

Chapter One



Heidegger's Plato

Nietzsche, who is such an important influence on what becomes the tradition of continental philosophy, evidently regarded Socrates throughout his career as a “problem.” In his early *Birth of Tragedy*, he both severely criticizes Socrates as “the opponent of Dionysus,”¹ and therefore the enemy of tragedy, yet at the same time acknowledges in Socrates “the one turning point and vortex of so-called world history,” without which there would have been generated in the world “a gruesome ethic of suicide.”² This ambivalent attitude toward Socrates continues to his very late work. An entire section of *Twilight of the Idols* is devoted to “The Problem of Socrates.”³ Socrates is always “a problem” for Nietzsche because he is at once enormously attractive and repulsive.

Martin Heidegger, too, is troubled by Plato and the Platonic Socrates throughout his writing career, although his attitude, as we shall see, tends to be more consistently critical. I shall consider several texts and identify three broad stages in Heidegger's own attitude toward Plato. I shall begin with Heidegger's early (winter semester, 1924–25) lecture course on Plato's *Sophist*, where Heidegger, still very strongly under the influence of Husserlian phenomenology, interprets

Plato (and Aristotle) largely from the standpoint of the extent to which they prepare the way for something like philosophy as scientific research in the phenomenological mode. From this vantage point, as we shall see in detail, Plato is to be criticized as falling far short of Aristotle. Since this is the only work of Heidegger's that engages in a thorough interpretation of an entire Platonic dialogue, I shall examine it in the greatest detail. The second text to be considered will be, significantly, Heidegger's only formally published work on Plato, "Plato's Doctrine of Truth," from 1931 to 1932 (although I shall also consider briefly several lecture courses from the same time period). There, Plato will again be criticized, but this time more as the thinker who begins the fateful transformation of *aletheia*, truth as "unhiddenness," into truth as "correctness," and so the beginning of the "forgetting of Being" that becomes the Western metaphysical tradition. As such, Plato's thinking is, so far as possible, to be got beyond, if not indeed overcome. Later, as Heidegger becomes more oriented toward the poetical and even mythic, both in his writing style and the matters he addresses, he becomes somewhat more sympathetic to Plato and to the dialogue form, while remaining in the end still profoundly suspicious of Plato's thought. I shall consider third, then, an example from this later, more poetic period in Heidegger's thinking, his 1943–44 lecture course on *Parmenides*. I shall there suggest that Heidegger's own movement away from philosophy as science and toward a more poetic way of thinking *ought* to make him much, much more sympathetic to Plato than he in fact becomes. Finally, I shall consider two works of Heidegger's in which Plato is never mentioned, but in which it might be argued that the influence of Plato is—or ought to be—most apparent: Heidegger's two later attempts at writing dialogues, the "Dialogue with a Japanese," and "Conversation on a Country Path." There, we shall evaluate Heidegger's engagement not so much with his assessment of Plato's so-called doctrines, but with the Greek's choice of writing format.

THE LECTURE COURSE ON PLATO'S *SOPHIST*

In the winter semester of 1924–25, still at the University of Marburg, Heidegger gave a lecture course on Plato's *Sophist*.⁴ It is a remarkable and remarkably important text, both as one of Heidegger's most thorough studies of Greek philosophy (certainly of a Platonic dialogue) and as an important precursor to *Being and Time*. Before turning to Heidegger's interpretation, however, let us, in the spirit of the introduction, consider the dialogue the *Sophist* itself, or rather, let us consider some of the aspects of the dramatic situation presented therein,

which we would need to take account of in a thoughtful interpretation of the dialogue. This is in no sense a substitute for a comprehensive interpretation of the dialogue as a whole.⁵ Rather, we need to consider as a crucial propaedeutic to an interpretation that dramatic or existential situation in which Plato has placed what is said in the dialogue. In the light of that propaedeutic, we can turn to Heidegger's own reading of the dialogue.

In the introduction, I discussed critically a widespread view that interprets the many differences and contradictions in the dialogues in terms of Plato's supposed development throughout his career. That view involves a series of guesses as to when Plato actually wrote each dialogue, and so what was the order of that composition. Plato, we noted, gives us no indication of his own as to the order of composition of his dialogues. He does, however, give us, in varying degrees of explicitness, the *dramatic* date of each dialogue, the approximate time, and in particular the time of Socrates' life, in which it supposedly took place (that is, at the level of the probably fictional drama). As I mentioned at that time, in some dialogues, such as the *Meno*, say, or the *Laches*, that time is indicated only generally. In other dialogues, however, the dramatic time, and especially the time of Socrates' life, is very explicit and precisely indicated. The *Sophist* is one of those dialogues. Particularly given that in many dialogues Plato seems to feel that only a general indication of the time period is necessary, in those dialogues such as the *Sophist* where a very explicit indication is given, we are presumably invited to consider the significance of that explicit indication with care. The first thing we need to do, then, in reading the *Sophist* is to consider the significance of the dramatic date.

As a consideration of the *Theaetetus* makes clear, the *Sophist* takes place toward the very end of Socrates' life, indeed, the day *after* he has been indicted for impiety and corrupting the youth, and so very shortly before the trial for his life that Plato memorializes in the *Apology*. Indeed, it is part of a series of at least seven dialogues that dramatically take place at the very end of Socrates' life: the *Theaetetus* took place "yesterday," and at the end of that dialogue Theodorus and Theaetetus agree to meet Socrates "tomorrow," presumably to continue the discussion (which in the *Theaetetus* ends in *aporia*) about what knowledge is. But not before Socrates must go to answer the charge of the king archon for which he will be brought to trial. On the way to that destination, Socrates meets Euthyphro and has the dialogue named after that respondent. Thus, again in terms of dramatic time, these two days are ones of extraordinary intensity and urgency: yesterday Socrates engages in two dialogues (the *Theaetetus* and

Euthyphro) and today he will participate—even if less dominantly—in two more (the *Sophist* and *Statesman*). Are we not invited, then, to consider each pair (and perhaps all four) together? In any case, today Socrates keeps his appointment with Theodorus and Theaetetus that occasions the *Sophist* and *Statesman*. Shortly after that, the *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo* occur, whereupon Socrates' life ends.⁶

By placing so many dialogues within so short a space of time toward the very end of Socrates' life, Plato portrays a powerful sense of urgency as Socrates confronts his end. He is soon to go on trial (and in the *Sophist* he knows this) for which, if convicted, his life may end. To accentuate the sense of impending death, Plato has the telling of the *Theaetetus* take place in the shadow of Theaetetus' own death (it is one of those second-hand dialogues in which the story is told long after the event). Clearly, there is a sense presented of the impending urgency brought about by the nearness of this double death. Heidegger himself has given this sense of urgency in the face of our possibly impending death a name: Being-toward-death. There could hardly be a more dramatic portrayal of this experience than that presented by Plato in the short time before the end of Socrates' life.

As Socrates will soon emphasize in his own defense in the *Apology*, part of the reason for his having been charged with impiety and corruption of the youth, as he sees it, is a crucial confusion on the part of his accusers and the Athenians between philosophy, of which he is a representative, and sophistry. His defense will include in part an explanation of the difference between his work and those of the sophists.⁷ Especially since, in the drama of the *Sophist*, Socrates only answered the charge yesterday, the question he eventually asks the Eleatic Stranger at 217a, what do the people in Elea say the differences are among the philosopher, sophist, and statesman, can hardly be innocent, abstract, or theoretical. The distinction among these, or their easy confusion, must be very much on Socrates' mind, and what he learns today may, he might well hope, be useful in his defense. So the guiding question of the *Sophist* about the difference between the philosopher and the sophist is one, at this point in his life, of the utmost existential urgency. This must be kept in mind as one evaluates the Stranger's answers, so formulaic, so methodical, so abstract, indeed, at crucial junctures, formulated in such a way as to make more, not less, problematic the difference between the philosopher and sophist.⁸ Of what use can they be in the life of Socrates? Does not this practical uselessness of the results of the Stranger's diatribes call into question the efficacy of the method? At very least, we are invited to consider the stark contrast between Socrates' own efforts to get clarification on

matters of importance to life with the stranger's much more abstract and intellectual pursuit of what turn out to be elaborate definitions.

As I argued in the introduction, the fact that Platonic dialogues take place among distinct individuals of varied character, ability, and interest is a crucial beginning point for the adequate interpretation of any dialogue. Accordingly, let us consider briefly the cast of characters in the *Sophist*. With one striking exception, the cast of characters "today" is the same as those of "yesterday" in the *Theaetetus*. First is Theodorus, a mature mathematician of some renown, and apparently the teacher of Theaetetus. His conduct today in the *Sophist* must be understood and evaluated in the light of his conduct yesterday in the *Theaetetus*. There, he several times exhibited a distinct reluctance to participate in the give and take of dialogue with Socrates, despite Socrates' repeated efforts to get him into the discussion, quite explicitly preferring to have the much younger Theaetetus undergo the questioning.⁹ Indeed, at 146b, early in the discussion when Socrates is trying to lure the older mathematician into dialogue, Theodorus explicitly admits that he is unused to dialectical discussion of the sort in which Socrates engages. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that Theodorus here explicitly denies that he is a philosopher, at least in the Socratic sense. This is especially striking as we turn to the *Sophist*, for there, at the beginning of the dialogue, Theodorus introduces the stranger with considerable pomp as "a very philosophical man," (216a) and a bit later, under Socrates's playful chastisement, calls him not a god but godlike, "For that is what I call all philosophers" (216c). He certainly did not call Socrates godlike yesterday! Given Theodorus's conduct yesterday, how confident should we be of his self-assured assertion about the Stranger's status? Moreover, again joining his conduct yesterday with his opening statements today, there is at least the strong implication that Theodorus considers the Eleatic Stranger a philosopher *but not Socrates*. In that light, how should we take his judgment? In sum, despite Theodorus's assertion that the Stranger is "very philosophical," or rather, precisely in the manner in which he does so, the actual status of the Stranger, whether he is a genuine philosopher or not, even whether he is perhaps a sophist, becomes a problem in the *Sophist*, not something that can be taken for granted.

Second, there is Theaetetus. He is also a mathematician, indeed, he becomes a very distinguished one, although at this time he is a young adolescent, perhaps sixteen years old or so. We learn in the *Theaetetus* that he is genuinely intelligent, and that in addition to becoming a distinguished mathematician he also later distinguishes himself by his courage in war, dying as a result of battle, even if from "the flux."¹⁰ We

know from that dialogue that, in marked contrast to his teacher, Theodorus, Theaetetus has a genuinely philosophical spirit, and he shows himself fully open to having his views tested and even refuted by Socrates. As we shall see presently, this should be contrasted to what happens in the *Sophist*, where the Stranger emphatically does *not* test Theaetetus's views. Instead, the Stranger uses Theaetetus basically to gain assent to the Stranger's own suggestions and directions. The most Theaetetus does in this dialogue is indicate when he doesn't quite understand something and needs further explanation.

Third, of course, is Socrates.¹¹ Surely today, in the *Sophist*, we must imagine Socrates as thinking about the events of yesterday, the two dialogues—*Theaetetus* and *Euthyphro*—and quite especially his experience in court, where he has now been formally charged with impiety and corrupting the youth. We should recall that piety is the explicit theme of the *Euthyphro*, underlining just how much the charges against Socrates must be on his mind. This may in part explain Socrates' utterly strange behavior today, for he is indeed out of character. Theodorus, as we have seen, ostentatiously introduces the stranger from Elea as a "very philosophical man." If Socrates were his usual self today, how would we expect him to respond to this purported philosophical stranger? Just as he responded yesterday with Theaetetus and with Euthyphro: to enter into dialogue with him! Yet strangely, Socrates almost immediately falls silent (to be sure, after determining what the topic of discussion will be and pressuring the Stranger into conducting his presentation via Socrates' own preferred procedure of question and answer) and lets the Stranger conduct the rest of the dialogue without response from Socrates. What are we to make of this behavior, so out of character for Socrates? Is it a mark of his preoccupation with the events of yesterday? Is he genuinely hoping for practical help from the Stranger in distinguishing philosophy—and so his own calling—from sophistry? This much is surely clear: one striking existential question raised by the drama of the *Sophist* is what to make of the silence of Socrates. We will have to take special note of what Heidegger makes of it.

Finally, there is the Stranger from Elea, who will basically conduct the dialogue to ensue. That he is from Elea immediately invokes Parmenides and, more generally, Parmenideanism. Later in this dialogue, the Stranger will risk "parricide" by criticizing father Parmenides' injunction against speaking of non-being (241d). By contrast, yesterday, after having rather harshly criticized the partisans of flux, including Heraclitus, Socrates pointedly refuses to engage in what he and Theaetetus recognize should follow next in the argument, a critical

evaluation of the Parmenidean position (*Theaetetus*, 183e). Nevertheless, the Stranger, despite his eventual critique, remains heavily influenced by Parmenideanism, especially in its development by Zeno. This is exemplified in his emphasis on the method of diáresis, a method, despite its many flaws, characterized at least by the appearance of procedural rigor (not to mention its propensity for abstractness). So between the mathematicians Theodorus and Theaetetus on the one hand, and the Parmenidean Stranger on the other, Socrates is in the presence in this dialogue of what we may call a strong bias toward the mathematical in a broad sense.¹² Yesterday, with Theodorus and Theaetetus, Socrates countered this mathematical bias with regular use of metaphors and images. Today he is silent. Should we take that silence as consent? Hardly! Surely part of the drama of the *Sophist*, part of the problematic of the dialogue for the reader, is to wonder what the silent Socrates must be thinking of the appearance of argumentative rigor that characterizes the method of division soon to be exhibited by the Stranger.

Indeed, one of the first things Plato invites us to do by the juxtaposition of Socrates' examination of Theaetetus yesterday and the Eleatic Stranger's today is to contrast the two procedures. The contrast is striking indeed, and nothing about it suggests what Heidegger and many other scholars have claimed, that the Eleatic Stranger's procedure is meant to be taken as straightforwardly superior to that of Socrates.¹³ Let us briefly examine what happens in the two procedures.

In the *Theaetetus*, perhaps more than in any other dialogue, Socrates explicitly comments on his own interrogative procedure in addition to exhibiting it in his discussion with Theaetetus. In his famous self-characterization as a philosophical midwife, Socrates emphasizes that he does not have wisdom of his own that he gives to those with whom he talks. Rather, he draws out and thus helps give birth to the ideas that are within the souls of his interlocutors. Thus it is that in that dialogue Theaetetus himself is genuinely interrogated; his own views on what knowledge is are elicited, they are critically evaluated with the help of Socrates, and Theaetetus is again and again made to see that what he thought was a well-founded view is not. The point to be emphasized here is that Theaetetus personally is examined. His own views are elicited, his own views called into question, he himself is forced to acknowledge his lack of wisdom. Socrates' last speech in the dialogue testifies to the benefits he believes will ensue from this very personal examination:

"And so, Theaetetus, if ever in the future you should attempt to conceive or should succeed in conceiving other thoughts, they will be better ones as a result of this inquiry. And if you remain barren, your

companions will find you gentler and less tiresome; you will be modest and not think you know what you don't know. This is all my art can achieve—nothing more" (*Theaetetus*, 210c).

The contrast with the Stranger's procedure in the *Sophist* could hardly be more striking. For the Stranger almost never genuinely questions Theaetetus about the boy's own convictions. Instead, having explicitly asked for docility in the respondent before rather reluctantly agreeing to conduct his discussion via question and answer (*Sophist* 217d, a passage to be discussed in more detail later), the Stranger for the most part simply gets Theaetetus's assent to, or checks to see if he understands, the cuts or divisions that the *Stranger* in almost every case suggests. We are very far, today, from the intensely personal examination of Theaetetus's soul of yesterday. The most Theaetetus does with the Stranger is ask for clarification of difficult cuts. The Stranger's procedure, then, is nothing like the Socratic elenctic of self-examination. It is an altogether more abstract, less personal procedure.

Second, as mentioned earlier, the Stranger gives a strong impression—which, as we shall see, does not hold up to careful examination—of methodological rigor in his procedure: hence the "method of division," or "method of dieresis," as it is regularly called. By contrast, Socrates' procedure of questioning that we witnessed yesterday, of eliciting from Theaetetus his views and then calling them into question, is far, far looser in its formal structure. Indeed, in any strict sense, it could hardly be called a method at all. Socrates' questioning, there and elsewhere, makes ample use of metaphors, asides, digressions, myths, jokes, in sum, all of the characteristics of a genuine if informal conversation. The Stranger, instead, claims to proceed by carefully dividing each cut in two, leaving aside one and pursuing the other with further cuts until the process is completed. As we shall see, Heidegger will regard this appearance of methodological rigor as a distinct advance. We should not hasten to that conclusion.

Third, a crucial contrast is that whereas Socrates' procedure is one of discovery, the Stranger's procedure, despite the superficial appearance of question and answer, is in fact didactic. That is, in Socrates' questioning we actually discover what Theaetetus believes and subsequently discover whether it is a viable position or not. The Stranger, by contrast, proceeds by drawing divisions that are always and only ones that the Stranger *already knows* and suggests to the compliant Theaetetus. His procedure, then, is not one of discovery, since he presumably discovers nothing that he did not already know, but rather is one in which he discursively presents the divisions that he must have decided upon in advance in each case. After all, the stranger would

have been just as happy to present his position, which he already knows, discursively rather than via question and answer. Socrates' earlier pressuring of the Stranger to employ Socrates' preferred procedure of question and answer, we now see, has a distinct bite. Despite the superficial similarity, in the hands of Socrates and the Stranger, then, the two procedures are in fact utterly different.

Given these differences and this confrontation of procedures, should we simply say that Plato is espousing one procedure over the other? Or does it not make more sense, in these two dialogues that dramatically occur one day apart, to contrast thoughtfully the two procedures, to notice the strengths and weaknesses of each? To be sure, many, perhaps most modern scholars take the Stranger's method of division in the *Sophist* as "the later Plato's view." As we shall presently see, Heidegger does precisely this as well. But I suggest that we do not do so. I suggest instead that we are invited by Plato to consider each of the ways of philosophy exhibited yesterday and today and measure their relative strengths and weaknesses. Can we imagine the intelligent young Theaetetus, who undergoes these two very different procedures one day apart, doing anything else? Perhaps we should choose one or another. But perhaps, as well, Plato's view lies in the interstices between them, in the critical evaluation of each toward which he is leading us.

Theodorus, as we have seen, introduces the Stranger from Elea as a "very philosophical man" (*Sophist*, 216a). We have already said that this judgment is not necessarily to be accepted without skepticism. Indeed, it should be taken as a question. Just who is this man who, rather bizarrely, remains a stranger throughout the two following dialogues. Why do we never, even after extended conversation, learn his name? What is it about the stranger, or the position he represents, such that it does not occur to Theodorus to introduce him by name, and, perhaps even more strange, does not occur to either Socrates or the others present to inquire of his name, Socrates, who seems always interested in names and indeed even in the parentage of those whom he first meets? What is it about the stranger or his position that such anonymity is appropriate? We might note in advance that the Stranger, almost in imitation of the method he espouses, remains strikingly impersonal, didactic. Perhaps we do not need to know much about the person of the Stranger precisely because his method is so impersonal, so abstract as to be indifferent to time, place, and personal situation. Is this, we must ask from a Socratic standpoint, say the standpoint of yesterday, a virtue?

Socrates, too, immediately expresses skepticism about Theodorus's judgment of the Stranger. He puts it politely: perhaps the Stranger is

a god, a god of refutation (216b). Not a god but godlike, replies Theodorus (whose own name, "gift of god," Plato is no doubt having Socrates play upon), an epithet he says he would apply to all philosophers (216c). One wonders immediately and again: would he consider *Socrates* godlike? There is certainly no evidence from his conduct of yesterday that he would. Does he, then, even consider Socrates a philosopher? If not, what confidence will we have in his judgment that the Stranger is one? One wonders secondly: would Socrates agree that all philosophers are godlike? Has he not throughout his career pointedly *distinguished* the aporia and lack of wisdom that is the human condition with the divine, who are wise? Will he not do so again most pointedly of all in a few days, in the *Apology*? "God-like," we might speculate in anticipation of Heidegger's lectures, would be a more appropriate epithet applied to *Aristotle's* portrayal of philosophers than either Socrates' or Plato's. Heidegger, as we shall see, accepts Theodorus' portrayal, and proceeds to read Plato through Aristotle. It is as if the problematic status of that procedure is prefigured in this very passage.

Socrates now introduces the topic of the next two day's discussion (assuming that the putative dialogue the *Philosopher* takes place tomorrow in dramatic time). He has a problem, one for which in part he is about to be put on trial. It is not clear to most people what the difference is between three kinds of people: sophist, statesman, philosopher. Could the Stranger explain what the people "over there" (in Elea) think about this? (217a). It is instructive, and in keeping with the earlier mentioned anonymity of the Stranger, that Socrates pointedly does *not* ask what the Stranger himself thinks, but what the folks in Elea think. This from the man who just yesterday—and characteristically—had emphasized to Theaetetus the intensely personal character of philosophic inquiry. For some reason the Stranger as a person is so irrelevant that he can remain unnamed, and his own views are of insufficient interest to invite the kind of personal questioning that went on yesterday. Once again, does this have something to do with the abstract methodology that is about to be introduced? At very least, Socrates' lack of interest in the Stranger's personal views anticipates the abstract, impersonal methodology the latter is about to espouse. It also starkly contrasts to Socrates' own procedure and to his own conception of philosophy.

That the question of the relation between, especially, the sophist and philosopher is on Socrates' mind is particularly striking in the light of the events of yesterday. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates developed an extensive critique of that sophist of all sophists, Protagoras. One

would think that, at least in the minds of Theaetetus and the others present at both discussions, the difference between sophist and philosopher would now be relatively clear. But the charges that Socrates had to answer before the king archon must have reawakened in Socrates' mind the problematic relation of sophistry and philosophy, and the ease with which they can be confused. Perhaps he reintroduces the issue today because he realizes that he is going to need all the help he can get. We have to ask again, is he likely to be helped in his forthcoming defense by the definitions of the sophist in the dialogue today? Will the Stranger's method be helpful to him at all?

The last thing Socrates does before falling silent and before the Stranger begins his demonstration of the method of division is to pressure the Stranger into using at least a superficial version of his own procedure of questioning. He does so (while apparently politely asking the Stranger which procedure he prefers) by reminding the latter that the great Parmenides had used question and answer on Socrates when he was a young boy. The Stranger, with obvious reluctance and only with the qualification that the respondent be docile and untroublesome (217d) agrees to proceed by question and answer. We have already seen how little his use of that procedure resembles that of Socrates.

So the diaseses begin. Before concluding this brief inspection of the dramatic situation in which the *Sophist* takes place and in the context of which it must surely be interpreted, I want to make a few very general remarks about the various divisions or definitions of the sophist and the discussion that takes place in the rest of the dialogue. First, to reiterate, the Stranger's method, by making the various cuts and leaving one side alone while continuing the cuts in one direction, is surely intended, by the stranger at least, to give the impression of methodological rigor. This is the source of the oft-espoused view that the Stranger's method somehow represents an advance on the much looser procedure of Socrates, and so represents the later, more mature Plato's own view. This will in fact be Heidegger's position. But Plato early on in the procedure gives the reader every indication of his awareness that the rigor is superficial, that in fact it is not a genuinely rigorous procedure at all. Two brief examples will suffice. In the exercise meant to demonstrate the gist of the method, the definition of the angler, the Stranger, at 220a, gets Theaetetus to agree to the division of "animal hunting" into two kinds: footed animal hunting and wetlands animal hunting. This hardly exhausts the alternatives or constitutes a comprehensive cut, unless one supposes that the Greeks had never heard of snakes. Even more explicitly, at 222b, in the midst of

the very first division that yields a formulation of the sophist, the Stranger, having arrived at the cut “animal hunting on foot,” asks Theaetetus’s assent to the next cut, tame vs. wild animal hunting. Theaetetus expresses bewilderment at the notion of tame animal hunting, and the Stranger replies,

If man is a tame animal. But put it any way you like, whether you set down no animal as tame, or some other animal as tame but man as wild, or again, whether you say that man is tame but you consider there to be no hunt for men—whichever of these ways of saying it you consider congenial, mark off that one for us. (222b)

There could hardly be a more explicit indication on Plato’s part that we are supposed to recognize that these divisions are not at all natural or necessary, but arbitrary in the highest. To an important extent, it simply does not matter what divisions are made; an adept practitioner of the method will be able to proceed successfully. Yet as we shall see, Heidegger, like many scholars, will accept as Plato’s own intention the apparent goal of methodological rigor, and will criticize Plato (in favor of Aristotle) for obviously failing to succeed at being genuinely rigorous. I suggest instead that Plato *wants us to see* the lack of rigor as a problem with the Stranger’s procedure. We shall consider this in greater detail when we turn to Heidegger’s own lectures.

It is also noteworthy that, under the Stranger’s conception of philosophical procedure, there is no “Socratic elenchus” of each of the diaseses and resulting “definitions.” When the first one is finished at 223b, it is not examined, questioned, or criticized. Instead, it is simply *accepted* as they move on to the second definition. In turn, when the second one is finished at 224d, it is simply added on to the first without comment, and so on with the others. Nor is there any indication that, say, the second one is somehow superior to or an advance upon the first. This underlines how the Stranger’s procedure, by contrast to Socrates’ and in spite of the superficial use of question and answer, is in fact a didactic, not an interrogative method. By his method, we accumulate what could apparently be an indefinitely large series of definitions of what we are seeking. In this dialogue we stop, depending on how one counts, at six (or seven?). Why stop there? There is no real indication that closure is reached. Presumably one could go on indefinitely with varying characterizations of sophistry. Or, one could ask, if there is a closure point or a definitive characterization, how would we know that we have reached it, rather than simply having

discovered yet another formulation? How would one know that one had exhausted the search for the sophist by this method? Without an internal critique or elenchus of the succeeding definitions, there seems to be no way to know, or even to suspect, that one has achieved closure. Is this method superior to Socratic elenchus? Could it possibly be so?

In sum, the Stranger's method is clearly a didactic one, not an interrogative or discovery procedure. As such, it depends for what success it might have decisively on the previously accomplished insight of the practitioner. One might put this point less graciously: it depends on the prejudices and agenda of the practitioner. The very arbitrariness of the method opens it to the possibility of manipulation.

Several other features of the Stranger's procedure need to be identified before we turn to Heidegger's treatment of the dialogue. First, at a decisive passage at 227b, the Stranger has occasion to emphasize to Theaetetus what we today would call the "value-neutral" character of the method. Perhaps we would even want to say that the method is "beyond good and evil." The Stranger's own way of putting it is quite dramatic. Commenting on the ridiculousness of some of the names they have used in the divisions, the Stranger cautions:

Altogether ridiculous, Theaetetus. But as a matter of fact, the method of argument happens to care neither more nor less for sponging than for drinking medicine, for whether the one type of cleansing benefits us a little or the other a lot. The reason is that, in trying to understand—for the sake of getting insight—what is akin and not akin in all the arts, it honors them all equally and does not, in making its comparisons, consider some any more ridiculous than others; nor has it ever regarded the one who clarifies hunting through the general's art as any more awesome than one who does so through louse-catching, but only, for the most part, as more vain. And now. . . . (*Sophist*, 227b)

This value-free attitude stands obviously in the starkest contrast to the interests and procedures of Socrates, for whom the idea of the Good is the idea of all ideas (*Republic*), for whom the issue of what is good, what is best, is always at stake, and who, in the *Phaedo*, carries to the point of self-parody this teleological concern of his, telling how he has always believed that if the earth is flat or round, part of our understanding should be the knowledge of how and why it is *best* that it is flat or round, and so on (*Phaedo* 97c–98d).

Are we to take the Stranger's value-free method as a philosophic advance over the naïve teleology of Socrates? Then why does Plato surround the very passage in which the Stranger introduces this issue (227b) with the drawing of distinctions that *could not be drawn* within a value-free framework? At 226d, just before the passage quoted above, in discussing "the separating art," the Stranger draws the distinction between "the removing of worse from better, and also that of like from like." How are we to distinguish the worse from the better within a value-free framework? Then, immediately following the quoted passage, at 227d, the Stranger asks Theaetetus, "Do we say that in the soul villainy is something other than virtue?" Again, how would such a distinction be coherent on the basis of the Stranger's value-free stance?

Heidegger, as we shall see in detail presently, affirms this value-free stance articulated by the Stranger as an important advance in *Plato's own philosophic position*. In the spirit of the foregoing remarks, we ask, is the Stranger's view to be taken as Plato's own, or are we being asked both to compare it with the way of Socrates and to notice that it itself cannot make the distinctions it needs to make on its own terms and thus risks incoherence?

The same issue arises again, implicitly but no less crucially, toward the end of the dialogue when the Stranger introduces the notion of the five "greatest kinds" (249 aff.). They are, as is familiar, Being, Motion, Rest, Sameness, and Difference. But with Socrates sitting silently by, and keeping in mind the discussion of yesterday, is not one invited to ask, if these are the five greatest kinds, what about the Good? Is it not the greatest kind of all? Or justice? Courage? Sophrosyne? Once again, are we to take the Stranger's view, with Heidegger, as Plato's, or are we being presented with a profound philosophic provocation: can we, or can we not, coherently discuss the structure of being without reference to the Good?

The discussion of the greatest kinds presents us with our last general consideration before we turn to a more detailed inspection of Heidegger's interpretation. At the apparent end of the diaseses, the Stranger points out to Theaetetus that they are still left with an enormous problem: the sophist can avoid being caught because of the apparent inability of the "friends of the forms," certainly including the Parmenideans, to deal with non-being. How can the sophist have a sham wisdom, how can he say what *is* false, if non-being can in no sense be? The concluding portion of the dialogue is taken up with the question of non-being, oriented toward explaining how the sophist can deceive, how he can speak what is not true. It is crucial, in the spirit of the discussion of the dialogue form so far, to keep in mind

that nothing about this important passage suggests that it is presented as "Plato's theory of Being and Non-being." It is a focused, targeted account dictated by the problem of coherently saying that sophistry is sham wisdom. Although we may well want to generalize what is said beyond the limitations of that context, we must be very careful in doing so. Certainly it is *not* careful, to leap to an interpretation of the dialogue as "Plato's doctrine of Being." Armed with these observations about Plato's use of the dialogue form and about the dramatic situation in which the *Sophist* takes place, we are prepared to turn to Heidegger's detailed interpretation of the dialogue. Let us do so.

One must begin a sympathetic understanding of Heidegger's interpretation of Plato—and of Greek Philosophy—by appreciating first how deeply imbued he was at that time with the spirit of Husserlian phenomenology. One sees this almost immediately that one turns to the text, in Heidegger's emphasis on philosophy as "science" and his conception of philosophic thinking at the time as "research." From the very beginning, he makes it clear that he understands his own phenomenological procedure as science, and that the scientific spirit of phenomenology finds its roots in the Greeks. Speaking of his intentions in this lecture course on the *Sophist*, Heidegger says, "Our lectures do not intend to train you to be phenomenologists; on the contrary, the authentic task of a lecture course in philosophy at a university is to lead you to an inner understanding of scientific questioning within your own respective fields. Only in this way is the question of science and life brought to a decision, namely, by first learning the movement of scientific work and, thereby, the true inner sense of scientific existence."¹⁴ Moreover, Heidegger's insistence, which he is about to announce, on reading Plato through Aristotle, is justified in part because Aristotle is *more scientific* than Plato. Heidegger assures us that "What Aristotle said is what Plato placed at his disposal, only it is said more radically and developed more scientifically" (PS, 9). By approaching Plato through Aristotle we shall thus "secure the ground on which Plato moved in his research into the Being of beings as world and into the Being of beings as human Dasein, the Being of philosophically scientific existence. We will be brought into position to participate in the possible ways of Plato's research into Being" (PS, 16). (We shall address the appropriateness of reading Plato through Aristotle in detail presently.) Later, preparing to turn to the *Sophist* itself, he adds, "Our considerations thus far have had the sense of a preparation for understanding a *scientific* dialogue of Plato. I expressly emphasize 'a *scientific* dialogue' in order to indicate that not all Platonic dialogues attain this height of scientific research, although all of them in a certain

way aim at knowledge. There is no scientific understanding, i.e., historiographical return to Plato, without passage through Aristotle" (PS, 131; Heidegger's emphases). And even later, in words of praise, he adds, "In other words, genuine existence resides in the idea of scientific philosophy, as Socrates first brought it to life and as Plato and Aristotle developed it concretely" (PS, 160).¹⁵ At this point, I want to emphasize in these passages Heidegger's language. It is full of the appeal to "science," "scientific philosophy," "scientific research," and "research into Being." Clearly, Heidegger is at this point deeply under the influence of the Husserlian notion of phenomenology as "rigorous science," and he is interpreting the greatness of Greek philosophy precisely in terms of its proximity to his own conception of philosophy as science. This is crucial to understanding the interpretive decisions that Heidegger makes in this lecture course: his occasional praise of Plato is nearly always in terms of his movement toward scientific philosophy; his preference for Aristotle is that Aristotle is more scientific than Plato, etc. However much I shall presently contest these judgments, I think they must be understood as grounded in Heidegger's own construal of phenomenological philosophy at the time.

This is particularly important in understanding the otherwise bizarre guiding insistence on Heidegger's part that Plato must be read through the eyes of Aristotle. We must do so, first, he says, because Aristotle is "clearer" than Plato. Early on, Heidegger asserts,

If we wish to penetrate into the actual philosophical work of Plato we must be guaranteed that right from the start we are taking the correct path of access. But that would mean coming across something that precisely does not simply lie there before us. Therefore, we need a guiding line. Previously it was usual to interpret the Platonic philosophy by proceeding from Socrates and the Presocratics to Plato. We wish to strike out in the opposite direction, from Aristotle back to Plato. This way is not unprecedented. It follows the old principle of hermeneutics, namely, that interpretation should proceed from the clear into the obscure. We will presuppose that Aristotle understood Plato." (PS, 7–8; more on the last claim presently).

Later, in developing the same general point, he again speaks of the movement from Aristotle to Plato as "from the clear back into the obscure, i.e., from the distinct, or the relatively developed, back to the confused" (PS, 132). To say the least, many an astute student fails to

find Aristotle clearer than Plato. What is the criterion, we must thus ask, by which Heidegger finds it so obvious that Aristotle is "clearer" and more "distinct" than Plato. The very juxtaposition of the terms offers us the clue. Heidegger is clearly thinking in a Cartesian, scientific mode: Aristotle is clearer than Plato precisely in so far as his writing is more scientific, more suggestive of scientific writing, than is Plato's. And by this criterion, Heidegger is surely right. Undoubtedly, Aristotle is more scientific in this sense than Plato. In light of our previous considerations about the dialogue form and Plato's project of writing, we must ask, does this judgment of the greater clarity of Aristotle to Plato and the decision to read Plato by this standard of clarity itself clarify or obscure what is going on in the Platonic dialogues, and in the *Sophist* in particular?

In turn, this helps make some sense both of Heidegger's interest in the *Sophist*, his choice of that dialogue for the course, and of the interpretation he renders. For the Eleatic Stranger in the *Sophist* has a method, *diareisis*, a method that, however problematic in the details, surely has the look of scientific methodological rigor. It is an easy move for Heidegger from this recognition to the judgment that in this dialogue *Plato* is moving toward scientific thinking. Moreover, it even makes sense, given his earlier association of phenomenology with research into the "Being of beings," that he would interpret the core of this dialogue, with Bonitz (PS, 160–161) as the discussion toward its very end of Being and the other greatest kinds.

But let us move more carefully here. What about the claim, first, that one reason to read Plato through Aristotle is that we can presuppose that Aristotle understood Plato? Can we make that presupposition? Heidegger simply makes the assertion with, apparently, no sense that it needs support. "We will presuppose that Aristotle understood Plato." (PS, 8). In one sense, the presupposition *does* seem obvious. Aristotle, one of the titanic geniuses of the history of thought, who studied with Plato in the latter's Academy for almost twenty years, how could he *not* have understood Plato? Or if he did not, who possibly could? It would seem almost insulting to entertain the thesis that perhaps he did not.

At the risk of such an insult, I want to suggest that two features of Aristotle's thought may have indeed made it impossible for him to understand Plato: that he was such a fundamentally different thinker than Plato, and that in any case, when he considered his predecessors, from the pre-Socratics through Plato, he tended to evaluate them almost exclusively in terms of the extent to which he saw that they paved the way for his own thinking. Let us consider each of these in turn.

One of the dangers of seeing Aristotle as culminating Greek philosophic thinking, and especially believing that he was a clearer version of what Plato was trying to say, is that seeing Plato as leading up to Aristotle involves a tendency to see only the similarities in their thinking; that is, the ways in which Plato does indeed lead up to Aristotle, and in so doing to overlook the great differences between them. We have already quoted the passages where Heidegger says that, "What Aristotle said is what Plato placed at his disposal, only it is said more radically and developed more scientifically" (PS, 8). Shortly thereafter, Heidegger is even more expansive on this assumption: "In order to be able to watch Plato at work and to repeat this work correctly, the proper standpoint is needed. We will look for information from Aristotle about which beings he himself, *and hence Plato and the Greeks*, had in view and what were for them the ways of access to beings" (PS, 9; my emphasis). Moreover, "What Aristotle conceives in a more precise way was already seen by Plato. . . . We see thereby that we will find in Plato the same orientation as Aristotle's. We have to presuppose in them one and the same position with regard to the basic questions of Dasein" (PS, 16). Now, it is no doubt true that in many instances there are common themes, common questions raised by both Plato and Aristotle. But by focusing only on these similarities, by seeing as the differences only those ways in which Plato is less clear than Aristotle on the same or similar topics, one can easily overlook the deep and fundamental differences between them. And in many ways, Aristotle is a deeply and fundamentally different thinker than his teacher.

To begin to see this, one need only consider the way each organized his writing, indeed, even the titles of his works. For Aristotle *has* a "metaphysics," "physics," "psychology," "ethics," "politics," and so on. That is, he explicitly organized his work into these different books, with their relatively carefully defined subject matters, methodologies, and first principles. Moreover, in addition to the explicit titles of his books, Aristotle draws a broad distinction between the theoretical, practical, and productive sciences, once again on the basis of distinctions in subject matters, methodologies, and first principles. This enables him both to organize or classify the subject matters in a relatively clear way, and to study each subject matter in isolation from the others, thus again, presumably, attaining greater clarity in each. To be sure, these divisions are not at all rigid, and there is much appropriate overlap among them. I am not at all claiming that Aristotle is a strict maintainer of rigid categorical distinctions between disciplines. But he does pave the way for that process by first making those distinctions,

which become our disciplines, and writing his works in at least the partial light of those distinctions. In more specific ways, for example, he carefully distinguishes in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* between the five basic modes of knowledge (*nous, sophia, episteme, phronesis, and techne*), the set of distinctions from which Heidegger begins his study of Plato's *Sophist*. Lastly on this issue, after an apparent early dabbling in the writing of dialogues, he wrote all his work in a treatise format. Heidegger is so unimpressed by this difference from Plato that at least once in the *Sophist* course he refers to the *Sophist* as a "specifically ontological treatise" (PS, 160).

Now none of this is true of Plato. He writes dialogues, not treatises, the titles of which are not clearly delineated subject matters but usually the names of characters (sometimes, intriguingly, minor characters) in the dialogue. When they do take titles that indicate subjects, they are not names of disciplines but of specific topics: *Sophist, Statesman, Republic*, etc. Moreover, *no* Platonic dialogue can be designated as treating a single, specific subject matter, including the three named just above. To be sure, what after Aristotle will be called metaphysical issues, ethical issues, psychological issues, epistemological issues, etc., are raised in this or that dialogue. But typically, they are raised in something like the manner that they arise in human life: as intertwined in complex and sometimes confusing ways.

What we could call the "existential complexity" in which philosophical issues are raised in the dialogues is of course the source of the presumed (by Heidegger at least) Platonic obscurity. Where *is* Plato's metaphysics (if there is one at all)? His ethics, epistemology, politics, etc.? They are notoriously all over the place, buried here in one dialogue, there in another, and making it thus unendingly difficult to get a hold on what Plato's position on this or that topic really is.

The crucial question to be raised here, in regard to Heidegger, is this: is this Platonic tendency to place issues in the complex and intertwined existential situations in which they actually arise, and the Aristotelean decision to divide them up into separate disciplines with relative clarity, to be interpreted as an advance on Aristotle's part, as his seeing something clearly that Plato only saw obscurely? Or is it perhaps not that Plato had not yet thought of the idea of clearly dividing the sciences, but rather that he *rejected* the idea in favor of a presentation of issues as they arise in a concrete human life and situation? We need not here resolve this question in order to acknowledge that it is a question, one which indicates how utterly different these thinkers were. But the very raising of the question, and so of the issue of the fundamental differences between Aristotle and Plato, is obliterated

if we simply assume that Aristotle was doing the same thing as Plato only clearer.

I have developed this line of thinking and questioning in order to allow to be raised as a serious—and not an insulting—question whether Aristotle might not have been such a fundamentally different thinker than Plato that he really couldn't understand him in a deep sense. This hypothesis is made more plausible, I now want to suggest, by the second consideration mentioned above, Aristotle's attitude toward his predecessors, including Plato.

Aristotle reads all his predecessors, from the pre-Socratics through Plato, with a very narrow focus: they seem to interest him primarily in terms of the extent to which they do or do not hold to some aspect of Aristotle's own thinking. Thus the early pre-Socratics are insightful in so far as they see the "material" cause of things. They are criticized in so far as they fail to see the other of the "four causes." Plato clearly sees the significance of formal cause, which is his great insight, but fails to adequately account for material cause. One might indeed speculate that Heidegger at this stage of his career gets his guiding thesis that Plato and the earlier philosophers must be read through Aristotle from Aristotle himself! But a brief look at Aristotle's reading of his predecessors reveals that by interpreting and evaluating them within such a narrow focus, Aristotle obviously passes over, or fails to see, much of the richness of these thinkers. There is nothing in Aristotle's evaluations of his predecessors, for example, that can match the richness and depth of the examination of Protagoras or the Heracliteans in the *Theaetetus*, or of Parmenides in the *Sophist*. It is instructive in this regard that although at this time, in 1924–25, Heidegger is insisting that Plato must be understood through Aristotle, less than a decade later he has begun his series of incomparably rich studies of a number of pre-Socratic philosophers that could not conceivably be understood as Aristotelean. Quite to the contrary. Those studies of the pre-Socratics think those figures in remarkably creative and unorthodox ways that are as far as possible from Aristotle's rather professorial assessments of his predecessors in terms of their proximity to his own thought. As we shall see, it is odd that although Heidegger rather quickly and completely rejects the notion that the pre-Socratics should be read through Aristotle, he never can quite bring himself to reject that idea as applied to Plato, even in his later work.

If these considerations are plausible, they make altogether problematic the guiding interpretive decision that determines the entire course of Heidegger's lecture course, that Plato must be understood through Aristotle and again and again assessed as a less clear version