CHAPTER 15

~~Idea~~ and Language: Gadamer's Platonism

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This paper[1] is divided into three parts. I first situate Gadamer's underlying motivations in light of Heidegger's oral teaching in the 1920s. I make occasional reference, including in the footnotes, to the interpretation of Plato made by other students of Heidegger, in order to underscore the specificity of Gadamer's contributions. After sketching the main components of his reading, I concentrate on the theory of Forms, especially in the *Phaedo*, in connection with the paradigm of number. In the last section I discuss a few potentially problematic features of that interpretation with reference to Heidegger and Kant.

1 Before, with, and against Heidegger

It is easy to forget that there is a Gadamer before Heidegger. Three important elements of that first period in the development of his thinking should be emphasized: the situation in Germany in 1918; the dominance of Neo-Kantianism; and his reading of Plato. The experience of the tragedy of the Great War undermined the belief in progress, thus prompting a skepticism about science which would come to be characteristic of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.[2] This crisis renewed and stimulated thinking, leading to a proliferation of discussion and reading groups, and the young Gadamer discovered poetry, especially that of Stefan George (1868–1933).[3] He was initiated into philosophy through transcendental idealism taught by the Neo-Kantians Richard Hönigswald in Breslau, Nicolai Hartmann, and especially the towering figure of the Marburg School, Paul Natorp. He wrote his doctoral thesis on the concept of pleasure in Plato (1922)[4] under the supervision of Natorp,

1 Warm thanks to Denis Dumas and Alan Kim for helpful and challenging comments on earlier versions of this paper.

2 For the Breslau and Marburg periods before Heidegger (1918–1923), cf. Grondin (1996); (1999), 61–107.

3 See Gadamer (1983b); Kim (2010), 186–222.

4 Gadamer (1922).

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whose *Platos Ideenlehre* had just been reprinted.[5] Gadamer's thesis was a rather conventional exercise, although it did treat the entire Platonic corpus. Gadamer would later claim ~~in his memoirs~~ that he had "been formed more by the Platonic dialogues than by the great thinkers of German Idealism".[6] He would also frequently criticize Natorp's Plato interpretation. Nevertheless, the influence of the Neo-Kantian and of the transcendental approach more generally leaves significant traces in Gadamer's thinking, as I will show in the last section.

When Heidegger came to Marburg, in 1923, his lectures primarily focused on Plato and even more on Aristotle. Hannah Arendt testified to the novelty and vitality of Heidegger's teaching:

> It was technically decisive that, for instance, Plato was not talked about and his theory of Forms expounded; rather for an entire semester a single dialogue was pursued and subjected to question step by step, until the time-honored doctrine had disappeared to make room for a set of problems of immediate and urgent relevance. Today this sounds quite familiar, because nowadays so many proceed in this way: but no one did so before Heidegger. The rumor about Heidegger put it quite simply: Thinking has come to life again.[7]

Arendt is evidently referring to Heidegger's seminar on the *Sophist* (1924–25), the climax of his early engagement with Plato. At that time, he read Plato in light of Aristotle, following Natorp[8] and his critique of Platonic Forms, which would later contribute to his rejection of "Platonism" as dogmatic metaphysics. Heidegger was also interested in the ideal of the theoretical life (the life of νοῦς, σοφία), endeavoring to bring out both its conceptual and existential motives with a view to the ontology he was in the process of developing, namely "the hermeneutics of facticity".[9] Only after the "turn" (*Kehre*) would he develop his radical criticism of Platonism as "forgetfulness of being". Yet, in 1927, Heidegger

5 Natorp (1921), newly with a so-called "Metacritical Appendix", "Logos-Psyche-Eros"; see Lembeck in this volume.

6 Gadamer (1985a), 184 (Gadamer ~~1977a,~~ 500).

7 Arendt (1978), 295.

8 Heidegger (1992), 10–12; cf. 1–5.

9 See for instance Heidegger (1985). We now know, thanks to the publication of his lectures and seminars, that his relation to Plato was complex and remained ambivalent, even paradoxical. For a detailed and comprehensive study of the question, see Gonzalez (2009), and in this volume.

still sees fit to announce his revival of "the question of Being" in *Being and Time* with an epigraph from the *Sophist* (244a7–9).

Some of his most influential students, inspired by this return to the Greeks, elaborated their own readings of Plato, which are at once Heideggerian and anti-Heideggerian in character. In addition to Gadamer, the most important include Walter Bröcker,[10] Jacob Klein,[11] Leo Strauss,[12] and Gerhard Krüger.[13] A detailed study of the connections between what can be called the "Marburg School of Plato" and Heidegger is still needed; in the meantime, I shall content myself with a few comparisons, usually ignored by commentators, that may contribute to a better understanding of the underlying motifs of Gadamer's "return to Plato", viz., the specific differences between Gadamer's reading and those of Heidegger as well as Gadamer's Marburg friends, Krüger, Strauss and Klein.

The young Heidegger's efforts to "think with" the ancients astonished and perplexed his audience. Who was, in fact, speaking? Plato and Aristotle—or Heidegger? Therein lies for Gadamer a fundamental hermeneutical truth, which he will later analyze more explicitly, namely that in the reading of ancient texts, and more generally the understanding of the past and of the other, one is transformed by this dialogue, in what he calls a "fusion of horizons". The unity and reciprocity of practice and theory implied in this conception ultimately means the primacy of the practical, that is, application of the object of understanding to one's specific situation, and therewith self-knowledge. Philosophy thus conceived is activity and participation, as opposed to dogmatic thinking and, more particularly, the methodological ideal of neutrality embodied then in the field of classical philology by Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (the once severe critic of the young Nietzsche)[14] and Werner Jaeger. What are the conditions for a reading of the Greek texts that allows them to speak to us about human life? According to the scientific model of philology, the task is to translate, where translation is conceived as mere reproduction of the same. But Gadamer would reply: translating is rather transposing into the present. These ancient texts can only speak to us again if we let them do so "from the fundamental experiences of our own life-world [*Lebenswelt*]".[15] Thus Heideggerian practice leads to Gadamerian theory. The reverse is equally true. Gadamer's hermeneutical theory rests on Heideggerian

10 Bröcker (1965).
11 Klein (1934–~~1935~~) [~~CONSULT RENAUD~~] (1968); (1965); (~~1978~~).
12 Strauss (1953); (1964).
13 Krüger (1939); (1948); (1950).
14 Gadamer (~~1982~~), 274–6.
15 Gadamer (~~1989a~~), 124.

substantive views, that is, just as much on the "content" as on the "mode" of Heidegger's oral teaching, namely the hermeneutics of facticity, which reflects a modified version of Dilthey's conflict between science and life (*Lebenswelt*). More specifically, Gadamer's hermeneutical theory is originally inspired by the appropriation of Aristotelian practical reason (*phronēsis*) in Heidegger's 1923 seminar on *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.[16] Gadamer will seek, in his first major publication (1931), and especially after 1960, to fuse Aristotle's *phronēsis* and Platonic dialectic.

Gadamer's Plato interpretation changed over the years and key elements of its final version sometimes lack clarity, posing hermeneutical difficulties of their own to the commentator, as we will see in the last section. It is important to underscore the fact that Gadamer gained his independence from Heidegger only slowly and belatedly, in contrast to his Marburg friends, especially Krüger and Löwith.[17] To that end Gadamer first decided to acquire better training in classical philology from 1924 to 1927. His main mentor in this field was Paul Friedländer, a student of Wilamowitz, and admirer of George's poetry. At the time Friedländer was working on the first volume of his *Platon* (1928).[18] The fact that Gadamer's distancing from Heidegger was slow and gradual explains his long ambivalence towards Plato. Both his *Habilitationschrift*, entitled *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*,[19] and *Truth and Method* (1960), testify to this lingering indecision. It is in his magnum opus that this ambivalence is most evident, namely in the two sections dealing specifically with Plato, which present two largely opposed accounts of Platonism.[20] One essentially corresponds to the Heideggerian critique, while the other takes up the dialectical and aporetic reading of his 1931 book, a sympathetic account he deepens and

16 Heidegger's notes for that seminar have never been published, although the appropriation of *phronēsis* is well documented in the 1924–25 *Soph.* lecture (Heidegger 1992, 21–64; 132–88). Attendance at the 1923 seminar was actually preceded for Gadamer by his private reading of the "*Natorp-Bericht*" (1922; Heidegger 1989), which was for him an "electric shock" comparable to his first contact with Stefan George's poetry (Gadamer ~~1977b,~~ 212).

17 Cf. Grondin (1999), 149.

18 Gadamer (1986d), 332.

19 *Platos dialektische Ethik* was written under Heidegger's supervision in 1928 and published in 1931.

20 "*Das Vorbild der platonischen Dialektik*" (1986a), 368–75, and "*Sprache und Logos*" (1986a), 409–22.

strengthens after 1960.[21] Plato would move into the center of the increasingly outspoken quarrel between Heidegger and Gadamer concerning the status of philosophy and tradition.[22] "Plato is not a Platonist", Gadamer would contend, no more than true philosophy is scholasticism.[23]

The key element of the Gadamerian appropriation of Plato is dialogue (*Gespräch*).[24] As in play, dialogue is not about the will or subjectivity of the participants but about the question at stake (*Sache*), a give-and-take that transcends it. For Gadamer, as for Heidegger, thinking is a practice, not a set of propositions or doctrines. Therein lies the two thinkers' common conception of the primacy of the practical. The phenomenological task of tracing modern scientific terminology back to the ordinary understanding of things requires a return to the Greeks. For Gadamer this task rests upon a permanent possibility rooted in the infinite potentialities of speech (*Sprechen*), following the example of Socratic conversation. Heidegger's Plato however soon proved metaphysical, dogmatic, un-Socratic. On the whole, Gadamer's and Heidegger's disagreement about Plato rests upon a deeper agreement, viz., that the pre-theoretical language of the life-world, which is historically changing and limited, is the source and basis of all authentic thinking. Thus the motivations underlying Gadamer's Plato interpretation, both positively and negatively, go back to Heidegger's lectures, in which a simultaneously old and new conception of philosophy as practical and finite emerges.

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21 In the section on the *Cratylus* ("*Sprache und Logos*") Gadamer formulates a severe and fundamental criticism against Plato, Heideggerian in inspiration, that Plato reduces language, conceived on the mathematical mode, to the mere sign of a well-defined and already known reality; pure thinking of the Forms is a direct grasp, without words, of Being conceived as reified objectivity; the net result of which is "that Plato's discovery of the Forms [~~Ideen~~] conceals [*verdeckt*] the true nature of language even more than the theories of the Sophists [did]"! (Gadamer ~~1989c,~~ 408; 1986a, 412). Earlier in the book, in "*Das Vorbild der platonischen Dialektik*" (Gadamer 1986a, 368–75), he claims on the contrary that "the literary form of dialogue places language and concept back within the original movement of conversation" (*in die ursprüngliche Bewegung des Gesprächs*), thus protecting "the word" from dogmatic abuse (Gadamer 1989c, 368–9; 1986a, 374). In his later Plato-studies, Gadamer endeavors to explore and insist upon this consciousness of finitude, namely the dependence of thinking upon language and the fundamental and irreducibly dialogical character of all authentic thinking; see e.g. Gadamer (1968a), 73, 95.

22 Cf. Gadamer (1978a), 130; Dostal (1997).

23 Gadamer (~~1977a),~~ 508; (1988a, ~~1991~~), 331.

24 This element, largely absent from Heidegger's interpretation and thinking, is possibly the key difference between him and Gadamer; cf. Gonzalez (2006), 432–3; (2009), 344–5.

2 The Gadamerian Rereading of Plato

2.1 *Principles and Outlines*

Let us begin with a brief inventory. Gadamer's studies in Greek philosophy fill up three of the ten volumes of his Collected Works.[25] Plato is discussed in far greater detail than any other author.[26] There are two monographs, *Plato's Dialectical Ethics* (1931; trans., 1991) and *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy* (1978a; trans., 1986c); one book of translation and commentary on the "theory of Forms" (1978b);[27] and some twenty-eight articles or chapters. To these one must add the two previously mentioned sections of *Truth and Method*.[28] From a chronological point of view and across all categories, the vast majority of Plato studies were published after 1960, the year of *Truth and Method*. Thematically, his studies on Plato deal with dialectic, broadly defined (as both method and ontology), and the theory of Forms, especially the Form of the Good. About ten Platonic dialogues are given individual treatment, including *Phaedo, Republic, Parmenides, Sophist, Philebus*, as well as the *Seventh Letter*.

The novelty of the approach taken in this chapter lies mostly in considering the following aspects: (i) the relation to Heidegger in connection with his other Marburg students; (ii) Gadamer's Plato-translations, and thus some philological features of his interpretation; (iii) the connection between the theory of Forms and the "unwritten doctrine";[29] (iv) the modified Kantianism and Neo-Kantianism implicit in his reading.[30]

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25 *Gesammelte Werke* (= *GW*) 5–7 ("*Griechische Philosophie* I–III").

26 See Gadamer ~~(1977a) *GW* 2~~: 494; 487. As for works mainly on Aristotle (a clear division between his Plato and Aristotle studies is not always possible; see, e.g., Gadamer (19~~78a~~), there are two translation books (Gadamer, 1948; 1998) plus some eleven articles or chapters, most published after 1960.

27 *Plato: Texte zur Ideenlehre* is not reprinted in the *GW*; the translations were already published in 1965, without the Greek text and commentary, in the first of a three-volume history of philosophy (Gadamer 1965). This small book is divided into four parts: introduction (7–10), Greek texts and translations (12–73), commentary (75–92), bibliography (93–5). The Greek text is Burnet's (1900–1907).

28 Gadamer (1986a), 368–75; 409–22.

29 But see Zuckert (1996), 96–100, and especially Gadamer (2010) for an account of that issue.

30 The reception of Gadamer's Plato interpretation could be generally characterized as follows. Apart from the typical neglect by philosophers (among them some sympathetic to Gadamer) who view Plato as irredeemably "metaphysical" and by Plato specialists who find his Plato suspiciously modern looking, the reception has been on the whole positive: most of his Plato studies have been translated into many languages (English, Italian, French, etc.); the numerous book reviews and short studies are either interested

What are the principles and outlines of Gadamer's Plato interpretation? Its critical intention must be emphasized first. The separation (χωρισμός) of the Forms from the phenomena do not imply, he claims, the traditional two-world doctrine, a reading that constitutes a deformation of Plato's true intentions (*eine Umformung der eigentlichen Intentionen Platos*).[31] Against the dualistic and dogmatic Platonism criticized by Nietzsche and the later Heidegger, Gadamer defends a Socratic Platonism focused on human finitude. The separation of the Forms, he argues, does not imply the laws of the empirical sciences, as Natorp claimed, but rather it constitutes the condition of dialectic and a bulwark against the Sophistic misuse of language.[32] Gadamer generally accepts, although rarely discusses, the traditional chronology of the dialogues (divided roughly in three periods) and so, too, stylometry,[33] but he rejects the developmental theory on the ground that the unity and coherence of Plato's thought are by far more significant than its discontinuity.[34]

This coherence resides in dialectic as rooted in the practice of dialogue. Here we must draw a sharp contrast between the Platonic dialogues and Aristotle's treatises and lecture notes.[35] The dialogue form is meant to mimic living conversation grounded in daily life, as exemplified by the Socratic logic of question and answer about the good in human life. The doctrinal content cannot be detached from the dialogical context, conceived as an event (*Geschehen*), for the Platonic dialogues always present thinking in action (*im Vollzug*). In that sense Plato-Socrates unites argumentation (λόγος) and action (ἔργον), theory and practice.[36] False knowledge displays just this lack of unity between thinking and life.[37] The dialogue form in Plato was discovered, Gadamer repeatedly points out, by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1804),[38] and later explored again by

in the importance of Plato in Gadamer's thought (e.g. Smith 1991; Dostal 1997, 2010; Wachterhauser 1999, 62–91; Figal 2001; Grondin 2010; Gonzalez 2006, 2010; Risser 2012) or its relevance for contemporary Plato scholarship (e.g. Griswold 1981; White 1988; Szlezák 2010; Renaud 2012) or both (e.g. Zuckert 1996, 2002; Renaud 1999, 2008). Rowe's general remark (1994, 217) is still worth quoting: "the question whether or not [Plato] was ever really a Platonist seems a good one, if the object of knowledge remains permanently out of reach". For a more detailed account of the reception up to 1998, see Renaud (1999), 18–21.

31 Gadamer (1986b), 13–14.
32 Gadamer (1978b), 9.
33 Cf. Gadamer (1969), 312.
34 Cf. Gadamer (1968a), 73.
35 Gadamer (1978b), 8.
36 Gadamer (1977a), 501. Cf. Krüger (1948), xviii-xxii; Klein (1965), 3–10, Strauss (1964), 50–5.
37 Gadamer (1991), 117.
38 See Laks and Szlezák in this volume.

Friedländer as well as Krüger, Klein, and Strauss.[39] Unlike Friedländer however, Gadamer emphatically subordinates the philological and literary questions to philosophical issues. He also does not interpret "between the lines" to the extent that Klein and Strauss do—their esotericism is foreign to him.

While the Platonic dialogues cannot be reduced to a set of dogmatic teachings, Gadamer grants that certain dialogues and key passages in them stand out in importance and offer special insight into Plato's thought, the core of which is the so-called theory of Forms. In the introduction to his anthology of texts on that theory, *Plato: Texte zur Ideenlehre*, Gadamer presents the passages he has chosen as setting up an overall interpretation as well a cross-examination of it. Since Aristotle, the meaning of the theory of Forms has been subject to endless controversy. There are two main areas of disagreement, one pertaining to the ontological status and function of the Forms; the other, to their place in the development of Plato's thought. The question has also been raised as to whether we should even speak of a "theory of Forms", given the fact that this expression (or anything similar) cannot be found anywhere in the corpus nor is any general exposition of it given.[40] For Gadamer, the "theory" is not the dividing line between an ethical Socrates and a metaphysical Plato, as has been widely held since Aristotle.[41] Rather, Gadamer insists on continuity throughout the corpus and the connection of this theory with the problem of the One and the Many. For Gadamer recognition of the theory of ~~forms~~ and of the method of dialectic is the natural consequence of Socrates' demand for definition: the function of the theory is to make explicit the conditions of the dialectic that Socrates is already practicing in the "early dialogues".

The theory of Forms does not, however, constitute the center of Platonic thought, Gadamer argues. This honor goes to the dialectic of the One and the Many. Gadamer thus decisively links the theory of Forms with the doctrine of ideal numbers presented in Aristotle's reports of Plato's oral teaching. Gadamer claims that he had advocated this approach since the 1930s, which would suggest he had arrived at it independently from the Tübingen School (to which I return below). His approach to this question could therefore have been the fruit of his close collaboration with Jacob Klein,[42] whose important study, *Greek Mathematical Thought and the Origin of Algebra*, dates from the time of

39 It would more accurate to say that Schleiermacher rediscovered it, after the ancient, especially Neo-Platonic commentators; see Renaud and Tarrant (2015), 196.

40 See Wieland (a Gadamer student) (1982), 125–150, as well as Sayre (1993) and Gonzalez (2002).

41 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1078b23–32: the notions to be defined according to Socrates are not separate (χωριστά).

42 See e.g. Gadamer *GW* 5: 159 (1967 preface from the second edition of Gadamer, 1931).

their most intense association (1934–1936). In connection with Klein's work, as well as in departure from it, Gadamer elaborated a new interpretation of the role of mathematics in Plato, especially with regard to language and thinking. While mathematics represents an ideal of rationality, it remains subordinated to the requirements of dialectic (understood primarily as the method of questioning and answering), and therefore prone to the "weakness of language" (*Seventh Letter* 343a1). The *logos* has, Gadamer claims, a "numerical structure": like number it exists only in a whole defining both its identity and its difference. A single number can only exist as part of a series of numbers, such as the various relations of numbers in string lengths on a musical instrument. Likewise Forms are not isolated but interrelated, constituting a unified plurality. A *logos* (or statement) unifies what by nature is distinct, as numbers are unified by counting. For every Form, there exists a *logos* giving its essence. Thus, according to Gadamer's reading there exist indefinitely many—adequate and inadequate—ways of grasping the Forms, and this is why indefiniteness is an integral part of intelligibility. The ideality of number and language is therefore articulated in terms of the dialectic of the One and the Many. On the whole, the importance of mathematics for Plato resides paradoxically in the limits of knowledge. The Pythagorean heritage is understood in the light of the Socratic heritage.[43]

2.2 *The Theory of Forms or the Aporetic Dialectic*

I will now examine Gadamer's interpretation of the theory of Forms more closely. My analysis is based on his book of translation (*Plato: Texte zur Ideenlehre*, 1978b), generally neglected by commentators, as well as on his two monographs (1931, 1978a), and articles on the *Phaedo*, *Parmenides* and the *Seventh Letter*, all published between 1964 and 1991.[44]

The three passages chosen by Gadamer in his translation are *Ph*. 95b–108c; *Prm*. 128c–136e; and *Seventh Letter* 342a–344d. This selection implies a general interpretation of the theory of Forms and its place in the corpus.[45] His translation seeks to render Plato's Greek as living speech (*lebendige Sprache*).[46] His brief commentary (75–92) does not pretend to discuss all the difficulties, but rather aims to bring out the main steps in the argument; the underlying agreements between the three passages; and the innermost motives (*innersten Impulse*) of Platonic thinking. More generally, following the example of

43 Gadamer (1978b), 8.
44 That is: Gadamer (1964, 1968a, 1973, 1974, 1982, 1983b, 1988a).
45 Gadamer (1978b), 8.
46 Gadamer (1978b), 10.

Heidegger, Gadamer endeavors to dissolve "the dogmatic and doxographic sclerosis" that has plagued analysis of the theory.[47] I concentrate here on the decisive segment of his treatment of the *Phaedo* and link it thereafter to the two passages.

Gadamer regards the *Phaedo* as the dialogue in which the theory of Forms is first explicitly introduced. According to Gadamer, Socrates, on the day of his execution, attempts to prove the immortality of the soul through the analogy between the soul's mode of being and mode of being of numbers and Forms. In the key passage (*Ph*. 99e–101e), Socrates explains wherein lies the insufficiency of the natural science of the age (περὶ φύσεως ἱστορία), especially that of Anaxagoras, and argues for the necessity of a new method of inquiry. Anaxagoras speaks of Intelligence (νοῦς) as the cause of the coming-to-be and passing-away of things, and as the cause of the world's order (ὁ διακοσμῶν τε καὶ πάντων αἴτιος). This provokes Socrates' initial enthusiasm, but Anaxagoras' explanation turns out to be exclusively empirical and mechanical. It thus confuses, Socrates complains, the cause (αἰτία) with that without which the cause could not be cause, i.e., the material conditions of its realization. Socrates' presence in prison cannot possibly be explained by the bones, blood and nerves of his body which hold it together and allow him to be seated. Rather his presence there can only be explained by the fact that the Athenians believe it is best to condemn him, and that he in turn believes it is best to submit to their verdict (*Ph*. 98e). Likewise, Socrates claims, it must be possible and necessary to explain the world and all its natural constituents by the fact that is best for them to be the way they are and not otherwise. In other words, the true good (ἀληθῶς τὸ ἀγαθόν) must be what links and binds everything in the universe by Intelligence. His predecessor's account supposes immediate sensory access to things, and is therefore misguided in ignoring (despite Anaxagoras' teleological promise) the common opinions, which view things in terms good and worse. A "second sailing" doing justice to them must be adopted. The key passage, which I quote at some length,[48] then follows:

> So I thought I must take refuge in the way we speak about things [εἰς τοὺς λόγους καταφυγόντα—*meine Zuflucht zu der Weise zu nehmen, wie wir von den Dingen reden*] and investigate the truth of things by means of words [σκοπεῖν τῶν ὄντων τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐκείνοις {sc. λόγοις}]…. I started in this manner: taking in each case as my presupposition the statement [ὑποθέμενος

47 Gadamer (1978b), 10; this remark recalls that of Arendt cited earlier.

48 My English translation tries to stay as close as possible to Gadamer's German rendering, otherwise following mostly Grube (in Plato, 1997).

> ἑκάστοτε λόγον—*indem ich jeweils … diejenige Behauptung zugrunde lege*][49] that seemed to me the most compelling [ἐρρωμενέστατον], I would pose [τίθημι]~~as~~ true, about cause and everything else, whatever agreed [συμφωνεῖν] with this, and as untrue whatever did not so agree [*setze ich das, was mit dieser in Übereinstimmung zu sein scheint, als wahrhaft seiend*] … This … is what I mean. It is nothing new, but what I have never stopped talking about [ἐν τῷ παρεληλυθότι λόγῳ], both elsewhere and in the earlier part of our conversation. I am going to try to show you the kind of cause [αἰτίας] with which I have concerned myself. I turn back to those oft-mentioned things [ἐκεῖνα τὰ πολυθρύλητα] and proceed from them [ἄρχομαι ἀπ' ἐκείνων—*meinen Ausgang nehmen*]. I assume [ὑποθέμενος—*ich setze also voraus*] the existence of a Beautiful, itself by itself, of a Good and a Great [τι καλὸν αὐτὸ καθ' αὑτὸ καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ μέγα], and all the rest.
>
> *Ph.* 99e–100b

> And whenever you must give an account of the presupposition itself [ἐκείνης αὐτῆς δέοι σε διδόναι λόγον—*über jene Voraussetzung selber Rede stehen*~~,~~] you will proceed in the same way: you will adopt another presupposition [ἄλλην αὖ ὑπόθεσιν ὑποθέμενος—*indem Du wieder eine andere Voraussetzung zugrunde legtest*], the one which seems to you best [βελτίστη φαίνοιτο—*als die beste erscheint*], of the higher ones until you come to something acceptable.
>
> *Ph.* 101de

Gadamer's translation of the key terms, "λόγος" and "ὑπόθεσις", involves important hermeneutical and philosophical decisions. He avoids translating "λόγοι" as "thoughts" ("*Gedanken*", Schleiermacher), "concepts" ("*Begriffe*", Apelt) or even "reasonings" ("*raisonnements*", Dixsaut); Grube's "discussions" (*Ph.* 99e) comes closest to Gadamer's option, although a little later, Grube then uses "theory" for λόγος (*Ph.* 100a). Rather, Gadamer chooses a paraphrase drawn from ordinary language: "the way in which we speak of things" (*die Weise, wie wir von den Dingen reden*).[50] He thus opts for one of the two basic possible meanings of λόγος (in the singular): speech (*Rede*), instead of reason

49 Likewise, Bröcker's translation (1965), 202: "*Indem ich voraussetze oder zugrunde lege* [ὑποθέμενος]".

50 See Krüger's similar translation (1949), 46: "*vernünftige Reden*". He elaborates on this elsewhere (1958), 159. Bostock's general position (1986, 160) partially concurs with Gadamer's: "We must conclude that *logos* does not here mean 'definition' after all, and apparently it just bears its general meaning of 'statement' or 'proposition' (or, as Gallop prefers to say,

(*Vernunft*). This translation is arguably justified insofar as Socrates has just castigated the natural sciences for ignoring the way people talk about things in terms of good and better. He translates the verb, ὑποθέμενος, as "taking as my presupposition" (*zugrunde legen*) rather than "hypothesis" (Grube, Bostock). The noun, ὑπόθεσις, occurs three times in the passage (*Ph.* 101d2, 3, 7) and is in each case rendered as "presupposition" (*Voraussetzung*). On the whole, his translation of "λόγος" and "ὑπόθεσις" implies his twofold hermeneutical and philosophical thesis, namely that (a) the acceptance of the Forms is inseparable from language and dialogue; and (b) they are a starting point, not an endpoint.

Gadamer thus interprets the recourse to Form (*Wendung zur Idee*)[51] as a return to everyday language (*Sprache*), as opposed to the "scientific" method, in both Socrates' day and our own. Socrates readily admits that his presupposition of the existence of the Forms (of the Good, of the Beautiful, of the Just) may strike one as "naive and perhaps foolish" (*Ph.* 100d4).[52] As such it does not so much constitute a theory as a pre-understanding, in the sense in which we all have an "idea" of the ἰδέα, since it lies at the very root of all human speech and action. The separation of the Form from sensible things, according to Gadamer, does not therefore imply the metaphysical "two-world view", but simply the concrete condition (*Möglichkeit*) of thought (*Denken*) against its foe, the sophistical abuse of language. Without common speech, neither conversation nor dialectic are possible.[53] The Socratic "What-is-*X*?" question just is the quest for the *eidos* of a thing, of which Socrates' interlocutors all have

'theory'). It apparently covers any kind of view that may be advanced, and not only views about definitions".

51 Gadamer (~~1977a~~), 502.

52 Gadamer (1931), 50. Cf. also *Ph.* 76d8: "as we are always saying" (ἃ θρυλοῦμεν ἀεί).

53 Gadamer (1978b), 9. Klein (1968, 73 = 1934–36, 73–4) approvingly refers to Gadamer's interpretation ("1931: 56 ss".) and further brings out the relation to modern science *avant la lettre*: "We must not overlook the fact that the procedure by 'hypothesis' stressed by Plato is not a specifically 'scientific' method but is that original attitude of human reflection prior to all science which is revealed directly in speech as it exhibits and judges things. Thus, compared to the study of nature embarked upon by the physiologists, that 'second-best sailing' (δεύτερος πλοῦς) of Socrates, which consists of 'taking refuge in reasonable speech' (εἰς τοὺς λόγους καταφυγόντα—*Ph.* 99e) is indeed nothing else than a return to the ordinary attitude of the dianoia; … When engaged in reasonable speech under the guidance of the dianoia, we always suppose something 'other' to underlie the objects, namely *noeta*. These, albeit appearing in the mirror of our senses, are the true objects of our study, though we may not even be aware of making such 'suppositions'".

some idea (viz., just in virtue of speaking and of having general notions at all regarding the Good, the Beautiful), but no clear, exact understanding.[54]

What is the connection between language and the transcendence of the Form? It lies in the ideal intelligibility of the word (*Idealität des Wortes*).[55] Every word, spoken or written, always retains the same meaning and so constitutes a stable, intelligible unity. The acceptance of the Forms, and the quest for essence, is implied, presupposed in our very use of words. The so-called theory of Forms merely makes that function and aim explicit. The "turning to the Forms" therefore prefigures, in Gadamer's view, the criticism of Neo-Kantianism by Husserl[56] as well as the radicalization of that criticism by Heidegger. That is, the error of Neo-Kantianism consisted in taking scientific analysis as a starting-point and forgetting its precondition, namely the pre-theoretical understanding of things as objects of everyday concern.

The Forms or ideal essences (*ideale Wesenheiten*) cannot therefore be mere concepts.[57] They imply a vision of the whole of things (*ein Ganzes des Seienden*) as they are represented in our mind (*wie es sich unserem Geiste darstellt*).[58] Gadamer points out that, far from being a mere mental representation, the Platonic Form is the object of that representation, an object external and independent from it. He cites the *Parmenides*: the Form is not a thought (νόημα—*ein blosser Gedanke*) present in the mind (ἄλλοθι ἢ ἐν ψυχαῖς—*im Geiste*), but that of which (τινός) thought is a thought (*Prm.* 132bc).[59] Forms must therefore be conceived like norms or models (ὥσπερ παραδείγματα—*wie Urbilder*) embedded in nature (ἐν τῇ φύσει) (*Prm.* 132d2).

Gadamer emphasizes moreover the underlying unity between the hypothesis of the *eidos* in the *Phaedo*, and the dialectic of participation (μέθεξις) in the prelude to the *Parmenides*. The problem associated with the concept of "participation" (the way in which phenomena partake in the Forms) is genuine and even insoluble, but, according to Gadamer, it is not in fact Plato's main concern.[60] The ~~existence~~ of the Forms is the key, and their acceptance the defining moment of dialectic. There occurs in the *Parmenides* no crisis, no major shift,

54 See Allen (1970), 107–10. Also, Kirkland (2012), 111–5, who characterizes the theory of Forms and therewith the Socratic project as a whole as "proto-phenomenological" in character (154, 159, 199), often employing openly Heideggerian terminology.

55 Gadamer (1978b), 82; (1986a), 394.

56 See Kim in this volume.

57 Cf. Krüger (1950), xxix; the ~~Ideas~~ are not laws of the mathematical sciences (cf. Natorp) but "*das eigentlich Seiende*" (1950: xxx).

58 Gadamer (1978b), 10.

59 Gadamer (1978b), 55.

60 Gadamer (1988a ~~[1991]~~), 330, f.

despite the common belief to the contrary.[61] The mathematical entities in favor of which Plato is supposed to have abandoned the Forms are inseparable from the Forms. According to the Aristotelian criticism of Plato, the Forms are identical to numbers.[62] But where does the close relation between Form and number lie?

Gadamer raises this question, which comes to prompt a revision of his own earlier critical interpretation. He reasons as follows. The problem of the relation between Form and what "participates" in it, is illustrated, metaphorically, by number.[63] A number is not something isolated, yet it is different from the totality of numbers of which it is a part. Like all beings in general, it is one, that is identical with itself, and yet distinct from others. The number's mode of being therefore illustrates, in the *Parmenides*, the question of the essence of a thing, to which the *eidos* is the answer. The relation between the multitude and unity of numbers is mathematical, or eidetic, in nature.[64] The Forms or ideal essences are similar to the whole series (*Gefüge*) of numbers: just as there exists no isolated Form (αὐτὰ καθ' αὑτὰ—*rein für sich; Prm.* 133a9), so too there exists no individual number that does not have its place in the whole series of numbers.[65] This is also true, Gadamer claims, of thinking and being in general. All knowledge implies a whole (*ein Ganzes*). This means in turn that the soul's conversation with itself is endless, and all thinking dialectical, that is, aporetic.[66]

Gadamer's interpretation of Plato was developed in contrast to that of the Tübingen School, a school of interpretation of vital importance in current Plato scholarship, deserving to be better-known in the English-speaking world.[67] Its major representatives, and Gadamer's main interlocutors, Hans Joachim Krämer (1959) and Konrad Gaiser (1963), agree with him in adopting a unitarian approach, although they base it on the indirect tradition, notably the Aristotelian testimony. Unlike Gadamer, however, they defend a systematic and deductive interpretation of the Forms with reference to a so-called doctrine

61 Cf. esp. *Ph.* 96e–97b; 101b, 104a.

62 Aristotle, *Metaph.* 987b10–13; Gadamer (1988b [~~1991~~]), 245.

63 The being and becoming of numbers are already discussed in the *Phaedo*, first inadequately with the logic of physiology (*Ph.* 96a–97b), then, as we have seen, in terms of "participation" (the Small and the Great: *Ph.* 100e5–101a; 102b–103a).

64 Gadamer (~~1982~~), 292.

65 Gadamer (1978b), 10.

66 Gadamer (1978b), 10. Gadamer likes quoting (e.g., 1978a, 161) Plato's definition of thinking (διάνοια) as a dialogue of the soul with itself (*Soph.* 263e3–4; *Tht.* 206cd; cf. 208c).

67 See Hösle in this volume; also, D. Nikulin (2012) for a collection of classic and more recent essays by leading proponents of the school: H.J. Krämer, K. Gaiser, but also T.A. Szlezák, J. Halfwassen, V. Hösle, and Nikulin.

of principles (ἀρχαί; *Prinzipienlehre*), viz., the One and the Indefinite Dyad (τὸ ἓν καὶ ἡ ἀόριστος δυάς), associated with the Great and the Small.[68] From these two principles, they claim, Plato deduced the ideal numbers; the intermediary numbers; the world-soul; and the sensible realities. Although Gadamer also admits the existence of oral instruction (*mündliche Unterweisung*) held in a small circle of members at the Academy,[69] yet he grants the written dialogues methodological primacy for the study of Plato's thought. On his view, this "teaching" is not so much doctrine as dialogue, conceived in continuity with the one modeled in the written dialogues. According to Gadamer, the main error of a systematic and deductive reconstruction of the principles, characteristic of the Tübingen School, consists in giving primacy to the One as the source of the Forms, for, he claims, the One is inseparable from duality. Instead, it is really, as we have seen, the *problem* of the One and the Many, a problem frequently discussed in the dialogues. The One is never alone, but always unfolds within plurality. In the *Republic*, the One is the principle of goodness and the highest object of knowledge (μέγιστον μάθημα, *Rep*. 504e5–6).[70] It does not, however, imply a system. Reason necessarily seeks unity, but endlessly; the notion of a closed system is an addition that dates from late antiquity.[71]

Gadamer admits that in his 1931 book he pushed the notion of a Platonic "teaching" (*Lehre*) too far into the background.[72] From the 1960s on, he developed and defended a new interpretation of the "Platonic teaching" about the unending quest for unity. The doctrine of principles, now interpreted as the doctrine of the One and the Many, stems from the existence of the Forms, not the reverse, as the Tübingen School claims. This is because the relation between the One and the Many is based on the *logos* itself (language and thinking). The *logos* has a "numerical structure", in the sense that it is at once One and Many. The task of definition requires the method of division (διαίρεσις), but the whole of which it is a part remains unattainable. The doctrine of the One and the Many thus illustrates the dialectical, or open character of the all (human) knowledge. The objects of knowledge never manifest themselves univocally; rather, the same thing appears in various ways and different contexts. This is why all things, all relations among Forms is a mixture (*Mischung*) of unity and plurality.[73] According to Plato's rich and largely metaphorical vocabulary of "participation" (μέθεξις, κοινωνία, συνουσία, παρουσία, μῖξις,

68 Aristotle, *Metaph*. 1081b31–1083a.
69 Gadamer (1978b), 91; 1968b, 130.
70 Gadamer (~~1968~~), 135.
71 Gadamer (~~1998~~), ~~xx.~~
72 Gadamer (~~1968~~), 130.
73 Gadamer (~~1968~~), 145.

συμπλοκή), the Forms partake in one another, just as sensible things participate in Forms.[74] They constitute, as in the *Phaedo*, the very condition of speech and dialectic.[75] On the whole, Gadamer's aporetic conception puts the principle of the Dyad first. He thus reverses the traditional hierarchy of unity and plurality,[76] insisting on the gap between human finitude and infinite, divine knowledge. Contrary to God, human beings are incapable of conceiving, in a single intuition, all the relations determining a thing or a Form.[77] The doctrine of the indeterminate duality thus understood implies "the primordial discrepancy between essence and phenomenon" (*Ursprünglichkeit des Auseinanderfallens von Wesen und Wirklichkeit*) and the endless character (*Unabschliessbarkeit*) of dialectic.[78]

For Gadamer, the "epistemological digression" of the *Seventh Letter* (342a–344d) corroborates this dialectical conception of knowledge. Although it does not mention the doctrine of first principles, it does present itself as a well-structured and coherent view that Plato probably held on various occasions.[79] It gives an account of why a written presentation of Plato's thought does not and cannot exist.[80] The weakness of all discourse (τὸ τῶν λόγων ἀσθενές, 343a1) makes all forms of knowledge of true being uncertain. In this way, the choice of the dialogue form over that of the treatise is justified.[81] The decisive distinction is not so much between written and oral teaching, as the Tübingen School claims, but more fundamentally between doctrinal presentation and dialogical search. All linguistic expression, written or oral, is susceptible to misunderstanding and falsification;[82] at the same time, immediate, intuitive grasp of reality beyond language is also impossible.[83] Hence, the

74 Gadamer (~~1968~~), 147.

75 *Prm.* 135c1–2: he who would not admit that for each thing the Form is one and always the same, would destroy the possibility of dialectic (καὶ οὕτως τὴν τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι δύναμιν παντάπασι διαφθερεῖ—*und auf diese wird er die Möglichkeit des Sichverständigens vollständig zerstören*). The presupposition of the Form must therefore be maintained. In that sense *Prm.* 135e–136a (συμβαίνοντα ἐκ τῆς ὑποθέσεως) perfectly parallels *Ph.* 100b–101e.

76 Cf. Krämer (2007), 209.

77 God (or a god) possesses that exact and complete knowledge (οὐκ ἄν τινα μᾶλλον ἢ θεὸν φαίης ἔχειν τὴν ἀκριβεστάτην ἐπιστήμην;—*so wird doch kein anderer als ein Gott diese genaueste Wissenschaft besitzen*, 133c10–11). See Gadamer (~~1968~~), 152; cf. Gadamer (2010a), 152.

78 Gadamer (1980), 205–6 (1968a, 79–80).

79 Gadamer (1978b), 10.

80 Gadamer (1978b), 88.

81 Gadamer (1978b), 8.

82 Gadamer (1978b), 10.

83 This is an interpretation diametrically opposed to that polemically advanced in one of the Plato sections of *Truth and Method* (1986a), 416. Yet, as we have seen (note ~~20~~), the

dialogue form is more than just an appropriate literary form for introducing and exhorting to philosophy—it is the method of philosophy. "The harmony between *logos* and *ergon*, on which Plato's *œuvre* rest, is true for all thinking [*alles Philosophieren*]".[84]

Gadamer's numerous publications on Plato display considerable continuity (especially after 1960 when he finally overcomes an ambivalence largely due to the influence of the later Heidegger's anti-Platonism), viz., in his rejection of a two-world metaphysical Platonism, and his defense of a Socratic Plato. Gadamer's unconventional account of the theory of Forms has been examined here in connection with the key *Phaedo* passage and the doctrine of ideal numbers from Plato's oral teaching. Basic aspects of his translation of the *Phaedo* (especially of λόγος and ὑπόθεσις) reveal how he conceives the Platonic Form as a presupposition anchored in language. In opposition to the Tübingen School, Gadamer understands the doctrine of the One and the indeterminate Dyad as being identical to that of the One and the Many. The *logos* has a numerical structure in the sense in which it is both One and Many, implying the aporetic relation between essence and phenomenon.

3 The Theoretical and the Practical: The Relation to Heidegger and Kant

It is a remarkable fact that the Platonic conception of dialectic and knowledge as interpreted by Gadamer corresponds exactly to the main thesis of *Truth and Method*, as this latter is formulated against the mathematical model of modern science.[85] Is this because Gadamer elaborated his hermeneutical theory, as he claims, from his reading of Plato, or because he read Plato in the light of his

dialectical (or aporetic) interpretation is defended in the other section on the dialogue form, and again at the end of book (1986a), 461. As Smith remarks (1991), 31, this is a "dramatic turn" when Gadamer comes to consider the Platonic Forms as "eventual" and "linguistic" in character. Yet while this might be true of the *Phaedo*, it does not appear to be so in the *Republic*: after looking at shades and reflections in water, the freed prisoner would then be "capable of looking at and contemplate the sun itself" (δύναιτ' ἂν κατιδεῖν καὶ θεάσασθαι οἷός ἐστιν, 516b6–7). See also *Phdr*. 249c.

84 Gadamer (1978b), 10, 92. Friedländer, whose first Plato book (1928 = 1958 rev.) opens with a chapter entitled "Eidos", strongly emphasizes the existential dimension of Plato's encounter with Socrates and of his conception of philosophy based on it: his dialogues "do not philosophize about existence; they are existence, not always, but most of the time" (1958), 235.

85 Gadamer (1986a), 461.

hermeneutics of finitude?[86] I would like to address this question indirectly by raising two interrelated questions: (1) If we admit that Plato is a dialectical, non-dogmatic thinker, then what is his view on the status of the theoretical in relation to the practical? (2) According to Gadamer's Plato, what access can we have to the Forms? More specifically, do Forms have a transcendent or, in the Kantian sense, a transcendental status? The second question is inseparable from, although not reducible to, the question of whether the access to the Forms is language-bound and therefore indirect, or, rather, intuitive and direct.[87]

Gadamer's interpretation of the Platonic doctrine of One and Dyad, the meaning of which limits the legitimate scope of mathematics, remains speculative insofar as it is not based upon the dialogues or the admittedly fragmentary testimonies of the indirect tradition. While Gadamer knows Krämer and Gaiser's work well and acknowledged its importance,[88] he never discusses it in detail. His interpretation is based essentially and more simply on the existence of a doctrine of the One and of the Dyad, and in his main paper on the subject he advances it "as only an hypothesis".[89] One could object to it for example, as many have done, by arguing that the limiting role attributed to mathematics in Platonic thought by Gadamer is incompatible with the role Plato grants it in the *Republic* and later dialogues.[90] My own approach will be rather to step back and consider his reading in light of Heidegger's lectures, as well as of the Kantian and Neo-Kantian background.

As we have seen, Heidegger's reading of Plato and Aristotle in the early and mid-1920s was characterized by a certain ambivalence, as it combined appropriation ("thinking with") and critical intent. This approach led Gadamer to his own hermeneutical theory of finitude (*Endlichkeit*). Interestingly, however, in elaborating his ontology of facticity, Heidegger insisted in his own way on the ideal of *theōria* (or *sophia*), that is, the task of "*durchsichtigmachen*"[91] or

86 Cf. ~~Gadamer~~ (2010a), 153.

87 It is possible that in Plato's view dialectic fulfills an indispensable but only preliminary function preparing thought (διάνοια) for a silent intellectual grasp (νόησις). On this view, the *Phaedo*'s "escape into the λόγοι" would be followed and completed by an intuitive, immediate mode of knowing. See, e.g., Sayre (1988).

88 Gadamer co-organized the 1967 conference on the Tübingen School, the proceedings of which were published as Gadamer and Schadewaldt (1968).

89 Gadamer (~~1968~~), 133.

90 For such and other critical considerations, see Renaud (1999), 102–42.

91 A frequently used expression by Heidegger at the time, as Gadamer notes retrospectively when rereading the "*Natorp-Bericht*". Gadamer, 1989b: 14; there he also points out that the later Heidegger ends up going in the opposite direction in recognizing more and more the irreducible lack of clarity (*eine letzte Undurchsichtigkeit*) as constitutive of human thought.

clarification. The appropriation of practical reason (*phronēsis*) is, however, what proved decisive for Gadamer.[92] The primacy of the ideal of *theōria* is nevertheless present in his (1931), *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*. There, in his analysis of the *Philebus*, the ideal of the contemplative life is viewed as an integral part of the Socratic search concerning the (human) good. In contrast, the recovery of the theoretical ideal is absent from his 1978 book. Should one therefore see in the latter a more coherent picture with respect to Plato and with respect to Gadamer's own hermeneutics of finitude, or possibly both? In other words, if the ideal of the life of *theōria* is not (fully) realizable for us human beings, does this imply that it is devoid of meaning and should therefore be abandoned?[93]

Heidegger's analysis of human existence is partially based on the question of Being raised by Plato and Aristotle. This question is primarily addressed to the only being capable of raising it, viz., the human being (*Dasein*). However, while for Plato and Aristotle "being" means in its truest sense always—or eternally-being, according to Heidegger the most authentic sense of being is, rather, to "exist": human *Dasein* as fundamentally constituted by temporality and mortality. Some of his students (Krüger, Klein, Strauss),[94] inspired like Gadamer by his rediscovery of Greek philosophy as a return to the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) would, however, ultimately opt for the theoretical life and permanence over against the phenomenology of finitude and temporality.[95]

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92 Cf. Taminiaux (2002b), 176–202.

93 This is Gonzalez's view (2010: 185).

94 Contrary to the two others, Strauss did not regularly attend Heidegger's course then, and the influence of the later on him is partially due to the intermediary role of his friend, Jacob Klein. See Taminiaux (2002c), 208~~,f.~~

95 Comparing Gadamer's interpretation with Klein's is particularly instructive given their otherwise very similar approach. After referring approvingly to Gadamer concerning *Ph*. 99–101 (see note ~~52~~), Klein (1968: 73 = 1934: 74) forcefully asserts that the pre-understanding of the logoi is but a starting point the aim of which is knowledge in the strong sense (ἐπιστήμη):

> ~~T~~here is, however, a higher kind of reflection in which this "supposing" is raised to the rank of a conscious procedure; this is the origin of every science and every skill (cf. *Phlb*. 16 C). For all science and all skill grows out of the natural activity of reflection when it attains the character of a fully developed "art" (τέχνη), which obeys definite rules. The "devices" of the ~~dianoia~~ that now becomes transparent and thereby learnable make completely explicit what the ~~dianoia~~ has in effect been accomplishing prior to any science. Conversely, the nature of this ordinary accomplishment of the ~~dianoia~~ can be grasped only through such a reflective understanding. And precisely those *technai* which are most highly developed, the science of measurement and above all, the science of counting and calculation (cf. *Euthyphro* 7bc), that "common thing of which all arts as well as all thinking processes and all sciences make use" (κοινόν, ᾧ πᾶσαι προσχρῶνται τέχναι τε καὶ διάνοιαι καὶ ἐπιστῆμαι—*Rep*. 522c~~,~~ *Phlb.* 55e; cf. *Rep*. 602d), permit us to grasp the true sense of the ~~dianoia~~.

Gadamer, Klein and the other Marburg friends all agree that Plato is aware of the limits of human understanding. The dispute between them is the following: does the human being have a notion, however vague, of what it would be like to have a full grasp of the Forms?[96] Put inversely: is it possible to conceive of a finite knowledge of finitude without implying the notion of a full intelligibility reserved for divine intelligence (νοῦς)? In other words, what access can human beings have to the Forms as objects?

Gadamer sometimes seems, in *Truth and Method*, to consider the grasping of truth as a genuine possibility, conceived of as adequation or correspondence between language and thing, and speaks then of the "language of things" (the title of the paper from which the following passage is taken):

> The idealistic philosophy of language from which Herder and Humboldt start already provokes the critical question that touches [Cassirer's] philosophy of symbolic forms as well: by directing attention to the "form" of language, does it not isolate language from what is spoken in and mediated through it? It is not as a formal power or capacity that language presents the correspondence we are seeking, but rather as the preliminary medium that encompasses all beings insofar as they can be expressed in words. Is not language more the language of things [*Sprache der Dinge*] than the language of man?[97]

Gadamer also sometimes admits that for Plato knowledge in the strong sense (ἐπιστήμη) is possible. In the introduction to his translation volume, *Plato: Texte zur Ideenlehre*, he claims that the very existence of Socrates, the just man, in an unjust world, is possible because "justice is in its true essence [*in ihrem wahren Wesen*] is knowable [*erkennbar*] to the human soul", so long as it correctly seeks it by means of dialectic.[98] He also occasionally grants that the Platonic conception of "philosophy" is more comprehensive than ours today, transcending the modern distinction between the natural and human sciences.[99] Indeed, the metaphysical turning-point in the *Phaedo* lies in the

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According to Klein therefore, dialectic, although based upon a pre-understanding of the Forms, yet finds its goal in the full grasp of them. He does not appear here to be criticizing Gadamer, whose 1931 book (*Plato's Dialectical Ethics*) still allows for the theoretical ideal, while *Truth and Method* will come to reject that ideal in terms of the Heideggerian Plato-critique of the 1930s.

96 ~~White~~ (1988), 256–7.

97 Gadamer (1976b), 76–7 (~~= 1986a,~~ 72–3).

98 Gadamer (1978b), 8.

99 Gadamer (1967), 309.

recognition of rationality (λόγος) in the world order, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, in our ability both to grasp that order by means of our own *logos*, and to give an account (λόγον διδόναι) of that grasp, i.e., dialectic. This twofold *logos* is typically understood in classical metaphysics as the reciprocal relation between macrocosm and microcosm. Is such a conception also implied in Gadamer's Plato interpretation or even in his own thought more generally? Gadamer's position both as interpreter and philosopher on this key question is not easy to discern.

He insists, as we have seen, on "the primordial discrepancy between essence and phenomenon".[100] Is this gap to be understood in connection with Kantianism and Neo-Kantianism? Gadamer says little about a possible debt to his teacher Natorp, and explicit references to Kant are infrequent, when not overtly critical, especially with regard to aesthetics. Gadamer contends, like Dilthey and Heidegger, that the Neo-Kantian concern with validity (*Geltung*)[101] presupposes the methodology of modern science, and thus neglects more fundamental questions of historicity and language. Nevertheless, he takes up the Kantian transcendental question about the conditions of possibility: "How is understanding possible? [*Wie ist Verstehen möglich*?]".[102] Gadamer traces Kant's categories and their application back to their preconditions, namely language and history conceived as primarily beyond human conscious, or that which he calls the history of effect (*Wirkungsgeschichte*).[103] In contrast to Schleiermacher's classical hermeneutics, language for Gadamer is not merely a tool for "translating" and understanding the world; rather, language itself schematizes and structures it and as such constitutes it.[104] Gadamer's hermeneutical conception of language thus appears as a modified Kantianism, since access to objects cannot be conceptually separated from the cognizing subject. The very notion of immediate knowledge (or intellectual intuition) is rejected; only a kind of mediated knowledge through language is countenanced. He does appropriate key concepts from pre-Kantian metaphysics, notably from Plato, but excises them from their original context. At the end of *Truth and Method* (in the final section, entitled "the universal aspect of hermeneutics"), Gadamer writes:

100 Gadamer (1968a), 80.
101 See Lembeck and Kim in this volume.
102 Gadamer (~~1986b~~), xxvii (preface to the second edition de *Truth and Method* from 1965).
103 Gadamer (1986a), 305–12.
104 ~~Gadamer~~ (2010b), 105.

> We can also see that the metaphysics of light brings out a side of the classical concept of the beautiful that is justified apart from [*losgelöst aus*] the context of substance-metaphysics and the metaphysical relationship to the infinite divine mind.[105]

Gadamer's ontology of language differs from the Greek and medieval traditions, insofar as it abandons substance metaphysics. For him the "presupposition" of the Forms, particularly the Form of the Good, is not so much an ascent from opinion to knowledge as a turning away from the (sophistic) wanderings of thought.[106] The same applies, according to Gadamer, to our access to Plato's text and the notion of hermeneutical practice. The classical text as an object of understanding is mediated by our pre-understanding, which for its part is determined by the ever-changing context of reception. Gadamer insists upon the vigilance required in the "fusion of horizons" in order to distinguish legitimate from illegitimate prejudices, e.g., what comes from Plato as opposed to what comes from ourselves.[107] This task is, however, conceived as infinite; more importantly, it appears to be conceived similarly to the Kantian noumenon, viz., as a necessarily postulated but inconceivable object. This is because, according to Gadamer, we only have access to readings mediated by an inexhaustible and insurmountable history of effect (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). From this perspective, the notion of an objectively correct and final interpretation must therefore be considered futile, because unattainable.[108] Platonic *anamnēsis* in Gadamer amounts to a historicized *a priori* implying the fusion of the theoretical and the practical, and the primacy of the practical understood as application (*Anwendung, Applikation*) to one's specific, ever-changing situation. On the whole then, his anti-dogmatic interpretation of Plato appears to be a modified version of Kant's metaphysics of finitude. One is led, finally, to conclude that there is a significant and problematic gap between Gadamer's post-Kantian position and Platonic metaphysics.

Yet there remains an undeniable proximity between Plato and Kant in the field of ethics.[109] According to both, humans are beings in search of the Good. While for Plato the Form of the Good is the supreme object of study (μέγιστον μάθημα), Kant conceives of the supreme good (*das höchste Gut*) in practical

105 Gadamer (~~1989c~~), 484; (1986a), 487~~, f.~~

106 Gadamer (1988b); ~~*GW 7:*~~ 248.

107 Gadamer (~~1985b~~), 14; Figal (2001), 26; ~~Gadamer~~ (2010a), 155.

108 See Krämer's criticism (2007: 44) that Gadamer's hermeneutics is unable to allow for degrees of correctness in interpretation, thus succumbing to relativism.

109 See Baum in this volume.

terms. The Platonic "Forms" are for him postulates of practical reason, and as a result the Form of God and the immortality of the soul are based not on ontology (which is for him necessarily *Schwärmerei*) but on a metaphysics of freedom.[110] The "Form [*Idee*]" thus conceived is an ever-unattainable ideal, which is precisely why it constitutes the condition for human freedom.[111] Gadamer ends his study on the *Phaedo* with what he regards as the perfect parallelism between the Platonic Form and Kantian freedom:

> To be sure, Kant displayed the fallacy of the "rational" demonstration which Mendelssohn[112] developed in his rethinking of the *Phaedo*. But Kant's own philosophical insight comes very close to that of Plato's dialogue. Kant's critique "proved" human freedom just as little as Plato proved immortality. But it did prove that the *a priori* validity of causality underlying all natural science could not disprove our human sense of being free. For Kant freedom was the only rational fact (*Vernunftfaktum*). Plato called that same fact something else: *idea* (*Idee*).[113]

As for Plato, the Form of the Good for Kant is the criterion by which we can evaluate the moral nature of our actions. While the concepts of practical reason constitute the necessary condition for the possibility of practical life, they have no value from a theoretical viewpoint. For Gadamer the (Platonic) Form of the Good is not an object of knowledge, as it cannot be conceptualized,[114] and all substantive absolutes are excluded.[115] However, Gadamer is here more Neo-Kantian than Kantian, for while Kant excludes ideas from the realm of experience, Neo-Kantian (Platonic) "ideas" are categories that structure

110 ~~Gadamer~~ (2013), 45–50.

111 This conception of the "idea" is very similar to that of Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (A328/B384).

112 See Rosenstock in this volume.

113 Gadamer (1980), 38 (1973, 200); cf. Gadamer (1997, 274): "Kant's example taught me what the Socratic wisdom basically was: to leave questions open and to keep them open. That is not skepticism but originates from the spiritual need for freedom". For a similar conception of Platonic Forms as "problems" (although independent from Kant's metaphysic of freedom), see Strauss (1953), 125.

114 It is, according to Gadamer, beyond knowledge; he refers to the famous formulation in the *Republic*: the Form of the Good is "beyond being" (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας, *Rep.* 509b9) as well as to the *Seventh Letter* (341c5–6) according to which the highest principles can in no way be expressed in words as the other forms of knowledge (ῥητὸν γὰρ οὐδαμῶς ἐστιν ὡς ἄλλα μαθήματα). Gadamer (1988b), 243.

115 Cf. Dostal (2010), ~~xxx.~~

experience.[116] Gadamer's conception of knowledge is emphatically language-bound. His central thesis, that "Being that can be understood is language", means that each thing "has its being in its presentation [*Darstellung*: i.e., the way it is presented or manifests itself]".[117] This ontology of things as "self-presentation" (*Sich-darstellen*) takes up the Heideggerian definition of the phenomenon as "self-showing" (*das sich Zeigende*).[118] However, while Heidegger's "self-showing" is immediate, Gadamer's "self-presentation" is mediated by and therefore inseparable from language; it is as he puts it "total mediation" (*totale Vermittlung*).[119]

At the end of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer explains his ontology by referring to the Platonic conception of the beautiful (τὸ καλόν) as the manifestness of the intelligible: the Good presents itself in the guise of beauty,[120] in the visibility of the ideal. Therein lies the unity of Form and phenomenon.[121] He also points to *Phaedrus* 250de, where the Beautiful is characterized as what is the most radiant (ἐκφανέστατον) and most lovely (ἐρασμιώτατον). Moreover, in *The Relevance of the Beautiful* (1987), Gadamer considers Platonic beauty as the object of Eros, i.e., as both human lack or finitude, and the consequent impulse towards the intelligible. These aspects of Gadamer's hermeneutics have undeniable affinities, as he claims, with Plato. A crucial problem arises however. Gadamer's "self-presentation" is language and, while there is a gap between the phenomenon and the essence (*Wesen, idea*), there is none between the phenomenon and language. In what sense then can Platonic beauty or Being be an object of contemplation? From a Neo-Kantian view-point, the beautiful can neither be a thing nor an object; it is rather a norm, an ideal allowing us to speak of beautiful things or the degree of beauty in them. Is the *idea* for Gadamer such a transcendental, formal, structuring, active category? While Gadamer's unity of Being and language precludes the pre-Kantian way of speaking of Being as existing prior to subjectivity (or heteronomy), he also emphatically avoids the modern model of the primacy of subjectivity, by elaborating an ontology of language as "the language of things".[122] But the "things"

116 On the question of the relation between Plato, Kant and Neo-Kantianism, see the detailed treatment in Kim (2010), 80–2.

117 Gadamer (1986a), 480.

118 Heidegger (~~1927~~), 35 (2.5–8).

119 Gadamer (1986a), 125; cf. Figal (2007), 532–4.

120 *Phlb.* 64e5–6: Νῦν δὴ καταπέφευγεν ἡμῖν ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ δύναμις εἰς τὴν τοῦ καλοῦ φύσιν.

121 Gadamer (1986a), 485, f.; (1978a), 193–5.

122 For the historically affected consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*) remains for Gadamer an event that is "more Being than consciousness" (*mehr Sein als Bewusstsein*); Gadamer (~~1971~~), 247.

remain forever elusive given "the primordial discrepancy" between Form (or noumenon) and phenomenon.

Unlike Gadamer, other Heidegger-students writing on Plato defended the pre-Kantian notion of object or, expressed in Kantian language, the priority of heterogeneity. According to Klein, Strauss and Krüger, Platonic Forms are ~~a~~ "problems", endless "tasks". This conception comes close to the Kantian "Forms", but according to Klein, Strauss and Krüger, human beings necessarily have a ~~"Form"~~ of the inaccessible as such.[123] For them, thought is not necessarily the fruit of human activity or "spontaneity"; it can also be "receptive" to a given that is prior to subjectivity. Such is the Platonic conception of thought as Eros, as a passive state, as something that befalls us (πάθημα).[124] This in the end raises the question, with Plato and perhaps the late Heidegger, of whether human life can be intelligible without the divine as that which precedes us and upon which we are dependent.

In this last section, I have examined the question of the status, in Gadamer's interpretation and in his hermeneutical theory, of the Platonic Form as object. While he seems to regard the Platonic Form as an object distinct and independent from representation, he sometimes speaks of it as though it solely had a transcendental status. He follows the early Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity (or finitude) and, unlike some of his Marburg companions, eventually comes to abandon his teacher's early concern for the Greek ideal of *theōria*. Both Gadamer's conception of language (as that which structures reality) and his interpretation of the Platonic Form (as endlessly open "problem") can be considered modified versions of Kantianism: "things" and with them "Forms", remain, and must remain, forever out of our reach, like Kantian noumena. Gadamer thus fundamentally disagrees with Heidegger's others students who defend in their Plato interpretation the pre-Kantian notion of object as heterogeneous. Yet Gadamer himself gives some weight to this position (that today seems so unlikely) with his thesis of the "language of things". In the end, Gadamer's lack of clarity on this decisive issue has its roots in the extreme difficulty of this question and we should at least partially excuse him for it.

123 Krüger writes (1950, xxxvii): "~~die Wissenschaft von den Ideen in Platons Dialogen [bleibt] überhaupt immer noch ein offenes Problem. Um sie aber auch nur als solches darstellen zu können, bedarf Platon allenthalben eines Vorgriffs auf das Unerreichte, das für die liebende Frage doch so unentbehrlich ist~~". Cf. Strauss (1953), 124–6.

124 *Ph*. 79d6–7; cf. *Grg*. 481cd; Krüger (1958), 88.

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