Understanding

As Creation

Plato reinterpreted

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Colophon

Title: Understanding as creation, Plato Reinterpreted

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Publisher: Foundation Dubitatio Liberat

Place of publication: Utrecht

Year of publication: 2021

Edition: First

ISBN: 9789492752147

Why this essay?

Translating is not translating. That is, it is not translating when a philosophical or epistemological subject is concerned, because it then becomes rethinking.

When we, the translator Mirjam Goedkoop and myself, started the project of translating the text on Plato into English, as it was published in the 2017 edition of the *Cultus van het Gelijk* (www.dubitatioliberat.org and at Academia.edu), we did not realise that the project would involve rethinking the meaning of several central concepts in the original essay. Gradually, we started to realise that in the original essay several analyses were not completed, not really internalized as they should have been.

So, we have reformulated these concepts and, in some places, also the central statements surrounding them. In the process of reworking the whole essay, it became clear to me that the way in which we in Western culture view Plato is wholly deficient. The man and his approach to life are misunderstood because analyses from our modern times, despite many good intentions, don't grasp the wholly different attitude which drove Plato's thinking.

I could have rewritten the whole essay in light of this new insight, but for the sake of integrity I did not. Because, by just adapting the text where it went wrong before, we allow the reader to see what happened and how we developed a new understanding with new conclusions. It is of utmost importance for the way historical epistemology is growing to see why and where we misunderstood Plato and how we came to these conclusions. And for that reason, it needs to be possible to track our thinking.

That does not mean that I didn't do anything with the conclusions from this work (that took us a year and a half, by the way). I developed the newly found ideas further in a short text, called *REVELATIO, 50 aforismen*, which will be published on www.dubitatioliberat.org and on Academia.edu.

As always, I am open for any criticisms or remarks on the content of this essay.

You can send these to Info@dubitatioliberat.org

Maarten van den Oever

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1. The approach

1.1 The subject matter

When in search of something, you have to know what it is you are searching for. It is fitting, then, to ask yourself critically if you have clarity regarding what you are searching for. In our case, we are faced with a problem in this regard, the problem of circularity. This study concerns the question of what knowing and truth is in light of the historical genesis of these concepts that inheres in them. This means that a description of the concepts 'knowing' and 'truth' at the start of a study about the meaning of these concepts is like concluding an investigation at the first stages of it.[1] This is, naturally, undesirable. This problem compels us to begin our search more or less without a subject, which does little to improve one's search direction. After all, what should you search for when you do not want to know what it is you are searching for?

So we will give a description after all, but one that blinds us as little as possible to matters we might not have anticipated. For this reason the description of the subject matter at the start of a study should really be provisional; we will give a description under the strict condition that it only exists and has relevance as long as the data of the study have not altered it. The description is modifiable, a work-in-progress.

[1] Of course, there are many instances of studies of 'the history of truth', resulting in the description of a past that did not occur, because our current understanding of truth did not exist back then. An example is *Truth* by Filipe Fernandez-Armesto, Black Swanbook, 1997.

The description, then:

The concepts 'knowing' and 'truth' are ideas determined within and by culture about the manner in which we construct and develop our assumptions about external reality. Concepts like 'knowledge' and 'facts' are in this regard merely linguistically determined descriptions of results that, we assume, come into being by means of the procedure of knowing and ascertaining truth.

1.2 Between presentism and historicism

As in the case of determining and describing our subject matter, methodical problems also arise when we attempt to identify the filters that determine our perception of the past.

First of all, there is the problem of *presentism*, viewing the past through the lens of the present. This problem first appears to be innocuous, but when we look at the nature of our subject matter in relation to episodes from the past, we can see that it is not. See, when you state a desire to look at the concepts 'knowing' and 'truth', the question arises whether these concepts existed in the historical period covered in this study. Was Plato acquainted with something resembling the current correspondence theory of truth, which concerns the correspondence between the content of a statement and the content of the matter that the statement is about? Assuming he was, was this theory a determining factor when he made statements about beings? In other words, was it a meaningful concern of Plato whether his assertions could be questioned on the basis of their correspondence to reality? Furthermore, when we inquire after the truth, we do so because we genuinely care about capturing truth in our statements. Did Plato (and Socrates) state his beliefs with the same consideration of finding truth?

In short, many questions pertaining to the concepts 'truth' and 'knowing' presume the current content and context of these concepts, and project onto the Antiquity the idea that thinkers operated under the same assumptions back then. This comes down to declaring a presupposition to be a truthful image. The question hereby imposes an idea onto reality instead of gazing underneath the surface of perceptible appearances. This is the danger that comes in if you take the present phrasing of a question for granted and overlook the particular nature of historical phrasings.

Historicism, on the other hand, is more or less the inverse of presentism. Karl Popper, its major opponent[2], disqualified historicism as a severe ideological blunder, since it means that the historical determination of data, like the concepts under our investigation, yield ineluctable and, accordingly, indisputable certain fates, of which we are not allowed to question the significance or value, because history is simply infallible. Historicism poses that the state of affairs that history leads to comes about inevitably. Resistance against this state of affairs is both erroneous and impossible. This is the case because the course of history is a natural process; events unfold the way they do by nature, and like nature they cannot simply be altered. With regard to this, Popper rightly concluded that such a worldview precludes any form of freedom of action or personal responsibility.

Epistemologically speaking, historicism results in the biased view that events of the past happened the way they did out of necessity, which means that the concepts 'knowing' and 'truth' have become what they are because they could not have become anything else, and therefore should not have become anything else. An equivalent of this line of thought is Fukuyama's assessment that with the fall of the Berlin Wall history arrived at its final destination. A similar example is the idea that the Enlightenment has brought humanity to the place it needed to arrive at, because this movement allowed humankind to find the knowledge it necessarily needed to find.

A related thought is the idea that science and technology by definition point to progress, since humanity is deemed to move forward by the laws of history. According to this way of thinking, our current existence is hardly acceptable if we are not willing to believe that now, at this present time, we have achieved that to which all preceding things had to lead, the evolution of man into a knowing and informed being.

This particular image of knowing is a prejudice, though. Other conceptions of knowing might have been possible. Maybe some damage could have been avoided. On the crossroads in history there might have been other possible roads we could have travelled and maybe wanted to travel instead of the one we went down. History is a given, but the belief that made choices are irreversible, or that

[2] Mainly in *Poverty of historicism* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1961; transl. Arbeiderspers, 1967), but also in *The open society and its enemies* in which Plato is discussed extensively.

erased options cannot be revisited, is largely unfounded. People make history, for good and for ill, and it is possible that regular patterns can be found in the course of this process. However, it is by no means the case that those patterns could not have been any other way, or that they come in to being and endure without human interference.

In summary, to take a closer look at the history of knowing is to navigate between the pitfalls of presentism and historicism.

1.3 Blinded by the target

There is yet another investigative problem that we need to acknowledge in advance. It pertains to the blinding effect of focusing on the target.

Thinking is seeing. You use your eyes to look but seeing happens in cognition. When you set about to do what we are attempting here, it is analogous to probing into the darkness with your eyes, trying to perceive that which is made difficult to discern by the dark. After all, a past that is not unravelled is darkness. Your focus on your subject matter can be seen as a beam of light on a selected place, separated from its surroundings. You attempt to direct your perception towards one specific aspect, in order to penetrate your subject matter. However, the abundance of light means you can only see contours, no depth, no width, no biotope, no meaning. How then, can you have perception?

In order to steer clear of this problem, Erik Oger[3] introduces the term 'night eye', a term borrowed from military jargon. Whoever approaches their target directly and straightforwardly cannot see clearly. Their target blinds them, they see less than they would if they were to near the target squinting, looking at it sideways. This stealthy gaze enables you to see more because it provides you with a view of the lit area without the blinding.

It is the notion that in order to grasp an object of knowledge, you have to perceive it the way it is in actuality, not the way it is captured by your own particular perspective. Not your experience of the object, but your understanding of it needs to be in command. So if you wish to understand Plato,

[3] Oger, Erik, *De rede en haar monsters*, Pelckmans, 2008, ch. 3

it is imperative to not delve into his texts right away. Instead, you should first try to get a sense of the framework of meanings in which his work operates. You should look at the work as a part of the web that contains it, in the depth of the chain of events of which Plato is only a link, in the diachrony of time in which he is just a random moment.

It is not a matter of 1 + 1 = 2, but on the contrary, of the possibility that these units blend, dissolve, et cetera. Never believe your subject matter the way it appears, but only the way it is understood by you, in itself and dynamically evolving. Epistemological research has the potential to lead to understanding but fails if it limits itself to crude facts and facile observations.

2. About Plato

2.1 Around our subject matter

Let us take the episode that Plato forms in the development of thought, our image of this historical period, as the location from which we wish to study our subject matter. Of course, this choice already betrays a significant bias, a bias that comes from the image of Plato as employed by historiographers of science. Presently, Plato is seen as the great classical hero of the history of thought. 'His Socrates' is the icon of the average reader's idea of wisdom. This in itself gives us enough reason to suspect a certain measure of presentism. We will attempt to battle this bias somewhat by taking Plato's historical context into account, but we cannot escape the overpowering impression left by the personage of Plato himself. Not just because many of his works are still available to us, but mainly because his work has played a major role in the more recent history of thought, and consequently in the development of the concepts 'knowing' and 'truth'. Plato is not merely the icon of the last 1500 years of Western culture, but also of the philosophy of the period from 400 BC to 600 AD. This is also the period in which Christianity was founded and Judaism entered a worldwide diaspora. Both religious beliefs, which also serve as epistemological beliefs, include a heavy dose of Platonism. This Platonism formed the basis of modern Western culture. This is why Plato is not a scribble in the margins of history, but one of its main chapters.

2.1.1 Hellenistic culture

This fact should not tempt us, however, to assume that Plato was an essential figure in his time as well. Hellenism was a culture that had developed around the Aegean Sea in the 3000 years before Christ. It is not and never was a culture in isolation.

Long before Plato, the Greeks had settled themselves on a great scale on the coastal belts of present-day Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania, the coast of present-day Libanon and Israel, cities like Carthago and the later Alexandria, the islands of Sardinia and Corsica, and the south of Italy and Sicily, usually in a healthy albeit competitive business relationship with the Phoenicians. Hellenism was a

discernible culture, but one that was in open contact with its cultural surroundings.

2.1.2 The Semitic influence

It is not odd, then, that there was an exchange between Greeks and other ethnicities not just of commodities but also of thought (as we will see repeatedly later on). The fixation of modern historiography on the history of Sparta and Athens would almost make us forget that these cities only made up a small part of the greater Greek hemisphere. At this stage, it is especially important to acknowledge that Greek culture had historically been influenced significantly by Semitic culture, in which a deity, thought of as earthly in every respect, constituted a mystical power at the backdrop of existence. As we will see, this notion of a mystical force that is thought to be distant but at the same time possessing a supreme power is rooted deeply into the minds of Plato and his predecessors. It was not so much an influence on their personal lives, but more of a force in the background, silently present and never manifesting itself. This notion stood in stark contrast to that other earthly pantheon known to the Greeks, the one they presumed to be present on the Olympus, in which gods fought with or against humans and took their place more or less amongst them.

2.1.3 The Greek entrepreneurial spirit

The Greek were a people of farmers and seamen, merchants and traders who settled everywhere they imagined they would be able to build a profitable relationship with the hinterland. Their mentality was a practical one, aimed at promoting their affairs and protecting their interests. Precisely because of this mentality, it was of great interest to the Greeks how their governments conducted their affairs; did they act in or against the interest of the people? Was the government skimming their profits or creating opportunities to maximise profit?

Exactly this entrepeneurial mindset, in which the actions of a government are not part of a natural order or a God given eminence but instead a questionable factor in the everyday struggle for existence, led the Greek citizens to be actively involved in the formation of government. The model of the Greek polis, which was flourishing in Plato's lifetime, was a model that depended on the involvement of all economically active citizens. Regardless of whether it was a

period of democratic rule or a dictatorship, the input of citizens was always the highest concern; what course of action would benefit them, would they stand to gain or lose from a certain decision? (Incidentally, one consequence of this system was that in times of danger caused by foreign threats, it would be difficult to convince citizens that investment in military force was needed; this type of investment did not yield any short-term rewards and was highly risky.)

2.1.4. The Greek polity

By nature, the polis was a manageable and well-ordered realm, given that a national rule, i.e. a government reigning over a country or a greater area, was not in place until the rise of the sovereign Philip II of Macedon. Inside the city walls of the polis people lived with each other and in service of each other, guided by a healthy sense of self-interest, of course.

This sense of self-interest was not the same for everyone, and not all segments of the population had the same view on what was in their best interest. Besides, the bottom layers of the population, which we would now call the plebs, never had a voice in the popular assembly, and neither did women. The balancing of interests mainly took place between the landed gentry on one side and the economically active citizens, who had attained financial independence and were known for their enterprising spirit, on the other side. However, In Athens these two groups lived in irreconcilable opposition to each other and alternated in the occupation of power. In the view of the gentry, themselves owners and exploiters of land, being actively involved in trade and monetary affairs was a despicable occupation, one in which the general interest is sacrificed for the sake of the pursuit of profit. In the eyes of the economically active population, the gentry was an untrustworthy and power-hungry circle of usurpers, whose talk of the greater common good served merely as a means to enrich themselves through political power instead of economic activity. In the case of Athens, the local gentry was forced by their numerical minority in the city to collaborate frequently with the city-state of Sparta, in order to seize power and install and retain a dictatorial rule, bypassing the popular assembly.

2.1.5 Political predecessors

In Plato's day, the icon of democracy was Solon, the statesman from the sixth century before Christ, who was a sea merchant himself and had provided Athens

with the Solonic Codex, named after him. This codex basically ruled that the free citizen was the bedrock of the community of the polis. It did so by abolishing the practice of enslaving someone as a result of accrued debt, and by instating a popular assembly and a popular tribunal. The following 300 years (until the subjugation of Athens by Philip II of Macedon) would become the golden age of Athenian democracy, in which Plato would lead his existence.

More precisely, the time period of Plato's life is the period in which Pericles (461-429 BC), the champion of the democratic party, had driven Athens to the apex of its power. Its downfall was ushered in by unfortunate hubris and arrogance in matters of war, among others by one of Socrates's interlocutors, the vain commanding officer Alcibiades. In 404 BC this led under the pressure of the Spartans to a dictatorial oligarchy of the Thirty Tyrants, which was already overthrown in 403 BC. The regime of the Thirty stripped all citizens (3000 men at the time) except the nobility of their power and terrorised the people, in the name of their self-ascribed role as protectors of the greater good of the population. It meant a victory of the greater good over the regime of self-interest that was democracy, a regime frequently criticised by Socrates in his dialogues.

When the Thirty were overthrown in 403 BC because of their terror, Socrates, as the criticaster of democracy, understandably became an obvious target of the democratically disposed Athenians. In 399 BC, this led to the people's trial in which Socrates was sentenced by the popular tribunal (400 people including Plato himself) to a forced suicide. The Athenian democracy remained in place for the rest of Plato's life, but was defeated permanently by Philip II of Macedon in 338 BC.

It is within this framework that Plato's writings came into being.

2.2 The man Plato

But let us look at the man in a little more detail. The current image of Plato is that of a superior sage, in modern terms a sort of super-professor, a hero of science and a man of incredible renown. With regard to the reality in which he lived his life, this image is a grotesque distortion of Plato's role in his own biotope.

2.2.1 Being wise in Athens

We can see this clearly when we examine the role that the sages of his time fulfilled in the society of the polis of Athens. In Plato's time, there was already a significant history of 'sages'. This can be seen in Plato's writings when he references the Sophists in general and Gorgias in particular. The kind of people we later started to call sages would be more accurately qualified as public debaters. They were figures who, as happened until recently in Hyde Park in London, more or less raised themselves onto a scaffold to convince the audience of their point of view.

In the case of Sophism in its narrow meaning, as discussed by Socrates, it concerns figures who strived to educate the public on how to become successful orators themselves; teaching the art of argumentation and persuasion was the focus of their occupation. And this occupation definitely had a function in the polis. Whoever acquired the skills to be an articulate and strong debater, would by this means make himself an important citizen in the popular assembly. When the Sophists helped certain citizens to become noteworthy citizens, this naturally caused outrage among other citizens, who found themselves forced into political minority by this process. For this reason, Sophists were often driven out of the city when they happened to have bet on the wrong horse. We can see, then, that Sophists definitely did not enjoy the reputation of the impartial sage. 'Sofia', the Greek word of which the most common modern translation is 'wisdom', did not mean 'wisdom' at all in Antiquity. Instead it meant 'expertise', 'skilfulness'. The Sophist was a craftsman, not a sage. This meant that if you wanted to have legitimacy as a teacher of virtuousness, it was highly advisable not to identify yourself with these Sophists.

It was probably for this reason that Plato and Socrates alike both went to great lengths to distance themselves from the Sophists; they wished not to be seen as Sophists in their written works and speeches. Plato chose the safety of never letting himself speak in his writings; it was much safer to be regarded merely as the transcriptionist of that other thinker, Socrates, who due to his untimely death could not contradict him anymore in any case. And even then, when Plato was of the opinion that his statements included a great measure of contingency and fantasy, invented for the sake of telling an attractive story, he would refrain from attributing these statements to either himself or Socrates. Instead, he would attribute them to someone like Timaeus, a person Plato was not terribly

concerned with. In Athens, written words could be lethal, it was therefore prudent to tread carefully.

2.2.2 A pragmatist by necessity

Plato was, as Popper cared to emphasise at length, a member of the aristocratic party, which had made itself very suspicious by collaborating with the external enemy, i.e. the Spartans, in the period preceding Plato's writings. His work shows explicitly that in his opinion, in order to be a true statesman, it is insufficient to be guided by crude bourgeois self-interest. According to Plato, there exist greater values in life and in the polis, values which commonplace merchants cannot conceive of and which can only be grasped by those who are consumed by the greater values of the general interest and by 'nobility'. Of course, whoever expressed such an opinion had to go to great pains to avoid being associated with the cynically viewed and lowly Sophists. This is the reason that Plato, while writing in the almost mandatory style of the dialogue, never lets his Socrates end up in overly clever and witty back-and-forth with other interlocutors. As a rule, the others merely listen, and say 'it is so' every few lines, without quarrelling with Socrates politically. This rhetorical style allows Plato to suggest that his written words are merely the end result of the dialogue - 'I never said this, but it was the outcome of the conversation' - and relieves himself of a certain responsibility. This gives him the freedom to make extreme statements regarding his opinion on matters. It is a publication strategy, a shrewd tactic that enables you to say those things you cannot say publicly.

2.2.3 A successful trainer

This approach led the modest nobleman Plato to become successful in Athens. By stripping himself of the accountability for his works and using this freedom to proclaim a form of statesmanship, he drew the attention of many members of the urban elite. This allowed Plato to found a centre just outside of the inner city of Athens, the Academy. Here he strived, in consultation with his pupils, to identify the virtues that were integral to statesmanship (which came down to good citizenship). As we will see in later parts of this project, Plato hereby developed a network of thinkers connected with him and with the Academy, thinkers who in turn gave rise to great philosophically important and defining schools like the Sceptics, the Stoics, the Dialectical school of Megara, and the Aristotelianism of the Lyceum. The ordinary nobleman from Athens transcended

himself, which increased his self-esteem to the point of inflation. He apparently became convinced that his ideas concerning citizenship, statesmanship and the state would lead to a superior form of society and of government, which, once in function, would prove its superiority as well. Plato probably had in mind the example of Pythagoras's experiment in Greek Italy. Here, Pythagoras had attempted to create a societal prototype in a city governed by him and his kindred spirits. When Plato later thought he had found the perfect conditions for his experiment in Syracuse, he was about to be unpleasantly surprised, since the rising dictator Dionysius was of the opinion that he could do perfectly well without Plato's advices. Like Pythagoras in his spiritually zealous dictatorship before him, Plato was driven out of his ideal city and society and was lucky to escape with his life.[4] Reality had proven more defiant than thought.

Disappointed by this failure, Plato returned to the position he had attained in Athens, that of a respectable teacher, and wrote his last great work *The Laws*. In this work he once again described in detail the rules and regulations which society and the statesman should adhere to. By writing *The Laws*, Plato cemented his powerlessness; incapable of bringing about real change in Athenian society, he withdrew into the position of the moralist on the sidelines.

2.2.4 Plato versus Socrates

In the discourse between philosophers, the relationship between Plato and Socrates has been the subject of much discussion. Generally, Socrates is regarded as the pure questioner of reality, a man of integrity with a secret affinity for democracy in his heart, while Plato is seen as the stealthy fellow traveller who uses Socrates to convince others of his own aristocratic insights, when what he really desires is a spiritual dictatorship. It is an attractive (though deeply ideologically loaded) framework: the reactionary aristocrat contrasted with the altruistic democratic way! It calls to mind the tale of Sleeping Beauty and the evil queen, the romanticism of good and evil. This is where one becomes suspicious; fairy tales are called fairy tales for a reason; they are quite far removed from reality. After all, why would Plato attribute statements to Socrates against the man's will? Why would he write down his master's words as his faithful transcriptionist, while (according to Western interpreters of Plato

[4] This episode will be expanded upon in part 4 of this project: 'The grail of knowledge'

like Karl Popper) not sharing his views? That would be like Karl Marx using Adam Smith to advertise Marxist ideas. A strange thought, is it not?

What is curious about this idea is that it blatantly assumes that Plato acted in bad faith; his citing of Socrates had to be ill intentioned. However, did he need this chicanery? Could it not be - which is far more logical - that Plato needed Socrates because the ideas of the latter truly were in line with his own way of thinking? Is there perhaps no need for an intellectual conspiracy theory to make sense of Plato's actions?

So far, all I have done is somewhat question the famous discrepancy theory (my name for it - MvdO) concerning Socrates and Plato. However, there is more to it, and there are more fundamental objections.

Above, we have constructed an image of Plato as if it were a photograph; look, this is his situation, this is his environment, these are the political relations, these are the competitors, and this is what his personality and life is like.

This image is, as I have argued before, highly misleading; photographs do not equal reality. It is the same photographical perspective that turns Plato into a crafty manipulator who uses Socrates as his shield. The picture changes when we ask ourselves why Plato went through so much trouble to thoroughly investigate subjects that could only cause him problems. What was it really all about? What was Plato's 'core business' in writing his works? Was he only concerned with teaching and raising the children of the elite? And even if that were the case, then what was the true purpose of this education?

These questions lead to the discovery that Plato's work reveals ideas that are part of a long and complex tradition of thought concerning life and existence. This tradition was far more defining for Plato's philosophy than the effort to intrigue for the sake of power. Plato was not this genius who had appeared suddenly and out of nowhere. In fact, it is questionable to begin with whether what he wrote really only came from the minds of either Socrates or himself. It is more likely that Plato was as single link in the tradition of an evolving philosophical discussion in Greece. And this is not philosophy as we imagine it in our modern Western perspective, as brilliant thinkers who live their lives in secluded libraries and whose cogitations reach depths that average people could never conceive of. This kind of philosophy concerns questions that were originally the everyday questions of the Greeks in the context of the life from within which they were able to ask questions.

It is not possible for us to give a complete reconstruction of the history from Homer (c. 850 BC) to Plato (c. 400 BC), since original source material is lacking. However, we can give a partial reconstruction of some historical elements. These elements all play a part in Plato's writings. As we will see, while it is possible that Plato did more than reproducing the work of his predecessors, we cannot really be certain whether or not this is true. It is not relevant to the value of Plato's opinions in any case. What is relevant, though, is that we can perceive a certain historically logical development in the philosophy of the Greeks, a development of which Plato and his ideas served as a temporary outcome.

3 The necessary conditions for Plato's ideas

3.1 Introduction

There are four notions we should examine, for they will lead to a better understanding of Plato.

These notions are:

1. The Greek beliefs about deities
2. The relationship between ontology and epistemology
3. The absence of transcendence
4. The development of a core theme prior to Plato[5]

3.1.1 The Greek beliefs about deities

The Greeks had a dual conception of godhood, as was the case in the Semitic world, for that matter. On the one hand, they acknowledged the existence of something resembling an incomprehensible, cosmic, passive power, a power too great to conceive of, which Plato described in the Timaeus as well. In the eyes of the Greeks, this power is a physical matter, a force of nature of immeasurable magnitude, and not a spiritual matter. According to them, this power is present beyond the firmament of heaven as the root of all existence. It is a passive power, a kind of silent super-plant that is present yet inactive, undeniable but not reachable. It is part of the material world but not perceivable in it. Had they had access to modern telescopic techniques, the Greeks would have expected to witness this force seated in the cosmos, motionless and expressionless.

[5] In contrast to Greek philosophers, relatively little has been written about the average Greek and the culture of the ordinary Greek people. Nevertheless, the embedding of Greek thought within the culture of the common people did in part determine what Greek thought could be and what it could not have been. Popular culture creates conceptual frameworks. Max Pohlenz provides a good introduction to this matter in *Der hellenische Mensch*, Vendenhoeck & Ruprecht, Gottingen, 1946.

On the other hand, the Greeks, like all other peoples, believed in their own very tangible and active gods. Zeus and his extended family on the Olympus were available, and they intervened with humanity, which is to say, with the Greek subset of humanity. Karl Jaspers describes this local and ethnicity-bound godhood as the precursor of the 'spindle era', in which all of these local deities were inevitably replaced with beliefs in terms of a universal God.

The local pantheon of the Greeks placed the gods literally in their midst. Homer summons then this god, then the other, to battle alongside their human companions in the Trojan War. He lets Odysseus repeatedly call on the gods for help throughout all his misfortunes and is not confident that the hero's courage and strength alone are sufficient to save him. Gods stand alongside humans, think and act like humans, and are just as jealous and sometimes just as stupid as humans. They do not transcend existence, but instead are a component of it. They can be called upon as allies and companions, or to ask for guidance and fortune telling. (Think, for example, of the Oracle of Delphi!)

This meant, however, that for the common Greek people, the human fate was almost tangibly as tragic as that of the Olympic gods. The genre of Greek tragedy acts as a catalyst in Greek thought. It distils from life that the tragedy of human existence is excruciating and unacceptable. The Greek people were faced with a problem, the problem of the tragedy of fate. The gods did not save humanity from this problem; on the contrary, they took part in it. From this perspective, then, the gods were not saviours. They certainly did not perish alongside humans, but they did not succeed in saving man from his fate, *heimarmene*, either.

According to modern Western religious thought, then, these gods are not gods. They are not superior, transcendent, or spiritual; they do not give redemption or mercy, and do not punish the wicked either. The Greek gods were different from our current conception of godhood; they were like humans among humans. Through lack of an omnipotent, actively guiding God, this bound the people to an existence the tragedy of which they suffered out of necessity.

This is a crucial observation, for it also gave rise to ancient Greek philosophy. After all, this Greek idea of godhood did not help one cope with day-to-day life. It did not help in explaining why the harvest succeeded or failed, why wars occurred and had to be suffered through, or why dictatorship and democracy alternated each other. The Greek idea of godhood did not offer solutions and only contributed to existing problems.

For good counsel, then, the Greeks had to go elsewhere. But where?

A religious vacuum arose, a vacuum in which Greek philosophy found its origins.

3.1.2 The relationship between ontology and epistemology

The Greeks were confronted with questions surrounding existence, which brings us to the second important point of departure of Greek thought. In order to properly understand this, we first need to rid ourselves of a particular Western bias. We assume that all of our knowledge has been subjected to meta-reflection, in other words, that with regard to all of our knowledge, we automatically verify if this knowledge has been attained through methodologically sound means. Simply put, is it correct that I am seeing what I am seeing? This is a mechanism which has been constructed and gradually internalised over the centuries, and with which we force ourselves to ascertain the epistemic value of our perception. This questioning is given additional weight since in our society, science holds the highest rank in the hierarchy of knowledge, and in science, the positivistic adage that says that knowledge only exists when its truth has been demonstrated predominates. In other words, for us, the question of truth is present in every evaluation of a perception or thought.

This is why the question of whether a statement is knowledge is always preceded by the question of whether the statement in question is true. The consequences of this automatic coupling are significant (as described in parts 1 and 2), in terms of reduction of reality and one's ability to act. It constitutes a perspectivistic distortion.

This distortion was not present in Greek Antiquity, for the Greeks did not ask this question in such a way and, more importantly, *could* not ask it in such a way, since they were not familiar with the idea that their perception could be fallacious. Their perception was accepted as a given, which is to say that they were willing to assume that through their perception, they could achieve acceptable cognitive results. I am decidedly not saying that they pretended to reach truth, because this is, as will be seen, an assertion they could not make in the modern Western sense.

It is not that they did not hold the discussion on truth in the proper way, but rather that they did not wish to hold this discussion at all. The focus of Greek thought lay not on the reliability of knowledge but on the nature of existence. Greek philosophy concentrated on questions of being, without a methodological

interim stage (at least until Aristotle). These were questions like 'What is?' and 'What is the meaning of?' Greek thought was not concerned with the knowable, but with the essential, it was concerned with the nature of things, not with the tangible. The Greek understanding of being was fundamentally holistic; it assumed a wholeness of beings, of which the tangible is only one facet. They would find the modern epistemological theme of 'truth' to be a pathetic shrivelling of reality.

Accordingly, the Greeks did not debate propositions, but instead debated the representation of being. When Socrates proposed subject matters to his interlocutors, these were interpretations of what is. In the discussion, what was at issue was not the accurateness of the representation, but simply the question of whether the thing represented 'was' or 'was not'.[6]

This means that the discussions that Plato described in his writings are by definition of an ontological nature and not of an epistemological nature. Even when the topic of conversation is the trustworthiness of perception, this is a discussion about the being of the perceptive faculty and not about the question of whether we are able to make a reliable claim concerning it.

The realisation that this is the case will prove to be of critical importance later on, when we look at the appreciation that is given by modern Western thinkers of Plato and his epistemology.

3.1.3 The absence of transcendence

The third notion is the Greeks' conception of transcendence, or rather the lack thereof.

In the pre-Platonic and the Platonic schools of thought, every occurrence was worldly. This was the case by definition, since their thinking exclusively concerned being in the way that their understanding conceived of being, as realistically existing around them. It was located within the existent and was not

[6] What Dutch translators (and translators of other languages) often and incorrectly translate with the expression 'that is true', is by the Greeks in Greek said as 'that is' or 'it is'. In other words, they say 'that exists, yes', and not, as the translation reads, 'that is true'. They discuss the actual being of what is represented and not an assessment of the truth of the statement on it.

part of the non-existent. Until more or less AD, the Greeks were incapable of thinking outside of the existent.

In Judaism and other Semitic religions, before AD, divinity was also earthily present, existent, a worldly superpower, a potentate and all-protector, but absolutely not something that, through eminence, feels exalted above all earthly pursuits and is simultaneously present and absent. Yahweh is with the Jews; He guards them, takes care of them, helps them on the battleground and in the household, is a guardian of the homeland, but not an unapproachable spiritual entity.

It is critical to remember this later on, when we examine Plato's beliefs regarding the form and the idea. These are not transcendences; they are worldly conceptions. The modern religious idea of a spirituality, which is non-existential and is located beyond the reachability of the worldly, is, admittedly, primarily derived from Platonic followers from the Roman era, but is utterly alien to the way of thinking of the ancient Greeks themselves. They were not at all unique in this regard, since other peoples of that era lacked this idea as well.

3.1.4 The development of a core theme prior to Plato

The fourth and last element which formed an essential condition for Plato's ideas is, as announced at the beginning of this chapter, the core theme in the philosophical thought that preceded Plato,[7] the fact that Plato is the product of a philosophical prehistory in Greece, which was governed by a clearly traceable theme. This concept is of such importance that we will devote an entire chapter to it.

[7] For data and locations regarding all central figures, movements and schools mentioned in this volume, see the relevant appendix in chapter 5.

4 The philosophical development before Plato

4.1 The framework of the pre-Platonic philosophy

In order to grasp the philosophical development that preceded Plato, we will briefly go into the central ideas of a number of important figures. Not much is known about them[8], and their texts have only partially been conserved and handed down via third parties. However, there is enough to be deduced from their works in order to see the connection between them and understand why their ideas generally constituted reactions to each other's views and attempts to formulate alternatives to those views.

4.1.1 Thales of Miletus[9]

Thales of Miletus, the first great well-known name from the so-called Milesian school, is the founder of the principle of reductionism. His central question is essentially the search for the element that is untouchable, the eternal around us, that which, in his mind, had to be thought of as the everlasting matter. One could only find an answer to this by asking a sort of 'what is...' question. What is essentially unchangeable, common to everything; what is the infinite and, consequently, the divine, since it reaches far beyond our human transience? His answer is not what matters here (according to him, it is was water), but rather

[8] In spite of the large number of publications in the modern era about pre-Platonic philosophers, it is by no means the case that there are many reliable sources available from Antiquity itself. First of all, there is a practical lack of primary sources, i.e. works written by the great minds themselves. The causes of this are miscellaneous, but what is certain is that virtually all of the texts we have at our disposal are secondary sources. The main source that gives an account of the ideas of ancient Greek philosophers is Diogenes Laertius (circa 200 BC), but he is a typical 'pain in the ass' for historians of science because of the randomness and incoherence in his writings. Other secondary sources are Plato and Aristotle themselves, but they are naturally less trustworthy for obvious reasons concerning partiality. Also helpful are the analyses, many of them made in the United States, in which meaningful commentaries are written about the different figures with the help of a variety of contextual facts. These can, for example, be found at Stanford University. Other publications that synopsize the Greek philosophers, like Bertrand Russell's A *History of Western Philosophy*, or H. J. Störig's *History of Philosophy part I* or Ton de Kok's *What is God*, to name a few, usually conceal the fact that they indirectly rely almost exclusively on texts like those of Diogenes Laertius.

[9] For persons, dates and times, see the appendixes at the end of part 5.

the direction of the question along which the answer would be reached: 'What is truly the unchangeable matter, that which is without beginning or end, the substrate of everything, that to which all things can be reduced?'

It is a central question, which needs to be understood very intensively and thoroughly in order to properly understand Greek philosophy in general and Plato in particular. The obsession is understandable; the Greeks saw themselves, as humans, arising and perishing, they saw natural phenomena arising and perishing, they saw wars breaking out and disasters occurring, and yet! Yet there was a persistence, a continued existence, a continuum that stretched across all experiences, which seemed incomprehensible in comparison to the much more obvious end of days. There seemed to be an elusive but apparently present power around, much stronger than the fluctuating nature of human history. There was something there, still, something that was apparently intransient, that did not suffer under the torments of time, that did not pass outside of the visible passing, that did not decline outside of the visible declining. It was a greater power than us humans, and animals and plants, something that governed us, that governed existence and the world in the sense of eternal presence, but that was not governed by us. What was that?

Asking that question is like wanting to find a fixed point, a given that does not perish.

4.1.2 Anaximander

Thales' successors in the Milesian school, like Anaximander and Anaximenes, expanded on this basic question, although their answers were different. Regarding this, Anaximander was explicit in connecting the first matter to divinity, because he thought that all of the worldly things we know, including water, had to be a form of conversion of the first matter, the existence of which he equated with divinity. What he added to this was the idea of a mechanically thought cosmology, in which light sources like the sun, moon and stars were seen as transmissions of a fire that was hidden behind a wheel-shaped firmament. The light sources were therefore transmissions of a greater divine primal whole, a belief that will later resound in Plato as well, when he describes the stars and planets as gods. Aristotle will adopt this belief in the form of a hierarchically ordered universe, because of which it will continue resounding until the seventeenth century, the era of the mechanisation of the general worldview. The world as an - admittedly divine - mechanism introduced the

conception of a world that could move in itself and by itself[10]. The fundamental idea of the mechanism, of the existence of a kind of cosmic driving force, was born.

The reaction of contemporaries to these rather speculatively sounding interpretations, which posited acting entities, and to the anthropomorphic gods blatantly assumed by poets like Homer, was predictable:

> But mortals suppose that gods are born,
>
> wear their own clothes and have a voice and body.
>
> Ethiopians say that their gods are snub-nosed and black;
>
> Thracians that theirs are blue-eyed and red-haired.
>
> But if horses or oxen or lions had hands
>
> or could draw with their hands and accomplish such works as men,
>
> horses would draw the figures of the gods as similar to horses, and the oxen as similar to oxen,
>
> and they would make the bodies
>
> of the sort which each of them had.[11]

4.1.3 Xenophanes

Xenophanes, to whom these lines are contributed, is viewed as the first great criticaster of the arbitrariness in the interpretation of godhood. He reduced knowledge to the sensible, that which could be perceived, and criticised the tendency of his contemporaries to interpret the eternally guiding entities according to their own preferences. He did not deny the experience of powers beyond one's control, but he did deny the ability to convert this experience into meaning and form by means of knowledge or skill. God was not extended, not something; God was everything. Xenophanes essentially stated that there was no distinction between the worldly and material on the one hand and the

[10] Alfons Dupré, *De strijd tegen schijnbare zekerheden*, Davidsfonds, Leuven, 2000, p. 16/17.

[11] A text by Xenophanes that is included in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, in the article on Xenophanes.

transcendent first matter of divine nature on the other hand, but on the contrary, that there was a union between the two at all times; everything was both worldly and material, and transcendent, eternal and immaterial[12]. All being was as such divine, and thus pantheism was created. Statements about a God who is allegedly invisibly present in the cosmos and of whom all kinds of attributes could arbitrarily be predicated are merely opinions, which can be exchanged for any other opinion all the same. Statements about all being are true if they are self-evident, and do not require the hidden divine to be presupposed in addition to or within them. F. R. Pickering[13] calls this the birth of critical empiricism: the desire to explain existence by searching for an explanation in existence itself. After all, all of existence is divine by virtue of its existence itself, and not so much by virtue of entities hidden inside of existence.[14]

This notion of pantheism, a formula for everything, is a fundamental idea in Western thought. At later times, there would be repeated attempts to grasp this all-encapsulating principle, for instance by putting it in terms like 'logos' or 'forms' or 'eidos' (= essence). The idea that there lies an all-encapsulating principle in existence, an order of existence, knowledge of which would grant us access to everything, would dominate the development of Western theories for many centuries, both along the line of science and along the line of theology. It would also become a decisive background idea in the work of Plato, as will be seen later on, since Plato also lets Socrates continuously proclaim a search for the 'true', that principle which gives access to the divine.

[12] This is the belief about the relation between object and the idea, or form of the object, which Plato will later adopt, but which, after Plato, will be abandoned by the Neo-Platonists and traded in for a purely transcendental conception of divinity.

[13] Pickering F. R., 'Xenophanes' in *The classical review*, vol. 43, 1993, 232-233.

[14] Precisely this, that existence is divine, but that divinity consists of the shadow of matter and the substance of the idea behind matter, is what Plato says.

4.1.4 Parmenides

The great poem by Parmenides, *On Nature*, forms a key to the work of Plato. We know Parmenides[15], who had actually met and taught Socrates, only through various left over fragments that have come into our possession via third parties. His system of ideas was based on the assumption that there had to exist intransience, that being included a basis of having-existence which qua knowability could not be compatible with non-being; non-being is an inconceivable and therefore impossible concept.

His assumption that there lies an intransience under all that is transient led to the proposition that the transient is therefore illusory, deceptive, a misrepresentation of the state of affairs. Knowledge therefore could not be directed towards the changeable as such, but had to be directed towards the constant, the eternal in the changeable. According to Parmenides, as researchers of existence, we should focus on that which lies beyond the field of vision, behind the phenomena we perceive. The Socratic investigation was directly in line with this pursuit, as was Plato's allegory of the cave. The later Aristotle also searched for the regularity and intransience behind his seemingly inductive perceptions that would explain the changeable appearances, and he thereby declared himself indebted to Parmenides. In addition, the idea currently present in the sciences that the narrow purpose of scientific research should be the discovery of intransient laws of nature can be traced back to this idea.[16]

Actually, Parmenides had not given an answer but had asked a question, namely the one concerning the nature of appearances and the world underneath the visible, that which determines our existence without us being able to perceive this determination as such. Note, however, that nor Parmenides, nor his predecessors or followers, asked what perception was or when perceptions were correct. Instead, he stated a thought, an observation, as such, without the addition of a meta-reflection on the truth of this thought. That is to say, the

[15] There exists a great deal of literature on Parmenides. For my purposes here, I have made use of Bertrand Russell's *A History of Western Philosophy*, of the relevant very good article in the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* and of various commentaries on Parmenides in various textbooks on philosophy.

[16] We will return to Parmenides below, because Plato, in the confrontation with Parmenides' ideas in the dialogue named after the latter, actually withdraws a significant part of his beliefs about forms and ideas.

question of whether his statements were true was of no concern to him. 'Truth' was not a matter of importance. He stated, end of discussion!

Of course, asking a question is always, at least in part, answering it. If it is true that we should search for the thing beneath things, the object that lies behind the phenomenal, the apparent, what then is this thing? This is the question that would occupy the minds of Anaxagoras and Heraclitus, the question after the all that really is, and is not assumed to be without being.

4.1.5 Anaxagoras

The starting point of Anaxagoras' philosophy was the basic premise of Parmenides; what is cannot not-be. Non-being is not thinkable, but this means that coming into being and perishing are out of the question as well, since these notions imply that there is a non-being before coming into being and after perishing. When matters really are, it follows that they always are. There is no beginning or end to them, for if there were, they would at some point not-be, and this is impossible. From this basic premise, Anaxagoras recognised the necessity of explaining the changeableness of matters, and his explanation for this was the proposition that observable and changeable matters are altering mixtures of eternal basic materials, without there being a limit to their bottom limit (= smallest) or upper limit (= largest). Only the composition changes, but the materials themselves never come into being or perish, for then there would be a being that becomes a non-being.[17]

The problem with this is the question why one mixture is not another mixture and vice versa. In order to answer this question, Anaxagoras introduced the concept that formed another key to the Socratic-Platonic philosophy. He believed that a guiding power should be presupposed, that mixtures do not form randomly without an ingenious design, since they are too ingenious to arise without the aid of intellect. The intellect is inside of the design; the thing is intellectually founded, a personification of the intellect, of the 'nous' as the Greeks say. The 'nous' expresses itself through the mixture, and from the mixture we can read the expression of what the 'nous' wants. [18] Here, the 'nous'

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[17] Patricia Curd, *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, 2011, p. 4/24.

[18] 'Nous' is a Greek concept that can be interpreted in multiple ways. The first definition given by the dictionary reads 'thinking and knowing as a function', which is to say the choice between siding with different possibilities. If you accept this interpretation, the philosophy of Anaxagoras naturally amounts to circular reasoning; the

first stands for Intellect, Reason or divine wisdom (the distinctions between which we will here ignore for the sake of convenience), and its definition is then heightened to the initiating and guiding first source of the composition of earthly matters.

Anaxagoras added an element to this that inspired later theories as well; 'nous' was not to be found in everything, but only in those matters that proved to be of a superior composition. What is significant here is not the curious nature of this notion itself, but rather the fundamental idea behind it that ingeniousness is reserved for certain matters while other matters are excluded from it. Intellect and divinity as privilege; it is a basic notion that we will see returning on many occasions.[19]

4.1.6 Democritus

Democritus, who was seen as a follower of Anaxagoras, I have to mention here because he is emphatically misunderstood. He is known in modern Western thought as the inventor of the atom, but what is much more remarkable than his idea that the first matter is composed of indivisible small parts (an idea which can in fact already be presumed in Anaxagoras' philosophy), is his idea that there can be a 'not', an emptiness, something that does not exist.

Democritus assumed that atoms could be distinguished from the not-being-an-atom, which is to say that there is a non-existent. This notion really equalled the discovery of the number zero[20], a notion which was only conceived of in the 9th

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mixture is that which chooses that it is. The second definition from the dictionary reads 'Intellect, as divine intellect, Reason', in short, a kind of intellect thought to be superior, a bare intellect, stripped from all human stupidities.

[19] With regard to Anaxagoras, the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* is by far the best source. Bertrand Russell clearly does not grasp the significance of Anaxagoras, and puts forward vague reproaches from Aristotle, who argued that the nous should actually be understood as a continuous, purposeful driving force instead of a static mechanism. The sympathetic Bernal (*De wetenschap als maatschappelijk proces*, part 1) has nothing to say about him whatsoever. Störig remarks with regard to the concept 'nous' in Anaxagoras that he certainly introduced it, but that he only regarded it as a 'first mover'. By this, he means the notion that there must have been an initiator, a spiritual entity which first developed the idea, the will, if you will, to generate something, to blend something, and that, according to Anaxagoras, afterwards everything developed mechanically.

[20] The number zero was introduced around 632 in Bagdad by a group of Indian scientists, who came from the astronomical observatory in Arin, India. Given the domination of Buddhism in those years, I believe it to be very

century AD by the Arabs (after the idea was imported from India) and would only reach Western Europe in the 11th century. This discovery was unacceptable for the Greeks. Accordingly, they did not embrace this idea, and they did not incorporate it as a basis for a systematic structure of knowledge. This was probably also the case because the time was not ripe for observations that could support this view. Euclidian geometry would make do without the number zero[21], and the astrolabe, the navigational instrument of the Arabs which was the most important instrument till the 14th century, would only become an effective instrument after the discovery of the number zero.

What is significant for our purposes is that Plato could not or would not conceive of the emptiness of Democritus. He could not imagine something that was 'un-'. Things and statements were! They were not 'un-'; they were not 'not-'. Regarding this, he retained the beliefs of Parmenides and Xenophanes. He built all of his reasonings in the form of positive statements that supported each other as they formed a pyramid of ideas. However, he would never examine the antithesis. Truth or untruth, the non-being of things, was not the question.

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probable that there are conceptual ties between the idea of emptiness in Buddhism and the discovery of emptiness in measurement; the number zero. In India, it is assumed that the scientist and astronomer Arya Bhatta (born in 476, but, according to Hindu friends of mine, absolutely a Hindu) is the founder of the idea of emptiness or the possibility of a number 'not', or zero. To this day, the relevance of that concept is still poorly understood.

Of course, it would be fascinating to examine if there were connections between Buddhist movements and the Greeks from Democritus' time. There are also sources which claim that Democritus derived his notion of zero from the Egyptians with whom the Greeks had intensive relations, but this also raises the question of whether these Egyptians had in turn had contact with Buddhism. On the other hand, it is presupposed in India that prior to Aryan Bhatta, there were already contacts and relations with the Greek world, but I have not been able to find much factual evidence to support this.

In the 9th century, the Arabic scientist Al Khwarizmi, who was connected to Bagdad's House of Wisdom, introduced the idea of the decimal system including the number zero, which was first brought to Bagdad by Al Kindi. He did so by publishing a book which was known as the book of Indian numbers. He also introduced algebra and named the term 'algorithm'.

[21] Regarding Euclidian geometry, there is Husserl's *Die Frage nach dem Ursprung der Geometrie als intentional-historisches Problem*, first published in *Revue internationale de philosophie 1 (2)*, p. 203-225, 1939.

4.1.7 Heraclitus

Heraclitus[22] is an intriguing student of Anaxagoras. He was not a solitary genius either. He was not someone who had fallen from the sky like a comet, but rather a logical consequence of his predecessors. There is not much we know about him. The papyrus roll with his written thoughts, which he once placed in the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, has been out of sight for a while. What we do know about Heraclitus has been derived from third parties.[23, 24]

It follows that Heraclitus is difficult to interpret, which is partly due to his habit of mingling clear statements with mystical semi-spells, which was very common for his time, but hard to convert back for us Westerners. What is so special about the man is that he was able to articulate matters that keep surfacing in the West (mainly matters concerning knowledge), and that will remain present in the future as well.

I will begin with his personal account of that which all of his predecessors had attempted to identify: the constant element, the unchangeable, the basic substance of all matters. Heraclitus nominated fire as the basic element (an idea which was adopted by Christian mythology). However, in Ancient Greek the terms 'fire' and 'radiance' are closely related, and in the mystical assertion that all things are filled with fire and can be reduced to fire, 'fire' can also be interpreted as 'inspiration' or 'spirit'. Essentially, he seemed to move away from the static view of Parmenides towards a dynamic view. According to Heraclitus, nothing was fixed; everything was always in motion. As an example, Plato

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[22] I have not been able to find and review Heidegger's publication from 1967 at Klostermann about Heraclitus.

Dr. J. de Boer, *Heraclitus*, Hollandia-drukkerij, Baarn. Of course, passages about Heraclitus can be found in well-known textbooks like Störig, and Bartelink's *Klassieke letterkunde* (Aula, 1964), but they do not add much of significance.

[23] There exists an edition, edited by Julius de Boer and released at Drukkerij Hollandia in Baarn, undated but probably from the 1930s, which includes a translated (and to my mind paraphrased) version of the 150 text fragments that are known from Heraclitus.

[24] It is difficult to interpret Heraclitus. There are many well-known interpreters who opined at length about the essence of his philosophy, and often represented it quite incorrectly. Recently (well, more or less), it was Martin Heidegger who occupied himself with Heraclitus between 1946 and 1966, which in 1967 resulted in an edition with transcriptions of his lectures at Klostermann.

attributes to Heraclitus the claim that one cannot step in the same river twice, as a metaphor for the idea that history and being are never at a standstill.

Commentary on this, for example by Daniel W. Graham in the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*[25], states that this interpretation is a misconception. Heraclitus asserts, according to this author, not simply that everything is eternally changeable and dynamic, but that precisely because of and throughout this constant change, everything remains the same. A thing cannot conduct itself in any other way than by constantly changing, constantly moving along with the flow, because otherwise it would perish. This is the basis for an explanation of the relationship between constancy and change. When you look at the human being as an occurrence, you see that it is constantly changing and has to be constantly changing in order to develop itself and survive as a species, and that it has constancy in this species-existence.

Heraclitus also gave a descriptive account of this movement. He believed that the movement was caused by the collision of opposites (because of which he has often been called the inventor of dialectics). All of being consists of opposites, and these opposites create change in collision with each other.

This belief of Heraclitus naturally gave rise to an inevitable question; why then, would the system of being not lose its balance, and how could it be explained that everything eventually remains constant if everything repeatedly collides? Moreover, why do we not perceive that constancy, that lever for the understanding of everything?

I could attempt to put Heraclitus' answer to this into my own words, but it has been phrased more aesthetically before; the description at the hand of Julius de Boer[26], translated below, presents the Heraclitus' statements concerning this.

> The one that unites all, the hidden harmony, lets there be discord only in the deceptive appearance. The eye is deceptive: bad witnesses are eyes and ears of the barbaric souls; the people allow themselves to be deceived regarding the knowledge of visible things. One should examine one's self, for reason is integral to the soul, which multiplies itself, in Heraclitus' sense

[25] In page 7 and 16 of his article, he actually states the matter more emphatically: "It is that some things stay the same only by changing" and "Heraclitus believes in flux as a necessary condition of constancy".

[26] Julius de Boer, *Heraclitus*, Hollandia, Baarn, p. 40.

> that is, which expands as man grows older and wiser. Thought is common to all, thought is the greatest privilege, and the wisdom comes in stating the truth and acting according to nature, to her attending unity. Therefore, when one wishes to speak mindfully, one should arm himself with that which is common to all, as a city arms itself with the law, and even more powerful, because all human laws are nourished by the one divine. There is a hidden harmony or unity, better than the public one, for the senses of man are deceptive. The people appoint the wrong teachers. General knowledge does not equal wisdom, even though the ones who love wisdom, the philosophers of the first rank that is, have knowledge of a great many things.

Behold the herald who announces Socrates, in many respects.

It was not unproblematic, for this attending unity of nature was postulated, presupposed, but at the same time characterised as not visible, not traceable, not demonstrable. Heraclitus gave a name to the beast, namely 'the logos', which means something resembling 'the order', in more modern terms perhaps 'the system' of natural being. However, he does not know what it is.

If you acknowledge that there is a system, an arrangement or order, then it can be concluded that it necessarily has to be permanent and constant, for otherwise the system would perish. There will be change, constantly and perpetually, but the constant in that change is the arrangement, and this is the eternal and unchangeable which all philosophers searched for. With this notion, the introduction of an order, a system, a dominant invisible hand, the awareness of a constant, a force on the background, was established.

The Greeks and Heraclitus later characterised the 'Logos' as a good order, a Reason of nature and, reversely, nature ordered after reason, 'rationally' that is. The Logos or Reason was a principle as well as a universal system. The smallest element in it was identical to the greater whole, for the principle was the same. This is why humans are possessed by Reason, why the Logos is contained within them. In a curious segment, Heraclitus expressed his conviction that this reason could be read from humans themselves, that its imprint is found in humans. 'One should examine one's self, for reason is integral to the soul, which multiplies itself.' Here we find the argumentation for why man should be examined in order to find the 'Logos', the supreme and constant truth, the fundamental structure

of existence. This is the quest that Socrates will embark on, and many others after him in the schools of Neo-Platonism and Christianity.

What Heraclitus did not clarify is what exactly this logos consisted of, what the essence or principle of it was. He circled around it, and this would become the subject of discussion after him; what is the structural principle that controls our existence, and how can we know this principle?

This line of questioning, searching for a unity which is constant, which together with other unities forms a system, that which is unchangeable in the midst of all changes, thus formed the central question of Greek philosophy. Where was this invisible eternal narrative that ruled over all things? What was it, then?

4.1.8 Pythagoras

In this mood, an idea arose which till this day would keep playing a role in Western scientific notions: quantity, or rather the idea of quantity, the reduction of matters, materials, objects, people and all other things to the number, that is the constant magnitude which remains equal to itself throughout all changes. Of course, the Greeks did not have access to the instruments or the scientific means of expression which the modern mathematics and modern sciences possess, but they had discovered the essence of mathematical thought, namely the unit that stands apart from change, high above the earthly, the reduction 'an sich', the bareness of the immortal.

The man who symbolised this discovery (and who, by the way, did not invent let alone transcribe the theorem named after him), Pythagoras,[27] was in his own opinion not a mathematician but a worldly and religious leader. His explanation of mathematics remained limited to the description of monads and dyads (singularities and dualities) and the description of relations between, for example, celestial bodies in terms of monads and dyads. That being said, he had found the constant of Heraclitus, the basic element of Democritus and the basis of all that connected all things of Parmenides; the divine systematic structure of quantity, the system that covered everything and was in agreement with nature. He applied this basic element in a quasi-religious manner, as a symbol of a

[27] Russell writes quite extensively about Pythagoras in *A History of Western Philosophy*, without demonstrating a substantive understanding of the relation between Plato's forms and Pythagoras' numbers, for that matter. The *Stanford Encyclopaedia* contains a good monograph on Pythagoras, dating from 2005, which includes an excellent bibliography.

superior eternally being. The constancy was in the fact that mathematical propositions possessed a validity which persisted regardless of the fluctuations around them; the proposition '1 + 1 = 2' was valid with regard to everything, they reasoned, whether it was said of tables, humans, apes or beans. It was a validity that was separate from the changeable nature of the world and therefore a divine validity, in the sense of superior, exalted from the vicissitudes of earthly matters. The number as the incarnation of the constant in existence, as the perpetual idea behind the appearance of things... It was the everlasting nature of the validity of numerical propositions which, as the modern mathematicians would confirm, would yield eternal truth because they stood apart from the material, and therefore appeared to be an indication of the unchangeable order of nature that the sages were searching for.

Incidentally, this is a characteristic of mathematics that grants the field its almost 'divine' status in the present day as well.

Pythagoras was convinced that Anaxagoras had been correct in his assumption that the understanding, the 'nous', was not connected to all people or all things. Reaching the intellect was a state reserved exclusively for the privileged, those who were noble of mind, the 'top ten' of society. For this reason, Pythagoras created a union of kindred spirits, which gained great power, and which was bound to strict rules for life.[28] Plato and Aristotle apparently did not take the figure of Pythagoras himself that seriously, but they did assign great weight to the company that he founded and that exercised great influence from Southern Italy, both philosophically and sociologically. It was a prime example of the society of sages. In fact, the followers of Pythagoras embodied that which modern historiography ascribes to Pythagoras; they were mathematicians and were known by that title as well.

In his religious-ontological search for constancy and eternity, Pythagoras heavily influenced both Socrates and Plato. The discovery of an eternal factor, something which represented the searched for constant, could have served as a prototype for that which the young Plato attempted to identify by means of his concept of the form and idea of things. On the other hand, the mathematical aspect of this eternal factor would inspire Plato to propose various, often dark relations between numbers and statements, to which he furthermore ascribed

[28] In Croton in Magna Graecia (= Southern Italy here) the company of Pythagoras ruled over the common people for some time, but its exclusivity apparently proved its downfall, which meant that the company ran into great trouble with the local population and was eventually driven out of Croton, where the colony mainly resided.

an explanatory power, in a similar way to how an explanatory power is ascribed to mathematical propositions in the present day.

4.2 The central theme of Classical Greek philosophy

This exposition of the ideas of the pre-Socratics in relation to each other creates an image, a map of philosophical thought in that period. It demonstrates how much the philosophers from that era were occupied with the search for the hard core of life and being, for the veracity of existence, the essence, the stability, which could serve as a foundation for their reasonings. They did not find an ultimate answer, but through the directions of their questioning, they determined in which direction consequent work and thought would proceed. They created the paradigm, the frame of thought within which ideas could emerge, and their enormous impact can be seen in the authors that came after them, like Plato and Aristotle, who in their texts often hold imaginary discussions with the predecessors and contemporaries described here.

Think, for example, of the introduction of reductionism by Thales, the 'all is...' question; the idea of Xenophanes that the all, that is all things, must belong to the animated; the search for the basic element, whether this should be water, fire, atoms or first matter; and the rise of the idea of a hidden intellect, a 'nous', a power that must lie behind the visible and must be intransient and systematic. Above all, think of the idea that in all things, there is a divide between transient processes and intransient eternity, the divine element in life, which testifies to this underlying power. These philosophers searched for the essence, the veracious essence of being of everything. They did not search for knowledge, since 'general knowledge does not equal wisdom'. It was about more than knowing; it was about understanding. What drives the world, what is the great permanent force within it that is able to persist through the vicissitudes of life and survives everything? The Greeks desired to learn about this matter, but how?

Before we discuss the answer that Socrates and Plato himself attempted to formulate to this question, we will first contemplate the way in which Western philosophy believed Plato's answer should be interpreted, in an attempt to understand why we view Plato the way we do now. This brief reflection is essential in order to be able to demonstrate that there exists a problem in the relationship between our current perspective in the history of philosophy and science, and the ideas of Plato himself.

5 Western culture on Plato

5.1 The choice of mouthpieces of Western culture

There are two ways in which one could approach the choice of philosophical authors who write about Plato.

The first approach aims to find those who have demonstrated the best perspective on the substance and qualities of Plato's work. While this is a fine idea in theory, it is also completely arbitrary, for who and what decides what is 'best'? Furthermore, what is the value of the criterion 'best perspective' for our purposes?

The second approach aims to find those who represent the majority of the conceptions of truth that exist in our current modern society. Their perception of Plato utilises the concept of truth and valuation of the societal usage of this concept in the way society currently does, and it will therefore have a reflective value: the interpretation of the concept of truth that people utilise presently. To put it in popular terms, those who most frequently put on the spectacles that we wear today when looking at Plato are the best choice for understanding the perspective of contemporary Western culture on Plato.

5.1.1 Why Popper and Heidegger?

The practice of science in modern society is not determined by philosophers. Of course, it is not. Or is it? Is it not actually the case that modern scientists do not read philosophy but that their practice and their everyday life are still in part determined by philosophy? A disturbing idea, of course, for modern scientists, who often detest philosophy in any case. The development of research procedures, the method of organising intersubjective validity, the objective of reaching a maximal validity of verification and falsification... These are all concepts which have been and are derived from the central theses of epistemologically oriented philosophers, mostly from the school of Popper's critical rationalism[29].

[29] Here, three version of Popper's famous book *The Open Society and Its Enemies* in three different languages have been used. The reason for this is that it is known that Popper himself had strict supervision over the

In the social and political sciences and in the economy, this so-called ‘positivistic' school of thought is often not accepted. The notions employed in these fields stem from the ideological and theory-oriented developments in the social sciences and social movements of the past fifty years. This includes authors like Marcuse, Foucault, Sartre, Arendt and many others whose theories are rooted in the thought of Husserl and Heidegger.

What is central to the issue is not whether these authors occupy the most advanced positions in the current philosophical discourse. Rather, what matters is that they are the most 'concept'-defining in the thought of the average professional in today's society.

Popper's critical rationalism is highly contested in philosophical circles, and among epistemologists it is even obsolete. However, for lack of a practicable alternative, it is virtually the only notion that practical scientists keep in mind as a guiding principle for their work. Neither Heidegger, Marcuse or Sartre are 'heroes' in the organisation of everyday life, but their ideas about enlightenment, ascension and existence formed a crucial cornerstone of the welfare state, because they provided man with the right to a dignified existence and the idea that the dignified aspect of human existence equals its fulfilment.

I believe, then, that it is a reasonable approach to take spokespersons from both groups as representatives of modern culture.

Karl Popper is the undisputed and chief representative of critical rationalism, which is so influential in the everyday practice of science (even though Popper himself would probably appreciate not even a tenth of the results of this practice) [30]. He occupied himself with Plato at length in his work *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, and it is this work that we will use as the source for his reception of Plato.

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text in order to avoid confusion about linguistic terms, especially where the interpretation of Plato is concerned. These are the following: *Die offenen Gesellschaft und Ihre Feinde,* UTB Taschenbucher 473, 1958, Franke verlag, Bern; *De open samenleving en haar vijanden*, Lemniscaat, 2009, and *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1945.

[30] Popper’s criteria for the value of scientific research mostly come down to a reduction to laboratory conditions, which hardly any social-scientific or historical research meets.

For the, originally phenomenological, movement of which Husserl and Heidegger[31] are regarded to be the founders, we will take Heidegger's book *The Essence of Truth* as a point of departure. This work is based almost entirely on a few of Plato's writings[32].

5.2 Karl Popper

5.2.1 Karl Popper as scientific optimist

Karl Popper is the personification of the eminently political idea that knowledge can be univocal and indubitable and can therefore decide on political debates and even render them redundant. According to this idea, political disagreement should be solved by finding the univocal truth in debate. Popper is the prophet of the idea that political disagreement is evitable because we can let the truth decide in political debate. His worldview demonstrates a dichotomy between false prophets and science, and under the heading of science, he waged battle his entire life against those who preached unscientific knowledge and who, on the basis of this knowledge, drove people down ideological and dead-end roads, at the end of which only death and destruction awaited.

'The attempt to make heaven on earth invariably produces hell.' Due to this stigma regarding the future, Karl Popper allowed his thinking to be governed by fear. And who could blame him. A preceding history of 150 years, from the Jacobin terror to the Nazi extermination camps, demonstrated a passionate but failing pursuit of emancipation that perished bloodily each and every time. This course of events could only lead people to face the facts; paradise did not wish to be enforced. Mistakes followed one after another, bodies were piling up, and every new eruption inevitably degenerated into new manifestations of

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[31] Incidentally, it is in essence not entirely correct to lump Husserl and Heidegger together, especially not where the consequences that Heidegger deduces from his idea of knowledge are concerned, which Husserl does not share. However, it is simply the case that both of them influenced a number of defining authors that came after them.

[32] Heidegger, Martin, *The essence of truth*, publication date of the English language edition unknown, original German language edition: 1988 Frankfurt.

barbarism. Precisely in his lifetime, Popper was forced to behold the senseless killings of two world wars, and he was not naive enough to believe in the termination of this madness, like Bertrand Russell did.

Here, philosophy had initially persisted only in anger; the unfounded optimism about social and scientific technology was followed through until far into the nineteenth century and found its representatives in a form of positivism that was combined with social engineering, like that of Auguste Comte and Henri de Saint-Simon. There were many groups in society that envisioned a linear societal and scientific progress[33] and based a form of epistemological positivism on this vision, as can be seen in Émile Durkheim, the inventor of 'the social fact'. He viewed the identification of social facts as a necessary condition for the undertaking of society as a project.

The 'scientific' socialism of Marx and Kautsky, and others, also shared in the idea that the construction of our system of knowledge would lead to the evolution of society towards a society in which informed proletarians with 'knowledge' of reality would manage society rationally, without the anarchy of a market-oriented economic system, which, by itself, cannot be regulated and therefore cannot be known. Their own work attempted to demonstrate (as can be seen mostly in the work of Friedrich Engels) that the power of knowledge was capable of exposing regular laws of history, through which a scientific basis for the management of society could be established.[34] This pretence of a future of which the lawful certainty could be exposed would be shared by many after them, among whom Marxists like Edgar Zilsel in the Vienna Circle.

In Germany, Austria and England, the sight of the horror of Jacobinism during the French Revolution had made a deep impact. What went wrong in the human endeavour that one could be so mistaken in the destiny of humanity? Why did our knowledge, our understanding, fail us so deeply, that the horror of the guillotine could not have been avoided? These concerns were not exclusively raised by conservative ideologues like De Maistre. There were also concerned observers who supported the revolution in principle. Kant was already present.

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[33] An optimism which, as was the case with the encyclopaedists, based itself on the idea that knowledge, in the form of science, would be capable of comprehending the entire universe, and could, in this way, liberate man from his limitations. This material pursuit of emancipation was formulated most precisely by Baron d'Holbach, the intimate friend of Denis Diderot, who led the encyclopaedists and edited the encyclopaedia.

[34] The idea of regular laws in historical reality would continue to influence Marxism in all its forms until late into the twentieth century. It led Otto Neurath and Edgar Zilsel, for example, to research the regular laws of history in analogy to the regular laws of the natural sciences.

He was too good an observer to regard the failure of the realm of Reason as a threat to the anthropomorphic scientific ideal of the Enlightenment. He was also the one who sought to give a new direction to the ideas of the Enlightenment by consciously asking himself: 'Was ist der Mensch?' His legacy was controversial. It was sceptical to the bone.

In nineteenth-century Germany, there were thinkers like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche who had their doubts even about Kant's offer, but there were also scientific optimists, who, even with the baggage of Kant and Schopenhauer, developed an epistemological optimism, which, it is safe to assume, was closely related to the political optimism that came from socialism. These scientific optimists were the philosophers of the Vienna Circle. The immense influence of this group will is discussed extensively in the project 'From capability to knowledge', but what is important to emphasise here is the role of this group as the intellectual destiny of Karl Popper.

5.2.2 Popper and the Vienna Circle

Popper, who himself began his career in society as a true Marxist (although this would later traumatise him for life), did not participate in the meetings of the Vienna Circle in the first decades of its existence, but he did heartily support the society, at the very least on an emotional level. To such a degree, even, that he would later found a continuation of the Vienna Circle[35] at the university in London.

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[35] The difficulty regarding an overview of the members of the Vienna Circle is that, in its original form, it consisted merely of regular meetings between a few gentlemen in a café, and only developed into a regulated society from 1922 onwards. An extraordinary amount has been written about the different movements within the Vienna Circle. However, broadly speaking (as we will do later on), we can distinguish three main movements with regard to epistemology. Most famous is the movement surrounding Rudolf Carnap, which included the thinking of Frege and Tarski as well, who practiced logical positivism in its most narrow sense, and persisted in this, be it in a more moderate form later on, until the end of his life. The second movement is the one surrounding Ludwig Wittgenstein (who, incidentally, was never present in person at the discussions regarding his work, which were organised by Schlick, and was instead represented by Philipp Frank), who practiced a logical and linguistic analytic philosophy. Bertrand Russell was the most important fellow representative of this movement. The third and least well-known movement, though the largest movement within the Vienna Circle, was the one led by Otto Neurath, to which Edgar Zilsel belonged as well; it was the movement of those who wanted to combine the exact sciences and humanities, and unite them in a science that could be called 'hard' or 'Archimedean'. It was not by chance, of course, that most of these thinkers were affiliated with Austro-Marxism. Precisely because of this appreciation of the exact sciences, Albert Einstein and Gödel often joined the Vienna Circle as well. The Vienna Circle and its significance is the subject matter of the project by the foundation Dubitatio Liberat

The Vienna Circle began in 1907[36] with meetings which were organised mostly by Otto Neurath, and ended in 1936, with the murder of Moritz Schlick. The group viewed itself mainly as a society aimed at the search for the Holy Grail, namely the ground on which a Unified Science based on experience and logic could be founded. They used the term logical empiricism for their effort, while later generations would characterise their ideas as logical positivism, because of their systematic tie to the positivism of Comte and Hume.

The society, with which people like Neurath, Schlick, Kraft, Carnap, Wittgenstein, Einstein, Gödel and Zilsel were either directly or indirectly associated, was characterised by a legitimatisation of knowledge; perception could lead to knowledge, posited knowledge, and therefore to facts, a proposition which went far beyond the Kantian epistemological scepticism. The philosophy of the members of the Vienna Circle was based on an inductively thought model of the construction of knowledge. From the assumption that experience should speak for itself, they searched for an inductive confirmation of theses in reality. The accumulation of individual facts of knowledge should facilitate the formation of hypotheses, which, through their confirmation in increasing number, would develop into laws. The members combined an epistemological pragmatism with a strictly logically thought conception of reality. In their approach, all facts were considered equal, and the exact and social sciences both fitted the same model. The accumulated knowledge could, so they believed, eventually be condensed in a univocal encyclopaedic framework. Possibly not in the form of a direct iteration of the encyclopaedism of Diderot and d'Alembert, but still as a proper continuation of it.

In his time in Vienna as a young communist, it inevitably happened that Popper was closely confronted with the ideas of Otto Neurath[37], the leader of the left wing of the Vienna Circle. Neurath was the most notable defendant of the inductive conception of science as a ground for the Unified Science he envisioned. With regard to this, his fundamental notion was the doctrine later

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that in reference to the work of Edgar Zilsel has been published in two volumes on the website of the foundation and in part on Academia.Edu in the years 2017, 2018 and 2019.

[36] The start date of the circle is relative, because its members were often already acquainted through their participation in the Ernst-Mach Gesellschaft.

[37] In fact, Michiel ter Hark (2004, Groningen) posits that Popper had in reality only published 'stolen goods' from Otto Selz (who rarely published himself), his tutor, presented as his own ideas.

known as 'sensualism'; that which the senses perceive can, as a hard fact, form the foundation of every science, irrespective of its position in the total arrangement of the sciences. Popper initially accepts this notion as well, although he rejects the inductive method (as did Vienna Circle member Hans Reichenbach from Berlin). For him, the ground of every truth statement, including, then, truth statements through falsification, is that it is possible to perceive the data. A fortiori, he believes that statements should follow the basic assumption that it is possible to make grounded judgments about concrete facts, which means he principally rejects scientific relativism.

The guiding principle of the inductive practice of science is that generalisations can be derived from the various separate perceptions through logic, based on the idea that mathematical probability increases as empirical probability increases.

5.2.3 Popper on Plato

The theory that became decisive for Popper was the idea, conceived by Neurath and Zilsel, that the practitioners of science form a cooperative research collective, in which by means of the exchange of opinions and results, progress in the knowledge of mankind is attained. This progress is made because through the exchange, the number of perceptions that can confirm the result increases so that it can be converted into law. It forms the basis of Popper's later notion that in the Republic of Letters, by means of falsification and the exchange of knowledge, an 'accumulation and growth of knowledge' is created. This idea, that through the purification of knowledge, the filtering out of untruth, universal scientific truth can be reached, was the inducement for Popper to address Plato.

Popper regards Plato, or, I should really say, he regards Socrates as the true founder of scientific doubt, the basic approach which makes the practice of science possible in Popper's mind. According to Popper, what is essential in Socrates' dialogues is the falsification of opinions by confronting them with facts that contradict the presented opinion. The truly positive, i.e. demonstrated, given facts expose the previously stated opinion as incorrect. Popper believes that Socrates is the man who, through his dialectical method, disarms political stances and replaces them with the truth.

However, in the figure of Plato himself (Popper makes a strict distinction between Plato and Socrates, a distinction he utilises to attack Plato and defend Socrates), Popper mostly perceives dangers.

Popper never abandons the idea of experience as the basis of science, and this is precisely why he attacks Plato. He believes that Plato disavows experience and replaces it with an uncritical form of rationalism. He accuses Plato of 'hineininterpretieren', of creating ghost-constructions and presenting them as legitimate. Popper calls this spiritual naturalism[38]. He puts forward Socrates' remark 'the soul is more important than the flesh' as evidence of his belief that for Plato, spiritual objects take precedence. The spiritual rather than the material truth is nature; this is how he describes Plato's position.

Of course, on the background, this claim is strongly related to Popper's interpretation of Plato's theory of forms or ideas, and of course the great value that later authors have assigned to the allegory of the cave is also a factor on the background. According to Popper, everything suggests that Plato turns epistemology on its head and views physical reality as a product of a much more fundamental spiritual reality.

Popper makes an important observation regarding Plato in light of his alleged historicism. Historicism is the approach to diachrony (over time) in which events that precede the synchronic determine those that follow the synchronic. In other words, it is a destiny of the future determined by the sequence of events from the past. This historicism is crucial for Popper because it touches on a personal experience that traumatised him.

In 1919, together with a few communist friends, he became involved in a gunfight during the street fights in Vienna, during which six of his comrades lost their lives. To this event, which was in itself already shocking to Popper, another layer of trauma was added when the party leadership attempted to palliate the incident by stating that this is simply the historically inevitable fate of left-wing militants in the necessary class warfare (see *The Poverty of Historicism*). This was unacceptable to Popper. He believed that the whole idea of historicism is a deception used to exonerate responsible parties in advance to relieve them from the task of taking responsibility for their own actions. Popper retained this belief until his death.

Popper names the view that destiny is inherent in history and the passage of time eschatological sociology or eschatological historiography. According to Popper, Plato applies this theory in a regressive sense. He views the present, Popper argues, as a step back compared to the past, and claims that it is the

[38] Karl Popper, Lemniscaat, p. 102/103

inevitable fate of the Athenian city state to keep degenerating further and further. Here, the eschatology is negative; paradise is lost and hell approaches us inescapably, so goes Popper's interpretation of Plato.

Popper criticises the substance of Plato's historicism on epistemological grounds; the evidence on which Plato bases his theory of regression stems from spiritual naturalism, which means it is not empirical, and therefore arbitrary. Besides, the different pieces of evidence exist independently from each other, as inductive facts, and there are no means to examine the truth-value of these facts through verifiable operations. In everyday English, Popper believes that Plato is talking nonsense.

Nevertheless, Popper does realise that with this critique, he basically rejects an entire branch of science (one which, according to him, obviously hardly deserves the name 'science'). For this reason, he reiterates the core of his argument until he is able to identify what he believes is going on.

Because this point is of utmost importance for the interpretation of much that follows, I will present the passage (from chap. 5, part IV[39]) in which he specifies his point unedited:

> ... for the Form or Idea of a thing, as shown above (in Plato's text - MvdO), is also its essence. The main difference between natures and Forms or Ideas seems to be this. The Form or Idea of a sensible thing is, as we have seen, not in that thing, but separated from it; it is its forefather, its primogenitor; but this Form or father passes something on to the sensible things which are its offspring or race, namely, their nature. The 'nature' is thus the inborn or original quality of a thing, and in so far, its inherent essence; it is the original power or disposition of a thing, and it determines those of its properties which are the basis of its resemblance to, or of its innate participation in, the Form or Idea.

In Popper's opinion, this means that, according to Plato, what people believe something to be, is not what it actually is. Plato believes that the convention that perception is trustworthy is deceptive, and that in reality, one does not perceive nature but only the footprint of the idea. Agreements on facts are mirages. The

[39] From *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Routledge.

underlying essence is the only thing that counts. Popper argues that, according to this reasoning, all knowledge which concerns that which lies beneath the appearance is reduced to essentialism, and individual experiences are declared to be inferior to pure rational thought (compare page 114 in the Dutch version). So, this is exactly the opposite of what the Vienna Circle and Popper believe; according to them, only perception yields reliable data concerning the reality of beings, and everything else is hocus-pocus.

The essence of this belief is that whether a fact can be called scientific is determined by its measure of demonstrability, be it in a positive verifiable or in a negative falsifiable sense. The data need to be demonstrated, this is what Popper is concerned with. Otherwise, we are dealing with essentialist quasi-science, with magic and tribalism, which are at the core of a closed society, in which new findings from reality cannot lead to a change in understanding.

In this way, Popper excludes a large part of thinking from competition where contributions to the political and societal debate to create and maintain an open society are concerned.

Whether Popper is justified in doing this or not, is a question for philosophers and therefore not for us. Here, what matters is the observation that Popper draws a dividing line within the field of epistemology, which he bases on a condemnation of Plato. Plato as the man of magical tribalism, as the wizard, who saw essences where there are none, opposite to Popper as the scientist, who knows that certainties constitute the best foundation for democracy; in order to attain democracy, the debate should be held on the basis of indisputable data.

5.3 Martin Heidegger

5.3.1 Heidegger, the person

Here, it is not the place to elaborately discuss the person of Martin Heidegger and his biotope, however interesting the analysis of those matters may be. Our research focuses solely on the manner in which he perceives Plato. The annoying aspect of this is that in reality, the manner in which Heidegger perceived Plato appears to have been influenced strongly by Heidegger's ambitions and conations in relation to the environment of his biotope. 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe.' Heidegger is not Heidegger, and we should elucidate this ambiguity in order to understand Heidegger's treatment of Plato's ideas.

Heidegger was not known for his integrity. His wife believed him but had to experience time after time that he was cheating on her. Hannah Arendt believed him and had to experience his betrayal of her. Colleagues and friends believed him and had to discover time after time that the great teacher abandoned them when it was convenient to him. Is that bad? No, not in principle, since we know by now that the most powerful rulers in our world are all eager to partake in some mendacity. However, the curious thing about a philosopher like Heidegger is that his supporters are adamant that this hypocrisy and mendacity played no role in the writing of his great works. The image of the philosopher Heidegger is exalted, and because of this, he considers himself a sage, a superior thinker, a solver of global problems. Because of this self-esteem, it becomes necessary to employ an adjusted style and an adjusted repertoire of syntaxes. The philosopher does not create this image arbitrarily; he believes in it himself. The philosopher is authentic in this belief, which does not necessarily mean that he is authentic in his assertions. The system of assertions and linguistic style should realize the belief, not the other way around.

This argument serves to signify my belief that in the case of Martin Heidegger, what he asserted was determined by what he believed. I did not conjure up this belief out of thin air. Recent publications, inter alia about the *Black Notebooks*, about his letters to his children, and - less recently - about his letters to his wife

Elfride[40], strongly support the heavily documented account of Farías[41], which was severely criticised upon release but is currently gaining momentum. His thesis is that Heidegger placed his philosophy in service of his political goals, and that at the heart of this philosophy lay no other value than the philosophical translation of Heidegger's political conations (which, incidentally, shows parallels to the previously discussed Karl Popper). In light of this, we should first come to an understanding of Heidegger's political and societal efforts before we can grasp his philosophical perspective on Plato.

5.3.2 The phenomenological background

Martin Heidegger is regarded as *the* central philosopher of the movement of phenomenology. This is really a curious state of affairs, both in light of his predecessors (Brentano, Bolzano and Husserl) and in light of his followers (inter alia Gadamer, Sartre, Arendt, Marcuse, Löwith, Jonas and Merleau-Ponty). The two most important precursors of the phenomenological movement, Bernard Bolzano and Franz Brentano, were both Catholic priests who resigned from their posts. The first resigned involuntarily, due to his socialist and pacifist nationalist views, the second voluntarily, for the reason that he could not endorse the proposal adopted at the First Vatican Council in 1870 that defined papal infallibility as dogma. Both of them, then, were Catholics searching for a third option between the critical empiricism that had been propagated from England since the Enlightenment, and the Catholic scholastic mysticism that was no longer capable of satisfying the zeitgeist of the nineteenth century[42].

I lay emphasis on the catholic roots here, because in the lifespan of Heidegger, the most important trails were also set out in the period in which he grew up

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[40] *Mein liebes Seelchen! Briefe Martin Heideggers an seine Frau Elfride, 1915-1970*. Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt (DVA), München, 2005.

[41] Victor Farías*, Heidegger and Nazism*, Temple University Press, 1989.

[42] It was the case, though, that Catholic traditionalism maintained a remarkable influence, mostly through organised support from the Vatican (see E. Lamberts, *Het gevecht met Leviathan*, 2011, publishing house Bert Bakker, about the Black International), but in the progressive metropolis of nineteenth-century Prague, where both gentlemen worked, the standards that held sway, which were fuelled by the resistance against the Austrian occupation, were different from those the Vatican gentlemen, who conspired with the Emperor, wished for. In 1907, Heidegger received the book *The Manifold Meaning of Being* by Franz Brentano from the priest Conrad Gröber, who later became Archbishop of Freiburg, at the time of Heidegger's rectorate in 1933, and collaborated closely with Heidegger there.

within Catholic institutions. With regard to these institutions, he broadly remained loyal to their leaders and ideas, although he later disavowed the Church as such. The militant Catholic revanchism against Bismarck and the liberal ideology gave rise to a kind of Catholic nationalism with strongly anti-Semitic aspects in the Southern Germany where Heidegger grew up. Regarding this, Farías stresses the precursory role of Catholic priest and anti-Semite Abraham á Sancta Clara, who served as an exemplary hero for Heidegger. In this early period, Heidegger developed the basic idea of an emancipation of the oppressed Catholics, later extended to the oppressed 'authentic' Germans, to a more glorious existence.

His scientific career was precisely that, a career in science and not necessarily for the sake of science. His mentor and initial patron, Husserl, had preceded Heidegger with an extensive and elaborate discourse in which the phenomenological reduction was developed into a basic epistemological instrumentation, which put flesh on the bones of the third option in the ideas about knowledge and truth [43]. Husserl demonstrated that, between the positivism of the Vienna Circle and the scepticism of the Kantians, there existed a middle ground, through which reality could be scientifically engaged without reducing it to its perceivable features.

Already in 1927, in Husserl's *Jahrbuch* of all places, Heidegger publishes his magnum opus *Sein und Zeit*, in which he shifts the focal points of the philosophical discourse from epistemology to ontology, or, to put it in layman's terms, he promotes an interpretation of the phenomenological grasp of knowledge in which Being is charged with an immanent drive to transcendent or superior humanity. That was not Husserl's intention. On the contrary, he approached Being strictly scientifically, that is instrumentally, i.e. using knowledge to analyse being, not to change it materially.

Heidegger's ideas made him very popular in the Germany of his time, in which students suddenly envisioned an image of science that gave wings to their desire

[43] Of course, Husserl is deserving of much more attention than I am giving him here, precisely because of this construction of a phenomenological reduction, which constituted its own step in the evolution of conceptions of truth in the nineteenth and twentieth century. See his works *Ideeën zu einder reinen Phanomenologie und Phanomenologisch Philosophie* (Meiner Verlag, Hamburg, 2009) and *Die Frage nach dem Ursprung der Geometrie als intentional-historisches Problem* (*Revue internationale de philosophie 1 (2)*, p. 203-225, 1993). See also Peursen's *Fenomenologie en werkelijkheid* (het Spectrum, 1967).

to liberate themselves from the 'barbarity', i.e. every detraction from the sublime self-image of German culture.

It did not stop there. When the emerging Nazism offered him the chance, he took advantage of this political 'Umwelt' in his position as rector of the University of Freiburg in order to introduce precisely the pure and superior state of science (which, he believed, should be a 'Wissendienst' to the Führer) that he imagined as the outcome of his philosophical works. The Wissenführer (who was called exactly that) Heidegger was the figure who would guide his students on the road to superior spirituality and spirit-ness.

However, he had overestimated the idealism of the Nazis. Hitler was not like the brothers Strasser, who were virtually the only ones in the Nazi party who could be suspected of idealism, and in the Night of the Long Knives (June 30th, 1934) both Gregor Strasser[44] and Heidegger's forcefully implemented 'Wissendienst' perished (after the loss of his main supporters in the party, he was forced to stand down). The initially still favourable disposition towards Heidegger of the Nazi command was replaced by a suspicious scepticism, and Heidegger, once fallen from grace, willingly allowed himself to be forced out of his function.

What is of interest to me is not the details of this history, but rather the essence of Heidegger's conduct; he did what he believed was right, and given his many explanations, statements and letters from this period, there is no doubt that he practiced a form of Nazism in Freiburg that went further than the Nazism that Hitler and his allies desired. Heidegger did not occupy his position reluctantly. His heart was in it, because it was the culmination of his scientific aspirations to see the emergence of 'truth' from the position of ‘führer’ of the Wissendienst. A truth which he had imagined and developed in his philosophy.

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[44] On to the role of the Strasser’s, Victor Lutze and Ernst Röhm, much has been written already, but most of Otto Strasser's own works (the leftist of the two) are difficult to come by or simply unavailable, which means that I am unable to study any intrinsic connection. Only Otto Strasser's *Le front noir contre Hitler* (Marabout, Paris, 1968) provides some insight, but no information about the Strassers' own opinion on the university. On the other hand, a great amount of information exists about the role of the student movements at German universities and at the University of Freiburg in particular, as documented by Farías. This information indicates that those groups, under the reign of Heidegger, mostly focused on the internal scientific revolution, which should have brought about a revolutionary scientific praxis, something which Rosenberg's foreign policy office and Rudolf Hess, the chief opponents of the Strassers, detested.

5.3.3 Heidegger's truth

5.3.3.1 The term *aletheia*

In order to gain insight into Martin Heidegger's understanding of truth, you should read Plato, since his analysis of truth is an analysis of the work of Plato. In order to stay as closely as possible to Heidegger's intentions, we will concentrate on two of his own texts. The first is *The Essence of Truth*, which was first released publicly in 1930 (compare Farías, p. 72), but of which the formal publication followed only in 1943. This text is foundational because it concerns a development and substantiation of Heidegger's interpretation of 'truth', on the basis of which he constructs the rest of his philosophy. So, while his most important work is *Sein und Zeit*, the main argument for his theory of truth can be found in *The Essence of Truth*. The second text is the so-called *Rector's Address*, meaning Heidegger's inaugural address as rector of the University of Freiburg. This address clearly reflects what Heidegger regards to be the necessary implications of his understanding of truth.

Reading Heidegger is like chewing. You read it, and then you realise that the words you just read cannot be reduced to a message. You then read it again, start to spell it out, and only then you begin to wonder what he is really saying. The reason for this is that Heidegger refuses to accept the terms he employs for what they are, because in that form, they are inconvenient to him in, i.e. do not express what he wishes to express. Heidegger's interpretation of a Greek term is not an interpretation but a paraphrase; regarding any term, he presents the meaning that he believes should be the meaning of the term in the original Greek text. It took some time for this to dawn on me, but it is a very important realisation. The eclecticism and the 'extremely loose' translations enable Heidegger to utilize Plato's words to explain matters in the direction he wishes the explanation to follow. When reading Heidegger, you do not read a Plato-interpretation but a Heidegger-theory that accounts for itself by using Plato's concepts.

The first and most notable example of this is the term ‘αληθεια’ (= Ancient Greek; from here on, we will use the term *aletheia*). Heidegger defines this term in a particular way: *The Greek word for truth is aletheia - unhiddenness.* It is a logical course of action to consult the dictionary for verification, and if you do, you will find that the dictionary reads: 'veracity' or 'accuracy'. So why does Heidegger change this into 'unhiddenness'?

Well, let me explain. In his introduction, Heidegger opposes the correspondence theory of truth. What is 'correspondence'? *Truth is correspondence, grounded in correctness between proposition and thing* (p. 2).

> Excurs: Note, a proposition is a statement that one person (that is pole 1) makes about a supposedly real thing, pole 2. Correspondence means that pole 1 and 2 become connected through a linguistic expression, the content of which agrees with the content of pole 2 (but which is made by pole 1, even if he asserts that he does not truly make the statement, since, after all, the content of the statement originates in pole 2. This, accordingly, comes down to 'empiricism', or externalism in the sense of the previously mentioned sensualism of the Vienna Circle).
>
> The polar opposite of this belief is that in which the perception of pole 1 is and remains exactly that, namely an experience within the confines of pole 1, which means that it depends on the capacity or proficiency of this experience whether it agrees with pole 2 ('rationalism' or internalism).
>
> In both cases, there is the underlying assumption that is possible to reach correspondence between pole 1 and 2.

In other words, there is equality between the statement and that which is described in the statement, regardless of whether this statement arises on the basis of internalistic or externalistic grounds.

Heidegger believes that such a view comes down to short-sighted sensualism. *We obtain nothing at all intelligible with the concept of truth as correspondence. What presents itself as self-evident is obscure* (p. 3). In other words, the perception is not the same as the thing perceived (the central theme of Plato's *Theaetetus*, later discussed by Heidegger). Here, he takes 'truth as correspondence' to mean a perception that is supposed to agree with the thing perceived.

According to Heidegger, the essence of 'truth' is not what one perceives but the 'Whatness' of the thing perceived. That which is not directly perceivable, but does determine the authenticity, the real fact of the thing perceived. Because

one cannot directly perceive this, and it therefore remains hidden at first, the actual vision of that which is the essence of the thing perceived, the vision of the unhiddenness, the *aletheia*, is that which evades our perception through its outwardly appearance. *We called essence the universal, the what-being* (p. 2).

You may believe to have understood that it is simply the case that Heidegger wishes to see this in it. Quod non. He ascribes it to the Greeks:

> The Greeks understood what we call the true as the un-hidden, as what is no longer hidden, as what is without hiddenness, as what has been torn away from hiddenness and, as it were been robbed of its hiddenness. For the Greeks therefore, the true is something which no longer possesses something else, namely hiddenness, and is freed from this. Therefore, the Greek expression for truth, in both its semantic structure and its morphology, has a fundamentally different content to our German word 'Wahrheit', as also to the Latin expression veritas. The Greek expression is privative. The meaning-structure and word-formation of aletheia are analogous to the German word 'Unschuld' in its contrast with 'Schuld', where the negative word presents the positive (to be free from guilt) and the positive word presents the negative (guilt as deficiency). *(*p. 8, *The Essence of Truth*)

So here he claims that he does not express his own opinion, but that of the Greeks[45]. Heidegger ascribes to the Greeks the notion that in the term *aletheia*,

[45] Of course, an infinite amount has been written on Heidegger's interpretation of the term aletheia. There is not much use in citing all of this, since I believe that the correctness or incorrectness of the Heidegger-interpretation will arise naturally from the discussion of Plato's conception of truth later on. For those who do wish to read up on it, there is the website www.ontology.co/aletheia.htm, which includes various articles in which the concept aletheia is discussed, also in the context of Heidegger's interpretation. The articles are written by Richard Campbell, Alan Barry, Thomas Cole, Jan Woleński and Anthony C. Thisselton, derived from their various specialised studies. In essence, the material comes down to the statement that Heidegger's view is linguistically incorrect, although the various authors differ slightly on what exactly the correct translation would be. There are two things that emerge from all of their commentaries. Firstly, aletheia represents the truth or veracity of a matter as the opposite of its appearance. Secondly, they point out that for the Greeks, a common grammatical expression like aletheia did not refer to a specific descriptive sentence but instead to a property of the being, the object of the expression; being had precedence and determined the veracity, not the other way around: 'Being as... the facts that make true statements true.' Here, 'true' does not refer to the predicate 'true' of a scientific proposition, since the term existence was not a point of discussion for the Greeks, but instead refers to the term 'really' being there or not being there, meaning truly being present as opposed to falsely being present, i.e. not being there. Only this veracity of

there can be seen a liberation from hiddenness, and moreover, that as long as there is hiddenness, there is guilt. The liberation from hiddenness annuls the guilt.

Notice how much meaning is heaped upon the concept here. In reality, the word means 'veracity'. Veracity is not truth, since 'being true' refers to a statement in the modern Western mode of thinking, i.e. correspondence between the statement and the thing discussed. Truth concerns a statement and assigns a qualifying judgement to it, but veracity concerns the object itself, not any statement, and gives a qualification of that thing, namely by identifying what is veracious about it, and therefore what the essence of it is.

Truth is a matter of agreement between a statement and the thing discussed in the statement. The combination 1-7-231 agrees with a combination 1-7-231. The statement that this is the case is true. But 'veracious'? Something can be true, but that does not automatically mean that it is veracious. 1-7-231 agrees with 1-7-231, but what is the true nature, what is veracious about the thing 1-7-231? This is the Pythagorean question that was never resolved. Who asks this question, like the Pythagoreans did in respect of the nature and meaning of numbers, does not presume that someone is attempting to hide the answer. He assumes that there are subject matters which elude his understanding, which are, for the time being, impenetrable to our intellectual capacities or to our perceptual capacities, but which through this impenetrability, force him to keep searching. They are not hidden; they are however not understood.

Veracity is according to the true nature, not according to the truth. It is the conceptual essence of an object, it is inside of the object (and, as we will see when we discuss Plato later on, this is how the Greeks understood it as well), but not inside of the statement as such.

Heidegger considers the truth statement to be implicitly qualifying. Guilt and innocence are attached to the object of a truth statement; if it is hidden, then it is guilty, and if it is unhidden, then it is innocent. Apparently, he already knows

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being there refers - see the first remark - to the contrast with the falsity of being there, i.e. with only its appearance. We can therefore conclude that according to the authors, in the concept of aletheia there is a notion of something in the being which they deem more essential than its appearance, but which does belong to the being, and which determines the linguistic expression of that being.

what Pythagoras and Plato what the real essential nature of the object of a truth statement did not, namely is.

5 3.3.2 The Allegory of the Cave

We will follow Heidegger on the path on which, via the Allegory of the Cave, he believes to be following Plato to the depths of his thought. I would take the liberty of not paying too much attention to the elaborate discussions about the arrangement in the cave that Heidegger puts forward to represent Plato, because my aim is to delve deeper into the construct of the cave schema.

Imagine: You are deep down and it is dark. You are sitting with your back to a fire behind you, and in front of you, you see shadows on the wall of the cave of that which is located between the fire and the wall. If you have never been outside of the cave, you believe, Plato explains, that everything that is displayed on the wall in front of you is real. Plato states that this is an illusion. Heidegger then adds that everything you see is 'hiddenness'.

This is the point of departure of the Allegory of the Cave. If you were to step outside of the cave, into the sunlight, you would see nothing at first, but then you would see the figures in reality. At this point, you would view these figures as an alternative reality, separate from the reality of the cave. Only after you go back into the cave and notice the resemblance between the figures from outside, from the light, and the shadows on the wall, you will understand that the shadows on the wall are the figures from the light, and only then, the Heideggerian unhiddenness presents itself.

Truth or veracity. Heidegger states that the people in the cave simply do not see things properly (he believes to be reflecting Plato here). When they come outside, Heidegger argues, and see the real figures and the real movements in the sunlight, the unhiddenness, they will realise that in the cave, they saw hiddenness. Perception that is deceived, and after the exposure, recognises the unhiddenness.

Notice what Heidegger is essentially doing here; he posits - inspired by what he believes to be Plato's ideas - a perceiver opposite the thing perceived, exactly as the correspondence model premises, but adds to this that the hiddenness must have been premeditated, that there is guilt in the being-hidden. After all, he believes the thing perceived to be hidden, not merely invisible.

Plato, on the contrary, was not at all concerned with the agreement between the perceiver's thoughts and the shadow image on the wall, but instead with the possibility or impossibility of recognising the veracity of things, in case we find ourselves in the situation in which we see only shadows. Plato saw it as the almost inescapable fate of humans to fail to learn about the true nature of things, their essence. The issue was not that this essence was hidden away, but that we could not see it, or rather, that we could not 'see through' it. His view is literally (as it recurs in other places in his work as well) that what we see in our existence are shadows of what is there in reality, for the veracious reality is the reality of the form or idea of things, not their material or sensible form.

Aletheia is inside of the things. It is never separate from them, since the most veracious aspect of a thing, the idea, is like a flipside of the thing. You cannot see the side of a coin that is facing away from you, but only the front side, and this is the case for the objects of our acquisition of knowledge as well; the veracity is out of sight, it is situated at the backside of the coin.

5.3.4 True or veracious?

Let us return to the central concept. Heidegger claims not to think in terms of correspondence: 'We obtain nothing at all intelligible with the concept of truth as correspondence.' And further on: 'Truth as unhiddenness and truth as correctness are quite different things; they arise from quite different fundamental experiences and cannot at all be equated.'

He states that, from the classical period onwards, 'the truth as unhiddenness' became corrupted by or devolved into 'the truth qua correctness', and that it is important to investigate this amalgamation in order to rediscover the path to 'the truth as unhiddenness'. Translation: not the correct presentation of perception, but the uncovering of that which is concealed should become a priority again. Except here, this concealed authenticity carries an epistemological label, namely that of true knowledge. After all, what 'the truth as correctness' is criticised for, is that it is fixated on the empirical facts, on that which we can directly perceive on the wall of the cave. 'The truth as unhiddenness' refers to the veracity of the moving figures on the wall, but for Heidegger, it essentially remains an epistemological discovery, namely the discovery of the acquisition of knowledge of the facts behind the facts. It is an establishment of truth, which is to say the verification of whether the image agrees with reality, be it in a manner in which, at most, this reality is compared

in a sort of three-dimensional way with the old truth, which is deemed to be two-dimensional. In essence, our search for truth remains the same; it concerns the validity of 'fact-finding', an alignment of two poles, the perceiver and the thing perceived, and therefore the rationalistic version of the establishment of truth in order to reach correspondence. So, it does in fact concern 'truth as correctness', and not the uncovering of the essence of the thing perceived. In the end, Martin Heidegger is concerned with nothing other than hiding, via a fabricated terminology, the fact that he strives to posit a rationalistic version of truth as correspondence, supplemented with the idea that, by loading this concept with moralising contents (hiddenness, guilt, liberation, revelation), it becomes useful for political purposes. If the acquisition of knowledge becomes revelation and liberation, it depends on the political goal what this acquisition of knowledge will effect.

However, was Plato's understanding of truth really bipolar? Socrates does not at all believe in bipolarity, but primarily in the authenticity of things; he observes a strict externalism:

> But if it isn’t the case that everything always has every attribute simultaneously or that each thing has a being or essence privately for each person, then it is clear that things have some fixed being or essence of their own. They are not in relation to us and are not made to fluctuate by how they appear to us. They are by themselves, in relation to their own being or essence, which is theirs by nature. (*Cratylus*, 386e)

In short, the authenticity of things is not determined or influenced by our perception and exists separately from our perception. Accordingly, it is not capable of a desire to premeditate concealment from our perception, or of owing something to our perception. Heidegger's rationalising correspondence view sidesteps Socrates' attribution of authenticity, i.e. veracity, to things. What is inside of the thing is not touched upon in Heidegger's epistemological question, since this question is loaded with Heidegger's agenda, which does not relate to objects at all. The obligations and moral contents and representations of the epistemological inquisitor do not touch upon the authenticity of the thing. Heidegger searches for nothing other than his own desires.

6 Plato’s wisdom

6.1 How time created a phantom

There lies an immense sea of time between Karl Popper and Martin Heidegger on the one hand, and Plato and Socrates on the other hand. When we view the last two through the lenses of the first two, it appears as if the concepts that the last two discuss have fallen from the clear sky like a brick. The Socratic Method, the Socratic Dialogue, the Platonic philosopher king... In the present day they appear to be alien inventions.

If Plato is understood in the context of his own time, and the discourse, circumstances and populace of that time, those ideas are no longer eccentric or unworldly. On the contrary, they answer to the needs of the people in his environment and of his time. By taking the circumstances of his time into account, we can understand what he wanted to respond to and also what the meaning is of certain central theses he posits here and there.

It follows that it does not suffice to, as Popper does, connect the interpretation of Plato's intentions to the self-interest that is claimed to be interwoven with his theses. In fact, even if Popper would have been correct in this regard, so what? What then does Plato's idea of the good mean exactly? What then is the value of his concept of truth or his concept of divinity? Dismissing these questions with the impertinence that Plato is ultimately concerned with power and self-interest is a sign of parochialism in theory construction. No, we will have to dig considerably deeper in order to outline the circumstances from which the Platonic concept of Knowledge and Being emerged.

6.2 On the concepts in Plato’s text

6.2.1 Introduction

The history of knowing and thought has a progression that mirrors the construction of a spider's web. All those who engage in thought spin their thread and make an addition to the existing web, and every new thread cuts off an

opening. We may be able to crawl along the thread we spun, but every thread we encounter forms a new shackle from which we cannot be freed, and which binds us as well. Without the shackles, the thread, the spider would fall. However, he is tied to the thread and it binds him, more so with every thread. It is possible to view this in both a positive and a negative light. Man is bound and torn by what he believes. Sometimes he relishes in the warmth of certainty, that warm companion, other times he feels restrained by all of the dogmas surrounding him, and he invents new ones himself.

Plato says in *Cratylus* (403c-d) about the shackles of desire:

> *Socrates: 'I will tell you how it looks to me. But first answer me this: Of the shackles that bind a living being and keep him in a place, which is stronger, force or desire?'*
>
> *Hermogenes: 'Desire is far stronger, Socrates.'*
>
> *Socrates: 'So, if he is to bind them with the strongest of shackles, rather than holding them by force, he must, it seems, bind them with some sort of desire and not with force.'*
>
> *Hermogenes: 'Evidently.'*
>
> *Socrates: 'Now, there are lots of desires, are there not?'*
>
> *Hermogenes: 'Yes.'*
>
> *Socrates: 'So, if he is really going to hold them with the greatest shackles, he has to bind them with the greatest desire.'*
>
> *Hermogenes: 'Yes.'*
>
> *Socrates: 'Is it possible to have a stronger desire than the notion that by being with someone you will become a better man?'*
>
> *Hermogenes: 'No, it is absolutely impossible, Socrates.'*

He who constructs shackles starts with the rewrapping of concepts; every concept should have the loading he requires to guide the reader down the route he constructed. Heidegger was certainly not the first to come up with that. Plato was no different; in *Cratylus*, he describes at length and in etymological terms the meaning of a number of central concepts he utilizes, and this is how he spins

his web. Whether this etymology is correctly applied is in this regard, as with Heidegger, really not very relevant. What is important is that the given implementation reflects the meaning that Plato employs or wishes to employ. That literal meaning, in terms of Plato, should in my opinion initially just be accepted for the interpretation of the text, since there is no reason whatsoever to assume that Plato intended there to be double meanings. Warren and Molegraaf, the translators of the Plato translation used by me, preferably adhere very closely to the meanings that appear in this fragment.

The most important concepts for our purposes are knowledge (*episteme*), veracity (*aletheia*), understanding (*synesis)* and comprehension(*noesis*)

6.2.2 On knowledge in Plato's text

(*Cratylus*, 412a) Socrates:

> *Episteme (knowing, or rather, the art of knowing[46]) indicates that a worthwhile soul follows (hepomene) the movement of things, neither falling behind nor running on ahead. So, we ought to insert an ...[47] in the name and spell it hepisteme: to follow the constant.*

Remembering the seeming contradiction between Heraclitus and Parmenides, here we can see an attempt in the description to achieve exactly that which is commonly attributed to Heraclitus, namely, to substantiate into knowledge that which is fixed and stable in, and perhaps precisely because of its change. It is an attempt to, already in the definition, encapsulate the difficulty of grasping the fixed element beneath the surface.

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[46] In Attic Greek: art or skill with regard to knowing (source: F. Muller, J. H. Thiel, 1969).

[47] In the translated text by Molegraaf, there is a symbol here which, according to their explanation in footnote 25, is the left half of the H (eta) and represents an aspirate, which is to say an 'h', a letter which does not exist in Ancient Greek. It is safe to assume, then, that what is intended here is the 'h' at the beginning of *hepisteme*, so that adding the 'h' means that the *episteme* is not simply given, but something which can be followed in its pervasion of beings and can only then be found.

However, knowledge does not equal facts. For directly after the passage cited above, he says:

> *Synesis (to understand), in turn, seems to be a kind of syllogismos (summing up), and whenever one speaks of synienai (understanding), it is exactly as knowledge, for syn*

> *ienai (literally, 'goes along with') means that the soul 'journeys together' with things.*

In order to understand this, you should note Plato's intention; the soul journeys together with things, which is to say that the veracity of the thing is captured by the soul, its underlying idea or principle, for only the soul can do this, be it not without help from reason, but reason alone does not suffice; the soul needs to be present, needs to be in charge of the creation of the understanding.[48] His definition here foreshadows his further expressed viewpoint.

This 'becoming' of things is a central notion, which is not surprising in view of the discourse of the preceding philosophers. Plato says this previously in very clear terms as well, even though he uses the broad concept *noesis* there, of which Warren and Molegraaf argue that it also means 'knowledge'; one of the very rare

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[48] The term 'underlying idea' is an invention by Warren and Molegraaf which is aimed against the Christian and against the Hegelian hijackings (summarized by them as old and new Platonists) of the concept 'idea'. They argue (part 1, p. 167) that while what is intended is a concept that signifies an abstract matter which floats above things, this in no way indicates a separate and realistically existing spiritual entity which leads an independent existence with its own historical evolution. They apparently, and with reason, believe that the Platonic idea entails that everything has its own principle, and that this principle or this underlying idea is something that is connected with the thing inseparably, as Socrates will argue at a later point as well. Nevertheless, they do not always employ this new term with the utmost consistency either, especially not after Warren's passing, since it is indeed the case that, in their translation, Plato in some places gives the impression that he does view this underlying idea as an independent entity; because of this, Molegraaf sometimes switches to the term 'forms' in these places.

occasions on which I do not agree with their translation craft, since I am of the opinion that *noesis* is derived from *nous*, which means as much as 'intellect' and 'thought'. It follows that, to my mind, *noesis* means 'that which is thought' or the 'comprehended' as a verbal noun. This is what distinguishes *noesis* from *episteme*; *episteme* contains the information given by the senses, while *noesis* contains the information that one does not receive through the senses but through conceptual translation, meaning through the understanding.

Socrates says:

> *Knowledge (noesis- meaning that which is comprehended – MvdO) itself is the desire for the new (neou hesis). But to say that things are new is to signify that they are always coming into being. And such things are what the soul desires, as the giver of the name noesis expressed. (Cratylus, 411e)*

So, this is how Socrates explains comprehension; the desire that matters is the desire to follow that which comes into being in its becoming, to continually near it, to grasp the '-ness', i.e. the essence, of it in its dynamism. You can only comprehend a thing (as opposed to knowing it as knowledge) by realizing that it is not what it is, in the way it appears before you, but that it is instead the way it is coming into being 'as the soul desires' which makes it what it is.[i] In other words, what a thing truly is is its becoming, not its being, and not 'becoming as such', but becoming according to the desire of the soul, that is becoming what the soul wants it to become. Noesis is a form of forming the reality according to the wish of the soul, that is its designing it. The consequences of this statement are deadly to a positivistic epistemological framework; what our perception tells us is deception, and only our understanding, given by the desire of the soul, can explain what it is we see, because it can comprehend that what is seen is only a temporary component of the coming into being.

> *'As for sophia, it signifies the grasp of motion.' (412b)*

In order to understand Plato, it is vital to properly see what is expressed in this at first glance unremarkable part of Plato's works; the unity of change and constancy should be understood, and only when the constant therein is grasped, precisely in the variety of its dynamism, the philosopher finds what he is searching for. After all, the coming into being is not a process without purpose:

In fact, any attempt to let motion end (telos) actually liberates (lyei) (here, it should be interpreted more like 'unties' or 'releases' - MvdO) the motion. It makes motion unceasing and immortal. In my view, it is for this reason that the good is said to be 'lysiteloun', because lysiteloun implies that the motion is liberated from its finitude (lyon telos). (Cratylus, 417c)[49]

When the movement no longer dies, the perpetuity or constancy is reached. For the becoming leads to an end, and by reaching this end, intransience is reached, as both Parmenides and Zeno had argued as well. The good, which the philosopher must search for by his very nature, or, better put, must form in the creation of his comprehension, is to be freed from its finiteness, its *telos*, meaning to be eternal.

Heraclitean through and through.

6.2.3 On veracity in Plato's text

This brings us to the concept which, in part due to Heidegger, has become so central: *aletheia*.

As mentioned above, *aletheia* is most commonly translated as 'truth'. Warren and Molegraaf's translation is a bit muddled on this front; they sometimes write 'truth' and other times 'veracity'. Heidegger, as noted in the previous chapter, transformed it into 'unhiddenness', which reduces the purpose of the word to the removal of the concealment, which becomes a built-in property of man and his knowing, since his knowing becomes revealing.

What Socrates says on the matter is very brief, and only understandable if one keeps in mind the description of *episteme* and *noesis* given above:

[49] This extraordinary remark follows an introductory remark in which Socrates states that for the merchant a transaction is good (*kerdos*) because it ends in profit, which is actually an error in his opinion. The good is, as he states here, not that it ends in profit, but just the opposite, that by being freed of profit as *telos*, it, that is 'the trade', becomes a freed movement, in which it will not pursue any profit and in this way eternity is achieved.

Truth (aletheia) (veracity – MvdO) seems to be like these others, for apparently the divine motion of being is called aletheia because aletheia is a compressed form of the phrase 'a wandering that is divine (theia ale).' Falsehood (pseudos) is the opposite of this motion: so, once again, what is restrained or compelled to be inactive is reviled by the name-giver. The word is derived from heudontes (people asleep), but the meaning of the name is concealed by the addition of the psi. On (being) or ousia (what is) (ousia, for that matter, can be identified with eidos, and relates to the essence, the substrate of things – MvdO) says the same as alethes (true) (veracious – MvdO) once a iota is added, since it signifies ion (going). Ouk on (not being), in turn, is ouk ion (not going), and indeed some people actually use that name for it. (Cratylus, 421b-c)

Here, everything revolves around the literal descriptions. The divine motion of being' aptly describes that the motion, which replaces (*implements)* the static being, *the nucleus of it is,* precisely that which is divine, that is the constant in existence.

'Aletheia' says Socrates, is a divine wandering around (theia ale). *This wandering around inhabits the things, is the inside of them*.

Accordingly, Socrates associates the falsehood with sleeping, i.e. doing nothing and standing still, not existing and not moving. *The things as things, standing still, are sleeping beings.*

Therefore, the *aletheia* is clearly identified with 'moving', i.e. being.

'The divine motion of being' reminds us once more of Plato's conviction that the core of being is a coming into being, and that it is this eternal coming into being which is divine. '*Aletheia*,' Socrates argues, 'is a compressed form of the phrase 'a wandering that is divine (*theia ale*)''. This wandering is inside of things; it is the authenticity of things, not of statements. It is inside that which is the object of knowledge, not inside of the knowledge itself. It is a property of things, namely that property which makes a thing the motion that it is, which is its root or underlying idea, as Warren and Molegraaf understand this term. I would rather say: which is its principle.

These are concise statements on the being of things, on ontology, not on epistemology. Being 'true' (so: *being veracious)* concerns the motion in things; it does not concern a statement about these things. Just as the dynamism of being

human is what makes human beings human and the idea and form of human beings, and this idea and form therefore demonstrate the veracious nature of being human. A human being as a fixed object is no longer human, but precisely through his constantly coming into being, the development of his being human, he is the idea of human, and therefore human.

It is then consistent that according to Socrates ‘A lie (*pseudos*) is the reverse of movement or motion’, or in other words, is that what denies the movement inside the thing. The following dubious etymological deduction serves to underline this thesis:

> *'The word is derived from heudontes (people asleep) (…) On (being) or ousia (what is) (...) signifies ion (going). Ouk on (not being), in turn, is ouk ion (not going)' (Cratylus, 421c)*

In this way, Socrates converts the opposition of veracious - not veracious into the opposition of moving - not moving. What moves (in) the thing, the motion, is what is true of the thing, and this is its root or underlying idea, its principle.

We should take a moment to consider what we have achieved with this recapture of Socrates' concepts. He relates the statements on the true nature of beings to the following of the motion, and veracity to the moving authenticity of things, really to the moving itself, not in opposition to the not-moving, but as the motion, the motion which is permanent and eternal, as the constancy in the thing, as what it makes to what it - in substance - is. It is the ever-present motion which continues the thing and, through this, also makes it what it is, gives it its authenticity.

This does not sufficiently clarify what Socrates's intentions were. Contrary to a great number of Socrates-apologists who see the crux of Plato's and Socrates's intentions in the Socratic dialogue, Socrates is far from a democratic interlocutor, but instead someone who only needs his interlocutors - sometimes, only sometimes, and often not even - as a coat hanger for his own opinion. Their response or objection is generally taken seriously only pro forma, and on some occasions, when he believes to be a bringer of somewhat unfortunate news, he puts his words in the mouth of the interlocutor in order to appear himself more innocent in comparison.

Many Socratic writings are elaborate exposés on the opinion of Socrates, or the opinions Plato ascribes to him. When you read the *Laws* or the *Timaeus*, you are

confronted with a worldview that is worked out in almost comic detail, in which the interlocutor fulfils a role only pro forma. It in no way pertains to the open debate that Popper ascribes to Socrates. They are monologues in disguise. He has motivations, that innocent Socrates, and no modest ones either. However, whether these motivations agree with that which is ascribed to him, is a wholly different story. This will once again become clear below.

6.2.4. On knowing in Plato's text

Let us begin by investigating what Plato means with his curious ideas about knowing. They are often cited, for example by Popper in connection with the *Republic*, and by Heidegger in connection with the *Republic* and the *Theaetetus*. They, and many others, assess Socrates's writings on their value for the recognition of the value of knowledge. The theory of the forms or ideas virtually constitutes the centerpiece of many later views on Platonism and traces back to his conception of ideas, which Popper and Heidegger thought to be epistemological in nature.

What is Socrates's own perspective? The answer to this question needs to be scraped together.

We will begin with a characteristic remark by Socrates from the *Republic (Penguin, 1987, Transl. Desmond Lee*, p. 203):

> 479[E] *"Those then who have eyes for the multiplicity of beautiful things and just acts, and so on, but are unable, even with another to guide them, to see beauty itself and justice itself, may be said in all cases to have opinions, but cannot be said to know any of the things they hold opinions about."*

The text preceding this remark extensively discusses this distinction between opinion and knowledge, but at this point the cat is out of the bag; to see things, 'the many just things', is not to 'know' them. For knowledge can only relate to 'it', that background concept of justice which has to be given first so that things can be what they are, in this case just things. Being familiar with things is not knowledge (it is merely opinion), but recognizing the idea of those things, *that* is knowledge.

So, then we transform the question, for that which is the idea of things is what makes awareness of these things into knowledge, not the methodology we would apply. It is not the method that validates knowledge, but the substance of the object of knowledge, the veracity of it.

However, can a thing even be veracious in our Western use of language? A thing is, or it is not, there is no third possibility. However, the judgement 'true or not true' does not apply here, but the judgement 'veracious or not veracious' does, so Socrates argues. Because if we say that something is veracious, what we mean is that it is true to its nature, to that which constitutes the substance of the thing. The veracity of a thing does not equal the truth of a statement about it. Socrates says (*Cratylus*, 439b):

> *"So, if it is really the case that one can learn about things through names and that one can also learn about them through themselves, which would be the better and clearer way to hear about them? Is it better to learn from the likeness whether it itself is a good likeness and so finding the veracity of the thing? Or to start from the veracity itself, studying that as such, and after that checking if the image compares well.*
>
> *Cratylus: I think it is certainly better to learn from the truth itself (= veracity - MvdO)."*

Not the likeness, the statement, says that something is the case, but the thing itself. And then Cratylus says: 'the veracity' teaches us this, meaning the true nature, the being-veracious of the thing. This is not a statement about the reliability of knowledge, but instead a statement saying that knowledge should concern the substance, and that the other data are irrelevant. This bears no relation to the correspondence theory of truth; the point here is that the only thing that matters is finding (that is: creating) the veracity. What is at issue is not the bilateral principle of the modern Western assessment of truth (what I say corresponds with what is the case), but the identification of the substance, the true nature of the thing. The likeness is explicitly rejected as being in itself not of interest, i.e. the statement that something is the case is not the point, but the statement about the true nature, the underlying idea, the principle, is what grasping reality is all about.

Socrates, vol. 3, *Parmenides,* p. 99:

> *"The underlying ideas are types (more like models - MdvO) in nature, and other things are like them and are imitations of them. And this partaking by the other things of the underlying ideas implies nothing other than that they are likenesses of the underlying ideas."*

Behind this, there implicitly lies a different principle from what we call science. The Greek philosophers until Plato strived to penetrate to the true. They did not strive to penetrate to the true method, but to the true property of the thing that makes it that thing. In their experience, there is no subject-object dualism that needs to be overcome. Their access to perception is not under question, but what is under question is what is inside of the thing, how to form the underlying idea or principle of which it partakes. They pursue this problem because they are convinced that the thing is multi-layered, that it comprises both a layer of perception and a layer of essentiality underneath, a ratio or core of the object so to speak.

This has everything to do with the Heraclitean approach, which already came into play in the analysis of the definitions; the Greeks were convinced that, under the changeability of the things perceptible by the senses, there lies the unchangeability, and that it is this unchangeability in motion that is important. The motility itself is only likeness, not essence.

With this, the research perspective that we are familiar with in Western science evolves from a bilateral model to a triangular model; beside the observer and the thing observed, there exists a layer behind the thing observed, an essence which lies inside of the thing observed, partakes in it and forms the actuality of it, without equalling the likeness in its individuality.

There is another dimension to this arrangement as well. Does Socrates actually practice epistemology here, meaning the theory of knowledge, or does he practice ontology, i.e. the theory of being? Is his penetration to the essence in service of truth, without other interests? Or are we here concerned with a philosophy of being, with a theory that aims to teach human beings how to approach life?

Bearing this question in mind, we return to the allegory of the cave. What image could better lend itself to an epistemological consideration (Popper)? What could be of better use to indicate the 'concealment' of reality (Heidegger)?

It is understandable that, from the Western perspective, the allegory of the cave is considered to be the epitome of epistemological inquiry. Accordingly, Popper and Heidegger gladly utilise the allegory to substantiate their own version of the correspondence theory of truth. However, in order to accept their position that the metaphor of the cave concerns epistemology, you need to ignore the conclusion given by Socrates at the end of the allegory, since he says (Plato, Penguin, 1987, Transl. D. Lee, *Republic*, p. 244):

517b *"The realm revealed by sight corresponds to the prison, and the light of the fire in the prison to the power of the sun. And you won't go wrong if you connect the ascent in the upper world and the sight of the objects there with the upward progress of the mind into the intelligible region. That, at any rate, is my interpretation, which is what you are anxious to hear; the truth verdict of the matter is, after all, only known to God.(This does not concern any verdict about statements concerning factuality, because intelligibility is the realm of the gods and so it concerns veracity -MvdO). But in my opinion, for what it is worth, the final thing to be perceived in the intelligible region and perceived only with difficulty, is the form of the good; once seen, it is inferred to be responsible for whatever is right and valuable in anything, producing in the visible region light and the source of light, and being in the intelligible region itself controlling source of truth and intelligence. And anyone who is going to act rationally either in public or private life, must have sight of it."*

That first sentence is of the most importance: 'The world of sight can be compared to the stay in prison' (the cave - MvdO). True, the cave represents the perceptible appearances, and these do not provide you with any vision. 'In any case, my opinion is that in the world of knowledge the underlying idea of the good appears last of all and is seen only with an effort.' The good Socrates speaks of cannot simply be seen, but that good, the constant, is what ultimately matters to the philosopher, for the good is the parent of light and of the lord of light and is the source of veracity and reason. In short, this is a substantial plea for not placing trust in perception and instead searching for the good through understanding, that is through the design of comprehension. It is an ontological

treatise; he who does not search for the good, will not find wisdom. It has nothing to do with epistemology.

Are we here concerned with an investigative examination or instead with a theory of salvation? Does the ascent of the soul into the intellectual world concern a data collection or a coming into being of man? Socrates is evidently convinced that the good is a unique and in itself univocal concept[50]. The good is here synonymous with the veracious, which is the source of everything related to comprehension and reason. It is the inner shell of a principle which, as likenesses, carries with it veracity and reason. To reach this is ontology, it is a task for being. It is not epistemology, Socrates says laconically: 'whether this is right or wrong, God knows'. This line speaks for itself.

Socrates continues to contradict the epistemological interpretation (Penguin, ibid, p. 234):

508e *"Then what gives the objects of knowledge their veracity and the knower's mind the power of knowing is the form of the good. It is the cause of knowledge and veracity and you will be right to think of it as being of itself known, and yet as being something other than, and even more splendid than, knowledge and veracity, splendid as they are. And just as it was right to think of light and sight as being like the sun, but wrong to think of them as being the sun itself, so here again it is right to think of knowledge and veracity as being like the good, but wrong to think of either of them as being the good , whose position must be ranked still higher."*

So, what does Socrates argue here? He says that knowledge is a relative value; that behind knowledge and above it, there lies the principle of the good. For that which gives truth to the thing known, 'gives veracity' to that thing in Plato's view; it places an underlying idea in that thing. The idea that connects all underlying ideas is the good, since it is the good that forms the actual core of all underlying ideas, of all veracities. At the same time, he stresses that neither knowledge nor reason equals the good, because the good is of a higher order. In other words, the search for the substance or essence does not halt in the realm of knowledge

[50] This conception of the good bears strong resemblances to the Pythagorean view of quantities as absolute magnitudes that exist beyond changeability's. Likewise, the good is in itself not vulnerable to changes and history, for what is good will always be good and exists beyond the vicissitude of events and people.

and reason, but goes far beyond that, even though it could not exist without knowledge and reason. Socrates continues to uphold this triangle in the research perspective; between observer and the thing observed, the essence eludes us even when there is complete correspondence of representation and reality.

It is an ontological view with epistemological consequences. The Platonic perspective says that there is a flaw in the model of truth as correspondence that is fatal for the being of man, for his existence as a designing instance, and that the search for the essence is both a task for being as an indispensable approach to the value of any truth question. Without veracity, nothing is true; without essence, every statement is meaningless.

7 Plato, an appraisal

Establishing that there has been an epistemological misrepresentation of Plato's work, as we have done above, of course does not equal giving an adequate appraisal of the work of Plato in itself. We cannot do proper justice to this in our current context, nor do we have to, since for the central question of this study, it suffices to recognise three aspects of that endeavour. The choice of these three elements rests on their importance for the development of thought and knowing in Western culture after Plato.

7.1 The ontology of existence

The first element concerns the specific nature of the perspective which the Greeks, and Plato and Socrates in particular, utilised in their examination of the reality that surrounded them, of the ontology of their existence.

For Plato (but for his predecessors as well), the way of looking at reality was fundamentally holistic, or, in other words, multidimensional. In his perspective, there was no such thing as viewing a being from only one point of view; a disciplinary or paradigmatically directed approach was out of question, at the very least consciously speaking. The reason for this was simply that their object of study was the being as such, its be-ing, not its aspects. They could not, as modern science fundamentally does, fathom that from the examination of details and partial qualities, an image of the whole would automatically arise. Plato asked himself (as did his predecessors) what that whole be-ing was. That question, which would later be named metaphysics by Western philosophers, was a question of depth, not width: how do we penetrate that which is be-ing is so thoroughly that we can grasp its essence?

Plato set himself final practical ethical goals, but the way to achieve these was aimed at a contemplation of the being and the be-ing of the beings. He attempted to discern that in human beings which is the constant in being human, that which is there unchangeably through time, that which makes humans human. That was the function of the allegory of the cave: to demonstrate what it means when man attempts to understand, what the typical constant human factor in that is.

Plato really says that, for humans, understanding does not come without effort; that understanding is troublesome, and that in order to understand, you first have to see the light. That light does not simply present itself; the sight of it requires hard work and study, dedicating yourself to the effort, acquiring wisdom. This is the only way for humans to grasp what truly resides in being, to penetrate it all the way to the essence.

This ideal, this wish to truly grasp the essence of beings that transcends the accidentalness and temporality, became the ideal of all philosophy after him, irrespective of whether it called itself science or religion. This legacy did not belong to Plato alone; it comprised the whole of Greek philosophical history up to and including Plato. Plato provided the focus of this human search with names: the form or idea for that which is essential to the thing, the logos for the order and harmony of things, the psyche or soul for the spirit of things, the nous for the human

intellect. These are labels that serve to express the idea that we should not linger at the appearance of the beings as they come before us, but that we should persevere in order to penetrate them to the essence[i]. This search has been, and still is, a fundamental theorem for Western culture. It is as if Plato had placed a tiny train on the tracks, started the engine and said: 'There, off you go! From here on out it will drive itself, the tracks in front of you will take you where you need to be.'

7. 2 The theory of the spiritual presence

It is perhaps the most decisive historical element for the popular image of Platonic theory: the pair of 'material versus immaterial'. However, I believe that you cannot find this pair in opposition to each other anywhere in Socrates' work. That is because this dualism in fact completely contradicts the Platonic approach, in which the fullness of existence and all that exists is paramount. Plato cannot see reality in terms of separations between materiality and immateriality, but he does mark the distinction between what is perceptible by the senses and what

is not. This distinction does not weigh heavily upon him since, from the outset, he regards that which is perceptible by the senses to be well-nigh irrelevant. He does not make this judgement because it is material, but because it is an aspect and not a whole. In the perspective of Greek Antiquity, there was a fullness of existence to all of being that encompassed much more than what could be perceived. Being was not conceivable without an element inside of it (and not outside of it) that had to form its characteristic essence. Just as you can only call a horse a horse through combining horse-ness with the physical presence of the animal, so Plato could not imagine a separation between the two. There was no duality of material-immaterial, but a unity of both. Plato had wanted to analyse this unity, by distinguishing between the *eidos* or *idea* (terms for 'form') and the material shape or appearance of an object, not as a separate materiality beside the object, but as a dimension belonging to and inside of the object itself. The object remained a unity and could only be examined essence-wise. After all, the form was just as much the object as the physical substance that resided in the object.

This observation forms the basis for any analysis of Plato's ideas: according to the Greeks, the form is not spiritual. It does not float above the object, nor is it outside of it (as Popper believed). It is not the soul of the object either, or a mysterious core, but a dimension, a quality of being belonging to the object, not a supernaturally existing corpus.

What followers repeatedly highlighted in Socratism is this idea of a spiritually or essentially thought core in beings, sometimes referred to by the term *idea* or *eidea* (form), sometimes by the term *logos* (order), and sometimes named *ousia* (substance) or *e ten ennai* (that which [it] is). The principle that there must be something in a being that is the essence of it, and that this essence forms the soul of that being, will hereafter reappear many times, in various forms. The identity that Socrates recognised between the *logos* of a being and the divine serves to emphasise the superior quality of the ordered; it is an expression of admiration for the beauty[i] of the structure, not a literal identification of a God with the *logos* of a being or individual. The divinity was meant to be a superiority of quality, the quality of the structure, of the *logos* in being, not a spiritual essence. The *logos* was neither a soul nor a spirit, but instead a form of be-ing in

those two things, a function of them, like virtuousness, not a material part of them.

Plato envisions it in the following way: the soul, the *psyche*, which contains the essence of the human, partakes of the divine through its partaking of the *logos*. But if this partaking of the *logos* is not possible because our intellect, *nous*, is not capable of it, we are doomed and will never partake of the divine *logos*. It is wisdom in our intellect, so the participation of our intellect in the *logos*, that enables us to take part of virtue, i.e. the good. Hereby a perspective is placed opposite the imperfection of mankind, namely the perspective of partaking of the divine through the act of perfecting, becoming wise. It is then that paradise becomes visible and is from here on connected to the imperfect, besmirched existence of man, who was able to escape this state of being through the acquisition of virtue, of wisdom.

However, this is not how Plato's followers interpreted him. In the 1000 years after Plato, the image of man perfecting himself through learning gradually vanished in favour of an image of man defective by definition, man as a living deficit, contrasted with the spirit as a separately living being, as a spiritual perfection. The spirit liberated itself from corporeality, as it were, and was positioned above this corporeality more and more. It was seen as separable from the body instead of inseparable and gradually lost more earthly features, until it was even declared transcendent.

Plato was bastardized into a mage who saw spirits floating above objects, a teller of fairy tales instead of a philosopher. His understanding of the constancy became a theology, his *psyche* left this earth for a heavenly destination.

Moulded into this shape, his influence, in conjunction with the Semitic conception of Godhood, became immense. The separation between the earthly human and his transcendent overlords and controlling spirits became the central theme of Judaeo-Christian perspectives on existence. Plato's view on how human existence should be conceived, interpreted as a divide between body and spirit, became the dualism which would be so defining for Western culture. A

view that was meant to trace the constancy in being human became a religious schema, in which it is the inevitable fate of humans to be imperfect because they do not possess the spirit but are subjected to it. Plato turned upside down!

7.3 The third element in Plato: the existential perspective

In Paris, 2009, a book was published at Gallimard which gives a literal account of the lectures that Michel Foucault gave in 1983 and 1984, the last two years of his life. The book exclusively treats of Socrates and the Socratic life and opens a perspective in the works of Plato and Socrates that completely eluded Popper and Heidegger. I will use this book as a sounding board of sorts to my ideas in our re-evaluation of Socrates.

7.3.1 Candour

Before discussing this third element, we should consider the following pair of concepts: the dichotomy of subject and object. Plato and Socrates do not touch on this dichotomy directly, nor can they, since Plato has no conception of epistemology. There is no epistemic enquiry, no question of the validity of knowledge, because Socrates is not concerned with the problem of how to discover pure factuality. Socrates is not a philosophical Columbus, and he is therefore not interested in finding the philosophical America. For him, the rightness or veracity of the object as object can only be found in the object that is subject: in man and his virtue.

Foucault devotes two years of lectures to making clear that, for Socrates, virtue is the thing that matters, the veracity of his interlocutors, whom he wishes a life of candour (*parrhesia*) and care for themselves and each other (*epemeleia*). Whether they observe the correct chemical material composition of the objects around them is a thought that does not enter into Socrates' consideration here. This question is irrelevant. Socratism is completely subject-oriented; the subject

can be the object of the discussion, but not as the object of an enquiry into its composition in a material sense. Plato discusses ontology, not epistemology, and Socrates is concerned with ethos, not empiricism or validity or anything like that.

This has everything to do with the societal function of the Sophists, as well as the societal function of Socrates. They were teachers, discussion leaders, and the benefit of participating in such a discussion was that it improved one's performance in society. When their discussions offended the political order, this was not their intention, but a consequence of the fact that their 'candour' could sometimes collide with a political and societal climate of discussion in which many subjects were taboo, which had become a closed system.

To explain the value of candour (*parrhesia*), Foucault employs the example of the good and the bad ruler, in which the good ruler is the one who understands that he can and must appreciate the candour of the person addressing him, and who has the 'space' for this at his disposal. Later on, Machiavelli would emphatically repeat what Plato said: a ruler who is not good, in the sense that he fails to lend his ear, will bring on his own downfall, almost as if it were a law of nature. This is why the candour to speak freely is an essential condition in order to hear the will of the people. The popular assembly of a democracy, however, does not fulfil this function, since there the purpose is to win the debate, not to articulate veracity, i.e. to practice *parrhesia*. Convincing others that you are right by destroying the opposition with a great display of rhetoric, instead of listening to him with reason, counts as the overbearing principle. It follows that, in the interest of this principle, the opponent should get as little chance as possible to speak in general, and absolutely no chance to speak in candour. In this situation, a lie and a lot of noise can easily prove to be of greater value than free and candid speech. This leads to the paradoxical state of affairs where, in the system based on dialogue between citizens, there is often less candour of speech than in the system in which candour of speech is not the principle on which the ruling power is based.

All that remains in democracy is the choice between letting yourself be guided by the interest of being right, or by the principle that what is good should be the decisive factor.

7.3.2. Caring for each other

This last point brings us to that other concept, the *aletheia*. The veracity is that which stands for the unchangeable, that which forms the essence of beings. It refers to the search of the preceding series of philosophers, the pre-Socratics, to understand what is recurring, eternal and unchangeable. For Socrates, it serves as a label for that which he searches for in life, that which holds value for him and his interlocutors and which is stronger than and will survive all waves and events in history and society. It constitutes the factor of which he can legitimately say that it is more important than life itself; man's veracity, his virtue, makes him greater than he is. It gives him a value that makes him veracious, and that, according to Foucault, at least, broadens the *aletheia* through the *ethos*, resulting in *parrhesia* in the truest sense of the word. To explain this point, Foucault quotes a seemingly trivial sentence from the *Apology of Socrates* (his last defending work, in which he speaks to his friends right before drinking the cup of poison): 'And do not forget to bring Asklepios the rooster that I owe him.' This unremarkable little sentence, uttered right before his self-execution, demonstrates that Socrates deeply valued that true *aletheia* (which can in our mind be associated with integrity) that goes hand in hand with the *epemeleia* (the care for yourself and others) that is the virtue in man. One's way of living is what matters, not the life itself. This is why Socrates would rather die than let go of the *parrhesia*.

This brings us to another datum that has been obscured by the modern Western approach to the examination of Socratism: Socrates focuses on a way of living. He is not concerned with knowing the right facts or with knowledge about the rightness of facts. He is concerned with the right way of living, with virtue.

7.3.3. Ethics as life's mission

In taking this route, does Socrates operate under the pretence that he will also discover this right way of living? In other words, is it also the case that he is searching for an ontological Archimedean point, an unwavering fixed position from which life can be designed, on which a solid ethics can be established?

Socrates frequently mentions virtue as the norm for how to act, but does he identify this virtue too, and does he view it as such a fixed point?

Plato's later works, like the *Laws*, appear to suggest this, because in those the true teacher, which Plato of course ultimately was, indulges himself in laying down all possible rules and instructions for how to behave, as if he was able to stipulate in great detail what must be virtuous in life and politics.

However, when we examine the Socratic dialogues in themselves, what becomes apparent every time is that there is no answer in the sense of a final result of the debate. The debate remains unanswered, it is and remains an open question. Socrates does not provide an ontologically unwavering position, because he does not believe that such a thing exists. Therefore, virtue is not a fixed matter. Virtue is the dimension or the form of behaviour that gives it a *logos*, a structure that allows this behaviour and this way of living to partake of the divine. This structure is not for sale on the market and its apt description is not within easy reach. This structure is a way of living, an eternally workable field of activity, a realisation of the self as self, the construction of which was Socrates' ultimate goal. Socrates absolutely did not want to help his interlocutors attain their virtue, instead he wanted them to learn how to advocate for virtue and, through this, care for themselves (*epemeleia*). This attitude is 'open-ended'. There is no result and no answer, only a question, an eternally lasting question, the value of which does not lie in the answer but in continually posing the question: what here constitutes virtue for me? Of course, this attitude is ill-suited to our impatient and knowledge-oriented Western worldview; we demand answers. Hence the judgmental tone of someone like Popper.

7.3.4 Virtue as privilege

However, there is a dangerous implication here. The existence of one who possesses virtue indicates the existence of one who does not. The sage presupposes the non-sage. The qualification presupposes the disqualification. Plato and Socrates educate people because they are uneducated, lacking in their way of existing and living. This is no innocent pastime. After all, hearing that you are not virtuous, that you completely missed the purpose of life, as it were, is not a casual message. The wisdom, the *sofia*, is not just the supreme form of

virtuousness, but also a description of what identifies lesser groups, like craftsmen, merchants, slaves and especially those misshapen men (in the view of the ancient Greeks) we nowadays call women, as unvirtuous groups. If Socrates had viewed this as a statistical given, as a form of societal classification that is given and permanent, then no harm would have been done and everyone could have made peace with the situation. But it just so happens to be the essence of Socratism that one should never make peace. The unvirtuousness is unacceptable, for it must be conquered by virtuousness. This is by definition to the detriment of the unvirtuous; they who are not wise are besmirched, they are smirch themselves. It is a stigmatisation of the highest order: man as mistake of history, as he who is guilty of his imperfection for as long as he fails to acquire virtue.

7.3.5 The unbearable task of perfection

According to Socrates, what can be done to repair the human deficit can only be determined by examining what virtue would prescribe us to do. However, this implies that, instead of a god giving order to things, virtue takes this role. Socrates hereby creates an alternative for the Greek gods. Through this, through this different addressing of the request for help, the request for perfection as well, he creates the basis for different worldviews, like the one of religion in the modern Western sense. Ali Shariati calls this movement the transition from a religious pantheon that had become passive to a new, more active religion that *does* provide answers. This is the eternal battle of religion versus religion, which can be observed time and time again throughout history and always eventually rears its head again.

Through his ideology of the imperfect man who received a new altar on which to deposit his questions, Socrates (very much against his own will, I believe) laid the foundation on which, in the 1000 years after him, religions would be established which gave the people answers that the Greek pantheon could not. It is highly doubtful that Socrates himself strived for a cut and dried alternative. It rather appears to be the case that his strategy was consciously open-ended: the sage did not offer an answer, but he did offer an assignment. It is tempting to look at Socratism through a Western lens, to see Socrates as the preacher of

a supreme happiness which can be achieved by reaching for wisdom through the acquisition of knowledge and insight. The road to paradise is then within reach, through the acquisition of insight and, by extension, virtue.

However, here the implicit acknowledgement derived from his philosophy was that the imperfect man is doomed to reach for perfection under pain of the greatest possible degeneration and corruption. Because of this, both his imperfection as an unacceptable state and the rest of his life became fixed, due to the pressure the goal exerted on life itself. Life became a task and therefore an affliction, and this aspect strongly resounds in the philosophical and religious systems which developed after Plato. For example, Saint Augustine would later (400 AD) experience life as an unceasing agony. In Paul and Philo, you can also find passages that point towards this: the strive towards perfection and the awareness of the necessarily present imperfection do not go well together. Man is torn between a perfection he should set as a norm, as the existential obligation to be realised, and the awareness of an inescapable imperfection. The priest who flogs his ever so flawed little sheep from a strive towards perfection, is forced to continually damage his own soul with his awareness of the unreasonable cruelty that is manifested in such behaviour. How can one rhyme such an imperfection on the part of the sage / priest with the *sofia* he should possess? Believers are burdened with a torn existence, and I believe that the background of the appeal of Socrates lay in this disunity: how do we come to terms with the imperfection of our lives when perfection does not simply reveal itself?

Foucault calls this ('life in the courage for truth, the true life') the question of the 'philosophical' life, the way of living we ought to pursue. He argues that this question disappeared from Western culture after Spinoza. He then writes a passage which we should bear in mind in all that follows, and for this reason I will cite it here in full:

> In any case, I would simply like to suggest that if it is true that the question of Being has indeed been what Western philosophy has forgotten, and that this forgetting is what made metaphysics possible, it may be also that the question of the philosophical life has continued to be, I won't say forgotten, but neglected; it has constantly appeared as surplus in relation to philosophy, to a philosophical practice indexed to the scientific model. The question of the philosophical life has constantly appeared like a

> shadow of philosophical practice, and increasingly pointless. This neglect of the philosophical life has meant that it is now possible for the relation to truth to be validated and manifested in no other form than that of scientific knowledge. (Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, p. 236)

This excerpt reads as a protest against the closure of the societal debate. For Socrates' appeal to finding virtue, a timeless appeal, implies that we should practice care for one another in candid openness, that we should in all openness learn to live with the disunity in our existence that accompanies the strive towards perfection. We cannot reach perfection. Perhaps we should not desire to. However, acquiescence cannot form our existence, because we are obligated to the *epemeleia*, the care for each other, and therefore to the *parrhesia*, speaking candidly in care for each other, as this constitutes our virtue.

Socratism implicates a task of being, an existential ethics, born from the cohesion and interdependency that existed in the polis. From the nature of this task of being, acquiescence in existence becomes impossible, as well as acquiescence in our ignorance. We *need to* understand, in order to speak and in order to act. This is an adage that should be universally accepted, especially in the modern age of Western culture.

8 Final words

The examination of Plato in this essay shines a light on a philosophical moment. It paints a picture of philosophy in the context of the Greek polis and classical antiquity. The meaning of Plato stretches all the way to the roots of contemporary Western culture. We should ask ourselves questions that confront the discrepancy between the philosophy described here and the philosophy that dominates our current culture; questions about the nature of these differences, about the validity of the reasons for these differences and about the solvability of these differences.

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