

## **Analysis of Heidegger Essay, *Plato's Doctrine of Truth***

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[1]

Heidegger claims that the *doctrine* of a thinker is that which remains unsaid within what is said. But what if a thinker says all that he intends to say? We presume that Heidegger will respond that the thinker cannot do so. Our ability to express ourselves in words will always fall short of what we essentially understand and intend. Our words can only point in the direction of what we want to say. But further, there *will* be an unsaid doctrine to a our words, regardless of how well we express ourselves, and regardless of what we intend. Heidegger states, “What remains unsaid in Plato's thinking is a change in what determines the essence of truth.” Thus, the unsaid *doctrine* of Plato is the suggestion that there *is a change in what determines the essence of truth*. This is Plato's *doctrine* according to Heidegger. Regardless of what Plato wrote, and regardless of what he intended to say. Now, this is what Heidegger *says* about Plato. But our ultimate question must be to ask what lies *unsaid*? What is Heidegger's *doctrine*? Our task is to unconceal what Heidegger cannot say about what Plato cannot say. Yet our only method of doing so is to consider what was said by the both of them. Progress cannot be made otherwise. Let us consider, therefore, what Heidegger and Plato did say.

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What might it mean for there to be *a change in what determines the essence of truth*? This is our entire question. We know that Heidegger contends that the definition of the word *truth* has changed over time. The

word *truth* today does not mean what the word ἀλήθεια meant in antiquity. A process of change has been taking place historically. As a result, we are not able to comprehend the meaning of ἀλήθεια in its original form. We see, then, that the *definition* of the word *truth* has changed. But what would it mean for there to be *a change in what determines the essence of truth*? This is different. Heidegger will present an analysis of Plato's *allegory of the cave* in order to explain and support his contention. Before considering Heidegger, let us briefly recall Plato's allegory ourselves. The allegory is to be found at the beginning of Book VII, 514a to 518d, of Plato's *Republic*. Unfortunate souls have lived all their lives constrained in a cave and have looked only straight ahead at moving shadows on a wall in front of them. These shadows result from a fire behind them, with people and objects moving between themselves and the fire. What will be the result if one of these people is unconstrained? This person initially believed that the world of shadows was real, but now this person will recognize that the shadows are cast as a result of people and objects moving between the fire and the wall. Thus the people and the objects will be revealed to be more real than the shadows. Next, the freed person is shown the outside world. Now the sun is understood to be more real than the fire. A parallel process of realization takes place. If this person were to next think philosophically, the highest advancement has taken place. What does Heidegger say? Furthermore, what will Heidegger necessarily not say as his unsaid *doctrine*?

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Heidegger asks, referring to the allegory, what the “story” means? Story? Heidegger repeatedly speaks of the “allegory” but never of the

allegory. The continuous use of quotation marks has an intimated hidden meaning. For Heidegger, the “allegory” is not an allegory at all, it is a *doctrine*. We must keep this in mind. Heidegger writes, “...the things that the “allegory” mentions as visible outside the cave are the images for what the proper being of beings consists in.” Things in the outside world are, “...images for what the proper being of beings consists in.” Yes, this expresses Plato. The higher reality of the objects we see and touch (in the outside world) exists as their eternal and unchanging forms. Heidegger next states that this appearing in the outside world, “...has in addition something of a “stepping forth” whereby a thing “presents” itself.” Precisely why Heidegger uses quotation marks around *stepping forth* and *presents* may at first seem unclear. He is certainly quoting no one, nor is he using the quotation marks as a negation, as was the case when he used “allegory” in such a manner. What, then, is Heidegger up to? His intimated meaning is clear enough. This “stepping forth” whereby a thing “presents” itself is leading in the direction of *unconcealedness* as ἀλήθεια, as the proper definition for the word *truth* as it was originally understood. Next Heidegger speaks of ἰδέα. Standing in its ἰδέα, being itself shows itself, it “steps forth” and “presents” itself. Again, Heidegger is pointing toward ἀλήθεια as unconcealedness. We are beginning to understand the manner in which Heidegger is interpreting Plato. It appears no different than the manner in which he interprets Parmenides.

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The souls in the cave do not suspect that what they take for real, the shadows, may not be real. Considering this from the perspective of Heidegger's *Parmenides*, they are oblivious, they are in oblivion, λήθη.

This will be the counter-essence to ἀλήθεια. At first this counter-essence will be defined by Heidegger as ψεύδος. Later in *Parmenides*, we will experience Heidegger evolving the meaning of ψεύδος into that of λήθη as the changing definition of truth is demonstrated. We are now in a position to proceed to Heidegger's next sentence. It says, "...in the sun in the "allegory" is the "image" for that which makes all ideas visible." Let us consider first the quotation marks. The en-quoting of *allegory* is a negation, we do not really have an allegory, we have a doctrine. The en-quoting of *image* is a terminology. Perhaps now we may offer a reformulation: In the doctrine the sun represents that which makes all things visible. We have a metaphor. Heidegger continues, "It [the sun] is the [metaphorical] "image" for the idea of all ideas." That follows. And finally, this is Plato's *Idea of the Good*, a literal but according to Heidegger a misleading translation of ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα.

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We obtain an awareness of Heidegger as methodologist. Gradually words and expressions are introduced that have an interpretation more and more like *concealedness* and *unconcealedness*. Each time words are re-phrased, the import is being shifted toward the meaning Heidegger is attempting to impart. Metaphorically, the movement into and out of the light causes the eyes to need time to accustom themselves to the changes. The same will be true of the intellect. For the intellect is confused when passing into or out of the truth, it requires time to understand. The word Plato uses to define this process is παιδεία. With the succinctness that we have come to expect from Heidegger, he defines παιδεία simply as, "...guiding the whole human being in turning around his or her essence."

The German word *bildung*, which can mean *education* or *formation*, is the closest approximation to παιδεία. According to Heidegger, παιδεία is not simply putting information into the soul, but completely transforming the soul and leading it to a knowledge of our essential being. Thus the allegory of the cave expresses the essence of education. Education understood as *bildung*, and most properly as παιδεία. In Heidegger's opinion, this is what Plato is *saying*. We have yet to begin to consider the unsaid.

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Heidegger states next that the “allegory” will be interpreted as the Platonic “doctrine” of truth. Before we continue, let us briefly recall our own understanding of Plato's doctrine of Truth. Truth, for Plato, involves recollection, remembering, reminiscence. We are dipped into the waters of forgetfulness before birth. Learning, or coming to know Truth, takes place when ideas that have been lost to us return in some manner. Dare we say, when that which is concealed within us, or from us, is unconcealed? How might this unconcealing take place? The Socratic μέθοδος. Let us return to Heidegger.

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Plato's doctrine of truth is to be found in Plato's allegory of the cave. Heidegger asks us whether or not this interpretation might be going too far? Whether this might be an unfair stretch of the text? Let us hold this question in abeyance for now, while conceding its absolute legitimacy. We are looking for the unsaid in what is said. Heidegger will propose, “...that Plato's thinking subjects itself to a transformation in the essence of truth that becomes the hidden law governing what the thinker says.” We shall attempt to digest this passage one morsel at a time. First, what is the

“transformation in the essence of truth” mentioned? Heidegger contends that the term ἀλήθεια cannot properly be translated as *truth*. An historical process of distorting and changing the original understanding of ἀλήθεια has taken place. This is *a* transformation of the meaning of the word *truth*. But it is not yet *the* transformation in the essence of truth itself that Heidegger is positing. We do know that Plato's “thinking subjects itself to” this transformation.

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Plato's allegory uses the metaphor of light as opposed to darkness. The words παιδεία, education, and bildung represent light as opposed to darkness, ἀλήθεια as opposed to ψεύδος, or λήθη. Truth is to be found in education. It will follow that an essential relation must exist between education and truth. But what is it that brings the two together into an original and essential unity? Put more properly, what brings together παιδεία and ἀλήθεια? Heidegger will begin to answer this question by considering more carefully παιδεία. Education, bildung, are not sufficient translating words. What is the essence of παιδεία? It means, “...turning around the whole human being... removing human beings from the region where they first encounter things and transferring and accustoming them to another realm where beings appear.” What are we to make of this “translation” that Heidegger offers of the single word παιδεία? The contention that παιδεία is to be understood precisely as what happens to those souls in the allegory of the cave. The παιδεία is the μέθοδος. How does the allegory deal with the essence of truth? Not with any particular definition, as for example *veritas*, *certitudo* or ἀλήθεια, but with the *change in what determines the essence of truth*? This distinction must

be understood.

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The allegory comprises different dwelling places. Different domains or levels of ἀληθές, true, or of what it is to be ἀληθές. What is the ἀληθές, the *unconcealed* at each stage? At each point in the allegory of the cave, how much of all that is ἀληθές is apprehended by the souls? Let us begin with the stage where almost nothing is ἀληθές. Heidegger translates 515 c1-2 as, “In no way, then, would those who are chained like this ever consider anything else to be the unhidden except the shadows cast by the artifacts.” The import of Heidegger's *translation* is contained in the following proposition: Those chained would consider the shadows to be unhidden. This would mean that those chained *grasped* unhiddenness as a concept. This would mean that they were capable of *thinking* the *being* of the shadows. This would be the advent of φιλοσοφία, the *beginning*. Those in chains reside in λήθη (*oblivion*, to be understood as a translation from ψεύδος). Those in chains are the least in possession of ἀλήθεια and most in possession of ψεύδος. Yet the very notion of unhiddenness, φιλοσοφία itself, occurs even here, to these poorest, and most pathetically wretched of souls.

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Let us consider the *Grube & Reeve* translation of the same text: “Then the prisoners would in every way believe that the truth was nothing other than the shadows of those artifacts.” The prisoners *do* have a concept of truth. They have no reason to think that they do not know all there is to know, but they do know they know what they know. Heidegger's *translation* is perhaps convenient for his own designs, particularly his use

of the word *unhidden*, which word does not appear in *Grube & Reeve*. But nonetheless his *translation* does not appear unreasonable and certainly not overtly inaccurate. We are now in a position to move on to Heidegger's consideration of stage two.

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Those in chains are allowed to look around, they see more. More becomes *unhidden*. The person will then, "...consider that (the shadows) he saw before (without any help) are more unhidden than what is now being shown (to him, by someone else in fact)." In other words, the person who thought philosophically even when only apprehending shadows, will continue to do so. At the next level, the third, the person is out into the fresh air and gains another, higher perspective. More is revealed, more is unhidden, *unconcealed*. Heidegger translates Plato as speaking (516 a3), "of what is now addressed as the unhidden." This *most unhidden* is ἀλήθειατατα. How will this be defined? The most unhidden is that which appears antecedent (temporally after but logically prior) to all else that appears. It will appear last, but explain everything that has preceded it when it does. True παιδεία, education, is achieved only in the region of ἀλήθειατατα, the most unhidden, the most unconcealed. We know that it is the idea of the *Good*, for Plato, that encompasses all unhiddenness, all unconcealedness. This is the idea that shines the most brightly, in other words, is the most revealing and the most difficult to attain to. The *Good* is τό ἀγαθόν. Heidegger further defines τό ἀγαθόν as, "...that which is capable of something and enables another to be capable of something." The idea of the Good is the idea of ideas, it is what enables everything else. That the Good must be a personality, divinity, seems to be the import



of Heidegger's long and difficult analysis. All appearing is granted through the Good.

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We are now in a position to briefly recapitulate. Heidegger posits a *change in what determines the essence of truth*. Further, this is the *doctrine*, the *unsaid* in Plato's allegory of the cave. We are aware that historically the definition of truth evolves. It is at one moment *veritas*. By the time of Hegel the concept will have become *reason*. But these are *not* changes in what determines the essence of truth. These are simply changes in the definition of *truth* within one specific essence The Occidental. But we are in search of the Greek, the pre-Occidental essence of truth. What is this essence of truth? We have half answered this question. Our *σῆμα* waiting to be unconcealed is Plato's Idea of The Good. We may now proceed.

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Our knowing of the Good involves an apprehending and an asserting. We can understand it and speak about it, we can do philosophy about it. Truth is no longer *unconcealedness* or *ἀλήθεια* but is now *ὀρθότης*, *correctness*. Hence *the transformation in the essence of truth*. We have just witnessed the *moment* of transition itself. We have passed over from the thought of Greek antiquity into Occidental thought. This is the *unsaid*, the *doctrine* in Plato's allegory of the cave. This is the change in *what determines the very essence of truth itself*. For the first time an all-encompassing concept has been posited, an idea of ideas. This is the advent of *φιλοσοφία*. The history of western metaphysics begins. That which determines the essence of truth has been transformed.

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The highest thought brings together the knowing and what it knows. This is our idea of the Good. The idea of the Good allows for the correctness of knowing and the unhiddenness of the known. Truth is both unhiddenness and correctness. Heidegger describes this as an ambiguity. This is because there is a sense in which all unconcealedness has now taken place, with the realization of the idea of ideas, the Good, but also a sense in which it is now the task of metaphysics to fully grasp this idea. It has been disclosed only in initial brute form. This is the unsaid in Plato. The necessary change in the essence of truth that takes place once the positing of an idea of ideas takes place. At this moment, hiddenness has exhausted itself, and truth is fully unconcealed. The notion of truth has changed from the unhiddenness of beings to the correctness of φιλοσοφία. To rephrase, the essence of truth changes when all is unconcealed, when there is no hidden. This is the point where metaphysics begins, the object of which, for Heidegger, is the *divine*. Metaphysics, in the opinion of Heidegger, ends with Nietzsche. Was Heidegger correct in this assertion? In other words, did Nietzsche fully reveal the very essence of *divinity* itself, thereby closing metaphysical history? This is what Heidegger says. We have yet to begin to wonder about the unsaid.

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Let us now begin to wonder about the unsaid. What if a certain type of philosopher were to come along who was a man of both thought and action? A rare breed. A philosopher of astronomical intelligence, unfathomable energy, endless ambition, stunning bravery and diabolical cunning. And what if this philosopher devoured Nietzsche, saw what

Nietzsche said, and decided that it was up to him to decide what Nietzsche had left *unsaid*. And suppose that this philosopher understood existence as will-to-power. And suppose further still, that this philosopher saw himself as *divine*, and sought to posit himself as the *Übermensch*. Because this was *his* definition of justice. By his *own* interpretation, his *own* reading, his *own* determination of what Nietzsche said. What might this *unsaid* be? Is such a philosopher possible? Is it thinkable that we have witnessed such a philosopher already? What if this philosopher existed as a great orator? An orator whose simple yet powerful words imparted unto his vast audiences an *unsaid* that caused them to lavish upon him their utmost faith and devotion? Certainly we would know of this philosopher if he existed. There is no question but that Heidegger was able to both see and recognize this philosopher. And to witness his φιλοσοφία first hand.

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We are now in a position to conclude. There is the *unsaid* that is intimated, and the *unsaid* that is unintended. It is our position that Nietzsche is of the former, Plato the latter. We have arrived at no conclusion with respect to Heidegger. And we can arrive at no conclusion with respect to ourselves.