dominant contemporary view. Though Heidegger is harshly critical of the caricature of Plato that he uses to villainize the history of metaphysics, he has the resources to uncover an alternative Plato as well. We have now seen evidence of this alternative Plato in both the Sophist lectures and Heidegger’s treatment of the cave allegory, but we cannot complete this study without considering Heidegger’s reading of the Thaeatetus which continues his 1931/32 lecture course Essence of Truth, for as Heidegger tells us, we cannot understand truth without investigating untruth.
5.1. Introduction

We have seen in Heidegger’s reading of Plato’s cave allegory the transformation of truth from the primordial Greek understanding as unconcealment to the correspondence view held by contemporary metaphysics. This interpretation, particularly as it appears in Heidegger’s 1942 essay ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth’ is very familiar, in large part because it almost always plays a key role in the literature pertaining to Heidegger’s engagement with Plato. In stark contrast, we find Heidegger’s related interpretation of a brief section of Plato’s Theaetetus dialogue. Initially composed as the second part of the lecture course on Plato entitled Vom Wesen der Warheit (The Essence of Truth), this extraordinarily close reading of Theaetetus sections 184-187 was delivered alongside Heidegger’s early presentation of the cave allegory. In this 1931/1932 lecture course, the Theaetetus interpretation comprises more than half the lecture material, yet the body of scholarship which takes up this interpretation is scant at best. I will argue that the Theaetetus lecture has received so little attention in part because it does not lend

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support to the caricature of Heidegger as a violent, unfair reader of Plato promoted by those who rely on ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,’ the essay published in 1942, for their primary evidence of Heidegger’s engagement with Plato. Instead, as we shall see, Heidegger’s reading of the *Theaetetus* is particularly insightful and sympathetic, highlighting elements of Plato’s thought that anticipate Heidegger’s own project. As such, I will argue that the *Theaetetus* interpretation offers compelling evidence for the argument that Heidegger identifies two different Platos: the Plato of whom he is critical—a Plato who cannot get beyond logos and dialectic—but also an alternative Plato with whom Heidegger is sympathetic. In order to make this point, we will here engage in a close reading of Heidegger’s comments on the *Theaetetus*. As we have done with the *Sophist* lectures and his interpretation of the cave allegory, we will pay special attention to Heidegger’s conflicted relationship with Plato. Here again, I will not try to downplay Heidegger’s critique of Plato, but rather claim that his criticism is directed at the logocentric Plato. Once we are clear about the object of Heidegger’s ire, we can open space in which to also acknowledge the rich resources Heidegger has for identifying and interpreting the muthocentric Plato I have been describing throughout this project, resources which give further evidence to the profitability of revising the dominant view of Heidegger’s Plato. After we have made our way through the text, paying attention to this ‘two Plato’ model of interpretation, we will briefly engage the minimal literature that also takes up Heidegger’s *Theaetetus* interpretation.

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380 Of course, it is true that the complete course that included the *Theaetetus* lectures did not become available until 1988 and the English translation did not follow until 2002. However, even in the years since these publications, there have been startlingly few contributions to the secondary literature on Heidegger’s Plato that take these lectures into account.
5.2. Heidegger’s Reading of the *Theaetetus*

Having finished his discussion of the cave allegory by emphasizing the importance of investigating the essence of untruth as well as truth, we now turn with Heidegger to his interpretation of a brief section of the *Theaetetus*. He acknowledges that his analysis of this dialogue will be confined to an excerpt; in the interest of getting directly to the question, Heidegger will have us ‘in somewhat impertinent fashion cut into, as co-questioning auditors, the already progressing conversation, without knowing the beginning or end, yet at a point where we immediately feel something of the whole.’

The *Theaetetus* as a whole takes up the question ‘what is knowledge?’ Heidegger has us join the conversation just as Socrates and Theaetetus are considering Theaetetus’ first attempt to answer this question by proposing that knowledge is perception (*aisthesis*). Heidegger reminds us that the *Theaetetus* in general is ‘commonly characterized as Plato’s main epistemological dialogue’ on the grounds that its guiding question asks about the essence of knowledge. But Heidegger immediately takes issue with this attempt on the part of contemporary philosophy to co-opt Plato’s purpose in the *Theaetetus*:

One sings the praises of Plato and the Greeks because they were already sufficiently advanced as to pose epistemological questions, because in fundamental respects they had already reached a stage that was not subsequently attained until the nineteenth century. Yet although this is the common and generally accepted conception of the *Theaetetus*’ leading question, it remains erroneous, groundless, superficial and unphilosophical.

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381 Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 109 [149-150].

We cannot help but note familiar elements common to Heidegger’s readings of Plato. As we have seen in each text we have considered, we should be wary of the tradition’s appropriation of Plato’s text, for it is the history of philosophy that has done the most violence to the reading of Plato. Heidegger’s early warning alerts us to the fact that his efforts will aim at revising these misinterpretations and misappropriation.

In this particular case, the tradition’s failing stems from the desire to equate knowledge with scientific knowledge. It is no surprise that our first requirement for revising the traditional interpretation is to understand the guiding terms in their originary sense, without the modern sense that has since been heaped upon them. We would do better, Heidegger tells us, to understand ‘knowledge’ in its properly Greek fashion, as ‘knowing-one’s-way around in something’—a knowing that ‘extends across all possible human activities and all possible domains, in accordance with their respective modes of dealing.’

According to the Greek concept of knowledge, knowledge as ‘knowing one’s way around something’ and ‘knowing as seeing’ are unified because ‘knowledge as seeing’ derives from the Greek view that beings are ‘that which is present.’ One can best know one’s way around what is present by seeing, or keeping it in view; therefore seeing is linked to knowledge. However, knowledge requires having beings present even when they are absent, even when they cannot be seen physically.

This explanation of the essence of episteme provides some insight into the connection between knowing-one’s-way-around (episteme), seeing, and truth (aletheia).

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384 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 116 [159-161].
The Greeks understand *beings* as things that are present and *knowing* as having a being present to oneself. Since seeing is the most direct way of having a being present, knowing and seeing are connected.\(^{385}\) And if knowing and seeing are unified by their direct relationship to beings, then both allow one to have ‘disposal over beings as they show themselves and must show themselves, therefore over how they are manifest and unhidden.’\(^{386}\) And here we finally see the connection between knowing, seeing and truth: both knowing and seeing grant one access to the unhiddenness of beings, and as we saw in the discussion of the cave allegory, the original Greek sense of truth is the unhiddenness of beings.

Once we understand this connection between the Greek understanding of knowing, seeing and truth, we can see that Theaetetus’ initial thesis that perception (*aisthesis*) is knowledge is not as peculiar as it sounds to modern ears. Rather, this is deeply Greek thinking on Theaetetus’ part: to a Greek ‘perceivedness appears the most immediate mode of the unhiddenness of something, thus the most tangible ‘truth’…for Greeks, nothing is more self-evident than to interpret possession of *aletheia* (i.e. knowledge) first of all as *aisthesis*.\(^{387}\) But Heidegger wants us to now ask if perceivedness can bring us into relationship with beings, with the unhidden, as Theaetetus’ initial definition of knowledge would suggest.

As Socrates begins questioning Theaetetus, Heidegger wants us to notice that the investigation does not just focus on perception by any creature but relates to human

\(^{385}\) ‘Owing to its distinctive character of making present, sensory seeing comes to be the definitive example of knowledge as the apprehending of beings.’ Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 116 [159-161].

\(^{386}\) Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 117 [161].

\(^{387}\) Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 120-121 [164-167].
comportment. When describing human perception, we tend to say that the ears hear, the eyes see, etc. However, as Socrates gets Theaetetus to recognize, if we really mean that the various sense organs are responsible for perception, we would have a very disharmonious means of perception. Only the eyes could see, only the ears could hear, and there would be no organization of the sensory perceptions on behalf of the whole person. In order to combat this worry, Theaetetus concludes that the organs must be the conduits for sensory perceptions, but not the perceiving thing itself.

But how is the unity of the individual possible, given that perception comes through many different avenues? Heidegger translates the passage he finds to be crucial to this consideration:

It would be strange, my boy, if so many perceptual objects [such as show themselves, phantasiai and aisthesis] should be dispersed at different places within us, like the warriors in the belly of a wooden horse, and that they should not all converge and meet [assembled and braced] in something like an idea, i.e. in some single sighted nature, the ‘soul’, or whatever it is to be called.\textsuperscript{388}

Here Heidegger shines light on an element of the text frequently glossed over in popular English translations. Plato’s phrase ‘\textit{mia tis idea}’\textsuperscript{389} is translated into English as ‘some single nature’\textsuperscript{390} or ‘in one power,’\textsuperscript{390} to take two examples. Heidegger, on the other hand, translates this phrase as ‘something like an idea.’ Heidegger thinks that if we are to do justice to Plato’s own thought, we must not ignore the fact that here he chooses the same word associated with his ‘doctrine of ideas.’ Heidegger cautions that the

\textsuperscript{388} Heidegger,\textit{ The Essence of Truth}, 124 [170-171].


tradition’s interpretive efforts have saddled Plato with the fixed and metaphysical ‘doctrine of ideas,’ and in the process failed to see the broader ways in which he uses the word ‘idea.’ Here we find one such example that could offer rich resources for Plato interpretation, but which is downplayed by translations that choose to obscure the term ‘idea’ because its use here doesn’t neatly fit our caricature of Plato’s doctrine. Heidegger elaborates on this caricature and its consequences for modern philosophy with a description so significant that it is worth quoting in its entirety:

Plato is indeed the ‘inventor’ of the ‘theory of ideas.’ This terminology, to whose origination and later domination Aristotle contributed, was probably the most disastrous thing that could have happened to Platonic philosophy. For in this way it was rigidified into a formula, thus made moribund and philosophically powerless. When we encounter this word in Plato, particularly in the passage now under discussion, it is not permissible to interpret it according to the usual understanding of ideas and theory of ideas. Instead, we must constantly be aware that with the word ‘idea’ Plato means something which related to his innermost philosophical questions, something which opens up and guides this questioning, and something which for the entirety of Plato’s career remains a question. Instead of ‘explaining’ idea in terms of the dry school conception of a so-called Platonic theory of ideas, we must grasp the possibility and necessity of this word, at any rate its surprising occurrence in our passage, and we must grasp this from the given constellation of problems. Only in this way can we give to the word idea a meaning grounded in the matter itself, instead of everything running firmly towards the idea and thus over aletheia and ousia, such that finally the decision is made of metaphysics.  

Heidegger’s description of Plato’s understanding of the ideas here is important, of course, with respect to the matter at hand—namely the connection between perception and knowledge. But for our purposes it is critically important as well because it offers a direct and unambiguous reply to the well-worn criticism we have seen above that Heidegger misreads Plato in part because he takes Plato to be overly reliant on the

391 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 126 [173-174].

392 To see this criticism laid out by Rosen, Dostal and other, see chapter 3.
‘doctrine’ of the ideas. Here we see that Heidegger sees in Plato a much wider sphere of application for the ideas and in fact the criticism often made against Heidegger is here turned against the tradition—to understand Plato’s ideas in the narrow sense criticized above is to do violence to Plato by reading him only to uncover his fixed ‘doctrine of ideas,’ rather than listening attentively to what is most important for Plato himself.

Having highlighted the problematic historical understanding of the ideas, Heidegger returns to a discussion of what ‘idea’ did mean for Plato. Heidegger claims that the general meaning of idea is ‘what is sighted,’ not merely with the eyes, but with the mind or brain or soul. The soul unifies the perceptions, received through the senses, and in this sense when Theaetetus proposes that knowledge is perception, it is the unified sort of perception that he has in mind, not merely sensation. The soul is identified as relational: ‘soul serves to name the relationship to being (presence of the look) and thus to unhiddenness. The body and its physical constitution is admitted into this relationship, a relationship within which the historical human being is.’

The term ‘soul’ might be able to express this feature of ourselves that allows us to unify the objects of perceptions, but we are still no closer to knowing what is meant by soul here. Plato again poses the question of just what it is that performs this unifying task. The word offered in the text is dianoia, commonly translated as ‘thought’ but more literally should be taken as ‘perceiving through.’ If we allow ourselves to fall into the familiar mode of translating it as ‘thinking,’ we will be guilty of missing the fact that dianoia is a kind of perceiving, and thus repeating a misinterpretation that is in fact responsible for the tradition’s ‘misrecognition of what [Plato] was doing, i.e. through

\[393\] Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 129 [177-178].
corruption of his ideas, to the concept of ‘thinking’ and ‘ratio,’ which then led Western philosophy the road towards the total decadence of today.\textsuperscript{394} To avoid making this same mistake again, Heidegger wants us to look very closely at the section of the \textit{Theaetetus} that directly addresses how we perceive in a unified way. If we require ourselves to go back to the source here—to Plato’s own words—trying in the process to unburden the text from the centuries of interpretation which have been piled upon it, we may be able to ‘feel, out of the most vital actuality, the origin of an elementary questioning.’\textsuperscript{395}

Before we proceed to examine Heidegger’s close reading of Plato’s brief but important section on perception, we must pause to observe Heidegger’s relationship to Plato’s text here. In calling us to ‘an elementary questioning,’ Heidegger sets before us a text that he thinks can be considered an origin worthy of our engagement. He writes:

\begin{quote}
To be sure, what was later built up, and arranged in disciplines, by reference to this short section of the \textit{Theaetetus}, counts as ‘progress’, but progress is inessential to philosophy. It is always the beginning that remains decisive. The authenticity and power of philosophical understanding can only be estimated by whether and how we measure up to the origin, by whether, if we ourselves are to begin over again, we are able to make anything of this origin.\textsuperscript{396}
\end{quote}

It must not escape our notice the purpose that Plato’s text here serves for Heidegger. It is not one more piece to disregard, deconstruct or sweep away. It is, rather, the origin to which we must constantly return. Plato is not here merely the errant philosopher to be discarded or debunked, but the source we must engage to uncover interpretive possibilities.

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{394} Heidegger, \textit{The Essence of Truth}, 131 [80-182].
\item \textsuperscript{395} Heidegger, \textit{The Essence of Truth}, 132 [181-182].
\item \textsuperscript{396} Heidegger, \textit{The Essence of Truth}, 132 [181-182].
\end{enumerate}
To return to Plato’s discussion of perceiving, we should recap. Having decided that *aisthesis* was not an adequate definition of knowledge because it doesn’t account for the unification that must go on when we perceive multiple sensory perceptions at once, Theaetetus has proposed another possible definition: *dianoia*. Though *dianoia* is also a kind of perceiving, it is a ‘perceiving through’ which entails the sort of reflection that allows us to unify our sensory experience. But the idea of *dianoia* is still very vague and hasn’t yet answered the question ‘what organ unifies our perceptions,’ so Socrates and Theaetetus must further investigate the peculiarities of perception.

Socrates points out that when we perceive both color and sound at the same time, we do not perceive just the color and the sound, but also a host of other things as well. Plato identifies these in Socrates’ questioning of Theaetetus: ‘Now take sound and color. Have you not, to begin with, this thought which includes both at once—that they both exist? And further that each of the two is different from the other and the same as itself? And again that both together are two, and each of them is one?’ Heidegger discusses the ability to perceive these other things over and above sensory perceptions themselves and calls them ‘an excess.’ Though we don’t know exactly what this excess is, it is something that we cannot help but perceive beyond the color and sound themselves, and it includes, as Plato tells us here, being and non-being (existence).

Heidegger is impressed with Plato’s attention to this excess, claiming that here ‘for the first time in history, the excess in perception (over an above what is given in sense) is systematically demonstrated and treated as a fundamental problem.’ Heidegger sees this attention to the excess as a perceptive attention to being and non-being and for

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397 Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans., F.M. Cornford, 185a4-b1.
Heidegger, this highlights the ‘inner sureness of the dialogue…and the unprecedented conscientiousness and sobriety of its individual steps.’

We have seen that perceiving occurs through the sense organs and is unified in the soul. We have also seen that there is an excess that is perceived in the soul and that this excess always at least includes attention to being. After all, once cannot perceive something without perceiving it as something that is, that exists. But what is the nature of the relationship between the soul and being/non-being? Heidegger tells us that the soul is not in relationship with something else, it is the relationship. More specifically, he explains, that the soul ‘strives’ towards being essentially. In other words, ‘in Platonic terms, the word ‘soul’ simply means striving for being…striving for being co-constitutes the relationship of perceiving to what is perceived.’

Heidegger then addresses a concern that might arise with his translation here of ‘striving.’ One might think that striving for being and perceiving are two very different things. To use Heidegger’s own example, when we perceive a blue sky, we simply take it in. We do not have the experience of striving for being. Perceiving would seem to be passive reception while striving indicates an effort towards something we do not have. Given this apparent contradiction between having and striving, how can Heidegger claim that in perceiving, the soul is striving for being? Two objections threaten this view: first, it seems obvious that not every perception involves something like striving; many just present themselves to us –they ‘happen to us and rule over us.’ Second, Plato says that

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398 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 140 [193-194].

399 Heidegger is very particular here about the fact that eporegetai be translated as ‘strives for,’ not ‘conceives’ as Schleiermacher translates. Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 146 [200-203].

400 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 146 [200-203].
the relationship between perception and the perceived partially includes the relationship
to being, and that this part is a striving. He does not say that all perception proceeds from
striving for being.\textsuperscript{401} Though Heidegger accepts that these worries must be confronted,
he is unconcerned that they will jeopardize his claim that the soul is striving for being and
therefore that all perceiving requires striving for being. On Heidegger’s view,
unsurprisingly, the preceding objections result from a failure to adequately investigate
perception on our part. To this task, he now turns.

Recall that the first objection to Heidegger’s view claims that when we perceive,
we merely take things in, we do not strive; but Heidegger reminds us that when we ‘lose
ourselves’ in the perception of a blue sky or a bird singing or the warmth of the sun, we
are not looking at these things as beings, rather we are giving ourselves over to
immediate perception which does not recognize the objects of perception as beings.
When we pay attention to the being of these perceived things, we treat them with a kind
of ‘regard’ \textit{[Hinsicht]}. But in immediate perception, ‘this kind of regard is lacking. In
immediate perception, beings are perceived, as we say, in a manner which is non-
regarding \textit{[hinsichtlos]}.\textsuperscript{402}

To understand what this all means for Heidegger’s view that the relationship in
Plato of the soul towards being is a striving, we have to keep Heidegger’s fundamental
ontology in mind. When we lose ourselves in perception, we are perceiving beings, but
we are not perceiving or conceiving being. Heidegger reminds us here that we always
already function with an understanding of being—we use the words ‘is’ and ‘being’

\textsuperscript{401} Heidegger, \textit{The Essence of Truth}, 148 [205-206].

\textsuperscript{402} Heidegger, \textit{The Essence of Truth}, 149 [206-208].
properly, for example—even if we have only treated it in a ‘non-conceptual’ and ‘non-regarding’ way. This basic familiarity with being and beings is based in the ‘groundstance’ of humans, though it can and has been lost. If we are to ‘save and reestablish’ this familiarity, we cannot do it through the ‘objectivity of the sciences’ or ‘scholarly pedantry.’ What we must do is investigate and get clear on the meaning of being.

This line of argument, of course, is Heidegger at his most familiar. But how does this relate to Plato’s discussion of knowledge as perception in the *Theaetetus*? When we engage in non-conceptual perception, we lose ourselves in the perceived thing. In such cases we are perceiving beings but not being. In fact, in this sort of immediate perception we remain unaware of the connection between beings and being precisely because we have lost ourselves in the immediate experience. Therefore, though we can characterize the relationship between our soul and the objects of perception, or beings, as perception, we cannot thus characterize the relationship between the soul and being. It is clear then, to Heidegger, that Plato has another characterization for that relationship—that of striving. Put simply, perceiving may be merely a having with respect to beings, but with respect to being, it is a striving.

Though it may appear that striving can only pertain to things which we do not have, Heidegger points out that when we strive for something we ‘have’ it in the sense that it is there for us, makes itself felt, is the object of our striving. This shows that when we ask ‘what is striving,’ we really must ask ‘what is having,’ since it seems there are several ways in which we might have something. How does any of this come back around to the *Theaetetus*? The *Theaetetus* is about knowledge and knowledge is thought
of as possession of truth. Since possession is a sort of ‘having,’ clarifying ‘having’ will in turn ‘serve to clarify the essence of knowledge as one mode of possessing truth.’

But striving can be authentic or inauthentic. In inauthentic striving, we strive for something to the extent that we lose ourselves in the striving. Heidegger likens this sort of striving with greed in which we are consumed by the object of our striving. In such a case, ‘What is striven for is not had, but on the contrary has the striver in such a way that the latter is ensnared within his own striving and loses sight of his ownmost self.’ In contrast, in authentic striving, one is not lost in one’s object. Rather, ‘such striving would be authentic in so far as the striving self does not strive away from itself but rather back towards itself, i.e. in order that, in this striving, it may gain its own self.’

Heidegger identifies the concept of eros in Plato as the most authentic sort of striving.

Heidegger goes on to further elaborate the concept of striving for being. There are various characters of being—sameness and difference, for example, but also good and bad, beautiful and ugly. Heidegger applauds Plato for recognizing these various characters of being. He does worry, however, that Plato didn’t really ‘succeed in demonstrating the inner connection between the various characters of being,’ but this is a problem Heidegger sees in Aristotle and Kant as well, and claims began ‘at the beginning of ancient philosophy.’ Plato didn’t have much of a chance of to see this inner

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connection because ‘the superior strength of what had already determined the direction of
the understanding of being remained in force.’

Heidegger goes on to show that Plato’s discussion of the relationship between the
soul and being in the *Theaetetus* must be carefully separated from future concerns about
logic as syllogisms and deductive thinking. When Plato uses the words *syllogismos* and
*analogizesthai*, which share ‘logos’ as a root, Heidegger reminds us that we should not be
‘misled’ into thinking of contemporary meanings of logic because ‘these words are here
employed prior to any development of ‘logic’ as a formal-technical discipline, i.e. they
are employed in the closest possible interrelation with the fundamental philosophical
question of *being*. In fact, Heidegger is clear that ‘we must not read this later and
faulty development (logos as proposition) into Plato’s initial conception which aims in a
different direction.

So, we have seen that Heidegger lauds Plato for recognizing the connection
between soul and being—a relationship in which the soul strives for being, and we have
seen the distinction Heidegger draws between Plato’s use of ‘logic’ here and the
tradition’s appropriation. Now we see an even more startling endorsement of Plato on
Heidegger’s part. Heidegger tells us that Plato recognizes that the soul, on this
description, relates to past, present and future. Heidegger takes this as an indication that
Plato catches sight of the fact that ‘the relationship to being is intrinsically a reckoning

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406 Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 159 [221-223].
But having credited Plato with this significant insight, Heidegger then mitigates his praise: ‘It must be admitted that this fundamental connection between ‘being and time’, upon which Plato here stumbles, only comes into a weak halflight—to immediately again (and for good) sink back and disappear into the night of that blind logic of understanding which had become dominant.’ Still, it seems clear that the Plato here under discussion is not the sinister figure responsible for the history of philosophy’s mistakes. In this instance, where Heidegger has carefully told us that Plato is not employing the ‘logic’ of the tradition, we glimpse a Plato to whom Heidegger is sympathetic.

In Heidegger’s final analysis of the connection between the soul and being, Plato fares quite well. When Heidegger identifies Plato’s concept of eros as the prototypical authentic striving, he shows us that Plato lays the groundwork for understanding the soul as striving for being. Heidegger sums up: ‘That the soul is as such striving for being means that man as existing has always already stepped out beyond himself in his directedness to the all-embracing region of being…What it means for a human being to be himself, or to be a self, can be understood only from this phenomenon of striving for being.’

Now that Heidegger has led us through a close reading of Theaetetus’ first response to the question of knowledge—knowledge is perception (aisthesis)—we have arrived at the point where we can see the failings of this answer. We know that

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411 Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 166 [231-233].
knowledge must be knowledge of truth and that truth is the unhiddenness of beings.

Therefore, in order to have knowledge, we must have a relationship with beings. *Aisthesis,* strictly speaking, means what is given by the senses, but this does not require the relationship with beings that is necessary for knowledge, therefore it seems clear that knowledge and perception cannot be the same. Heidegger highlights a particularly important sentence where his translation spotlights the inadequacy of prior translations.

The question that Socrates poses to Theaetetus to conclude this discussion is translated by Schleiermacher as ‘Can anyone attain the true essence [*Wesen*] of something who has not even attained its existence [*Dasein*]?’ Here, Heidegger claims, Schleiermacher thinks of the distinction between *aletheia* and *ousia* as best represented by the distinction between essence and existence, but Heidegger claims this is anachronistic. Given the Greek understanding of these words, Heidegger proposes this alternate translation: ‘Is it then possible for anyone to attain something in its unhiddenness who has not already encountered beings as such [the being of precisely that something]?’

This translation makes clear what Heidegger’s preceding analysis has aimed to highlight: that having already encountered beings is a precondition for accessing truth as unhiddenness. Since knowledge requires access to the unhiddenness of beings and since perception, as sensory intake alone, doesn’t, Socrates convinces Theaetetus that these two cannot be the same. It is true that Theaetetus seemed initially to have a broader understanding of perception in mind in which perception refers to having beings before one. But, Heidegger tells us, ‘perception is ambiguous in respect of what is perceived; in the natural understanding it is two things: firstly perceiving of beings, secondly the seeing of colours, hearing of sounds

etc." In any case, Theaetetus’ first answer to the question ‘what is knowledge’ has proven inadequate, and an alternative answer must be pursued.

But first, Heidegger recaps. We saw in Heidegger’s interpretation of the cave allegory that truth as unhiddenness is an occurrence—deconcealment—that is a ‘fundamental occurrence in man as an existing being.’ Similarly, we now see in the *Theaetetus* that striving for being is also an event ‘that must occur in the ground of man’s Dasein.’ These two events ‘make a claim upon man’s essential nature. Each must be seized and made normative by man as he holds himself within the essence of his ownmost self, i.e. within the positioning stance of his Dasein.’ Heidegger claims that given the similarity of these two events, it should not surprise us that in both dialogues, at ‘decisive places,’ Plato treats *paideia*—the term commonly taken to mean ‘education,’ but one which Heidegger here translates as ‘the comportment of man by virtue of which he takes up his ownmost stance to being and the true.’ Deconcealment and striving for being are both essential characteristics of the groundstance of Dasein, but we don’t yet know how they are related to the essence of truth because we don’t yet understand the essence of untruth.

Here Heidegger brings us back around to the concern that animated his engagement with the *Theaetetus* in the first place—if we want to know what truth is, and what is the relationship between truth, striving for being and deconcealment, we must first understand untruth. Theaetetus’ second attempt to answer the question ‘what is

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knowledge,’ moves us in this direction, since it is in the course of this second attempt that
Plato initiated concern for this problem in the history of philosophy. He does not answer
it, Heidegger alerts us, but he does pose it.

In fact, it is our sole intention to awaken an understanding for where the question
of the essence of untruth is situated, i.e. within which sphere of questions Plato
places it, and how he thereby takes a decisive step towards the problem—but also
a step that makes it possible for the question to be derailed and degenerate into a
harmless triviality or disagreeable side issue, such that untruth, as the welcome
opposite of truth, is regarded as a property of the assertion.416

It may be that it is just this sort of ambiguity that allows Heidegger to find two
Platos—one to attack even as he sympathizes with the other. Had Plato answered the
question, perhaps there would not be the ambiguity that opens the door for
misappropriation. It is this point that Heidegger repeatedly makes when he faults Plato
for his role in the history of philosophy. But with the right interpretation, Plato can also
be taken to open the door for adequate engagement with the problem of being. In his
better moments as a reader of Plato, Heidegger takes this second route.

We now turn directly to the second attempt on Theaetetus’ part, introduced with
remarks by Heidegger aiming to show how this response follows appropriately on the
heels of the last attempt. We saw previously that if by perception, one meant sensory
experience, then knowledge and perception could not be the same thing because
knowledge must include unhiddenness and requires a relationship with unhidden beings
whereas sensory experience does not. However, Heidegger points out that Theaetetus
himself did not mean merely sensation when he initially proposed aisthesis as
knowledge. He had in mind a broader application of aisthesis, which takes perception to

416 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 178 [249-250].
be the ‘perceiving of beings.’417 This emphasis directs us to the question of the relationship to beings and Socrates now asks Theaetetus to consider an answer that addresses ‘what goes on when the mind is occupied with things by itself, whatever name you give to that’ (187a6), in other words, when the relationship between the mind or soul and beings is under consideration.

Theaetetus’ next answer that knowledge is doxazein, from the verb often translated as ‘to opine’ and the noun ‘opinion.’ But as usual Heidegger is not satisfied with the status quo interpretation; here his explanation is particularly illuminative: ‘this translation only goes half-way to capturing the Greek meaning of the word, a half-measure which, as everywhere and particularly here, is more dangerous than complete error.’418 Again we are alerted to the fact that ambiguity can have greater potential to lead astray than a flat out error. If we are to understand how the question of truth took such a wrong turn, we must understand what the Greeks really mean by ‘doxa,’419 rather than rely on the familiar but incomplete translation. Related to the verbs dokein and dokeo, which mean ‘I show myself’ to myself or others, doxa must retain the sense of a showing of something, but it also has the sense of the view or opinion of the person to whom the thing shows itself. Heidegger uses the German word ‘Ansicht’ to translate ‘doxa’ since it retains both senses; the English word ‘view’ has similar meanings—if you have a ‘view’ of a mountain top, you see it as it shows itself, but you might also have a ‘view’ about a political issue, which implies that you have a particular opinion.

417 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 181 [253-254].
418 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 181 [253-254].
419 Heidegger does acknowledge that this term even has ambiguity for the Greeks, which is one of the reasons it poses such problems for us in translation. Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 181 [253-254].
Heidegger claims that it is no accident that ‘doxa’ has this ambiguous sense about it, for one could not have a view about something if that thing did not show itself in some way.

But we cannot understand ‘doxa’ if we do not understand distortion. Theaetetus himself brings distortion into the realm of doxa by claiming that knowledge cannot be merely ‘a view’ because there are views which are alethes and views which are pseudes. Though we might expect Socrates to lead us along with Theaetetus through an inquiry after true views, instead he begins to further investigate false or distorted views, asking how it is that distorted views are even possible. Here we begin to get to the essence of untruth.

Before Socrates and Theaetetus can get to the essence of untruth, though, they must attempt to reconcile the fact that false views do exist with the fact that they seem not able to exist, for they have earlier agreed to the guiding principle that one cannot simultaneously know and not know. This principle would be quite natural for Socrates and Theaetetus to adopt, given that Heidegger tells us it is next of kin to the ‘fundamental truth of all previous ancient philosophy,’ that ‘nothing can both be and not be at the same time’ or ‘either something is or it is not.’ If their guiding principle is right, that there is no intermediate stance between knowing or not knowing, being or not-being, then it seems that there can be no such thing as a false view since in order to have a false view about something, one must neither know something adequately (know) nor be completely unfamiliar with it (not know).

Now we can better understand the root of the problem Socrates and Theaetetus come up against in each of their three initial attempts to understand the pseudes doxa. On

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420 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 204 [286-287].
one hand they are committed to the principle that one cannot both know and not know something but on the other hand, their own experience directly contradicts this ‘fundamental truth.’ They return repeatedly to an example familiar to all—one may well know Theaetetus and Socrates but from a distance, one may mistake Socrates for Theaetetus or the opposite. This seems, to Socrates and Theaetetus, to be an example that contradicts the guiding principle, for at the time that one is mistaking Socrates for Theaetetus, one both knows Socrates and does not know him.

In the course of this inquiry, Socrates and Theaetetus make three attempts to show that false judgment is possible (it seems that it must be, for they have both experienced it), but they cannot do so as long as they retain the guiding principle. After fruitlessly trying to reconcile the existence of false views with the guiding principle, they are forced to conclude that ‘this alternative (being or non-being), which for centuries the Greeks had regarded as quite certain, is shaken: that there is an intermediate between being and non-being, likewise between knowing and non-knowing. This intermediate is the ground of the possibility of the pseudos.’ Now Socrates and Theaetetus have to go back to the drawing board and reject their guiding principle. Heidegger applauds Plato for his willingness to do this:

Now if this fundamental principle of all being, and consequently of all knowledge, is retracted, the entire foundation of previous philosophy becomes unstable. From this we can get an idea of what a daring task Socrates/Plato undertakes. At the same time we can have an intimation of what power the phenomenon of the pseudos possesses to disturb and amaze, i.e. such that it forces this fundamental principle of all previous philosophy to be questioned. We can

also appreciate the poverty of those later thinkers for whom untruth became a harmless self-evidency, the mere opposite of truth.\textsuperscript{422}

Now that Socrates and Theaetetus have unburdened themselves of the fundamental principle that had been guiding them, ‘the way is clear for the interrogation of the phenomenon itself.’\textsuperscript{423} They are now able to see that, in fact, there is an intermediate position between knowing and not knowing: \textit{mathesis}—learning or coming to know. The attempt to get clear on the \textit{pseudes doxa} has yielded a noteworthy result: Socrates and Theaetetus are able to arrive at a middle position between knowing and not knowing and in the process upset a deeply entrenched principle.

What is most important for our purposes here is the role that logos plays in this section of the \textit{Theaetetus}. In their third and most promising attempt to show that a false view can exist, Socrates and Theaetetus try to understand the \textit{doxazein} as a logos. Here Heidegger shows us the beginning of the transition to propositional truth and at the same time clearly attacks the Plato of logos: ‘The demonstration of the logos character of the \textit{doxa} is important in so far as it alone is retained in the later development of the \textit{doxa} concept, so that the primordial elements of the \textit{doxa} disappear behind this characteristic and the \textit{doxa} as ‘opinion,’ is linked to assertion and the genuine phenomenon disappears.’\textsuperscript{424} Notice that logos is again tied up with the regrettable transition of the understanding of truth and untruth.

On Heidegger’s reading, Plato undertakes and achieves something remarkable in the \textit{Theaetetus}. It seems that the dialogue ends without any clarity or answers having

\textsuperscript{422} Heidegger, \textit{The Essence of Truth}, 204-205 [286-289].

\textsuperscript{423} Heidegger, \textit{The Essence of Truth}, 205 [287-289].

\textsuperscript{424} Heidegger, \textit{The Essence of Truth}, 202 [283].
been reached. *Pseudos* and *doxa* are not fully understood by the dialogue’s end, and an answer to the initial question about knowledge in general remains elusive. But still Heidegger claims, ‘this (palpably result-less) dialogue is, for those who grasp philosophy, i.e. who can *question* in a philosophical way, inexhaustible in new insights.’\[^{425}\]

Heidegger, like Plato, here seems to take the questioning itself to be the fundamental philosophical experience, but this should not surprise readers of Heidegger in the least. What such readers may find surprising is the sympathy Heidegger here has for Plato as a philosopher who shares his guiding approach. Heidegger spends the rest of his lecture course on the *Theaetetus* guiding us deeper along Plato’s path as he continues to investigate *pseudes doxa*.

The clarification of *pseudes doxa* requires further investigation of the soul’s relationship to beings on the grounds that ‘having a distorted view’ refers to the relationship between a person and the beings to which that person relates. Recall, of course, that the relationship between a person and beings is the ‘basic character of the soul,’ so we are led by Plato to a ‘renewed questioning concerning the soul.’\[^{426}\] Plato proceeds with this characterization of the soul by means of a two-fold approach carried out through similes. It does not escape Heidegger’s notice that this characterization is pursued with images rather than arguments: ‘this two-fold characterization is in both cases realized through the elucidation of a simile and image. It is the same as in the case of the cave allegory.’\[^{427}\]


\[^{427}\] Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 208 [291-293].
Plato first gives us the simile of the wax. In introducing this simile, we are warned that the tradition has failed to interpret it adequately, missing its significance entirely, choosing instead to focus on historically reconstructing the earlier thinkers from whom Plato may have inherited the image. In this effort at historical reconstruction, the tradition has missed ‘what Plato himself is asking and seeking,’ and in the process has sold Plato short. In Heidegger’s estimation, ‘it is not too much to assume that a man of the stature of Plato could himself come across the phenomenon of untruth and the question of what it is.’

Heidegger presents the image of the wax alongside another reference to the tradition of Greek mythology. Referencing those goddesses of the arts, Heidegger reminds us that the muses allow an artist to ‘visualize and freely form’ her work. The muses are able to fulfill this role because their mother is Mnemosune—‘keeping in mind’ (das Eingedenksein). Plato believes that this ability to keep in mind is essential to the soul; it is that faculty which allows us to keep things present to our mind, even when they are not present before us in bodily form. Heidegger agrees with Plato that this is ‘a fundamental aspect of our (human) Dasein.’ Heidegger gives the example of the Feldberg Tower in the Black Forest as a means of illustrating just what goes on in our relationship to beings when we make something present for ourselves, or when we keep something in mind. When we see the Feldberg Tower on a walk, the being is present to us in a bodily sense: ‘our comportment is a having present (Gegenwärtighaben) of the encountered entity.’ Later, when we are no longer standing in front of it, we are still able

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to bring the tower to mind, but our relationship to the tower is no longer one of having present but now of making present (ver-gegenwartigen).\footnote{Heidegger, \textit{The Essence of Truth}, 211 [296-297].} Heidegger is quite adamant that this making present is not merely ‘recollecting’ an image, if by ‘recollecting’ we mean rooting around in our mind for a representation of the Feldberg Tower that we remember. Rather when we make something present we are directed outside ourselves to the very tower itself. If we would properly attend to Plato’s view of having present and making present, here described in the wax simile, we would understand that Plato’s own view is closer to Heidegger’s than the tradition would believe. When Plato uses the simile of the wax to describe how something is imprinted on the mind so that it might be called up again, the tradition misinterprets this to mean that bringing something to mind that is not immediately present is merely recollecting, or calling up a representation. In the case of the Feldberg Tower, our minds, like the wax, retain the representation of the tower that we can then call up at will from inside ourselves. But Heidegger claims that this interpretation of Plato’s view fails to see the simile of the wax for what it is. On Heidegger’s reading of this simile, Plato actually shares Heidegger’s view that making present differs from having present, but still is ‘oriented to the beings themselves and not to anything psychical.’\footnote{Heidegger, \textit{The Essence of Truth}, 213 [299-301].} The problem with a typical reading of the wax simile is that the common and vulgar understanding now takes this simile as the real explanation, which is then adopted by science, psychology, and epistemology. This means that the fact of making-present is not clarified at all, so that the vulgar thesis is maintained that when we imagine something rather than perceiving it we can only be relating to representations.\footnote{Heidegger, \textit{The Essence of Truth}, 213 [299-301].}
It is the failure to attend properly to the muthos discourse of the image, to interpret it for what it is, that has led the tradition astray in this case.

In the simile of the aviary, Plato likens knowledge in the mind to birds in an aviary. It is right to say that the owner of the aviary ‘has them’ even when he is not directly holding all of them, because he possesses them. In this simile we also see a distinction between two ways that we might ‘have’ beings. We might have beings in the way that an owner of an aviary has birds flying every which way, but does not have any particular bird in hand. Plato calls this sort of having ‘ktesis,’ and Heidegger understands this to be one possibility of making something present. But as an aviary owner might catch a particular bird and hold it in hand, we too might bring a being to mind (exis), and this Heidegger understands as a different way of ‘making present.’ Having surveyed the two similes, Heidegger concludes that ‘the distinction between having-present and making-present again returns in a modified form within the sphere of making-present.’

It is now left to Heidegger in the final pages of his Theaetetus lecture course to show how making-present bears on the question of pseudeps doxa.

We have seen that when we say our comportment towards beings is a having-present, we mean that the bodily presence of a being is before us—when we see the Feldberg Tower, for instance, because we stand in front of it. But we can also relate to beings by making-present, as when we bring a being to mind that is not now directly in our view. Obviously, the range of beings available to us in making-present is much wider than those available to us in having-present, since a limited number of beings will be present to us bodily at any time. If we think of having-present as the sensory

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433 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 217 [305-306].
perception described by aisthesis and we think of making-present as dianoia, or what is ‘intended in reflection,’ we can see a complicated relationship emerge between aisthesis and dianoia—a relationship which shows us the importance of Theaetetus’ first attempt to define knowledge, even as it exhibits the limitations of treating aisthesis and dianoia as mutually exclusive. Discussion of these two types of knowing highlights the falsity of the guiding principle that one cannot simultaneously know and not know, since it is now clear that one can know in a variety of ways, and therefore, there are a host of possibilities other than ‘know’ or ‘not know’ to describe our relationship towards beings. We can know something by the having-present of aisthesis or by the making-present of dianoia, or by both. This realization requires radical alteration to the guiding principle.

Heidegger sums up:

It is not the case that beings are either perceived in aisthesis or not perceived; neither is it the case that they are intended in reflection (dianoia) or not intended, but the same being can be perceived in having-present as well as only intended in making present. In this way a new prospect is opened up: the same being can simultaneously stand in relationship to aisthesis and dianoia, the two go together in a new way. 

This newly discovered relationship between aisthesis and dianoia also highlights the importance for the dialogue of dealing with Theaetetus’ first efforts to define knowledge. Without both discarded versions of ‘perception,’ we would not now be in a position to see their relationship to each other and to the doxa and pseudes doxa to which the discussion now turns. Heidegger attributes this to Plato’s masterful style, asserting

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434 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 219 [308-309].
that ‘nothing in a Platonic dialogue, however laughable and nonsensical it may appear, is without significance.’

To return to doxa (‘view’) and the relationship between aisthesis, dianoia and doxa, we must return to the example Plato gives of seeing a familiar figure on the road and determining his identity. In this example we can arrive at our view either through the having-present of seeing a figure before us, or the making present of moving from our familiarity with Theaetetus’ schedule to the assumption that he is on the road, or, most likely, by a combination of knowing Theaetetus’ routine and seeing a figure ahead on the road. If this is indeed how we form a view, Plato is right to call doxa a ‘combination of what is encountered in immediate having-present [aisthesis] with what is made-present in advance [dianoia].’ Heidegger explains this two part knowing as a ‘forking’ and hesitantly illustrates it with a diagram which highlights the relationship between making-present and having present as a condition of possibility for the doxa and therefore as the condition of possibility for truth.

But this forking does not merely make truth possible, but also untruth. If we should see a figure on the road ahead and take it to be Theaetetus (which it actually is), we have through the forking (having present and making present) come to a view (doxa) that Theaetetus is up ahead. But if we should, though this same process, come to the erroneous conclusion that Socrates is on the road—after all we are told they look similar—we have still come to this false view (pseudes doxa) through the having present of a figure on the road and the making present of our prior knowledge of both Socrates

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436 Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 221 [311-312].
and Theaetetus. Heidegger wants us to carefully note that in order to err in this way, ‘I cannot simply look away from Theaetetus, but I must precisely look at him who seems like Theaetetus, in order then that I can look past him. It is only possible to miss a target if one aims at it, not if one shoots just in any direction.’\textsuperscript{437} This is important because it is made possible by the forking. Here Heidegger’s translation of Plato’s own words is more helpful than common English translations: ‘It is precisely in relation to what we perceive simultaneously through making present and bodily having present, that viewing something as something [the \textit{doxa}] twists and turns, becoming sometimes distorted, sometimes not (194b2).\textsuperscript{438} What we see most fundamentally here, is that the \textit{pseudes doxa} is made possible by the \textit{doxa}, and the essence of untruth would seem to belong to the essence of truth.

Though Heidegger is quite willing to applaud Plato for producing work that gives rise to this conclusion, he is not willing to go so far as to claim that Plato himself was aware of this insight. Ultimately, Heidegger turns from his sympathetic reading of Plato back to the more familiar interpretation of Plato effecting the transition from falsity as concealment to falsity as incorrectness of the proposition, or lack of correspondence between the subject and the predicate. Plato’s own interpretation of the \textit{pseudes doxa} feeds right into the transition underway in the meaning of truth. According to Heidegger,

\textit{[Pseudes doxa]} is a missing of the mark, a failure of the intended predicate… a being uncorrect. This mis-taking look of the approaching person (as Socrates) is an un-correct addressing [a logos]. Incorrectness in the predicate means incorrectness of the proposition. Thus Plato grasps the essence of the \textit{pseudes} as the uncorrectness of the logos, of the proposition. In this way the logos becomes the seat and locus of the \textit{pseudos}. The essence of un-truth is now un-correctness,

\textsuperscript{437} Heidegger, \textit{The Essence of Truth}, 225 [316-318].

\textsuperscript{438} Heidegger, \textit{The Essence of Truth}, 225-226 [316-319].
so that the mis-taking which looks-past becomes a character of the logos, the proposition.  

We must notice here again that Heidegger retreats from his sympathetic tone just as the discussion turns to logos. Having recently mined the muthos discourse of Plato’s similes for ways to think about the various modes of untruth and their relationship to beings, now Heidegger returns to a familiar attack on Plato fueled by Plato’s overreliance on logos. Plato, it seems has set up an inquiry into untruth rich with possibilities, but now he closes off all possibilities but one. When he claims that one ‘misses the mark’ by mistaking Theaetetus for Socrates, he makes the essence of untruth about incorrectness of the proposition, or the logos. But this also has consequences for truth. As Heidegger tells it, ‘untruth is the opposite of truth; accordingly, truth also must have its seat in the logos. Thus truth is correctness of proposition.’ It is clear here that the problems of Plato’s interpretation are wrapped up in his over-reliance on logos. Heidegger says this explicitly: ‘We now see that Plato interprets the phenomenon of truth in terms of the logos, and not by reference to the primordial essence of truth, i.e. the unhiddenness of beings.’ What Plato misses when he focuses on logos is what to Heidegger is most important: the key insight that for Dasein, beings can only become unhidden if Dasein already operates with a primordial understanding of being—‘in other words, being must originally be held in striving, in order that beings may become familiar to us.’ Thus, it is in the final few pages of Heidegger Essence of Truth lectures that we see what is really

Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 226 [318-319].

Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 226 [318-319].

Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 227 [319-321].

Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 228 [321-322].
at stake in this interpretation, and why it is so problematic that Plato misses this. Heidegger here presents us with an expanded illustration of the forking which makes it clear that the essential structure of *doxa* is not just about beings but also about being. It is part of our fundamental constitution as Dasein that our relationship with beings is always already determined by being. For Heidegger this familiar conclusion cannot be separated from the conclusion of the investigation into truth and untruth because, Heidegger tells us, ‘untruth belongs to the most primordial essence of truth as the hiddenness of being, i.e. to the inner possibility of truth. The question of being is thus thoroughly ambiguous—it is a question of the deepest truth and at the same time it is on the edge of, and in the zone of, the deepest untruth.’

It is here that Heidegger leaves us. Throughout this entire lecture course, comprised of his interpretation both of the cave allegory and of a section of the *Theaetetus*, the question of truth and untruth have been explored in two key moments of Plato’s work. In both cases we see that a real possibility for recognizing truth as an occurrence, as unconcealment, and recognizing that untruth as concealment belongs to the essence of truth, has come to the fore in Plato. Unfortunately, this opportunity slipped through Plato’s fingers, and subsequently remained lost to the rest of the tradition as well. Though there is a glimmer of the primordial relationship between seeing and the being of beings as one in which Dasein comports itself to the beings themselves in their being, this glimmer is not bright enough to eclipse the emerging connection between seeing beings and correctness, which in turn gives rise to a propositional understanding of truth.

\[443\] Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 228 [321-322].
But though in the final assessment, Heidegger’s Plato is far from innocent, one cannot come away from these *Theaetetus* lectures without recognizing a deep admiration for Plato on Heidegger’s part; an admiration which seems to stem from the conviction that a certain phenomenological reading of Plato provides the fertile ground in which the fruits of Heidegger’s own philosophical project have their roots. After all, the Plato we uncover in the *Theaetetus* uses the term ‘idea’ in a very broad way rather than the narrow doctrinal way it is often portrayed, sees—at least faintly—the connection between being and time, sees in perception an original and essential striving for being, asks revolutionary questions about the nature of untruth, sees that the question of knowledge is connected to the question of being, and uses images to understand our relationship to beings in a way that is not merely representational. These are all phenomenological insights and indicate that at the very least, Heidegger finds engagement with Plato profitable—not merely as cautionary tale or first chapter in the story of Heidegger’s philosophical *destruktions*, but also as a familiar and accessible path to a primordial understanding of issues paramount in Heidegger’s own project.

5.3. Commentary on the *Theaetetus* Lectures

For all these reasons, it is unfortunate that there has not yet been more engagement with Heidegger’s *Theaetetus* interpretation in the contemporary literature. If there were, I expect that such engagement would go at least some way to mitigating the uncharitable view of Heidegger’s Plato scholarship that dominates the literature of the past 50 years. Though there is not nearly enough extant literature to provide clear evidence for this claim, what does exist supports the suspicion. Most notably, Francisco
Gonzalez who we have seen criticize Heidegger’s Plato in both the *Sophist* lectures and the cave allegory, offers a much-softened assessment of Heidegger’s Plato as he emerges in the *Theaetetus* lecture. Here Gonzalez claims that the *Theaetetus* interpretation ‘offers a special opportunity of glimpsing what might have become a genuine dialogue and affinity between Plato and Heidegger. In Heidegger’s account of the history of metaphysics as Platonism, the *Theaetetus* interpretation is the discarded trace of a very different reading of Plato.’

But having acknowledged that the *Theaetetus* represents a positive engagement with Plato by Heidegger, Gonzalez goes on to interpret the peculiarity of this encounter when compared to the other interpretations of Plato by Heidegger which Gonzalez deems uncharitable. Gonzalez explains this inconsistency by claiming that Heidegger later abandons his charitable reading of the *Theaetetus* because ‘Heidegger’s extraordinarily perceptive and careful reading of the *Theaetetus*…simply does not support his thesis [that Plato is responsible for the transformation of the meaning of truth], so that the thesis must later be made to rest entirely on the Cave analogy.’

This, of course, is one way to explain why a Heidegger taken to be openly hostile to Plato is here charitable, but it seems to me a strained interpretation. My alternate interpretation, as we have seen it emerge throughout this project, suggests that Heidegger’s charity to Plato in the *Theaetetus* interpretation is not a departure from the elements of charity we find towards Plato throughout Heidegger’s engagement with

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445 As evidence for this claim, Gonzalez cites the fact that the *Theaetetus* is not mentioned in Heidegger’s ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth’ essay, for example.

Plato’s work. One need only speculate that the sympathy of the *Theaetetus* lectures was subsequently abandoned if one does not recognize that this sympathy to an alternative Plato continues to be present even alongside strident critiques of the logocentric Plato found elsewhere. In the sources we have thus far considered, we have seen evidence of a Heidegger who is at times sympathetic to the possibility of a more phenomenological, or muthocentric, Plato even as he is critical of the logocentric Plato co-opted by the tradition. Thus, on this view we can see that Heidegger’s early sympathy to the alternate Plato is consistent with his increasingly harsh critique of logocentric philosophy in general and his endorsement of alternate modes of discourse, including myth and poetry.

As such, Gonzalez’s thesis that Heidegger abandoned his charitable reading of Plato gives us a nice segue into the concluding step we must undertake in this project. In order to further support my claim that Heidegger did not abandon his charity towards Plato, but rather retained sympathy for the muthocentric Plato, we need to consider his evolving attitude towards myth and poetry as alternatives to logos discourse. Though an exhaustive look at the later Heidegger’s views on poetry and myth deserves an independent project, in what follows I will aim to briefly highlight this attitude towards muthos discourse in the later Heidegger as evidence that Heidegger’s sympathy with the muthocentric Plato does not wane entirely, as Gonzalez suggests, but rather grows into an even more pronounced view of the importance of muthos discourse in Heidegger’s later thought.
CONCLUSION

Having closely read some of Heidegger’s most sustained engagements with Plato’s dialogues, hopefully two points have become clear: first, that Heidegger is not uniformly hostile to Plato as the traditional story goes, and therefore it is worth revisiting Heidegger’s Plato; second, that an attentive reading of Heidegger’s Plato provides ample evidence for the interpretive strategy that guides this project, namely that Heidegger is sympathetic to the Plato of muthos discourse even as he is critical of the Plato mired in logocentrism. The final step of this project will attempt to situate the two decades of work on Plato discussed above within the broader context of Heidegger’s lengthy and prolific career, particularly Heidegger’s work after the mid-thirties, following what is frequently referred to as ‘the turn.’

It should immediately strike any reader familiar with Heidegger that this is a daunting, if not impossible, task. Not only are the nature and consequence of ‘the turn’ hotly debated, but Heidegger’s later writings introduce new terminology at an alarming rate—terminology that cannot be carelessly employed or easily explained since Heidegger’s very point is that thinking should no longer remain entrenched in philosophical concepts that can be clearly laid out in propositions. This all presents quite a problem for the project of briefly and clearly saying anything about the later Heidegger’s writings which doesn’t immediately do violence to their spirit. With this caveat firmly in mind, the following conclusion will advance modest aims: I will simply
touch down at various points in the latter half of Heidegger’s career, arguing that the 
muthocentric Plato who emerges in some of Heidegger’s earlier works prefigures 
Heidegger’s own ever-increasing focus on muthos discourse as an alternative to logos 
discourse—the discourse which Heidegger claims has dominated and encumbered 
philosophy from the Greeks to the present.

It makes sense to pick up where we left off. As we saw in chapters four and five, 
the discussion of the transformation of aletheia from unconcealment to simple 
propositional truth dominates Heidegger’s Plato lectures of the early 1930’s. He will 
tell this story time and again: when we fail to understand that truth is essentially 
connected to the unconcealment of beings in their being, we quickly lose sight of the 
importance of investigating being and instead only focus on beings themselves. 

Heidegger’s commitment to this particular story about the transformation of the essence 
of truth and its consequences for our understanding of being sets the path for his later 
thinking: to strengthen his claim about the relationship between truth and being, (1)

447 Of course, the idea that propositional truth is derived from truth as unconcealment is not 
presented first in the Plato lectures—section 44 of Being and Time aims to show that ‘the traditional 
conception of truth has been derived from this [primordial] phenomenon.’ Heidegger, Being and Time, 257 [214]. Here, it is not so much Plato who is responsible for the transition in the understanding of truth, 
rather Aristotle shoulders the blame: ‘Aristotle, the father of logic, not only has assigned truth to the 
judgment as its primordial locus but has set going the definition of ‘truth’ as ‘agreement.’

448 For example, see Heidegger’s 1935 lecture course, Introduction to Metaphysics, trans., Gregory 
Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 203 [145]. Also, the 1937-38 lecture 
course Basic Questions in Philosophy. Here Heidegger details the primordial Greek understanding of 
aletheia as well as the regrettable contemporary view of truth as correctness. As will be discussed later, 
here Heidegger’s own story of the transformation of truth begins to attain the mythic proportions 
characteristic of later discussions of the early Greeks, but here it is clear that though the early Greeks 
operated with a primordial understanding of truth, they did not properly investigate it and thereby opened 
the door for the unfortunate transformation in the essence of truth. Martin Heidegger, Basic Questions of 
See especially chapter 4. In his 1942-43 lecture course Parmenides and Heraclitus, Heidegger’s tells the 
same story. See especially section 2: ‘First meditation on the transformation of the essence of truth and of 
its counter-essence.’ Martin Heidegger, Parmenides, trans., Andre Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz, 
Heidegger will have to ratchet up his criticism of contemporary metaphysics and show the risks of failing to rethink the question of being and its relationship to truth; (2) he will have to tell a compelling story about the era before the dangerous transition was effected which compels contemporary thinkers to reexamine the thought of the earliest Greeks; and (3) he will need to chart a course for thought to think even more primordially than the early Greeks themselves—a task for muthos discourse including poetry—all the while showing what is at stake if this warning is ignored.

I will organize my comments about the later Heidegger’s work around the three elements of this strategy: first, I will pick up where we left off with aletheia at the close of the Theaetetus lectures, noticing the increasing fervor with which Heidegger attacks propositional theories of truth peddled by traditional metaphysics and lays out the consequences these theories have had for the modern world. Second, I will consider the story Heidegger tells about the early Greeks in which he highlights their own use of muthos discourse. Third, I will briefly attend to late Heidegger’s own use of poetry—the muthos discourse of choice of a thinker who in the latter stages of his career retreats almost entirely into non-conceptual, or inceptual, thinking as he becomes further estranged from the logos discourse of philosophy. It is my hope that this brief and incomplete attention to Heidegger’s later writings will support my argument by showing that Heidegger’s early phenomenological sympathy to the muthos discourse of Plato—and early critique of the logocentric Plato—is firmly in line with his eventual complete disillusionment with logos discourse and with his attempts to redirect thinking towards alternative, more hermeneutic, forms of discourse, particularly poetry.
6.1. Amplifying the Attack on Metaphysics and its Consequences

Heidegger’s attack on metaphysics is familiar and abiding. In *Being and Time*, he sets for himself the ambitious task of ‘destroying’ the history of ontology. If we are really to be able to ask the question of the meaning of being anew, Heidegger tells us that the ‘hardened’ tradition which has neglected this question must be ‘loosened up, and the concealments which it has brought about must be dissolved.’ But Heidegger is quite clear that such a destruction does not entail leveling and removing the apparatus of philosophical history altogether. Though we should not merely continue the path that the history of philosophy has trod, Heidegger tells us that ‘this destruction is just as far from having the negative sense of shaking off the ontological tradition. We must, on the contrary, stake out the positive possibilities of that tradition.’ Heidegger does not want to ‘bury the past in nullity;’ rather, he says of his project, ‘its aim is positive; its negative function remains unexpressed and indirect.’

But in the years after *Being and Time*, Heidegger amplifies his attack on metaphysics, particularly emphasizing the dire cultural consequences of traditional philosophy. In his 1935 lecture course *Introduction to Metaphysics*, a course which he himself suggested could serve as a companion to *Being and Time*, the familiar elements of *Being and Time* are present: the question of the meaning of being has been so neglected that ‘being for us is now just an empty word and an evanescent vapor,’ and

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449 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 44 [23].

450 In the preface to the seventh edition of *Being and Time*, Heidegger recommends that the reader simultaneously study *Introduction to Metaphysics*, the first course he chose for general publication. This fact is highlighted in the Translators’ Introduction to Heidegger’s *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans., Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), vii-viii.

451 Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 53 [38].
we must renew our questioning by first returning to the primordial sense of being present in the early Greek world. Here, Heidegger spends ample time discussing the Greek term \textit{phusis}—‘the emergence,’ the ‘unfolding that opens itself up, the coming-into-appearance in such unfolding, and holding itself and persisting in appearance—in short, the emerging-abiding sway.’\textsuperscript{452} Heidegger claims \textit{phusis} best gets at what being meant for the early Greeks: ‘in opposition to becoming, [\textit{phusis}] shows itself as constancy, constant present. This presence announces itself in opposition to seeming as appearing, as revealed presence.’\textsuperscript{453} Understood this way, \textit{phusis} has an essential connection to the primal sense of logos as gathering, a connection Heidegger spends considerable time mining in the early thinkers Parmenides and Heraclitus. This original sense of logos ‘is related to the originary gatheredness of Being, and Being means coming-into-unconcealment; this gathering therefore has the basic character of opening up, revealing.’\textsuperscript{454} Thus, both \textit{phusis} and logos are essentially related in that both have the character of revealing rather than concealing. This is important because it allows us to see how far away our current understanding of logos has fallen from this primordial one. Herein, of course, lies the problem. When the connection between being and logos is severed, we open the door for logos to become merely an assertion, a tool for attaining truth:

\textit{The true as the correct is now merely spread about and spread afar by way of discussion, instruction, and prescriptions, thereby becoming ever more leveled...}

out. Logos must be made ready as a tool for this. The hour of the birth of logic has arrived.455

Logos is now in the service of truth as correctness and the ominous era of logic is upon us.456

These concerns surely echo those of Being and Time, but the tone here is altered. Being and Time’s reassurances of the ‘positive aim’ of Heidegger’s critique of the past, are here overshadowed by dire warnings about the cost of failing to cast our glance far enough backwards. Our lack of attentiveness to being has radically changed our relationship to beings for the worse: when ‘human reason attains predominance, and even posits itself as absolute, the Being of beings must become thinkable in the pure thinking of mathematics. Being as calculable in this way...makes beings into something that can be ruled in modern, mathematically structured technology.’457 Heidegger does not mince words when spelling out the grim consequences of such use of ‘reason.’ This technological thinking, Heidegger claims, has ushered in ‘the flight of the gods, the destruction of the earth, the reduction of human beings to a mass, and the preeminence of the mediocre.’458

455 Heidegger, Introduction to Metaphysics, 201 [143].

456 For clarification, it is worth explicitly noting that when Heidegger speaks of the ‘logos’ of early Greek thinkers, he means a primal logos that, like muthos, share a relationship to being. This primal logos is not the logos of contemporary metaphysics and is not implicated in the forgetfulness of being. In fact, it shares all the features of muthos and poiesis and is not yet distinguishable from these other terms. Through the rest of this section, when I refer to primal logos, I do not mean to infuse it with the ‘logocentric’ baggage that comes with the logos of contemporary metaphysics and logic and that I have been opposing to muthos throughout the dissertation.

457 Heidegger, Introduction to Metaphysics, 207 [147-8].

458 Heidegger, Introduction to Metaphysics, 47 [34].
There is no question that here Heidegger’s cautionary language has a new urgency. The consequence of the forgetfulness of being is a technological culture, and the consequence of such a culture is nothing short of a ‘darkening of the world.’

Asking about beings as such and as a whole, asking the question of Being, is then one of the essential fundamental conditions for awakening the spirit, and thus for an originary world of historical Dasein, and thus for subduing the danger of the darkening of the world, and thus for taking over the historical mission of our people, the people of the center of the West. Only in these broad strokes can we make plain here to what extent asking the question of Being is in itself historical through and through, and that accordingly our questions, whether Being is to remain a mere vapor for us or whether it is to become the fate of the West, is anything but an exaggeration and a figure of speech.\textsuperscript{459}

In such warnings we see that the oblivion of being leads to a technological mindset rooted in the preeminence of logos, in the sense of ‘reason’ and ‘logic,’ that dominates philosophy. Thus, it should not come as a surprise that Heidegger ends \textit{Introduction to Metaphysics} with a fragment from his favored poet Friedrich Hölderlin. In the wake of Heidegger’s great critique of logocentric philosophy as science, logic and mathematical thinking, he turns to the muthos discourse of poetry as a fitting way to gesture towards an alternative role for thinking. Indeed, Heidegger’s poetic ending exhorts the reader to adopt the task of questioning as well as the recognition that ‘being able to question means being able to wait, even for a lifetime.’\textsuperscript{460} This patient questioning presents a compelling alternative to the impatience of the scientific quest for decisive, quantifiable results.

\textsuperscript{459} Heidegger, \textit{Introduction to Metaphysics}, 52-53 [38].

\textsuperscript{460} Heidegger, \textit{Introduction to Metaphysics}, 221 [157].
6.2 Muthos of the Early Greeks: The First Beginning

If Heidegger’s concern is that we have lost touch with the importance of the question of the meaning of being, with grave consequence, he must employ a compelling strategy to reignite our interest in this question. Heidegger has always revered the early Greeks for recognizing the connection between beings and being, but in his later work, Heidegger’s own story about the early Greeks takes on the character of mythic narrative of a grand Greek origin. By rehearsing philosophy’s history from Plato onward, Heidegger shows us what went wrong. But by returning to these Greeks prior to Plato, he allows us to see how thinking might have taken a different track. If we return to the ‘first beginning’ of the early Greek thinkers, we can position ourselves for what Heidegger will call ‘the other beginning’—the path Heidegger sets for thought by which the thinker can go beyond the early Greeks.

Heidegger’s discussion of these early Greeks provides evidence of his move towards muthos discourse in two ways. First, Heidegger singles out early Greek thought as a model precisely because it acknowledges the power of muthos to set beings out in truth. Secondly, Heidegger’s own tale of the great first beginning has a larger-than-life

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461 See for example Heidegger, Being and Time, 256 [213]. Here he says ‘Parmenides was the first to discover the Being of entities.’

462 For a detailed look at Heidegger’s mythologizing of the early Greeks, see John D. Caputo’s Demythologizing Heidegger (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1993). Caputo’s claim here is that it is Heidegger’s tendency to speak of the early Greeks in mythic terms that allows him to believe in the ‘unique power of German thinking and poetizing to recover the primordial power of early Greek Beginning’ (90)...and to wish that it not ‘be contaminated by what is not primordially Greek’ (118). Such views, Caputo thinks, are dangerously connected to Heidegger’s involvement with the Nazi Party. I’m not making or endorsing any such claim about Heidegger’s politics here. I only wish to show that Heidegger’s portrayal of the early Greeks in mythic fashion is further evidence of his sympathy to muthos discourse.

463 Heidegger’s distinction between the first beginning and the other beginning is found in many places, but it particularly pronounced in Contributions to Philosophy (from Enowning), trans., Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). See, for example, section 6.
quality of a myth; his starring characters—the presocratics—have a godlike connection to originary being. Thus, both the content and style of Heidegger’s story about the early Greeks give evidence to his sympathy to muthos discourse, a sympathy we have already seen emerge in his early comments on Plato.

As Heidegger tells the tale of the early Greeks, characterizations of their thought as poetry—as muthos discourse—abound. In Introduction to Metaphysics, for instance, Heidegger tells us both Heraclitus and Parmenides recognize that ‘unconcealment happens only in so far as it is brought about by the work: the work of the word as poetry, the work of stone in temple and statue, the work of the word as thinking.’\(^\text{464}\) But it is in Heidegger’s 1942-43 lecture course entitled Parmenides and Heraclitus that we find a particularly rich discussion of muthos discourse in the early Greeks, so it is to these lectures that we will briefly turn.

At the outset of his course on Heraclitus and Parmenides, Heidegger warns us that we tend to be skeptical about the prospect of learning anything from such ‘primitive thinkers.’ However, if we properly approach these two, ‘namely by [thinking] the thoughts both these thinkers have thought,’ we will realize that the skepticism is unfounded.\(^\text{465}\) Heidegger starts with Parmenides, and in order to acquire the ‘genuine relationship to the primordial thinker’ that he seeks, he begins a close reading of Parmenides’ ‘doctrinal’ or ‘didactic’ poem. Heidegger’s treatment of the beginning of the Parmenides’ poem is particularly interesting for our purposes because here he is quite explicit about the fact that we must pay attention to Parmenides’ form of discourse. He

\(^{464}\) Heidegger, Introduction to Metaphysics, 204 [146].

\(^{465}\) Heidegger, Parmenides, 3 [4-5].
recognizes the temptation to characterize Parmenides’ work as either poetry or philosophy:

The words of Parmenides have the linguistic form of verses and strophes. They seem to be a ‘poem.’ But because the words present a ‘philosophical doctrine,’ we speak of Parmenides’ ‘doctrinal poem’ or ‘didactic poem.’ Yet this characterization of his thoughtful utterances actually arises out of an impasse. We know poetry and poems and we also know philosophical treatises.

Heidegger cautions us against adopting either characterization too quickly: ‘Perhaps, however, we have here neither a ‘poem’ of ‘poesy’ nor a ‘doctrine.’

But if we are dealing here with neither a poem of poesy or a doctrine, how should we characterize Parmenides’ work? To answer this question, we must detour through Heidegger’s essay ‘On the Origin of the Work of Art,’ initially delivered as a lecture in 1935, but revised as late as 1956. It becomes clear in this essay that Heidegger uses the term ‘poetry’ in two distinct senses. There is poetry in the narrow sense, which is what we mean when we talk about poems as a form of art that uses a certain sort of ‘poetic’ language—‘verses and strophes,’ for example. This narrow definition of poetry Heidegger calls ‘poesy.’ But there is a broader sense of poetry as well. He explains: ‘Poetry is thought of here in so broad a sense and at the same time in such intimate essential unity with language and word, that we must leave open whether art in all its modes, from architecture to poesy, exhausts the essence of poetry.’ In other words, poesy is one form of poetry, but it is not identical to poetry in the broader sense. Heidegger clarifies the relationship: ‘Language is not poetry because it is the primal

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466 Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 2-3 [3-5].

467 Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 3 [4-5].

468 Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 3 [4-5].
poesy; rather, poesy propriates in language because language preserves the original essence of poetry.\textsuperscript{469} Though the broader definition of poetry is not yet fleshed out, we can see that poesy falls within poetry.

If we acknowledge this distinction between poesy and poetry, we can see why it is important to Heidegger that we not interpret Parmenides’ poem as either ‘doctrine’ or ‘a poem of poesy.’ To consign it to one of these two categories is to miss the fact that it more properly should be characterized as poetry in the broad sense. Understanding poetry in the broad sense is tremendously important to understanding Heidegger’s interpretation of Parmenides. Let’s return briefly to ‘The Origin of the Work of Art.’ Here Heidegger discusses the sort of language which ‘brings beings as beings into the open for the first time.’ Contrary to the typical understanding of language as a mere tool for ‘verbal exchange and agreement’—the view of contemporary logos—Heidegger is here talking about the language of primal logos. On this understanding of language, language is what names

beings for the first time, first brings beings to word and to appearance. Only this naming nominates beings to their Being from out of their Being. Such saying is a projecting of clearing, in which announcement is made of what it is that beings come into the open as.\textsuperscript{470}

Heidegger calls this language, by which beings are set out into the open, ‘projective saying.’ He then connects the dots between language, poetry and truth:


\textsuperscript{470} Heidegger, ‘Origin of the Work of Art,’ 198-199.
‘Projective saying is poetry…Poetry is the saying of the unconcealment of beings…the essence of poetry is the founding of truth.’

Now we can see, with respect to the Parmenides poem at hand, that Parmenides is neither laying out philosophical doctrine with logos discourse in the contemporary sense, nor is he merely presenting poesy in the sense of an aesthetic style. Rather, Parmenides is engaged in poetry in the broad sense—setting out beings in their being, saying the unconcealment of beings, setting them out in truth. And this is possible precisely because Parmenides uses language in its original, broad sense—as poetry, primal logos and muthos—rather than logos in the contemporary sense.

The connection between Parmenides, poetry and muthos becomes more pronounced as soon as Heidegger begins his reading of the poem. Heidegger makes much of the fact that the source of Parmenides’ revelations is the goddess ‘truth.’ He acknowledges that this seems strange to us as contemporary thinkers since ‘we would consider it extremely odd for a thinker to relate his thinking to the word of a divine being…Thinkers do not proclaim ‘revelations’ from a god…They state their own insights.’ In trying to reconcile this curiosity, Heidegger points out that one might maintain that the goddess is merely ‘abstract’—that nothing here has to do with ‘mythical experience,’ but rather a thinker who is ‘personifying’ the universal concept of ‘truth.’ In fact, Heidegger suggests,

If we consider that the start of Western thought is accomplished with the Greeks, according to the prevalent view, by a dissociation of ‘logos’ from ‘mythos’, then

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472 Heidegger, Parmenides, 5 [6-8].

473 Heidegger, Parmenides, 5 [6-8].
it seems entirely understandable that in the first ‘primitive’ attempts at such thinking there might still be preserved remnants of ‘mythical’ representation.\(^{474}\)

However, Heidegger warns that to adopts this traditional ‘from myth to logos’ understanding of ancient thought, we would reduce the goddess’ presence in the poem to ‘poetical and pseudo-mythical decoration.’ Though this might be the most prevalent reading of the text, it ‘nevertheless remains a singular error.’\(^{475}\) Heidegger firmly maintains that we cannot adequately approach Parmenides if we remain entrenched in the mindset which the history of philosophy since Plato has foisted on us. In this particular case, the required ‘renunciation of the prevailing views’ entails suspending our tendency to divide muthos discourse from logos discourse so that we may dismiss or demythologize the former. If we are able to avoid this temptation, by noting that muthos and logos both originally belong to the realm of primal language as a way of setting out beings in unconcealment, then we accomplish the first step, ‘whereby we pledge our heedfulness to the claim of the beginning…a beginning which is closer to us than what we are wont to consider nearest.’\(^{476}\)

Heidegger’s introduction to Parmenides’ poem has alerted us to two things. First, we cannot adopt the ‘widely held position’ that the Greek world moved from the superstition of myth to the clear light of logos as reason, and has progressed forward ever since. Secondly, when we reject this view that philosophy has progressed from Plato onward, instead seeing it as a falling away from an original experience of truth, it will become clear that we must return to thinkers like Parmenides, Heraclitus and

\(^{474}\) Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 6 [8-9].  
\(^{475}\) Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 6 [8-9].  
\(^{476}\) Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 6 [8-9].
Anaximander, because they, unlike any other thinkers, ‘think the beginning.’ Heidegger tells us how their thinking is different:

For these thinkers do not ‘take up’ the beginning in the way a scientist ‘attacks’ something. Neither do these thinkers come up with the beginning as a self-produced construction of thought. The beginning is not something dependent on the favor of these thinkers, where they are active in such and such a way, but rather, the reverse: the beginning is that which begins something with these thinkers—by laying a claim on them in such a way that from them is demanded an extreme retreating in the face of Being. The thinkers are begun by the beginning, ‘in-cepted’ [An-gefangenen] by the in-ception [An-fang]; they are taken up and gathered into it.477

So we have seen that these primordial thinkers’ thought is characterized by certain features: a receptivity to this ‘Beginning,’ the experiencing of aletheia as unconcealment, and the primordial connection to being that goes along with the experience of truth as unconcealment. Because their thought bears all these features, Heidegger considers it poetry in the broad sense, rather than philosophical doctrine. We have already gestured to the connection between poetry and muthos discourse, but later in the Parmenides lectures, Heidegger treats us to an explicit discussion of myth. This discussion supports the argument of this dissertation—that Heidegger’s sympathy to muthos discourse puts him in a unique position to read muthos discourse in Plato sympathetically.

Here Heidegger tells us that something has the character of muthos if it says something ‘about the essence of concealment and disclosure.’ He also tells us that the primordial thinker ‘thinks Being itself on the basis of unconcealedness and concealment.’478 If we attend to this connection, we cannot help but see that the primordial thinker thinks muthos. Since Heidegger heralds the presocratics as the

477 Heidegger, Parmenides, 7-8 [11-12].

478 Heidegger, Parmenides, 61 [89-91].
primordial thinkers who think the beginning, and muthos makes this thought possible, then it cannot escape our notice that here Heidegger again explicitly acknowledges muthos’ ability to disclose truth.

Having shown that the artificial divide between muthos and logos (evidenced in the ‘from myth to reason’ view of philosophy’s progress) is a misinterpretation, Heidegger goes on to explain in greater detail the primordial relationship between muthos and logos. Following a path already trod in Basic Questions of Philosophy, as mentioned above, here Heidegger again explains that for the earliest Greeks, muthos, logos and epos were all ways of expressing the sort of language that ‘preserves the relation of Being to man.’ It was not until later that logos is understood as reason in opposition to myth as legend. When we understand that logos, muthos and epos ‘belong together essentially,’ we will realize that ‘the ‘mythical’—the muthos-ical—is the disclosure and concealment contained in the disclosing-concealing word, which is the primordial appearance of the fundamental essence of Being itself.’ In short, the myth/logos divide that is presumed to structure the history of philosophy is not warranted, according to Heidegger. Both muthos and logos originally referred to primordial language that disclosed being—that set beings out in truth. It is only after the history of philosophy co-opts logos and turns it

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479 Heidegger also discusses this supposed divide between muthos and logos in What Is Called Thinking. There, he says ‘myth means the telling word…logos says the same; muthos and logos are not, as our current historians of philosophy claim, placed into opposition by philosophy as such; on the contrary the early Greek thinkers are precisely the ones to use mythos and logos in the same sense. Mythos and logos becomes separated and opposed only at the point where neither mythos nor logos can keep its original nature.’ Martin Heidegger, What is Called Thinking, trans., Fred D. Wieck and J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1968), 10.

480 Heidegger, Parmenides, 70 [103-104].

481 Heidegger, Parmenides, 70 [103-104].
into reason, that myth is denigrated for being unreasonable or unreliable. If we return to the original understanding of myth, we see the connection between muthos and truth.

What have we so far achieved in our brief and incomplete discussion of a handful of Heidegger’s later texts? Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that Heidegger’s reading of Plato is not so one-sidedly dismissive as it is often characterized. I have tried to claim that in fact Heidegger identifies a sympathetic Plato—the Plato who speaks in muthos discourse. Now that we have considered Heidegger’s discussion of muthos as it appears in the Parmenides lectures, we have further evidence to support Heidegger’s sympathy to just such a Plato, since he here explicitly lays out the view that muthos discourse grants access to the being of beings by allowing beings to show themselves in unconcealment. But there is an unanswered question that must be addressed before we proceed. If I have succeeded in showing that Heidegger is sympathetic to the Plato of muthos, why would later Heidegger allow this sympathetic Plato to all but drop out of the picture? The later texts, as we have seen, are peppered with the telling of Heidegger’s favorite history of philosophy—from Plato onward, logos was detached from muthos and came to mean ‘reason;’ truth came to be understood as correctness; being was reduced to presence. If the later Heidegger is even more explicitly sympathetic to muthos discourse, why does the sympathetic Plato fall away in favor of the mythic tale of the great beginning prior to Plato?

I believe the answer to this question is exactly what we should expect, given the argument of this dissertation as a whole: as we have seen throughout Heidegger’s work, when Heidegger engages the muthos discourse of Plato, he finds an ally; when he engages the logocentric elements of Plato, he finds an adversary. As we have just seen,
Heidegger’s later work amplifies the attack on the tradition of metaphysics as Heidegger tells a tale that valorizes the primal logos of the early Greeks and vilifies the logic of subsequent philosophy. As this tale takes on mythic proportions, and Heidegger shifts his attention even more to the early Greeks, he spends less time engaging Plato explicitly, with the result that the caricature of Plato as progenitor of the tradition abides while the sympathetic Plato who emerges in the close readings fades into the background. In Heidegger’s tale of the history of philosophy, there is need for Plato to play the familiar role of prototypical metaphysician and less time for nuanced close readings of Plato’s texts. As Heidegger the Geisteshistoriker paints the tradition in the broad strokes, the sympathetic Plato of the Sophist lectures, the cave allegory and the Theaetetus lectures only complicates Heidegger’s compelling narrative about the history of philosophy and the transformation of truth, the oblivion of being, the rise of reason and the metaphysics of presence.

But though there is surely some truth to this characterization of Heidegger’s later references to Plato, it is not the whole story. From time to time, the sympathetic Plato resurfaces in Heidegger’s later works, reminding us that when Heidegger takes the time to nuance his story about philosophy’s beginning, Plato still has a sympathetic role to play. By far the most interesting reemergence of the sympathetic Plato can be found later in the Parmenides lectures. Having discussed muthos generally, as we saw above, Heidegger turns to a discussion of muthos in Plato specifically. He takes up the Republic, referring to the familiar cave allegory of book VII, which here Heidegger explicitly calls ‘muthos.’ Heidegger reminds us that this myth in the dialogue’s middle is a myth about aletheia:
This ‘myth’ is known as Plato’s ‘cave allegory.’ Many meanings have been attributed to this ‘allegory’ but never the simple and most obvious. What is at issue in this ‘allegory’ as even its name suggests, is a cave, a hiding, a concealing, and also unconcealedness. This same Platonic dialogue on the polis, which contains a muthos about aletheia, concludes, at the end of Book X with another muthos. The highpoint of this muthos is what is says about lethe.  

So, here Plato is credited with giving us a myth about aletheia as unconcealedness but also a myth about lethe, or concealedness. Heidegger will lead us through an interpretation of this myth, but not without a hefty disclaimer: since Plato has been so severely co-opted by Christianity and traditional philosophy, it is almost impossible to read Plato in any other way. In fact, Heidegger tells us that

a Greek interpretation of the thinking of Plato is the most difficult, not because this thinking contains in itself special obscurities and abysses, but because the following ages, and still we today, are inclined to rediscover immediately our own, later thinking in this philosophy.

This confirms our prior speculation that sympathizing with Plato is difficult for a thinker bent on exposing the failures of the tradition that happily adopts Plato as its honored ancestor. It is no surprise then that early Greek thinkers who have been always on the margins of the tradition—even characterized as ‘presocratics,’ a term that defines them with reference to Socrates and Plato though they predate both—are better spokespersons for Heidegger’s critique of traditional thought.

Heidegger’s introduction in the Parmenides lectures to Plato’s concluding myth of the Republic highlights Plato’s status as a transitional figure, but still one who has one foot firmly in Greek thinking. Heidegger says that ‘the last work of the Greeks that names lethe in its essence is the muthos concluding Plato’s dialogue on the essence of the

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482 Heidegger, Parmenides, 92 [136-137].

483 Heidegger, Parmenides, 94 [139-140].
Here Heidegger sums up everything we have so far attributed to him regarding myth in Plato. Weighing in on the debate detailed in chapter one regarding Plato’s peculiar use of myths, Heidegger gives a remarkably clear endorsement of the view for which I have been arguing:

At the end of the dialogue on the _politeia_ Plato has Socrates tell a story. People have often been puzzled by the occurrence of myths in the Platonic dialogues. The reason they turn up from time to time is that Plato is indeed prepared to abandon the primordial thinking in favor of the later so-called ‘metaphysics,’ but precisely this incipient metaphysical thinking still has to preserve a recollection of the primordial thinking. Hence the story.\(^{485}\)

Though the logocentric Plato is clearly headed in the wrong direction, in the moments of _muthos_, it is clear that he still has access to primordial thinking. Thus, it is also clear that engagements with this Plato—the Plato of myth—can provide positive possibilities for interpretation, not merely fodder for critique.

Though Heidegger offers a lengthy discussion of this concluding myth, one rich in the etymologies and historical license we have come to expect from him, for our purposes it will suffice to focus on the connection between _aletheia_ as we saw it emerge in the cave allegory and _lethe_ as it appears here in the myth of Er. If the allegory of the cave gave us insight into _aletheia_ as unconcealedness, the myth of Er takes up _lethe_—concealedness. As Heidegger never lets us forget, _aletheia_ is composed of the alpha privative and the word _lethe_. Thus concealment is properly part of unconcealment—for a being to show itself in unconcealment, it must be wrested from concealment. When speaking of the part of the myth of Er that deals with the place of _Lethe_, Heidegger says

\(^{484}\) Heidegger, _Parmenides_, 95 [140-142].

\(^{485}\) Heidegger, _Parmenides_, 98 [145-146].
this: ‘lethe as essential withdrawling and concealing never lets anything emerge, and hence it sets itself against all coming forth, i.e. against phusis. The field of lethe prevents every disclosure of beings, of the ordinary. In the essential place of lethe everything disappears.\(^486\)

In sum, the muthos which concludes the Republic highlights the relationship between aletheia and lethe. They are essentially related and address the concealment and unconcealment of beings. Plato’s use of this myth show that he still participates in ‘Greek’ thinking, even as he unwittingly prepares the way for a transition. Though lethe will go on to be understood by the tradition as ‘forgetting,’ in this myth one cannot miss its connection to concealment and unconcealment. As we saw in reference to the Sophist dialogue, the cave allegory and the Theaetetus dialogue, the Plato who tells Er’s story is not the caricature of philosophy’s inaugural metaphysician, but rather a transitional figure who maintains a foothold in the tradition of early Greek thought.

6.3 Heidegger’s Poetics: The Other Beginning

We have seen that early Greek thought is steeped in muthos discourse of myth and poetry. As later Heidegger tells the story, early Greek thinkers have access to truth as unconcealment because their language—muthos, poetry, primal logos—allows beings to show themselves in their being. We have seen Heidegger use Parmenides as an example of muthos discourse and a striking alternative to the sort of logos discourse adopted by contemporary philosophy. We have even seen Heidegger credit Plato with still having access to this function of muthos discourse, seen particularly in his use of

\(^{486}\) Heidegger, Parmenides, 118 [175-176].
myths like the myth of Er. But though Heidegger thinks there is much to be learned from a return to primordial thinkers and their language, their relationship with beings and their experience of \textit{aletheia}, Heidegger does not think that a simple return to this sort of thinking charts an adequate path for contemporary thinkers. The early Greeks experienced the world primordially, but they were not aware of this fact, and consequently did not move far enough in the direction Heidegger believes thinking must go. For this reason, Heidegger frequently calls for a thinking that is ‘more Greek’ even than that of the Greeks. If we investigate this peculiar claim, we will see the later Heidegger move even more deeply into muthos, particularly poetry, in an effort to enact the ‘other beginning’ in which thinking charts a new course. In this section thus far, I have aimed to show that Heidegger’s sympathies to the muthocentric Plato prefigure his explicit commitment to muthos discourse in the later part of his career. The last step in that effort will be to briefly note some of his most pronounced ventures into poetry as muthos discourse.

We recall, of course, that in \textit{Introduction to Metaphysics}—and elsewhere—Heidegger takes traditional philosophy to task, calling for an alternative form of thinking. Heidegger spends much of his later career ambitiously taking up his own challenge. It would be impossible to give a comprehensive description of the fruits of these labors, but we will touch down in several texts, hoping to get a sense of the way in which Heidegger’s later work moves further from the logos discourse of metaphysics towards muthos discourse of poetry.

Two texts worth turning to are Heidegger’s \textit{Beitrage}, or \textit{Contributions to Philosophy} and also the lecture course \textit{Basic Questions of Philosophy} from the late
1930’s. Written at roughly the same time, they take up many of the same issues. Never presented publically during Heidegger’s lifetime, *Beitrage* represents Heidegger’s attempt at the alternative form of thinking he advocates. This is the sort of thinking we must pursue ‘in the age of crossing from metaphysics to be-ing-historical thinking.’

Here Heidegger again speaks of early Greek thinking as ‘the first beginning’ and a model for our own thinking, but acknowledges that early Greek thinking does not go far enough in the right direction. Though the Greeks let beings display themselves in their being, and therefore had greater access to being than subsequent philosophy, being for them, as *phusis* and primal logos, was presence: ‘The Greeks experienced and conceived of beings as such as what is constant…Beings are for the Greeks what is present, *pareon*, over and against what is absent, *apeon*.’ So the early Greeks are revered because they recognized being as unconcealment. But they fall short because this view of being can only see beings as those things which are present in unconcealment. On this view, being doesn’t move beyond presence, thus the subsequent history of metaphysics was able to become a metaphysics of presence—a metaphysics concerned only about beings in their presence while operating in total oblivion of the question of being itself.

It is because Heidegger recognizes the danger of being as presencing in the early Greeks that he distinguishes the ‘first beginning’ of Parmenides and Heraclitus from ‘another beginning’ which we must undertake, following early Greek cues, but going further. According to Heidegger, there is a fundamental difference between the Greek

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489 Heidegger, *Contributions*, 15 [19-21].
understanding of unconcealment as aletheia and the path our inquiry should take today. ‘For the Greeks, unconcealedness remained unquestioned’ in spite of the fact that it ‘rested directly in the path of the most properly Greek philosophical inquiry into beings!’; however, ‘for us it is what is most worthy of questioning.’

But for this questioning to occur, ‘inceptual thinking is necessary as an encounter between the first beginning, which still needs to be won back, and the other beginning, which is still to be unfolded.’ This inceptual thinking—the alternative, non-conceptual thinking that Heidegger pursues in his later career—allows one to return to the first beginning and experience be-ing as an event that grounds all experience. Heidegger calls this event ereignis, translated in Contributions to Philosophy as ‘enowning.’ Enowning is very difficult to describe, but to the extent that we can say anything about it, perhaps it can be thought of as the event that grounds being. Heidegger says ‘inceptual thinking is enthing of the truth of be-ing and thus engrounding of the ground. By resting on the ground, this thinking first of all manifests its grounding, gathering and holding power.’ More than simply referring to the being of beings, enowning makes possible, or grounds, the being of beings.

490 Heidegger, Basic Questions of Philosophy, 115 [132-133].

491 Heidegger, Contributions, 40 [56-58].

492 Heidegger has now adopted Seyn rather than Sein (in this translation be-ing rather than being) in order to show that ‘being here is no longer thought metaphysically.’ He explains: ‘Be-ing historical inquiring into be-ing is not reversing metaphysics but rather de-cision as projecting-opening of the ground of that differentiation in which the reversing must also maintain itself. With such a projecting-opening, this inquiry moves completely out of that differentiation of beings and being.’ Heidegger, Contributions, 307 [435-436].

493 Heidegger, Contributions, 40 [56-58]

So, Heidegger has told us that this other beginning must follow the Greek beginning in its recognition that \textit{aletheia} is unconcealment—that truth and being are essentially connected. But it must go further by means of inceptual thinking, enownment, whereby be-ing is thought more primordially than it is by the Greeks, as an event of appropriation, a ground, a clearing or space in which beings show themselves. Heidegger is quite clear that inceptual thinking is the path philosophy must take and he is equally clear that the poet must be the guide. Of his favorite poet Hölderlin, Heidegger says ‘we would today hardly know anything of the character and the necessity of a reflection on the first beginning, if [he] did not stand in the path of our history,’ if he had not been able to ‘acknowledge in an original way the primordial question of the Greeks and to unfold it.’ \footnote{Heidegger, \textit{Basic Questions of Philosophy}, 117 [135-6].}

We have begun to see above the connections Heidegger sees between myth, poetry and inceptual thinking. All are forms of muthos discourse and all are alternatives to the logocentric discourse of traditional philosophy; furthermore, it is only by means of such alternative forms of thinking that we can go further down the path initially blazed by the primordial Greeks. Hölderlin as a poet allows us to glimpse what thought might look like on this model. Our final step is to touch down in some later essays where Heidegger, inspired by Hölderlin’s poetry, moves even further into muthos; from poetic language to invocation of the Gods, Heidegger’s thought here looks much less like traditional philosophy and more like poetry. Consider, for example, Heidegger’s 1951 essay ‘Building Dwelling Thinking.’ Here Heidegger gives us a mythical image of the relationship between concealment and unconcealment: ‘the divinities are the beckoning
messengers of the godhead. Out of the holy sway of the godhead, the god appears in his presence or withdraws into his concealment." The same essay later highlights our relationship to the world with the poetic refrain: ‘mortals dwell…mortals dwell…mortals dwell.’

Similar figures of myth and poetry dominate the 1950 essay ‘The Thing.’ ‘The gift of the pouring out is drink for mortals...The outpouring is the libation poured out for the immortal gods.’ Here these poetic references encourage us to see ‘things’ as they show themselves in unconcealment, rather than as science sees them. In the technical language of science, the jug that pours out libations becomes ‘a hollow within which a liquid spreads…a nonentity.’ The effects of such scientific reductions have been catastrophic: science ‘already had annihilated things as things long before the atom bomb exploded. The bomb’s explosion is only the grossest of all gross confirmations of the long-since-accomplished annihilation of the thing: the confirmation that the thing as a thing remains nil. The thingness of the thing remains concealed, forgotten.’ Poiesis—muthos—is the answer to this sort of thinking. Where science tries to exhaustively determine and clarify, poetry is content to appear as ‘lawless caprice,’ committed to remaining on its path even though it ‘always risks going astray, leading astray.’

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499 Heidegger, ‘The Thing,’ 184. This is how Heidegger characterizes his thought in ‘The Thing’ in response to a student asking questions about his thinking.
The significance of poetry as a path for thinking becomes most clear when Heidegger posits it as an alternative to ‘the way of revealing that holds sway in the essence of modern technology’—enframing (Gestell). As the logical, technological way of understanding things, enframing is at odds with poiesis. As poiesis reveals, enframing conceals. In this difference between poiesis and enframing, perhaps we can most clearly see what is at stake in the distinction between logos and muthos:

As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but exclusively as standing-reserve [as in enframing]…he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve. Meanwhile, man, precisely as the one so threatened, exalts himself and postures as lord of the earth…This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: it seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself…but enframing does not simply endanger man in his relationship to himself and to everything that is.…Above all, enframing conceals that revealing which, in the sense of poiesis lets what presences come forth into appearance…The threat to man does not come in the first instance from the potentially lethal machines and apparatus of technology. The actual threat has already afflicted man in his essence. The rule of enframing threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth.

Here Heidegger makes it clear that the task for thinking is to think poetically. It is only in this way that humans can avoid the dire consequences of a technologized world and experience primal truth as the unconcealment of beings. This call to revisit poiesis in the broad sense that includes muthos confirms what we have referred to as Heidegger’s sympathy with muthos discourse and which we have identified throughout his career. It is this sympathy which motivated Heidegger to attend to frequently overlooked parts of Plato.

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500 Heidegger, ‘The Question Concerning Technology,’ in Basic Writings, 325.

Having now concluded our study of Heidegger’s often overlooked engagements with Plato, it is worth revisiting what has hopefully been accomplished. My primary goal has been to show that the traditional reading of Heidegger’s Plato—a reading that takes Heidegger’s appropriation of Plato to be deeply unfair—fails to attend closely enough to the nuances in Heidegger’s sustained discussions of Plato. Once this attention is given, I believe an alternative characterization of Heidegger’s Plato emerges: though Heidegger is clearly critical of the logocentric Plato, he finds an ally in the muthocentric Plato. This interpretive framework, which I have applied primarily to close readings of Heidegger’s studies of certain Platonic dialogues, has farther reaching implications for future study which run in two directions—in one direction calling for revisions to our reading of Heidegger; in the other direction, our reading of Plato.

With respect to our reading of Heidegger, this interpretive framework enables us to rethink our reading of Heidegger as an interpreter of Plato, but also encourages us to begin thinking about the relationship of muthos and logos in Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology. Though I have not devoted much space to this consideration, hopefully it has become clear that Heidegger’s interest in the muthocentric Plato and later in poiesis as an alternative form of thought, are part of his effort to redescribe phenomenology in a way that goes beyond mere logos discourse as theory, syllogistic logic and representational truth. In this process, Heidegger highlights the derivative nature of traditional philosophy, which should properly be understood as grounded in more primordial thought. Though this does not amount to rejecting logos, it does amount to a rethinking of logos discourse and its relationship to alternative forms of discourse including myth and poetry. Going forward, this recognition sets the stage for further
efforts at engaging Heidegger’s later work that do not characterize it as a retreat into the irrational.

With respect to our reading of Plato, Heidegger’s engagement with the phenomenological Plato may present positive possibilities for rereading the Plato of myths in a way that avoids the temptation either to treat Plato’s muthos discourse as literary adornment or to measure it by the benchmark of reason, rather recognizing it as an alternative form of discourse worthy of attention in its own right. With his comment that ‘when Plato wants to say something fundamental and essential in philosophy’\(^\text{502}\) he turns to muthos discourse, Heidegger encourages us to heighten rather than relax our attention when Plato’s characters turn to stories. When he reminds us that Plato’s muthos discourse acts as ‘a clue [that] leads us to what simple description, be it ever so accurate and rigorous, can never grasp,’\(^\text{503}\) he calls us to question our assumption that truth resides only in the correspondence of a thing to its simple description. Though we have not fully investigated how these insights would affect readings of Plato, hopefully it is clear that there is space for a profitable future discussion of the place of myths in the dialogues of this more phenomenological Plato.

Thus, it is my hope that our study of these few engagements between the sympathetic Heidegger and the muthocentric Plato has not only revised our picture of Heidegger’s Plato but also highlighted the profitability of revisiting the status of myth in Plato. In the final analysis, though the picture of Heidegger’s Plato presented here may differ substantially from the traditional picture, one description of Heidegger the historian

\(^{502}\) Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 12 [17-18].

\(^{503}\) Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 13 [18-19].
remains unchanged. As always, Heidegger’s unorthodox engagements with the history of philosophy alert us to new possibilities for interpretation of the familiar canon and prevent complacent acceptance of philosophy’s traditional tale of its own history. As such, Heidegger’s interpretive efforts with respect to Plato are surely contributions to what Gadamer rightly called Heidegger’s ‘incomparable renewal of the tradition.’

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