

Sophistes

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*Plato's Dialogue and Heidegger's
Lectures in Marburg (1924-25)*

Edited by

Diego De Brasi
and Marko J. Fuchs

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	vii
Introduction	1
Heidegger's Lectures on Plato's <i>Sophist</i> and their Importance for Modern Plato Scholarship <i>Diego De Brasi and Marko J. Fuchs</i>	
Chapter One.....	27
Plato and Heidegger on Sophistry and Philosophy <i>Jens Kristian Larsen</i>	
Chapter Two	61
Heidegger: Sophist and Philosopher <i>Catalin Partenie</i>	
Chapter Three	75
Negation as Relation: Heidegger's Interpretation of Plato's <i>Sophist</i> 257b3–259d1 <i>Laura Candiotta</i>	
Chapter Four.....	95
Is the 'In-Itself' Relational? Heidegger and Contemporary Scholarship on Plato's <i>Sophist</i> 255c–e <i>Nicolas Zaks</i>	
Chapter Five	113
The Term <i>symplokē</i> in <i>Symposium</i> 202b1 and in <i>Sophist</i> 240c1ff, 259d–261c: Heidegger's Interpretation of the Concept of "Interconnection" in Platonic Thought <i>Argyri G. Karanasiou</i>	
Chapter Six	131
<i>Tékhnē</i> in Plato's <i>Sophist</i> (Discussing Heidegger's Opinion) <i>Maia Shukhoshvili</i>	

Chapter Seven.....	143
Ὅρθολογία περὶ τὸ μὴ ὄν: Heidegger on the Notion of Falsehood in Plato's <i>Sophist</i> <i>Olga Alieva</i>	
Contributors.....	157

CHAPTER ONE

PLATO AND HEIDEGGER ON SOPHISTRY AND PHILOSOPHY

JENS KRISTIAN LARSEN

The present chapter investigates Heidegger's early understanding of Platonic dialectic in its contrast to sophistry as this comes to expression in his *Lectures on Plato's Sophist*. According to Heidegger, sophistry is a possible way of being, a way we, as human beings, may relate to the 'world' and 'ourselves', through speech, through *lógos*. More precisely, Heidegger understands sophistry as the opposite of philosophical inquiry, as what philosophy is not. But this means, Heidegger claims, that a satisfactory account of sophistry is only possible from the perspective of philosophy, from the positive phenomenon of which sophistry is the opposite (GA 19, 352); sophistry can only be understood if one knows what its opposition, philosophy, is, and knows it from 'the inside'. According to Heidegger it is this problem that stands at the centre of Plato's dialogue the *Sophist*. The stated purpose of the dialogue is to make the being of sophistry apparent and this, Heidegger claims, is possible only if the attempt to do so at the same time illustrates what philosophy is, not by defining philosophy, but by being philosophical (GA 19, 12; 191; 236; 245–46).¹ In other words, only a philosophical disclosure of sophistry will

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¹ All references to Heidegger are to the Gesamtausgabe; translations of *Sein und Zeit* are by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, whereas the translation of GA 19 is by Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer. The translations have been modified in many places without specific notice. References to Plato are to *Platonis Opera*, volume I, ed. E. A. Duke, W. F. Hicken, W. S. M. Nicoll, D. B.

bring the difference between sophistry and philosophy to light, and it is only in light of this difference that we will be able to understand what philosophy and sophistry, respectively, are.

Accordingly a major theme in Heidegger's interpretation of the *Sophist* is Plato's understanding of philosophy, which according to Heidegger must be seen as a specific type of disclosing activity, as a type of *alētheúein* that is fundamentally at odds with sophistry. Of course, Heidegger does not discuss Plato's understanding of philosophy and sophistry merely in order to give a historically correct interpretation. While discussing Plato's conception of philosophy and sophistry, Heidegger at the same time seeks to arrive at a primordial understanding of philosophy by entering into a critical discussion with Plato. The interpretation of Plato is part of the 'Destruktions'-programme characteristic of Heidegger's interpretations of philosophical texts (set out in §6 of *Sein und Zeit*), the goal of which is to rid the classical texts of the debris of tradition that stands in the way of a real appropriation of the texts, in order to uncover what is unsaid in them, namely the "primordial experiences" and hidden sources from which the "categories and concepts" of the tradition flow (GA 2, 29–31, see also GA 19, 10–11; GA 18, 66; and GA 62, 360–61). According to Heidegger, we "live off" the understanding the tradition gives us, often—but not always—by taking for granted the results previous thinkers pass on to us. Still, by engaging the tradition questioningly, we may bring the insights lying dormant in the calcified results handed over to us in the tradition to light, thereby resurrecting what remains unsaid in the classical texts as a potential leading to real questioning. This is what Heidegger attempts to accomplish in his lecture course on Plato's *Sophist*.

To investigate Heidegger's early understanding of sophistry is thus a challenging task, since this understanding cannot be isolated from his broader interpretation of Plato's understanding of philosophy or from his own understanding of philosophy, developed in discussion with the philosophical tradition. Moreover, as Heidegger's interpretation of Plato is primarily based on a reading of the *Sophist*, a text that may not be typical of Plato, we need to look at the *Sophist* itself if we wish to evaluate Heidegger's engagement with Plato. Accordingly, the chapter will have two main parts. The first part will focus on Plato's *Sophist*, in particular on

Robinson, and J. C. G. Strachan, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); volume II-V, ed. J. Burnet, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1900f.); *Platonis Respublica*, ed. S. R. Slings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); the translation of the *Sophist* is by Eva Brann, Peter Kalkavage and Eric Salem. The translation has been slightly modified at certain points without specific notice.

the connection between *aretē*, virtue, and the inquiry into sophistry in the dialogue. Here a now common reading of the *Sophist* will be examined critically. The second part will focus on Heidegger's interpretation of philosophy and sophistry in the light of the *Sophist* and will ask what role, if any, *aretē* plays in this interpretation. First, however, a few words about Heidegger's preoccupation with the *Sophist* are necessary.

I. Why the *Sophist*?

In Heidegger's early interpretation of ancient philosophy the lecture course on the *Sophist* stands out in being the only one in which Heidegger explicitly interprets Plato. Here Heidegger delivers a detailed account of Platonic dialectic and its contrast to sophistry, but apart from a digression that discusses Plato's *Phaedrus*, no other Platonic dialogues are treated at length in order to illuminate Plato's understanding of dialectic and sophistry. Instead, Heidegger draws heavily on Aristotelian texts since we need, according to him, to go through the conceptually speaking clearer thought of Aristotle in order to understand Plato correctly. That no other Platonic dialogues are consulted is apparently a consequence of Heidegger's conviction that the *Sophist* is of a much higher scientific rank than the dialogues Heidegger takes to be Plato's earlier dialogues (GA 19, 11–12; 165; 189; 198–99; 312–13). Hence, we may gather, Heidegger regards the distinction between philosophy and sophistry that can be read out of the *Sophist* as more revealing, truer, than the one displayed in, for example, the *Protagoras*.

This has led a number of scholars such as Stanley Rosen, Drew Hyland, and Francisco Gonzalez to seriously question Heidegger's interpretation of Platonic philosophy, at least as it is expressed in the period around *Sein und Zeit*. For according to these scholars, one should be careful about identifying the picture we get of philosophy and sophistry from the *Sophist* with a picture that Plato would himself endorse.² In contrast to what is the case in most dialogues that discuss sophistry, it is not Socrates who leads the discussion in the *Sophist*. Instead, it is a guest or stranger (*xénos*) from Elea. But who is this guest? Are his views also Plato's views? These questions lead naturally to a larger question, namely how one should understand the relation between statements made by the *dramatis personae* of any Platonic dialogue and Plato's own views, a

² See Hyland (2004), 21–23 and Gonzalez (2009), 8–63; both Hyland and Gonzalez follow Stanley Rosen's interpretation of the difference between the philosophic outlook of the Eleatic guest, the main interlocutor in Plato's *Sophist*, and Socrates, see e.g. Rosen (1983), 22–28.

question we need not discuss here. It is sufficient to point out two traits by which the guest may seem to differ from Plato's Socrates, traits that might, depending on how one sees the relation mentioned, lead one to wonder whether the guest should be regarded as a spokesman for Plato himself.³

According to many interpreters, the guest carries out the philosophical inquiry in a manner that differs from Socrates's way of discussing philosophical matters. The inquiry in the *Sophist* is formally cast as a question-and-answer procedure and as such it resembles a Socratic conversation. But whereas Socrates is commonly believed to question his interlocutor's convictions with a view to their 'psychic health', the guest does not seem interested in testing the convictions of his interlocutors. In fact, he explicitly states that he will only carry out his philosophical inquiry as a conversation if his interlocutor "submits to guidance easily and painlessly" (217d1–2)—otherwise he will prefer to carry it out as a monologue. What is commonly regarded as a fundamental aspect of a Socratic dialogue, the testing of the convictions of others through *élenchos*, thus seems to disappear.⁴ Additionally, the guest seems bent on leading the inquiry to results he himself regards as solid, a trait that many see as being in radical opposition to the professedly ignorant Socrates.⁵

Another apparent difference is the following. Whereas Socrates is often regarded as concerned primarily with questions about virtue and the good,⁶ i.e. ethical or political questions, the guest, it is often assumed, is not concerned with such matters at all,⁷ but merely with ontological questions. Since Heidegger's thinking may also appear to have a strong or one-sided ontological focus that tends to exclude ethical or political questions, it is easy to assume that Heidegger regards the *Sophist* as superior to supposedly earlier dialogues precisely because it disregards questions about the good and the virtues.⁸ But what if the guest does not represent Plato's understanding of philosophy and sophistry at all? Then the notion of Platonic philosophy that Heidegger both appropriates and criticizes in the lecture course would, because it is founded on the guest's

³ Whether there is a Platonic Socrates is of course a matter of controversy. Here we merely point to features different scholars have thought distinguish the Eleatic guest from what they regard as Plato's Socrates.

⁴ E.g. Frede (1996), 138; Hyland (2004), 24.

⁵ E.g. Stenzel (1961), 2; Rosen (1983), 8; Frede (1996), 138–139; Hyland (2004), 22.

⁶ This traditional view of Socrates finds its classic statement in Cicero (*Tusc.* V.10), who likely depended on Xenophon (*Mem.* 1.1.11 and 16). Modern versions of it tend to look to Aristotle (e.g. *Met.* 1078b17–23 and *PA* 642a28–31).

⁷ The classic expression of this can be found in Stenzel (1961), 38–39.

⁸ This is the view of Gonzalez (2009), 29–51.

teaching, not represent Plato's own view. Moreover, this misguided understanding of Plato could be regarded as the result of Heidegger's own understanding of philosophy as an ethically neutral inquiry about the being of beings.

This is essentially the claim advanced against Heidegger by Stanley Rosen, Drew Hyland and, most emphatically, Francisco Gonzalez.⁹ They contend that the early Heidegger violently aligns Plato's conception of philosophy with his own ontological understanding of it and criticizes it in light of this understanding. In so doing, they suggest, Heidegger misunderstands Plato's ontology and overlooks the ethical implications of Plato's dialogical understanding of philosophy.¹⁰

II. The Guest of Plato's *Sophist*

In order to evaluate Heidegger's interpretation of the *Sophist* and thereby his interpretation of Plato, we therefore have to ask what kind of philosopher the guest in Plato's *Sophist* is. According to Stanley Rosen, he is distinguished from Socrates by the fact that he is "guided in his analytical work by mathematical reasoning", which among other things comes to the fore in his attempt to make a technically sound distinction between philosophy and sophistry, an attempt that ultimately fails because a distinction between philosopher and sophist "cannot be made on the basis of a 'scientific' or 'technical' definition."¹¹ In a similar vein, Drew Hyland states that the guest's way of conducting philosophical inquiry is "value-free", a feature that "stands in the starkest contrast to the interests and procedures of Socrates, for whom the idea of the Good is the idea of all ideas [...] for whom the issue of what is good, what is best, is always at stake".¹² That the guest disregards the idea of the Good or, alternatively, a conception of the good in his philosophical inquiries is a view that is advanced in Julius Stenzel's *Studien zur Entwicklung der Platonischen Dialektik*, first published in 1916, a work worth considering since it has had quite an impact on subsequent interpretations on Plato's *Sophist*, including Heidegger's and Stanley Rosen's.

⁹ Rosen (1983), 4–6; Hyland (2004), 30; Gonzalez (2009), 60–63. Rosen does not consider Heidegger's interpretation of the *Sophist* in itself—presumably because the lecture course became available only after Rosen's study had been published.

¹⁰ A similar, if less direct, accusation is advanced by Gadamer (1998), 67, see also Gadamer (1990), 367–68. Gadamer's interpretation of the *Sophist*, however, differs radically from the interpretations offered by Rosen, Hyland and Gonzalez.

¹¹ Rosen (1983), 8–10.

¹² Hyland (2004), 29.

In this work, Stenzel proposes a developmental thesis, according to which a radical change in Plato's outlook takes place in Plato's supposedly later dialogues. Whereas Plato's earlier focus was on ethical problems, a focus that culminated in the teaching about the Idea of the Good in book 6 and 7 of the *Republic*, he now attempts to gain a more "encompassing understanding of reality" as his interest turns towards the fields of theoretical and natural philosophy;¹³ the objects he is investigating in turn force him to change both his method and his conception of the Forms or Ideas. Forms become more like concepts (*Begriffe*) than metaphysical entities, and the new method by which such concepts are to be defined is division according to *genus proximum* and *differentia specifica*.¹⁴ This new method is a "free logic", disconnected from a concept of the good and the useful.¹⁵ Stenzel even goes so far as to claim that a Form is now a "subject [*Substrat*]" or "the constancy of species [*Konstanz der Arten*]" found in "the realm of classes of natural science [*naturwissenschaftlichen Klassenreich*]"¹⁶ Plato's new interest is thus to define the particular concrete being (*das einzelne Wirkliche*) in a *scientific* manner,¹⁷ which in the *Sophist* is exemplified through the attempt to deliver a scientific definition of the sophist.¹⁸

The basic premise of this seminal interpretation which was to a certain extent accepted by Heidegger (see GA 22, 114),¹⁹ namely that the discussion we find in the *Sophist* disregards ethical or 'normative' questions, is shared by Rosen, Hyland and Gonzalez. But in contrast to Stenzel and Heidegger who suppose this indicates a break with a more Socratic period in Plato, they do not see the Eleatic guest as representing Plato's new position. Rather, they regard the *confrontation* between a Socratic understanding of philosophy and a more technical understanding, represented by the Eleatic guest, as a central feature of the argument of the *Sophist*.²⁰ Accordingly, an adequate reading of Plato's dialogue should focus on and interpret the significance of this confrontation. This is precisely what Heidegger does not do; according to Gonzalez, Heidegger

¹³ Stenzel (1961), 1.

¹⁴ Stenzel (1961), 44.

¹⁵ Stenzel (1961), 38–39.

¹⁶ Stenzel (1961), 1.

¹⁷ Stenzel (1961), 2.

¹⁸ A prolonged critique of Stenzel's understanding of the supposedly new method of division can be found in Larsen (2011).

¹⁹ We shall return to the question to what extent Heidegger accepts it below, see pages 48–51.

²⁰ Hyland (2004), 23.

therefore fails to notice “the many indications in the dialogue that this disassociation of philosophy from ethics [sc. characteristic of the Eleatic guest or stranger] is a problem. Most importantly, he does not see that this disassociation results in the Stranger’s failure to distinguish the philosopher from the sophist.”²¹

But does the Eleatic guest disassociate philosophy from ethical considerations? The strongest support for this claim is located in a passage from the *Sophist* (227a6–c6) and a further passage from the *Statesman* (266d7–10), both of which form the basis of Stenzel’s interpretation. Supposedly, these descriptions indicate that the guest’s method is as ‘value free’ or ‘neutral’ as is the ontology he expounds through the investigation. In the present context, it is enough to look at the former passage.

The passage itself is quite short. In order to appreciate fully what it tells us about the Eleatic guest, however, it is necessary to look at the context in which we find it, the difficult sixth definition of the sophist. Prior to this passage the guest has distinguished two types of dividing or discerning (*diakrínein*), one which separates better from worse and one which separates like from like (226d1–3). This distinction may seem crucial for the entire investigation carried out in the *Sophist*. At the beginning of the *Statesman*, a dialogue that in a dramatic sense follows directly upon the *Sophist*, Socrates speaks of the difference between sophist and philosopher as a difference in worth and honour (*Plt.* 257b2–4). If Socrates is right, a sound definition of sophistry that takes its difference from philosophy properly into account would thus have to account for the ways in which they differ in worth and honour. According to readings that follow Stenzel, however, the guest explicitly refrains from taking such considerations into account.

In the passage used to legitimize this claim the guest explains that, since the way of inquiry (*méthodos*) he and Theaetetus are following seeks only to understand which arts are akin and which are not, it honours them all alike; accordingly it does not care more or less for sponging than for drinking medicine, just as it regards the general and the lice-catcher as representing the art of hunting equally well (227a10–b2). This is certainly a paradoxical feature of his procedure, in so far as common opinion, *dóxa*, normally takes such differences in value into account when thinking about these arts; the art of the physicians is regarded more highly than the one connected with bathing (if there even is such an art), to say nothing of the general compared with the lice-catcher. To Stenzel, this indicates that the guest is a spokesman for a neutral, or scientific, ontology that he sees as

²¹ Gonzalez (2009), 50–51.

superior to the normative ontology propounded by Plato's Socrates.²² Rosen, Hyland and Gonzalez, on the other hand, see it as an indication of the guest's problematic understanding of philosophical inquiry. He deliberately disregards all normative issues and this is why he fails to differentiate philosophy from sophistry.²³

An attentive reading of the text that follows, however, reveals it as questionable whether this feature of the guest's *méthodos* turns him into a proponent of a neutral ontology. First, the guest states that his *méthodos* regards the arts as equally honourable, i.e. he does not *disregard* honour, but rather accords it to all arts. The reason for this, he states, is that the *méthodos* aims to understand what is alike or akin in the arts and what is not. This can be read as a reminder to Theaetetus of the purpose of their joint investigation: the goal of the inquiry is to find out whether sophistry and philosophy are or are not of the same kind (217a7–9). At the beginning of the dialogue, we learn that the philosopher, in particular, is difficult to make out. To some he appears to be “in no way honourable and to others in every way worthy” (216c7–8). But this implies that if one is to distinguish philosophy from sophistry properly, it hardly suffices to insist that one is worth more than the other, as if one already knew what they are. People do not agree *what* philosophy is and hence they *honour* it differently. In order to show that philosophy is more honourable than sophistry, we therefore first have to show what each of them is.²⁴ When the guest claims that his *méthodos* honours all arts equally, this may, accordingly, mean merely that it leaves honour out of the question, that it suspends ordinary and everyday evaluations in the process of establishing what something is. This need not imply that the guest himself disregards questions of worth; having finished his inquiry into the nature of philosophy and sophistry, we may well imagine that he concludes, now on a scientific basis, that sophistry is worth less than philosophy.

Second, it is precisely such an analysis of the nature of philosophy and sophistry that the guest is about to deliver. This is carried out through divisions that lay bare and analyze the specific field of objects of which the philosopher and the sophist both claim to treat. In this process, one could argue, he employs the distinction between better and worse that he contrasted with the distinction between like and like at 226d1–3. Does this show us that he is incompetent, that he violates his own method, as

²² Stenzel (1961), 1–2; 26–28.

²³ Rosen (1983), 119–121; Hyland (2004), 29; Gonzalez (2009), 50–60.

²⁴ This is how Socrates suggests one should proceed in *Men.* 100b4–6 and *Rsp.* 354b2–6.

Stanley Rosen suggests?²⁵ Not necessarily. To distinguish between better and worse is not the same as to distinguish between more and less honourable. Better and worse rest in a thing's nature, but people may honour what is worthless in its nature and fail to honour what is truly good. As Aristotle puts it, honour seems to depend on the ones who give honour rather than on what is honoured (*EN* 1095b24–26). Even if we ought to honour what is better and regard what is worse as less worthy, this requires that we first ask what is really good and bad.

The first division of the guest's *méthodos* that seems to distinguish between better and worse is carried out in the very passage claimed to show that these divisions are all neutral. As the final section (227c2–6) of this passage confirms, the *méthodos* regards all types of bodily cleansing as on a par because it wishes to separate the type of cleansing that is directed at the soul from all other types of cleansing. What the guest seems to suggest here is that all kinds of bodily cleansing must be regarded as alike when they are compared with the type of cleansing that treats the soul. It is possible that he makes this distinction because he sees the cleansing of souls as better than the cleansing of bodies. If this is correct, the passage, when read in its entirety, illustrates the kind of division that separates better from worse. This suggested reading of the passage is supported by the way the divisions that follow all seem modelled on a similar pattern, disregarding one section produced by the cut because the other section is either better or worse, compared to it.

Here a sketch of the divisions and some comments on them are enough to illustrate the point.²⁶ Focusing on the cleansing of the soul, the guest proceeds to divide virtue from wickedness (surely a division between better and worse) and then wickedness into two types. One of these types is characteristic of a soul in disorder, where “opinions” are “at variance with desire, anger with pleasure, *lógos* with pains” (228b2–4), a state of soul the guest likens to sickness and civil war (*stásis*). This type of vice, we may say, pertains to the whole soul, as a thinking, willing, and desiring being and characterizes a soul in utter chaos. The other kind of wickedness or evil is likened to ugliness and described as follows: “When things that

²⁵ Rosen (1983), 120, states that “the Stranger does not say that there are no relations of better and worse among arts [...]. His point is that, as diaereticians, we are to disregard these relations of better and worse [...]. The Stranger's methodological point thus reminds us of the distinction between ‘facts’ and ‘values’, popular among empiricists until a decade ago”. It seems likely that Leo Strauss's criticism of this distinction in positivistic social science has influenced Rosen's interpretation of the Eleatic guest; see Strauss (1965), 35–80.

²⁶ For a more detailed discussion of these divisions, see Larsen (2007).

participate in motion put forth some goal and try to reach it, and at each attempt are deflected from it and fail to achieve it” they are “liable to this [...] because of lack of measure”. This description is meant to pinpoint the unwilling ignorance of the soul where it misses the goal it sets for itself, namely truth, in consequence of a lack of proportion (228c1–d2). The result of this is “mental derangement” (*paraphrosýnē*; 228c1–d2), or, more literally, a state where the soul wanders (*pará*) from reason (*phrēn*). It is not clear from the passage whether “things that participate in motion” (*kinēseōs metáschonta*) refers to *souls* (in the plural) setting out for truth or to parts or aspects of a soul that together set out for truth. Still, we may regard the type of vice described as more intellectual compared with the other vice, as long as we by this understand ‘intellectual’ broadly enough to include the interaction of other elements of the soul with reason.²⁷ The main point is that this vice pertains to the soul as a being that strives for knowledge but misses its mark through ignorance.

That this type of vice is of great importance for what is usually defined as a Socratic point of view, according to which vice results from, or even is, ignorance, should be clear. Conceivably it also plays a vital role in the *Republic*, where Socrates claims that all souls naturally strive for the good, doing everything they do for the sake of it, but also that most people do not know what it is, which means they lose any benefit there may be from other things (505e1–5). To Socrates in the *Republic*, the soul is thus naturally directed at the good but this direction in itself does not ensure that the soul also reaches it: most people are led astray since they end up with the wrong understanding of the good. The similarly teleological structure pointed out by the guest, according to which the soul sets out for truth but misses it, seems to parallel the structure Socrates has in mind in the *Republic*. When the guest thus focuses on the vice of ignorance and leaves the other type of vice out of the picture, he can be said to focus on the more important of the two kinds of vice from what may be called a Socratic point of view, whether one understands ‘Socratic’ as referring to the perspective of the supposedly early dialogues or whether one takes it to include that of dialogues like the *Republic*.

The guest next states that ignorance, *ágnōia*, is removed through instruction and goes on to divide instruction into two parts. One part is said to treat the lack of positive knowledge, such as the knowledge exemplified in a specific art, a *tékhnē* (229d1–2). The other, which is the

²⁷ In the present context it is unnecessary to take a stand on the question what ontological status the guest ascribes to the different elements in the soul, such as desires, spiritedness, and reason, or on any possible relation to Socrates’s account of the different ‘parts’ or ‘elements’ of the soul in the *Republic*.

one that interests the guest, is directed at the specific kind of ignorance where one believes that one knows what one in fact does not know (229c5), i.e. the type of ignorance which Socrates in the *Apology* claims to have spent his life exposing in others (21b1–22e6). The guest focuses on this type of vice, rather than the other, because it is worse, as it is clear from 229c1–6, where it is said to be “marked off from the rest and equal in weight to” all other kinds of ignorance (229c2–3), a type of ignorance that, according to the guest, should be called folly, *amathía*. The guest and Theaetetus agree that this is removed through the type of instruction that should truly be called education, *paideía* (229c8–d4). That the guest regards this type of instruction as better than ordinary instruction is clear from the fact that he holds the kind of ignorance it removes as worse than any ordinary kind of ignorance: folly, he claims, is the kind of ignorance responsible for *all* the mistakes we make in reasoning (229c5–6). Furthermore, by bringing up the notions of *amathía* and *paideía*, the guest truly enters the heartland of Socratic thought.

That it is Socratic territory we have entered becomes clear beyond doubt when the guest performs the last division within the sixth definition, a division that focuses on *paideía*. The point of this division is to distinguish between an inferior and a superior kind of education, the first being traditional moral upbringing, which the guest identifies as an art of admonition (*nouthetētikē*; 229e4–230e3) and the second a new kind of education that proceeds through questioning. This new type of education based on questioning results from the educator’s conviction that folly as such is involuntary, on the one hand, and that it prevents us from seeking wisdom, on the other, since no one who believes himself wise about something, even though he is ignorant of it, would seek to acquire knowledge about it (230e5–9). The questioning educator therefore seeks to expel the vice of folly by making the one suffering from it aware of the fact that he fails to know what he believes himself knowledgeable about (230b4–c4). This he accomplishes through *élenchos*, through refutation (230d1). The guest ends the sixth definition by stating that this type of education through refutation is the “greatest and most authoritative of purifications” (230d8–9), which again makes it quite clear that his divisions are informed by considerations of better and worse.

This can also be seen from the fact that when the guest reluctantly accepts Theaetetus’s suggestion that they should call what they have described a sophist (230e6–231a4) he immediately qualifies this by stating that this is “the bred-to-kind kind of sophistry” (*hē génei gennaía sophisticē*), that is, the excellent kind of sophistry or sophistry “true to its kind” (231b3–8). It lies beyond the scope of the present paper to discuss

the complex question why Socrates here appears to be identified as a sophist, but it is worth noting that most commentators seem to overlook the fact that it is *not* the guest but rather Theaetetus who identifies the practitioner of *élenchos* as a sophist.²⁸ When the guest qualifies this suggestion by stating that the expertise possessed by the practitioner of *élenchos* is the *true* or *excellent* kind of sophistry, it is possibly meant in the same spirit in that Husserl claims that his phenomenology is true positivism, a positivism that will overcome the sceptical negativity that calls itself positivism.²⁹ If so, the guest is not suggesting that the practitioner of *élenchos* is a sophist the same way the sophists described in the previous five accounts are, but that he is what sophistry *ought to be*, if it truly was what it claims to be, wisdom pertaining to education.

The practitioner of *élenchos*, Socrates, or at least one who practices philosophical inquiry in a manner similar to Socrates,³⁰ stands in radical contrast to the sophists described by the guest in the seventh and final definition, which begins at 232b1. These sophists are said to be able to fool the young by giving them the impression that “they themselves are in all things the wisest of all” (233b2), an impression they can give because they appear able to debate correctly about everything. It is thus through their mastery of speech, *lógos*, that the sophists are able to give others the impression that they are wiser than everyone else. This impression does not depend solely on the sophists’ abilities, however. It also depends on the listeners still “standing off at a distance from the truth about things” (234c2–7). It is only because the young listening to the sophists have not reached the truth about—that is, a real understanding of—the subject matters the sophists are talking about that sophists can appear as all-wise. These subject matters include the divine, the earth and the heaven, becoming and being, laws and all political matters, and finally the arts (232c1–e4), that is, the subjects discussed traditionally by Greek thinkers up to and including Plato. The sophists described in the final definition thus build their reputation on their mastery of speech and on the ignorance of others. Moreover, since the sophists not only display their own ability to debate, but also teach it to others (232b8–12), we may suppose that the sophists also pass on to their pupils the impression that the pupils themselves become wise by learning to master the spoken word.

²⁸ See Larsen (2007) and (2011), 102–103; 119–122, for some suggestions why this happens.

²⁹ Husserl (1965), 70.

³⁰ Kerferd (1954) resists this assimilation, being followed partly in this by Notomi (1999), 66.

If we compare the practitioner of *élenchos* with this brief sketch of the guest's final description of the sophist, we obtain the following contrast. The practitioner of *élenchos* or the true-bred sophist sees that most people are unable to reach the truth, towards which the soul as movement strives, because they falsely believe they know what they do not know. He consequently tries to 'purify' and thereby educate others by removing this false belief. In contrast, the ordinary sophists build their reputation on the very fact that people have not reached a true understanding of the things that are and further give people the mistaken impression that true wisdom consists simply in the ability to debate everything, a purely formal technique that does not depend on a substantial understanding of the subject of debate (cf. 233a3–4). The sophists thus further entrench the folly that the practitioner of *élenchos* aims to expose. If the latter seeks to liberate the soul's movement in order that it may set out on its journey towards truth concerning the things that are, the sophists of the final description delude people into believing that no such journey is needed.³¹

This contrast between the noble practitioner of the *élenchos* and the eristic sophist that centres on the soul's relation to the truth about that which the soul seeks to understand is the culmination of what is generally regarded as the outer part of the dialogue. Whatever one may think of the merits of the guest's way of proceeding, his *méthodos*, in analysing sophistry, it should at least be clear that he focuses on matters on which a Socratic analysis of sophistry in its contrast to philosophy would also focus: virtue in its connection to knowledge, the connection of (involuntary) folly to vice, the notion of education as liberation from false beliefs, and the idea that sophistic education is sham education (for which, see 223b4 and 233c10). Furthermore, it seems clear that the guest has a genuine or so-to-say personal interest in these issues; at one point, when Theaetetus states that he believes he may himself be among the young standing off at a distance from the subject matters distorted by the sophists, the guest claims that he is trying, together with all the others present, to bring Theaetetus as close as possible to these without the usual ill effects (234e3–7). In other words, he claims that he is educating Theaetetus in a way that will render Theaetetus less likely to fall prey to the sophists' charms.³²

³¹ In the present context we cannot go into a more detailed comparison. For longer examinations of the relation between the seven definitions found in the first half of the *Sophist*, see Klein (1977), 9–32; Rosen (1983), 100–174; Bernadete (1986), II.83–112; Notomi (1999), 43–73. See also Larsen (2011), 98–132.

³² It is worth considering whether the guest can be said to teach Theaetetus about the subjects the sophists are said to debate—see the list of categories at 232c1–

This confrontation between philosophic and sophistic education, however, is easily lost sight of when one turns to the central part of the *Sophist*. The question dominating this part of the dialogue—How is falsehood possible?—may give one the impression that the guest's sole concern is to arrive at a satisfying account of false statements.³³ It might appear that in this part of the dialogue, the guest leaves all considerations about virtue, knowledge, soul, and education out of the picture. This impression is in fact mistaken, but it lies beyond the scope of the present chapter to demonstrate this in any detail. A brief consideration of three passages touching upon the relation between the soul as moving towards truth and the beings that will be understood once this movement succeeds will have to suffice.

The first passage runs from 245e6–249d5, where a dispute about the nature of being is reviewed. In the first part of this passage the guest attempts to refute the view that being is identical with body. The core of his refutation is that the ontology assumed by one who identifies being with body excludes virtue, *aretē*.³⁴ When a soul possesses virtues, the guest and Theaetetus agree, these virtues must be present in the soul (247a5–b4), and this implies that virtues as well as the soul must be among the things that are: otherwise we cannot distinguish between virtuous and non-virtuous souls. But, the guest argues, the notion that being is body does not leave room for virtue, since virtue is non-corporeal. The argument is complicated, and we need not discuss it in any detail here: the point important at present is that it is the agreement that souls become virtuous through the presence of virtue that makes the guest suggest, as a correction to the identification of being with body, that being is power, *dynamis* (247d8–e4).

e6—, as it could be argued that he in fact does so; the divine is at least touched upon in the *Sophist* (254b1; 265b6–266c6), as is the earth (265c1–6), and both subjects, constituting the first and second categories of the sophists' subject matters, are to be central in his grand myth in the *Statesman* which Theaetetus will overhear. Being and becoming, the third category, stand at the centre of the investigation in the *Sophist*, whereas political matters, the fourth, will be central to the investigation in the *Statesman*. Finally, the many divisions found in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*, as well as the central discussion of the *Statesman*, pertain to the interrelation between arts or kinds of knowledge, the subject matter of the fifth category.

³³ Such an emphasis seems characteristic of the approaches to the dialogue within the so-called analytic tradition; for an instance, see Frede (1992).

³⁴ For a more detailed discussion of this complicated passage, see Rosen (1983), 212–225; Brown (1998), and Larsen (2015).

When the guest turns his attention to certain friends of forms (248a4–5) in the next section of the passage, he criticizes them for being unable to explain how the soul “shares in” or “communes with” (*koinōneîn*) what they regard as true beings, certain “forms” or “looks” (248b2–4, c11–d2). What he attacks is their thesis that true being (*hē ontōs ousía*) “always persists in just the same condition” (248a10–11), and specifically that true beings therefore can neither be affected nor affect anything (248c7–9); this thesis about being, when interpreted in this way, renders true beings without any ‘function’, even for the soul that strives for them. The guest suggests that the notion that being is, or at least implies the possession of, power, namely the power to affect or to be affected, is what is needed to overcome this difficulty (248b5–6). Again, we need not look at the details of this complicated argument. The point we should note is that the guest, when discussing being in this passage, seems interested primarily in the soul’s *relation* to virtues or true beings. The relation between soul and what the soul seeks to understand discussed in the outer part of the dialogue may thus be seen to spill over into the ontological investigation of the central section of the *Sophist*.

Against this it could be objected that ‘one swallow does not a summer make’. At first sight, it might appear that this is the only passage in which the guest connects ontology with questions about virtue and hence with goodness.³⁵ But this is not the case; the question about the relation between the soul and true being or beings plays a role in at least two other passages as well. In the notoriously difficult passage identifying the science of dialectic, i.e. 253b9–254b2, the guest pinpoints why the sophist and the philosopher are so difficult to define and distinguish. The sophist, he explains, is difficult to see because he flees into the darkness of Non-Being, while the philosopher, devoted as he is to what is eternal through reasoning or calculation, is difficult to see because the eyes of the souls of the many are not able to look steadfastly at “the divine” (254a4–b1). That what the dialectician looks to is something divine, and that he attaches himself to it through reasoning sounds very similar to what Socrates claims about the philosopher’s relation to the forms in the *Republic*.³⁶ Here

³⁵ So Dorter (1994), 143.

³⁶ Guthrie (1978), 159–160, makes the same observation but immediately goes on to claim that “this aspect of the Forms [sc. their divine status] merits, and finds, no place in the logical problems of the *Sophist*”, apparently thereby thinking of the specific problem how one may account for false statements. This may be true, but that does not prove that the ‘normative’ aspect of the Forms touched on here does not play a role in the guest’s overall attempt to differentiate between sophist and

(see in particular 500b8–d9) Socrates claims that the result of this relation is that the philosopher imitates the divine forms and thereby becomes virtuous. That virtue results from the dialectician's relation to the divine is not stated by the guest in the passage discussing the science of dialectic, but it is not implausible to see such a thought as implied in what he says if one takes the second passage mentioned above, which comes at the very end of the dialogue, into consideration as well.

Here the relation between the soul and what it understands or recognizes comes to the fore. In this final part, running from 264b11 to 268d5, where the seventh definition of the sophist is completed, the guest discusses the notion of imitation (*mīmēsis*) in order to be able to define the sophist as an imitator. But the notion of imitation is not discussed solely in order to identify the sophist. At 267b4–5 the guest suggests that the art of imitation should be divided in two. On the one hand, we have a kind of imitation that is ignorant of what it imitates (267c3–9). This is where the guest suggests they should look for the sophist. On the other hand, there is a kind of imitation where the imitator knows what he imitates (267b11–12). What should be noted is that the guest chooses to exemplify the importance of keeping these two types of imitation distinct by focusing on the fact that most people imitate justice and the rest of virtue without knowledge (267c2–3) in order to appear as if the virtues are within them when in fact they are not. This suggests that the knowledgeable type of imitation, in contrast, *will* result in the virtues' actually becoming present within the soul of the one who imitates them. In the light of what has been said about being, virtue, and *dynamis* in previous parts of the dialogue, as well as the passage about the science of dialectic, it seems natural to regard the knowledgeable kind of imitation as another term for the kind of knowledge by which a soul, through reasoning, establishes a real connection with the things that are, including, among other things, the virtues.

In conclusion to this section it may be said that, in the light of the passages from the *Sophist* we have considered, it seems fair to say that the guest's philosophical investigation of sophistry and philosophy is not a neutral, scientific analysis of the world, if one means by this an analysis that disregards questions about virtue, vice, and the distinction between good and evil; his analysis both recognizes and seeks to account for the ethical dimension that can be seen to stand at the centre of Socrates's philosophic activity and that is pivotal for the continuing quarrel that at least Plato's Socrates has with sophistry. Perhaps the guest does not ask

philosopher, in which the question how false statements should be understood plays only a part.

directly about the nature of virtues, of friendship, and of the good in the way Socrates often does. Nevertheless he attempts to demarcate philosophy from sophistry by focusing on the soul's journey towards an understanding of true being, and, through this focus, he brings out features of the soul's relation to what it understands that look like a promising framework for explaining a number of traits we are used to regarding as characteristic of Socratic ethics.

III. Heidegger's Reading of the *Sophist*

By now it should be clear that it is problematic to regard the Eleatic guest as a proponent of a 'value free' method or ontology. Still, it might be the case that Heidegger regarded the *Sophist* as advancing such an ontology and that he found this attractive because he himself was primarily interested in purely ontological questions. In order to discuss whether this is correct, however, we are forced to enter some rather difficult terrain. The question whether Heidegger's own ontological project leaves room for, or is perhaps meant to have an impact on, ethical questions ideally requires a full discussion of the meaning of *Eigentlichkeit* and *Uneigentlichkeit*, authenticity and inauthenticity, in Heidegger—a notoriously difficult question. Happily, in order to evaluate how Heidegger's ontological focus affect his understanding of the difference between sophistry and philosophy, we need not enter this debate directly; we can restrict ourselves to looking at what Heidegger says about the good, about sophistry, and about philosophy in the *Lectures on the Sophist*, as well as at what he has to say about virtue and the good in two other lecture courses from the period around *Sein und Zeit: Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie* (GA 18) and *Grundbegriffe der antiken Philosophie* (GA 22). This still proves to be a difficult task, however, as the way in which Heidegger understands ontology complicates the question whether ontology and ethical considerations, in particular considerations about the good in an ethical sense, have any connection for him.

III.1 Heidegger's Ontological Understanding of the Good

We begin with Heidegger's considerations about the good in the *Lectures on the Sophist*. Discussing Aristotle's notion of *sophía* in the first part of the lecture course, Heidegger states that Aristotle managed to show that "the ἀγαθόν is nothing else than a determination of being [*Seinsbestimmung*] of that being which is defined by a τέλος", since he

saw that the good is not at first connected with *prâxis* (GA 19, 123). This, according to Heidegger, means that Aristotle was the first to reach a “fundamental ontological understanding [*ontologisches Grundverständnis*]” of the good (GA 19, 123). This could look like evidence for those who believe that the ethical dimension disappears in Heidegger in consequence of his preoccupation with ontology, so that Heidegger sees Aristotle as superior to Plato because Aristotle, in Heidegger’s reading, manages to liberate ontology completely from the notion of the good understood as a term connected with human praxis. We should accordingly take a moment to consider what Heidegger intends with this claim. What does he mean by “fundamental ontological understanding”?

The context in which Heidegger makes the above-mentioned claims is his discussion of the way Aristotle understands wisdom as having the good as its object. Heidegger points out that *sophía*, according to the first book of the *Metaphysics*, is directed at the “ultimate why or *ultimate for-the-sake-of-which*, οὗ ἕνεκα [which] as τέλος [is] always an ἀγαθόν (*Met.* I, 3, 983a31f.)” (GA 19, 122). But, Heidegger stresses, *sophía* is contemplative, it is not connected with *prâxis*, and hence the good *sophía* is directed at cannot be a good related to *prâxis*. Heidegger here observes that the reason Aristotle can still legitimately claim that *sophía* is concerned with the good is that Aristotle understands the good as a *cause* or *principle*, namely as the *télos*, “the ultimate, beginning from which something is understood” (GA 19, 123). Heidegger then adds that this analysis of the relation between wisdom and the good makes no sense if one understands the good as “value [*Wert*]” (GA 19, 123).

At first sight, it might appear that what turns Aristotle’s understanding of the good into a fundamental ontological understanding is connected with the fact that Aristotle (according to Heidegger) no longer understands the good as connected with human *prâxis* or with value, but rather sees it as an object of theoretical contemplation.³⁷ This would then mean that Aristotle’s ontological understanding of good (according to Heidegger) has no moral significance. As a number of considerations show, such a conclusion is mistaken.

First, when Heidegger here uses the term *prâxis*, he probably does not mean *prâxis* in the sense Aristotle uses the term in book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, designating political or ethical action in contrast to production (see in particular *EN* VI, 4). He possibly uses it in the looser sense also employed by Aristotle, where it is equivalent to *poiēsis*; this at least is how Heidegger uses the term when discussing the opening section

³⁷ This appears to be Gonzalez’s understanding of Heidegger, see below, page 48–50.

of the *Sophist* (GA 19, 269–271). If so, what he suggests is that Aristotle managed to reach an understanding of the good that did not interpret the good from the perspective of human production. What Heidegger claims Aristotle put in its place, moreover, is not an understanding of the good from the perspective of contemplation (in contrast to *prâxis* in the strict sense), but an understanding of the good that focused only on the *télos* of each thing. It is *this* focus that makes Aristotle’s understanding of the good ontological, and this ontological understanding *enables* Aristotle to speak of a good for contemplation. In other words, an ontological understanding of the good is not a specific understanding *of* the good contemplated by *sophia*, it is rather a general (i.e. ontological) understanding of the good that has implications for the good of contemplation.

Second, we must realize that Heidegger, in claiming that we cannot understand Aristotle’s notion of the good if we explain it in terms of value, should not be read as entering the discussion of the fact-value distinction current in the first half of the 20th century. In particular, Heidegger is not simply claiming that Aristotle was interested only in the facts, rather than values. His point is much more radical. From Heidegger’s earliest lecture courses until the period around his work on *Sein und Zeit*, it is clear that he is altogether dissatisfied with the distinction between facts and values, in particular with the manner in which the notion of value (*Wert*) is absorbed from the work of Hermann Lotze into the Neokantian movement (for a lengthy discussion of this process, see GA 56/57, 129–204). The point is not that Heidegger is, so to speak, against values, but rather that he finds the distinction between facts and values ontologically naïve. In Hermann Mörchen’s transcript of the lecture course *Grundbegriffe der antiken Philosophie* (held summer semester 1926), we find the following statement that, according to the transcript, Heidegger made while discussing the role of the good in Plato’s philosophy: “Values as such are fictions. The assumption [*Ansetzung*] of values is a misunderstanding of the Greek question [*Fragestellung*]. The ‘validity’ [*Gelten*] of values is a modern invention (Lotze)” (GA 22, 284).³⁸

This claim may be compared with Heidegger’s criticism – again made with reference to Lotze – of the notion of values in connection with his discussion of the Cartesian understanding of the world in §21 of *Sein und Zeit*. Here Heidegger argues that it is naïve to suppose that we can simply add value-predicates to things, the being of which we first and foremost understood as material, in the hope of arriving at an ontologically satisfying account of the beings we normally encounter and use in our

³⁸ See also GA 18, 43, where Heidegger remarks that the good, as the *péras* or *télos* of humans, is emphatically not a value.

world. The problem is that “value-predicates cannot tell us anything at all new about the being of goods”, as long as “the being of values or their ‘validity’” remain obscure (GA 2, 132–133). What Heidegger here suggests is that when we talk about values we talk “ontically”, as Heidegger calls it, that is, we are talking about *beings*, from our everyday perspective (see GA 2, 85), not from a phenomenological perspective, where we focus “ontologically”, in Heidegger’s sense of the word, on being, that is, on *the way* beings are. Accordingly, we need to investigate the mode of being characterizing the ‘things’ we regard as having a ‘value’, rather than supposing that they are material things that have the further property of value attached to them, if we wish to reach an adequate ontological understanding of them.

In light of these considerations, we may say that Heidegger’s claim about Aristotle’s ontological understanding of the good should be understood as follows. Aristotle is the first to reach a purely ontological understanding of the good. This understanding enables Aristotle, *among other things*, to operate with a specific good as an object of *theōria*. But this ontological understanding is not *only* connected with Aristotle’s understanding of the good purposed by wisdom; this understanding regards the good of something, anything, as the *télos* of that thing, a notion central to all Aristotelian thought. Therefore Aristotle’s ontological understanding of the good is also central to his practical philosophy, as Heidegger clearly acknowledges.³⁹ In order to understand this ontological notion of the good correctly, Heidegger insists, we must leave the notion of value out of the picture, but this is not because Aristotle, according to Heidegger, is a proponent of a ‘value-free’ ontology or method, but because the distinction between facts and values central to all talk about methods or ontologies as ‘value-free’ and ‘value-based’ is according to Heidegger a modern construction. That Aristotle’s understanding of the good is ontological is thus not the result of his disregarding ‘values’ (in contrast to, for instance, Socrates), but simply of his radical attempt to understand the good for each thing primarily on the basis of the way each thing can be said to *be*. The good, understood ontologically, is ‘the ultimate, beginning from which something is understood’, and the *télos*, as a cause, responsible for each thing being the way it is. To talk

³⁹ See in particular GA 18, 65–79; 91–101, and also Heidegger’s discussion of *teleion*, GA 18, 84–91, where he employs Aristotle’s discussion of this term in the *Metaphysics* to illuminate Aristotle’s ethics and his notion of virtue; see also the brief discussion in the earlier lecture *Phänomenologische Interpretationen ausgewählter Abhandlungen des Aristoteles zur Ontologie und Logik*, GA 62, 71–72.

ontologically of the good thus means to consider the specific *being* of each thing, where being should be understood so to speak verbally, as an ‘activity’ (*enérgeia*) or a way of being, and not as a static entity or property.

We may also re-state this point in terms more familiar from *Sein und Zeit*; what Heidegger means by an ontological understanding of the good is an understanding that focuses on the *being* of something, not on *a* being, which means that the relevant contrast to Aristotle’s ontological understanding is not an ethical or a practical understanding (connected with *prâxis* in the strict sense), but an *ontic* understanding, that is, an understanding that identifies the good as *a* being.⁴⁰

The suggestion that ‘ontological’ here means ‘pertaining to the being of something’ (and not ‘belonging to the philosophical discipline called ontology’) finds corroboration in Heidegger’s subsequent discussion of Aristotle’s conception of *eudaimonía*. There Heidegger states that Aristotle also understands *eudaimonía* in a strictly ontological sense, namely as *télos*. He elaborates this claim by saying that *eudaimonía* should be regarded as “the authentic being of human Dasein [*die Eigentlichkeit des Seins des menschlichen Daseins*, 172]”, or “the radically, ontologically grasped authenticity of being [*die radikal-ontologisch gefaßte Eigentlichkeit des Seins*, 176]”. These statements echo Heidegger’s interpretation of the opening section of the *Nicomachean Ethics* delivered in the previous semester, where he states that the good should be understood as *télos*, as being complete, *téleion*, and hence not as something “objective floating around, but rather a *how of the Dasein itself* [*Wie des Daseins selbst*]” (GA 18, 69). A being that is “complete” in this manner and hence good, which Aristotle also describes as a being characterized by having reached actuality, *entelékheia*, accordingly “holds itself in its authentic possibility of being [*seiner eigentlichen Seinsmöglichkeit*], so that the possibility is completed” (GA 18, 90). We may note that, in so far as one can identify the state of having reached one’s completion or goal as a state characterized by *aretē* (see GA 18, 86), it appears that Heidegger here uses “Eigentlichkeit” as an equivalent for *aretē* (in this connection, see also GA 19, 51; 170–71; 294–295, and GA 18, 68). To be authentic or, in perhaps more direct translation, characterized through what is “one’s own [*eigentlich*]”, is to be *in a way* that expresses one’s specific being.

⁴⁰ For the distinction between ontological and ontic in relation to Aristotle, see GA 19, 207 and 210. It must be kept in mind that for the Heidegger of the 1920s, ontology is not a philosophical discipline among others with which they may be contrasted; it *is* philosophy, understood as the questioning activity directed at being in its distinction from beings.

This ‘ontological’ interpretation of Aristotle’s notion of the good also guides Heidegger’s interpretation of the claim found in the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that *eudaimonía*, as an activity expressing human *aretē*, is found in contemplation, in *theōreîn*. When Aristotle here claims that it is this activity, this way of being-at-work (*en-ergeia*), as Heidegger translates the Greek term *enérgeia* (see GA 18, 70), that most fully expresses the “work” (*érgon*) characteristic of human beings (*EN* 1176a–1176b6; 1177a12–17, and 1097b24–25), Heidegger renders this thought in the following way: it is in *theōría* that we reach “our highest possibility of being. This highest possibility of being [*Diese höchste Seinsmöglichkeit*] of the living being called man is νοῦς. Νοεῖν, as ἐνέργεια θεωρητική, most satisfies the ἐνέργεια of this living being” (GA 19, 179). *Noûs* is the highest possible *way of being* for human beings.

But if Aristotle, according to Heidegger, was the first to arrive at an ontological understanding of the good, how, on Heidegger’s view, did Plato understand the good? Since Heidegger claims that Aristotle managed to arrive at an ontological understanding of the good because the good, understood as *télos*, at first (*zunächst*) has “no relation to πᾶσις at all” (GA 19, 123), one might assume that Heidegger is claiming that Plato, in contrast, did not arrive at a satisfying, or ontological, understanding of the good, *inasmuch* as he saw it as connected with *prâxis*. Again, if one further assumes that *prâxis* here means something like action, ethical or political, it might appear that Heidegger is suggesting that Plato did not reach a satisfying understanding of the good because he connected it with ethics. This is indeed how Francisco Gonzalez understands Heidegger;⁴¹ behind Heidegger’s appraisal of Aristotle’s notion of the good and of Aristotle’s distinction between *phrónēsis* and *sophía* lies an assumption, namely that “we must avoid at all costs contaminating ontology by introducing into it a practical conception of the good.”⁴² On Gonzalez’s interpretation, Heidegger sees the *Sophist* as avoiding this contamination, which explains why Heidegger regards it as philosophically superior to Plato’s supposedly earlier dialogues.⁴³

At first sight, quite apart from the question what *prâxis* means in this context, this might seem to be a fair description of Heidegger’s position in light of a passage from the aforementioned lecture course from the summer semester 1926, *Grundbegriffe der antiken Philosophie* (GA 22), to which Gonzalez draws attention. In a discussion of the idea of the Good as found in book 6 and 7 of the *Republic*, Heidegger apparently sides with

⁴¹ Gonzalez (2009), 30–31.

⁴² Gonzalez (2009), 32.

⁴³ Gonzalez (2009), 60–63.

Julius Stenzel in regarding the later Plato as moving away from the ethical orientation characteristic of Socrates. From the *Theaetetus* (which Heidegger, in agreement with Stenzel, regards as marking the beginning of Plato's later period) onwards, Heidegger states, "the question or problem pertaining to being [*das Seinsproblem*] is detached from the idea of the Good" (GA 22, 114). This reveals, Gonzalez claims, that in "Heidegger's view [...] the idea of the ἀγαθόν plays no role in the *Sophist*."⁴⁴ The understanding of Gonzalez's criticism is complicated slightly by the fact that both his and Heidegger's choice of words may not be altogether happy. For it is trivially true that the idea of the Good, as discussed in book 6 and 7 of the *Republic*, plays no direct role in the *Theaetetus* or the *Sophist*. If Gonzalez's claim is that Heidegger denies that it plays a role in the *Sophist*, then his criticism is of questionable relevance. If, on the other hand, what he means to suggest is that Heidegger claims that all considerations about the good disappear in the *Sophist*, this seems to be simply untrue, as will be shown in the following. In any case, Heidegger's position is more complex than Gonzalez's criticism suggests. It is true that Heidegger, when he later in the course summarizes his interpretation of Plato, appears to have said that a conception of the good should be separated from the question of being. According to the transcript of Hermann Mörchen, at least, Heidegger stated that to address "being as ἀγαθόν misunderstands being. It is no coincidence that in Plato the problem of the ἀγαθόν later disappears in its original function" (GA 22, 284).

If one takes a closer look at the passage in Heidegger's own notes to which this transcript attends, however, it appears that Heidegger has something in mind other than a simple detachment of ethical conceptions from the notion of being. Here he states, somewhat cryptically to be sure, that being is that which is simply understood "for its own sake", where this "for its own sake" is a proposition about being, meaning "end, πέρας, ἀγαθόν"; but if one considers matters precisely, this is "no proposition [*Aussage*] about being, but rather *away* from it, precisely not on its own, but rather called back [*rückrufig*], relative to the understanding of it, what it is *for* this and not on its own" (GA 22, 140). Heidegger here seems to suggest that being can be addressed as "for its own sake" and hence as good only from the perspective of our understanding of being, that this is not something which being is on its own, but something that being is *for*, or *in relation to*, our understanding of being. He contrasts this precise understanding to a "naïve ontical" understanding, according to which the highest being (*das Seiende-Sein*), understood as what is absolutely "for its

⁴⁴ Gonzalez (2009), 32.

own sake” and hence good, is “something higher [*ein Höheres*] than being [*Sein*] itself, [...] is itself what is over this [*es ist selbst das noch überdies*]” (GA 22, 140, see also GA 19, 210). Most probably, it is *this* naïve understanding, that is, an understanding that regards being (*Sein*) as a good, itself posited as *a* being (*ein Seiendes*) higher than being (*Sein*), that Heidegger claims is present in Plato’s earlier thought and disappears in the later Plato. It is the good understood as a transcendent *being*, grounding all other beings (a doctrine Heidegger sees expressed in the central part of the *Republic*)⁴⁵, that he most probably has in mind when he claims (according to Mörchen) that the good *in its original function* disappears in Plato.

This interpretation is supported by the passage mentioned above where Heidegger follows Stenzel. It is true that Heidegger maintains that it is a fact that the conception of being is detached from the idea of the Good in the later Plato, as Gonzalez points out. Gonzalez fails to note, however, that Heidegger qualifies this claim significantly. First, he states that with the *Theaetetus* a detachment from the good begins *in a certain sense* (GA 22, 113). Second, it is not simply from Socrates that Plato turns away, according to Heidegger, but from the specific fundamentally ethical orientation of Socrates. It is not ethics as such, but its primacy, that Plato gives up in his view. Finally, and most importantly, as soon as Heidegger claims that being is detached from the good, he asks two interrelated questions which indicate clearly the difference between his and Stenzel’s approaches to Plato. These questions are:

1. “Is the orientation of the problem of ideas towards the idea of the Good only an episode [sc. in Plato’s thought], or did factual motives [*sachliche Motive*] underlie the problems contained in the question about being [*Problemmengehalt der Frage nach dem Sein*] that led to the ἀγαθόν?”
2. “Can this question itself be answered from Plato’s later period, in other words, is that which was intended with the idea of the ἀγαθόν, not also [sc. to be found] present in the development of the authentic dialectic [*eigentlichen Dialektik*] and the understanding of the ψυχή in the later period? And does the function of the ἀγαθόν return once more in the end?” (GA 22, 114)

⁴⁵ Heidegger here evidently has *Rsp.* 509b7–9 in mind. It may of course be doubted whether this ‘Aristotelian’ reading of the *Republic* does justice to Plato. But that is irrelevant for understanding adequately what Heidegger means by the expression “fundamental ontological understanding”.

If we look at these questions and statements in conjunction, it seems that what Heidegger is suggesting is that Plato in his later period gave up a particular notion of the good, namely a naïve ontical one, but that the original motives conditioning his teaching that the good was the highest of all ideas carried over into his later period. These motives are related to the way being appears to us, when we come to understand being, and Heidegger seems to suggest that they are spelled out in what Heidegger understands as Plato's later development of the conception of dialectic and of soul. Inasmuch as Heidegger sees the *Sophist* as the text, together with the *Parmenides*, where Plato reaches a mature understanding of dialectic (see GA 22, 264), it seems safe to assume that Heidegger is suggesting that, in relation at least to dialectic, the motives in fact behind Plato's original assumption of the idea of the good are unfolded in the *Sophist*. Rather than being dismissed, then, perhaps the idea of the good is revealed in one major aspect of its true implications in the *Sophist*.

From these considerations about Heidegger's interpretation of the good, let us now turn to the question how his ontological understanding of it affects his interpretation of philosophy, or dialectic, and sophistry in the lectures on the *Sophist*.

III.2 Sophistry and Philosophy

Heidegger's overall interpretation of sophistry and dialectic in these lectures is guided by his interpretation of the Greek conception of truth, according to which truth is neither simply nor primarily a property of sentences or judgements, but first and foremost an activity on the part of the soul.⁴⁶ Truth should be understood so to speak verbally, as "truth-ing" (*aletheu-ein*), that is as an activity that discloses beings in their being (GA 19, 12; 21–27; 193–194; 220–21; 285–287). This means that truth should be regarded as a mode of being or a way of relating oneself to something.

This understanding underlies Heidegger's claim in the lecture course that sophistry, as well as philosophy, are ways of existing. Philosophy is an extreme possibility for the human *Dasein*, Heidegger claims at the

⁴⁶ Heidegger develops this interpretation throughout his lecture courses in the 1920s, clearly under the influence of Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen*. At least from the time around his lecture course from the winter semester 1931/32 on Plato's *Republic* and *Theaetetus* (GA 34), he finds a change in the conception of truth in Greek thought taking place in the philosophy of Plato, moving from a more primordial conception according to which truth means un-concealment of a being in its being to a derivative notion where truth means a sentence's correspondence to that which it is about.

beginning of the lecture course (GA 19, 12, see also 204–205), a possibility that Plato, according to Heidegger, seeks to bring to light through the philosophic attempt to disclose the being of sophistry and of Non-Being off which sophistry lives (GA 19, 192–3). The attempt to reveal what sophistry is thus simultaneously demonstrates *ad oculos* what philosophy is. The connection between dialectic (that is philosophy, as Plato understands it) and sophistry, however, goes deeper than this; according to Heidegger, Platonic dialectic is an activity carried out through *lógos* directed at *countering* sophistry (GA 19, 195–197, see also GA 2, 48–49; 224–225; 356). The dialectical disclosure of sophistry displayed in Plato’s dialogue thus both concretely illustrates philosophical inquiry and reveals sophistry as the opposite of philosophy, as what philosophy is not (GA 19, 245–246).

More precisely, Heidegger regards sophistry as a specific unfolding of our ability to apprehend beings through *lógos*, as a specific way of *being* as ‘animals possessing speech’; in this mode one looks solely at the *formal* ability to speak, that is the ability to speak in the right way, and beautifully “about all things, regardless whether what is said holds good or not” (GA 19, 215). This purely formal ability which the sophists turn into an apparent *tékhnē*—the mastery of the spoken word—stands, according to Heidegger, in opposition to Platonic dialectic. Dialectic is first and foremost to be understood as discourse, as *dialégesthai*. Dialectic is accordingly also a specific mode of *being* that is possible for us as speaking beings. Dialectic is as *lógos*-dependent as sophistry is. But as a scientific-philosophical discourse, dialectic is at the same time “a passing ‘through speech’, departing from what is idly said, with the goal of arriving at a genuine assertion, a *lógos* about beings themselves” (GA 19, 195). Dialectic thus has the aim of disclosing its subject matter by discussing it (GA 19, 196, cf. also 337), a disclosing that stands in opposition to the emptiness, the *Sachlosigkeit* (GA 19, 230), of the speech of the sophist, also identified as idle talk (*Gerede*) (GA 19, 195). In the end, Heidegger claims that dialectic is a way of speaking that seeks to transcend speech towards a pure seeing (*noeîn, theōreîn*) of the things we may attend through speech (GA 19, 197). This transcendence is directed specifically against the *lógos*-dependency of sophistry, a dependency that results in an “ungenuineness [*Unechtheit*] and uprootedness of human existence” (GA 19, 231).

For Heidegger, the *Sachlosigkeit* of sophistry that threatens to uproot human existence is not simply the result of sophistry, however. It is rather a result of the fact that human beings are, as Heidegger understands the Greek expression *zōon lōgon échon*, living beings possessing speech (see

GA 19, 179). For although speech, according to Heidegger, may lead us towards disclosing the world and ourselves if it is employed correctly, it is at first, and for the most part it remains, idle talk, *Gerede*: as such speech is not disclosing at all, but rather “concealing”, it “closes off beings for the Dasein” and blinds it (GA 19, 197, see also Heidegger’s interpretation of Plato’s criticism of the “free-floating λόγος”, GA 19, 339–345). According to Heidegger, sophistry thus thrives on this basic human tendency in the use of *lógos*, a tendency that characterizes all of us most of the time. Interestingly, Heidegger’s interpretation of Platonic dialectic as a specific countermovement to this concealment does not appear to be based on the so-called ontological middle section of the *Sophist*, which is the focus of most interpretations of the dialogue. Rather, it seems grounded in his reading of the sixth definition of the sophist we looked at above (see GA 19, 352). Instead of pursuing Heidegger’s interpretation of the middle section of the dialogue, we shall therefore end this study with a consideration of what Heidegger has to say about philosophy and sophistry in connection with his interpretation of the so-called outer part of the dialogue, in particular of the sixth definition.

In order to understand Heidegger’s interpretation of this definition, however, we need to look at a digression in which Heidegger interprets Plato’s *Phaedrus* (GA 19, 308–352); here we can only comment on a couple of remarks Heidegger makes about dialectic, although the entire digression is of relevance for understanding Heidegger’s interpretation of sophistry and Platonic dialectic. In this digression Heidegger examines Socrates’s discussion of the relation between rhetoric and dialectic in the second half of the dialogue (*Phdr.* 257b7–279c8). What is primarily at stake in this part, Heidegger claims, is “*speaking [das Reden] in the sense of self-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*” (GA 19, 315). This, according to Heidegger, is also what is at stake in the first half of the dialogue; when Socrates there discusses soul and *éros*, what is really at stake is “the basic determination [*die Grundbestimmung*] of the existence of man [...], more precisely *human Dasein seen in its fundamental relation [Grundverhältnis] to beings simpliciter*” (GA 19, 315). In other words, it is *lógos*, as what characterizes human beings and brings about their relation to beings, that is at stake in the *Phaedrus* as a whole.

Heidegger further observes that Socrates in the second half of the dialogue seeks to demonstrate that rhetoric can become a genuine *tékhnē* only if it is founded on truth and that such truth is gained only through dialectic (GA 19, 318–19; 328–329). More precisely, as Heidegger points

out in a for him characteristically ‘literal’ translation of *Phaedrus* 259e4–6, truth presupposes that “διάνοια ‘must be in such a condition that it already has seen [...] that being, about which it intends to speak, in its condition of being unconcealed [*in seiner Unverborgenheit*]’” (GA 19, 323). Again we see that Heidegger understands dialectic as a disclosing activity (GA 19, 337), an activity that ensures that the being about which one intends to speak has been revealed. Heidegger accordingly claims, and not without justification (see *Phdr.* 265d3; 266b5–6), that dialectic in the *Phaedrus* is depicted as culminating in a kind of vision, a “seeing of the matter at issue [*Sehen der Sachen*]” (GA 19, 333, see also GA 19, 339; 349). If rhetoric is to become a real *téchnē*, it is only this vision that will give it a sure footing.

In order to be able to follow the *lógos* revealing being, however, in order to be able to really participate in a dia-logical or dia-lectical search for truth, certain ‘subjective’ requirements must be met. Relying on the fact that Socrates claims that the dialectician will be able to write a true *lógos*, with knowledge, in the soul of his pupil (*Phdr.* 276a5–6), as well as on Socrates’s claim that this true *lógos* will know to which souls it should speak and to which it should keep silent (in contrast to the written *lógos*; see *Phdr.* 276d9–e3 and 276a6–7), Heidegger states that the soul of the learner, who is to see (*noeîn*) the things discussed for himself, must be correctly prepared for it (GA 19, 345). Platonic dialectic therefore presupposes that “the ψυχή, the inner compartment, the being of the existence of man, is in *correct condition* with regard to the world and to itself” (GA 19, 348). This condition, according to Heidegger, is the result of true education, *paideía* (GA 19, 345), and identical with “becoming beautiful inside”, a condition Socrates prays for at the end of the *Phaedrus* (*Phdr.* 279b8–c3). But to become beautiful, Heidegger finally claims, “is nothing else than what Plato fixes conceptually in the *Sophist* on the occasion [*bei Gelegenheit*] [sc. where he delivers] the sixth definition” (GA 19, 348).

Accordingly it is the psychic vice described as ugliness and its opposite, psychic beauty, that stands at the centre of Heidegger’s interpretation of the sixth definition. Focusing on the type of divisions that separates better from worse or cleansing, which we discussed above,⁴⁷ Heidegger begins his interpretation by claiming that this type of division not only separates the worse from the better, it also *liberates* the better in this process in the sense of bringing it “to its proper possibilities” (GA 19, 357–58). This is essential to his understanding of the entire passage. In the first division the guest performs within the sixth definition, the guest states

⁴⁷ See page 33–38.

that the cleansing he and Theaetetus should consider attends to *psychē* and then immediately qualifies this: it is more precisely the cleansing of *diánoia* his *méthodos* wishes to mark off from all other kinds of cleansing (227c4, cf. also 229c5-6). Heidegger, in accordance with this, poses the question in what sense “one can speak of a κάθαρσις περὶ τὴν διάνοιαν” (GA 19, 363), and, since Heidegger understands cleansing as liberation, we may surmise that his interpretation is really pursuing the question what a liberation of *diánoia*, a liberation that brings *diánoia* to its proper possibilities, looks like.

In order to understand Heidegger’s interpretation of this liberation, it must be borne in mind that Heidegger tends to understand *diánoia* as the type of *noûs* available to human beings, a *noûs* dependent on, or carried out through (*dia-*), *lógos* (GA 19, 179–80). This helps to explain how Heidegger can make the perhaps surprising claim that the sixth definition in fact centres on the cleansing of our *noûs* (GA 19, 365–367).⁴⁸ When the guest discusses the soul as a being characterised by movement towards truth that it involuntarily misses (*Sph.* 228c1–8), Heidegger accordingly regards this as Plato’s way of addressing *noûs* in a deficient mode of its activity, *noeîn*. This leads Heidegger to the further claim that the beauty that results from the cleansing, i.e. *élenchos*, of this movement should be understood as “the authentic real [*eigentliche echte*] νοεῖν, that is, the ἀληθεύειν” (GA 19, 368). A couple of pages earlier, where Heidegger discusses the fact that the guest describes truth, towards which the soul is said to have an impulse, as the *skopós* of the soul (*Sph.* 228c1–2), he claims that *skopós* can legitimately be substituted with *télos*. Accordingly, when *noûs* or the soul in motion goes awry of truth it goes awry of its own *télos* in Heidegger’s reading, and this is the same as to say that it goes awry of “itself, from the meaning of being residing in this being itself [*vom Seinssinn, der in diesem Seienden selbst liegt*]” (GA 19, 366). In contrast, Heidegger claims, when *élenchos* cleanses this misdirected soul, that is, when *élenchos* liberates the soul and brings it to its own possibilities, it for the first time becomes open “for a possible encounter with the world and with itself” (GA 19, 379) Therefore, when the guest discusses the virtue and vice of the soul under such predicates as beauty and ugliness, Heidegger claims, this must be understood in light of the fact

⁴⁸ Heidegger also claims (GA 19, 367) that *noeîn* for Plato is identical with *phroneîn*. This means that the sixth definition, in Heidegger’s reading, centres on a *phrónēsis* in motion. It might be worthwhile to bring this claim to bear on the startling claim Heidegger makes earlier on in the lecture course, that *phrónēsis* is “nothing other than conscience set into motion” (GA 19, 56), a task that lies beyond the scope of the present paper.

that “καλῶς resp. τὸ καλόν and αἴσχος are for the Greeks the decisive predicates for something and concern its authentic, or proper, way of being [*seines eigentlichen Seinscharakters*]” (GA 19, 368).

Let us end by summing up what these passages tell us about Heidegger’s interpretation of the sixth definition. We see that Heidegger interprets the virtue that results from *élenchos* as the soul’s true openness toward the beings it seeks to uncover. In other words, Heidegger appears to read the sixth definition as a passage where Plato discusses the dianoetic virtues, understood as specific modes of *alētheúein*, that Aristotle discusses in book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. This is really no surprise if one keeps in mind that Heidegger begins his lecture course by stating that Aristotle should prepare them for Plato and that “this preparation will consist in the question of λόγος as ἀληθεύειν” (GA 19, 11–12). A couple of pages after the passage where this claim is made we find the following statement: “To be true, to-be-in-the-truth, as a determination of *Dasein*, means: to have at its disposal, as unconcealed, the beings with which *Dasein* cultivates an association. What Aristotle conceives in a more precise way⁴⁹ was already seen by Plato: ἡ ἐπ’ ἀλήθειαν ὀρμωμένη ψυχή (cf. *Sophist* 228c1f.), the soul sets itself by itself on the way toward truth” (GA 19, 23). Moreover, in the passage where Heidegger discusses the movement of the soul mentioned by the Eleatic guest, he even goes on to identify this movement with what he himself calls the *In-sein*, namely the “structure of *Dasein*’s being-underway towards the unhidden” (GA 19, 369), one of the existentials in Heidegger’s own ontology of *Dasein* as unfolded in *Sein und Zeit*.

In the light of the above said, it is no surprise that we see the same ontological interpretation at play in Heidegger’s interpretation of the sixth definition that we found in his interpretation of Aristotle. The soul according to Plato, Heidegger claims, is a being that has a specific *télos*, namely truth understood as a disclosing activity, and when it reaches this *télos*, its way of being is in accordance with itself, it reaches its own good and thereby becomes authentic or, we could say, virtuous. In this state, the soul unfolds its own being as *noûs*, understood as an openness towards itself and the world. Heidegger’s interpretation of the good as ontological thus seems to guide his interpretation of Plato’s *Sophist* no less than it guides his reading of Aristotle.

Let us now turn to the question that started our inquiry: does Heidegger’s preoccupation with ontology render him blind to the ethical dimension in Plato’s thought? We can now formulate this question in a

⁴⁹ According to Heidegger this can be seen from his analysis of the five forms of *alētheúein* in book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

slightly different manner: given that Heidegger's interpretation of Plato is guided by ontological considerations, where 'ontological' means 'pertaining to *the way* something is', how good is this ontological reading of Plato, in particular of the discussion of virtue and vice as pertaining to souls? Does Heidegger's ontological reading do justice to Plato at all?

In my view, Heidegger's interpretation of the sixth definition not only illustrates that important aspects of his own analysis of *Dasein*, as unfolded in *Sein und Zeit*, express his critical appropriation and reinterpretation of the thought of Plato and Aristotle, in particular their understanding of soul, language, and truth, a fact now recognized by many interpreters of Heidegger. The interpretation also demonstrates that Heidegger's 'destructive' reading of Plato in fact manages to articulate a structure of the soul that is truly important to Plato, namely the soul as a being characterized by movement, and in such a way as to give us a much deeper understanding of it than many traditional readings of Plato do. The ontological dimension to Heidegger's reading does not obscure Plato's thought as expressed in the *Sophist*, but rather shows us a Plato 'made young and beautiful', in contrast to the Plato whose teachings are all too familiar to us through the tradition. Perhaps the Plato that emerges through Heidegger's ontological interpretation does not seem first and foremost preoccupied with ethical and political questions in any traditional sense, but it can hardly be said that it is Heidegger's ontological interest in itself that conceals the ethical or political dimension in Plato. On the contrary, it was precisely Heidegger's ontological, that is phenomenological, interpretations of Plato (and Aristotle) that inspired the ethically and politically oriented readings of ancient philosophy by such thinkers as Hans-Georg Gadamer, Leo Strauss, and Hannah Arendt, readings characterized by their radically new understanding of this dimension.⁵⁰

That Heidegger himself was not truly interested in these questions, that he was mostly interested in questions pertaining to what has traditionally been called metaphysics, is perhaps true. In the end, this interest may even have rendered him blind to aspects of ancient philosophy that his own interpretations brought to light. In fact, the way Heidegger interprets the difference between sophistry and dialectic may be regarded as displaying such a blindness. What Heidegger sees as the true 'object' dialectic should disclose, that 'object' the soul is moving towards when liberated through *élenchos*, seems simply to be structures of being. Heidegger repeatedly

⁵⁰ As Diego De Brasi and Marko J. Fuchs briefly claim in the introduction, what are now commonly regarded as the new, dialogically oriented readings of Plato, i.e. readings that stress the political and ethical aspects of Plato's thought, might not have been possible without the influence of Heidegger.

suggests that what distinguishes what he regards as the later Plato from the earlier Plato is the fact that the later Plato drew a distinction between being and beings and started to investigate being in a manner that resembles the ontological investigations Heidegger sees unfolded in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, in particular in book 5, and regards as parallel to what Husserl investigates under the heading *Kategoriale Anschauung* in the sixth Logical Investigation (GA 19, 223–24; 350–351; 362–63; GA 20, 96–98; 109; 200–202; GA 22, 121–23; 261–262; 264; 270–273).⁵¹

In contrast, when the Eleatic guest discusses the specific kind of *áгноia* that should be removed through *élenchos*, namely *amathía*, he specifies that *amathía* is the kind of ignorance where one falsely believes one understands the greatest things (*ta mégista*, 230e1). Since the practitioner of the *élenchos* is most likely Socrates, what the guest means by the “greatest things” is probably matters such as friendship, virtue, and the good (which is what the expression means at *Ap.* 22d7–8 and elsewhere). In this regard it seems significant that all these central terms seem to be missing in Heidegger's interpretation of Platonic dialectic. As can be seen from the *Gorgias*, for Socrates the difference between sophistry and philosophy is a difference in types of lives, a difference in the way one chooses to live. Heidegger acknowledges this,⁵² but he interprets it as a choice between being scientific or unscientific, between a way of being characterised by ‘*Sachlichkeit*’ and a way of being characterised by ‘*Unsachlichkeit*’: the sophist, Heidegger even claims, differs from the dialectician by only choosing a “formal-aesthetic ideal of human existence” (GA 19, 213–215, see also GA 22, 294). Therefore, although Heidegger sees a danger in *Gerede* and hence in sophistry, in so far as it uproots *Dasein*'s existence, his sophist at times comes to resemble an irritating prattler more than the dangerous man who deceives the young that he is according to Plato.

It may, in conclusion, be said that Heidegger, in a manner that partly resembles the Eleatic guest, manages to bring fundamental structures to

⁵¹ According to Hermann Mörchen's transcript of the Lecture course *Grundbegriffe der antiken Philosophie*, Heidegger at one point claims that Plato was the first Greek thinker to draw a radical distinction between ontic and ontological questions and that the *Sophist*, the *Parmenides*, and the *Philebus* were the dialogues in which this distinction was most clearly expressed (GA 22, 261–262).

⁵² He does so while discussing Aristotle's distinction between sophistry, dialectic, and philosophy in book 6 of the *Metaphysics*, according to which the difference between sophistry and dialectic is a difference in choice of life (*Met.* 1004b24–25). Choice, *prohairesis*, it must be remembered, is a central category in Aristotle's ethical thought.

light that explain the logical or ontological dimension to Socratic ethics, but that he seems reluctant to give the matters that Socratic ethics primarily seeks to clarify any substantial content. Why that is so, and what implications it has for a possible ethics in Heidegger, is a question that lies beyond the scope of the present chapter.

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