

Barely visible: Heidegger's Platonic Theology

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ABSTRACT Heidegger's thinking, according to his own testimony, is rooted in two traditions of philosophy: Platonic-Aristotelian ontology and Husserl's phenomenology. Heidegger's claim that the original understanding of Being is lost and has to be rediscovered conjoins the phenomenological claim that there is a certain mode of seeing that enables a revelatory philosophical insight. I would like to show how Heidegger combines both these claims in his supposition that the original philosophical conceptuality, as developed by Plato and Aristotle, was lost but can be retrieved by means of applying the phenomenological method to the interpretation of texts. Furthermore, I would like to interpret this retrieval in the context of Heidegger's project of "overcoming metaphysics" and Nietzsche's suggestion that "Plato was essentially a pantheist, yet in the guise of a dualist".

KEYWORDS ἄγαθόν; Heidegger, Martin; phenomenology; Plato; the Good; theology

If there is a datum “God,”
phenomenology shall describe it.
Edmund Husserl¹

I. OCCLUSION OF THE ORIGIN AS DETERIORATION OF ORIGINAL CONCEPTUALITY

Heidegger’s interpretation of Plato and Aristotle is focused on the concept of ἀλήθεια, nevertheless, in his reading also the ἀγαθόν, represented by the figure of the sun, is present, although not as visibly and explicitly as his interpretation of ἀλήθεια, just like, according to Plato’s claim in the *Republic*, ἀγαθόν itself is barely visible, μόγις ὀρᾶσθαι (517c). Heidegger’s early lecture course from 1927 ends with the following statement:

To gaze into the sun (into the suprasensible) without becoming blind may not be possible, but to see it adequately in reflection ... is quite feasible; we cannot lift the veil, but we can make it so thin that one can surmise that which is behind it ...; not so thick that you can make anything you like out of the apparition: for otherwise it would be a seeing which indeed should be avoided. (Heidegger 1975, 469)²

This very Platonic thought suggests that we can see something behind the veil of the sensible, and what we see there is not arbitrary, it is not a product of mere imagination, but rather something truly existing, making itself available, present. A certain seeing must be possible, noetic seeing, that allows us to see the non-sensible. In fact this postulate constitutes the core of phenomenology.³ There must be a faculty of non-sensual seeing, of seeing the invisible (i.e. sensually invisible). Hence the phrase coined by Heidegger: “phenomenology of the invisible” (Heidegger 1986, 399).

Heidegger’s fundamental claim is that being itself is forgotten, and our human being is conditioned by the fundamental fact of the forgetfulness of being, of one’s own being. The epigraph to *Sein und Zeit* starts with a quote

1. Husserl’s statement (“Wenn es ein Datum Gott gibt, werden wir es beschreiben”) is a part of an anecdote reported at least twice by Leo Strauss, in a conversation with Jacob Klein (Klein 1970, 2) and in a letter to Karl Löwith, supplemented by Strauss with an ironic comment: “Die Schwierigkeit ist, daß die die etwas von Gott zu wissen glauben, bestreiten, daß er ein beschreibbares Datum ist” (Strauss 2008, 664), countered in turn by Hans Blumenberg: “Es ist aber wohl das, was Husserl hätte sagen müssen und daher auch gesagt hat, mit dieser kindergläubigen Zuversicht auf die Leistungsfähigkeit der Phänomenologie” (Blumenberg 1998, 30).

2. Heidegger uses here Kant’s 1796 essay, *On a genteel tone recently sounded in philosophy*.

3. On Husserl’s “categorical intuition” (opposed to sensual intuition) as the seeing of being, see: (Heidegger 1986, 373f).

from the *Sophist* (244a) where already Plato claims that we have forgotten the meaning of being (Heidegger 1977b, 1): “we, who used to think we understood it, have now become perplexed.”⁴ The forgetfulness of being is, then, not Heidegger’s own idea, but a repetition of Plato’s thought that we have forgotten it and we must assume that we don’t know it in order to be able to recover the originary, true meaning of being. Although it is in the nature of being that it hides itself, it is nevertheless possible to overcome this hiddenness.⁵ One of the consequences of the fact that being is hidden, being as ἀλήθεια or being as ἀγαθόν, is that we only have a superficial, secondary, derivative, deteriorated understanding of it. For example, we understand truth as correspondence (*adaequatio*) according to the so-called classical definition of truth. Truth understood as ὁμοίωσις, as the agreement of thought or sentence (proposition) with the factually given reality, is only a superficial understanding of ἀλήθεια, according to Heidegger. Behind there is a deeper one: truth as manifestation, as disclosedness of being (Heidegger 1977b, 284).⁶ By analogy, there must be an originary understanding of the ἀγαθόν.

Heidegger claims that the Greeks could see the truth in its original meaning⁷, and so they could see the good (ἀγαθόν) as the self-revelation of the world⁸. Heidegger formulates this explicitly: “It is evident also that, just as the ἀληθές deteriorated into the *verum* and *certum*”, into truth understood

4. See also Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. Z 1, 1028b3–4

5. See Heraclitus DK B 123: φύσις likes to hide itself. On Heidegger’s identification of φύσις with being see e.g. (Heidegger 1983b, 16): “what does the word φύσις say? It says what emerges from itself (for example, the emergence, the blossoming, of a rose), the unfolding that opens itself up, the coming-into-appearance in such unfolding, and holding itself and persisting in appearance”.

6. “The tradition of two fundamental conceptions of the essence of truth, both of which emerged among the Greeks: truth as unconcealment or truth as correctness. The originary conception as unconcealment gave way” (Heidegger 2001, 127). See also ὄν ὡς ἀληθές in Arist. *Met.* VI.2 (1026a33) and IX.10.

7. Heidegger restates the traditional claim that what the Greeks saw was the divinity itself. C. Kerényi maintains that the Greeks had “a natural capacity” to see the divine, hence the “axiom of the Eleusinian religion...: ‘He who sees the god is great, he who does not see him is small’” (Kerényi 1991, xxxvi). R. Calasso concludes from the hymn to Demeter (“Difficult are the gods for men to see”, v. 111) and the *Odyssey* (“The gods do not appear to everyone in all their fullness”, XVI.161) that “Only to the select few, chosen by divine will, do they show themselves” (Calasso 2010, 5). Also according to W.F. Otto “in the cult, the human community meets the godhead... even the most enlightened observer no longer doubts the real presence of the supernatural” (Otto 1955, 29–30). Substituting the divine (god or gods) by a philosophical figure to be seen (ἀλήθεια or ἀγαθόν) is, after all, Plato’s gesture (ιδέα replaces θεά).

8. “What occurs for the phenomenology of the acts of consciousness as the self-manifestation of phenomena is thought more originally by Aristotle and in all Greek thinking

as correctness (of a sentence, a dogma, a statement on the nature of the world), “so the ἀγαθόν undergoes a characteristic process of deterioration” (Heidegger 1994c, 276). Nevertheless, it is in the nature of being as such that for the sake of hiding its originary meaning it has to deteriorate conceptually into secondary, superficial meanings, which are necessary for us to operate, because to evaluate, to judge, to formulate certain statements as correct we need those derivative meanings, e.g. of truth as correctness. Still, behind them there is a deeper hidden meaning, which Heidegger tries to disclose, suggesting that this is the proper goal of philosophy, in particular phenomenology understood as noetic seeing of the originary meaning concealed behind superficial conceptuality. This deterioration and occlusion occurs, therefore, “even into the present age, where it [ἀγαθόν] is determined as value.... But even this history of deterioration is not sufficient to get us in the right place to see” (Heidegger 1994c, 276).

Hence the question of method arises: how to see, to disclose this originary meaning of the ἀγαθόν? According to Heidegger, not by searching the dialogues, the texts, to see how the word ἀγαθόν is used. On the contrary, one can claim that in the seventh letter Plato is constantly talking about the ἀγαθόν even though this word is not used there. Plato, instead, is talking explicitly about the ἄρρητον, the ineffable, the unspeakable, but thereby he is discussing the originary meaning of ἀλήθεια and ἀγαθόν. Yet this originary meaning is non-discursive, and therefore one can only hint towards it, one cannot formulate it or define it explicitly, one cannot speak directly about it, as an object; objectifying speech is unable to grasp it; it is accessible only beyond λόγος (ἄνευ λόγου), beyond discursive speech. Such claims are in agreement with Plato’s reservations at the end of the *Phaedrus* (See: Heidegger 1992, 339–48 as well as Szlezák 1979; 1985; 2015; Agamben 1987). This philosophical stance thematizes the ἄρρητον of the Greek mysteries as something unspeakable, beyond speech (see Szlezák 2021, 578–579 and Schefer 2001), in opposition to ἀπόρρητον, forbidden to reveal. It is the goal of dialectics to lead towards this originary meaning, towards the meaning of the origin itself.

Heidegger comments on this difficulty of grasping the idea of the origin, of the ἀρχή ἀνυπόθετος (*Phdr.* 510b): “this idea is μόγις ὀραῖσθαι ... that it can be viewed only with difficulty,” it is hardly visible, very difficult to see, and “it is therefore even more difficult to say anything about it” (Heidegger 1988, 96; *Phdr.* 517b8f). But “one straightaway wants to know what the good is, just

and existence as ἀλήθεια, as the unconcealedness of what-is present, its being revealed, its showing itself” (Heidegger 2007, 99).

like one wants to know the shortest route to the market place" (Heidegger 1988, 97). This is not how we get there. In this way, inquiring directly, one does not get an answer. This is also a Platonic figure: we cannot go directly towards "that which is great", we need to "take a detour" (*Phdr.* 274a). When we address it directly, "we always run up against nothing" (Heidegger 2001, 199). A different way of approaching it is, therefore, necessary.

"Ἄγαθόν in itself", when approached directly, "is indeterminate with respect to its content" (Heidegger 1976, 160).⁹ This indeterminateness of the ἄγαθόν is its essential trait, but it is not something irrational, nor something mysterious. One can grasp it through dialectics, which initiates an inner shift towards the ἄγαθόν, a movement of "submitting oneself to its power" (Heidegger 2001, 199–200), because one of its characteristics is that it is the empowerment "of being as such and of unhiddenness as such" (Heidegger 1988, 109). It is this character of δύναμις what one has to submit oneself to in order to access it. Furthermore, ἄγαθόν itself has the character of submission, of *Gelassenheit*, of letting-be. Therefore, submitting oneself allows us to know the ἄγαθόν by becoming ἀγαθοειδής (*Phdr.* 509a; see *Ep.* VI 343e), by means of a ὁμοίωσις ἀγαθῷ. Its character of δύναμις as that which empowers by letting things be what they are is that which is to be imitated, by assuming a position of being ἀγαθοειδής (Heidegger 1988, 108–9; see 509b9–10), "so that I adjust myself to the power and so that power as power addresses me" (Heidegger 2001, 200).

II. PHENOMENOLOGICAL SEEING AS RETRIEVAL OF ORIGINAL CONCEPTUALITY

Only from such a position one is able to see the ἄγαθόν. Phenomenological seeing, as Heidegger understands it, is equivalent to νόησις, to noetic seeing described by Plato and Aristotle, to seeing the thing itself by means of νοῦς (see *Phaedr.* 475e. 247d: philosopher as φιλοθεάμων, fond of seeing, who rejoices in seeing being). Such a method of philosophizing was taught to Heidegger by Husserl "in the form of a step-by-step training in phenomenological 'seeing'" (Heidegger 2007, 97), "by long practice and exercise ... of a seeing in thinking" (Heidegger 2000, 589), "by approaching the same [thing] from the most diverse perspectives", in a "viewing or intuition [*Anschauung*] that is ... achieved when a thing is seen comprehensively with one beholding" (Gadamer 1994, 17–8), in "a simple originary apprehension" of its being (Heidegger 1979, 107). There are, nevertheless, various

9. Heidegger elaborates on this here: "the good is understood as τέλος without content, i.e., as a future which grants us the possibility of existing as [free] worldly *Dasein*".

concealments of seeing, among them the simple fact that we do not yet know that what we are looking for. The thing itself, that which is to be seen, once discovered, though, is initially not hidden, but becomes occluded again by means of petrified language, by taken over, worn out concepts (Heidegger 2016, 67). Certain conceptual purifications are, thus, prerequisite to seeing. Noetic seeing, in order to be possible, needs to use certain pre-given concepts as a point of departure, a launching-point taken over from the tradition, the Platonic tradition among others. This includes in particular the tradition of metaphysics, which is a pointer, a sign that instead of pointing occludes that towards which it should point¹⁰. This is what motivates Heidegger's strategy of destruction, ultimately leading to a reconstruction (repeating Plato's patricidal attitude to Parmenides, or Aristotle's stance towards Plato; Heidegger 1975, 29–31), leading to an originary seeing beyond any "doctrine that could have been learned, reproduced, and handed on" (Arendt 1978, 294), "freeing the original Aristotelian text so thoroughly and effectively from the overlay of the scholastic tradition and from the miserable, distorted picture the critical philosophy of the period had of Aristotle ... that he began to speak in an unexpected way" (Gadamer 1994, 32), to the point of being "confronted with matters [*Sachen*] in such a way that we no longer knew if the matters [*Sachen*] he was speaking of were his or Aristotle's" (Gadamer 1994, 115). According to Heidegger, speech is disclosing and, simultaneously, occluding. In speech (λόγος ἀποφαντικός) there is a possibility of pointing, revealing, but that which it points to is ultimately beyond λόγος. Such a seeing beyond or without speech, ἄνευ λόγου, is given in σοφία, in pure νοεῖν (Heidegger 1992, 57–64, 182; 2016, 69, 76, 78; see *Eth. Nic.* VI.6–7; *Met.* I 981b). For ultimately "God answers in silence" (Heidegger 1997, 353; 1998, 105, 211, 221. See also: Casel 1919).

Hans Blumenberg in his erudite study of light as the metaphor of truth remarks that "in constantly having to confront the unconceptual (*das Unbegriffene*) and the preconceptual (*das Vorbegriffene*), philosophy encounters the means of articulation found in this nonconceptual and preconceptual, adopts them, and develops them further in separation from their origin. ... This preliminary stage of a concept is, in its 'aggregate state,' more vivid, more sensitive to the ineffable, and less dominated by fixed traditional forms" (Blumenberg 2020, 130). Only the preconceptual phase is sensitive to

10. In the famous Buddhist metaphor a finger pointing to the moon, but we are initially only able to notice the finger. Rilke extends this metaphor even further in an intuition similar to Heidegger's motivation behind the "destruction of metaphysics", claiming that we are "like dogs that do not comprehend the meaning of an index finger and think they have to snap at the hand" (Rilke 2012, 21).

the inexpressible, therefore in order to attain the thing itself one has to, so to speak, retreat from the conceptual phase to that which precedes it. Julius Stenzel traces the Platonic concept of light to the preconceptual experience of the Eleusinian mysteries. Stenzel remarks that "this seeing points us towards something so bright, that it overflows us with its light, so that we do not see the world anymore" (Stenzel 1926, 242). A polemical statement is formulated by Rudolf Bultmann: "this primordial light should be seen as the ἀρχή, the origin of the world, and not something that is posited against the world" (Bultmann 1948, 22); the world should be seen as the aspect of the original light, its manifestation. Mircea Eliade collected evidences of such an experience from various traditions worldwide, both spontaneous and induced. According to a handwritten note in Eliade's archives:

Everything in the universe is a unique embodiment of the absolute Reality; everything is a mirror reflecting the supreme Light. And all the mirrors, each reflecting in itself the same supreme Light, reflect each other in such a way that each one of the mirrors reflects all the rest of the mirrors. The whole universe is represented as a limitless number of luminous mirrors facing one another so that the world is made to appear as an infinite mass of light. (Eliade 1969b; see also: 1969a; 1971)

Such a vision is in line with Heidegger's reading of Plato. One can even consider Platonic dialectics as one of the means of leading towards it. This tackles the question of dualism. Plato is sometimes understood as a dualist, hence the primordial light is posited in an originary, otherworldly domain. Transcendence is understood spatially, as a different space, another place, an otherworldly domain (this is common not only in the history of Platonism, see Culianu 1991). Certain expressions in Plato allow for such a reading, but there is also a possibility of another interpretation and this is the crucial part of Heidegger's approach, in conjunction with Nietzsche's claim that "Plato was essentially a pantheist, yet in the guise of a dualist" (Nietzsche 1971, 478, fr. 4[190], Summer 1880). There are reasons for this disguise: political, for example. The persecution of Socrates is an obvious reference. Also, later in the course of history Spinoza and Descartes had to be careful in revealing their metaphysical concepts, for it is politically dangerous to express certain beliefs, monistic or pantheistic, identifying nature with the divine¹¹. This could be the reason for Plato's reservations and his "guise of a dualist".

11. Spinoza's "caute" and Descartes' "larvatus prodeo" are most famous examples; another is the case of Al-Hallaj, persecuted for the proclaiming oneness with God; see Strauss 1941.

There are various occlusions and one of them is the default dualist mindset, framework of thought and the consequential understanding of the ἀγαθόν in opposition to something other than itself. Heidegger objects, attempting to interpret the dualistic passages in Plato's *Republic* in terms of monism: we cannot understand the ἀγαθόν as opposed to κακόν, to something other than itself. All otherness, all difference is within it, as in the absolute sense ἀγαθόν is identical with the all-encompassing unity¹², differing with itself and thereby encompassing all the otherness within itself¹³. Such an understanding of the ἀγαθόν has ethical consequences which Plato himself addresses in the *Republic*. The entire problematic of the ἀρχαί is based on this unresolvable paradox: ἀγαθόν is both opposite to κακόν (in the 'fallen', deteriorated meaning of the ἀγαθόν) and encompasses it (in the absolute, originary sense of the ἀγαθόν)¹⁴.

III. HEIDEGGER'S RETRIEVAL OF ORIGINAL CONCEPTUALITY IN THE *REPUBLIC*

There are six passages from Books VI–VII of the *Republic* singled out by Heidegger¹⁵ that I would like to address in order to show how his reading is an attempt to overcome the dualist understanding of Platonic metaphysics towards something which can be conceived as the original meaning of metaphysics: 1. ἐν τῷ γνωστῷ τελευταία ἢ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα καὶ μόγις ὄρασθαι (517b8f.), 2. πάντων αὕτη ὀρθῶν τε καὶ καλῶν αἰτία (517c2), 3. ἐν τε ὀρατῷ φῶς καὶ τὸν τούτου κύριον τεκοῦσα (517c3), 4. ἔν τε νοητῷ αὐτῇ κυρία ἀλήθειαν καὶ οὖν παρασχομένη (517c3f.) 5. ἡ τοῦ παντὸς ἀρχή (511b7), 6. ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας (509b9). As Heidegger says in his reading of Aristotle's *Physics* B1, the original core of metaphysics is physics (Heidegger 1976, 241). Plato's philosophy is likewise situated in the tradition of Pre-socratic, monistic philosophy of nature, where φύσις is the name of being itself. But

12. The identity of ἔν and ἀγαθόν, suggested by Plato in II and explicitly formulated in his controversial public lecture (see Gaiser 1980), was also claimed by other Socratics than Plato, e.g. Euclid of Megara (see *Diog. Laert.* II.106).

13. See Heraclitus DK 22 B 51 (= *Symp.* 187a): τὸ ἐν 'διαφερόμενον αὐτὸ αὐτῷ συμφέρεσθαι (ἔωτῷ ὁμολογέει).

14. Aristotle emphasizes this paradox in *Met.* XIV 1091b-1092a: τὸ κακὸν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ χώραν εἶναι; George Meredith tries to resolve it: "You must love the light so well that no darkness will seem fell" (Gollancz 1950, 7).

15. These passages are indicated explicitly in Heidegger 1993, 105 and analyzed in detail in two lecture courses: *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* given in Winter Semester 1931–32 (Heidegger 1988), and its repetition given under the same title two years later in Winter Semester 1933–34 (Heidegger 2001), counted by Heidegger himself among his the most important texts (Heidegger 1997, 107).

φύσις, according to Heraclitus, κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ, likes to hide itself (according to Heidegger: behind the veil of metaphysics which has to be removed to reveal its physical essence). The allegedly Platonic division between κόσμος αἰσθητός and κόσμος νοητός¹⁶ does not refer to two separate domains. When Plato is using the terms ἐν τῷ νοητῷ and ἐν τῷ ὁρατῷ (508c), he is rather addressing two aspects of the same, single, unitary reality. This confirms the monistic interpretation of Plato suggested by Nietzsche.

There is another formulation, though, which is problematic here: in 517c2 the ἀγαθόν is understood as the cause of whatever is right (ὀρθός) and fair (καλός). Hence what is not right and not fair has to be understood as not originated by the ἀγαθόν, which suggests another, second principle. A far consequence of this assumption is the problem of theodicy, to formulate it in modern terms¹⁷. But according to Heidegger's reading, this is merely one of the guises or occlusions¹⁸ that Plato (or perhaps the ἀγαθόν itself) creates, and overcoming such a dualistic understanding of the ἀγαθόν entails a certain transgression, or rather descent, κατάβασις, which is already signalled in the initial phrase of the *Republic*: Κατέβην, "I have descended" (into Piraeus to take part in the rite of an unnamed goddess)¹⁹. This downward movement of entering the abyss is stated in various ways in Plato, as a kind of non-dualism²⁰ with problematic ethical consequences. Hence the danger of dialectics as disregard for the laws, or what we nowadays call antinomianism²¹.

16. This binary pair of opposites, often mistakenly attributed to Plato, imposing a dualistic framework upon the understanding of Platonism, is in fact of much later coinage, i.e. Philo's (*De opificio mundi* 25).

17. See Schelling's dualistic interpretation of Plato in his *Freiheitsschrift*, especially relying on the identification of matter with evil (Schelling 2010, 41), against which Plato formulates his monistic (pantheistic) reading; see Arist. *Phys.* 192a and *Enneads* I.8.7.

18. Heidegger 1988, 100: "the necessity of freeing ourselves at the very outset from any kind of sentimental conception of the idea of the good, but also from all perspectives, conceptions ... where the good is conceived as the opposite of the bad and the bad conceived as the sinful"; see Heraclitus DK 22 B 58 (ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακὸν ἓν ἐστίν) and B 102 (τῶι μὲν θεῶι καλὰ πάντα καὶ ἀγαθὰ καὶ δίκαια).

19. This goddess, presumably of Eastern, Thracian origin, according to the commentators (e.g. Adam), could also be identified with the Eleusinian divinity, often described simply as "the Goddess" (ἡ θεὰ or ἡ θεός); see *Phaedr.* 250b; Euripides *Hel.* 1365; Aristophanes *Ran.* 401; Herodotus IX 65. Gershom Scholem also attributes antinomian tendencies to certain matriarchal goddess cults of Eastern origin (Scholem 1970, 114).

20. J.A. Planas shows Platonism as a technique of achieving a non-dualistic state of mind in his *History of Non-dual Meditation Methods* (Planas 2014).

21. See: 537e-538d (tr. Shorey): "Do you not note how great is the harm caused by ... dialectics? Its practitioners are infected with lawlessness [παρανομία]. It is a harm, though, only "to the novices of dialectic", to whom the law "is no more honorable than it is base", for

Now let us proceed to the core of Heidegger's analysis: the ἀγαθόν is the ultimate (τελευταία), the ultimately perceivable, that "which lies at the end in the field of the understandable" (Heidegger 1993, 105), of that which is to be understood (ἐν τῷ γνωστῷ) does not stand here for another domain but for "the whole sphere of that which is in any way accessible to us" (Heidegger 1975, 403–5). According to Heidegger τελευταία means that which is perceived ultimately, at the end, "that which the understanding finally comes up against, whereby the understanding receives its completion, termination, conclusion" (Heidegger 1993, 105). More than that: it is not only the completion of the understanding, the final thing to be understood in the movement of dialectics, but also that from which everything begins, it is the origin of everything, ἡ τοῦ παντός ἀρχή (τελευταία, 517b8), the beginning, ground, cause and origin, "Ausgang, Grund, Ursache" (Heidegger 1978b, 144) of all, of everything that exists, "of both beings and being" (Heidegger 1993, 106). Ἀγαθόν, then, is the first and the last, but also the in-between, or, to use Spinoza's term, the "indwelling cause", *causa immanens* (*Ethica* I Prop. XVIII; see *Leg.* 715e).

Thereby we address the question of transcendence, of ἀγαθόν as ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας (509b9). The transcendence of the ἀγαθόν means that it "lies beyond beings and Being" (Heidegger 1993, 106), "transcending even beings and their being" (Heidegger 1978b, 144). It is "beyond Being ... and therefore = nothing" (Heidegger 2001, 199). It is not a thing²². It is not a being. It is not a certain being, it is not the being of beings, it is not even being itself. Thus "the question of Being transcends itself" (Heidegger 1993, 106). What is more, "the ἐπέκεινα belongs to the *Dasein*'s ownmost peculiar structure of being" (Heidegger 1975, 425) as its world-formative power. "*Dasein* transcends means: in the essence of its being it is world forming" (Heidegger 1976, 158). Transcendence of the ἀγαθόν refers, then, to the demiurgic aspect of *Sein* as *Dasein*²³. *Dasein* incessantly transcends itself

such a novice "ceases to honor these principles and to think that they are binding on him, and cannot discover the true principles". In *Parm.* 130c-e young Socrates wonders whether hair, mud, dirt and other base things participate in the one, afraid "of falling into some abyss (βυθός)". Parmenides responds to Socrates: "you are still young, philosophy has not yet taken hold upon you", but when it does, "you will not despise them" (tr. Fowler).

22. This elevation of the ἀγαθόν reminds one of the ἀφαίρεσις method in *via negativa*. See the Novalis motto in early Heidegger: "Wir suchen überall das Unbedingte und finden immer nur Dinge" (Heidegger 1978a, 399) and Eckhart's claim in *Predigt 71*: "sah er mit offenen Augen nichts, und dieses Nichts war Gott" (Eckhart 1973, 543).

23. Heidegger 1975, 405: "... the ιδέα ἀγαθοῦ is nothing but the δημιουργός, the producer pure and simple. This lets us see already how the ιδέα ἀγαθοῦ is connected with ποιεῖν, πράξις, τέχνη in the broadest sense".

in the ecstatic movement of being towards the ἀγαθόν. Ἀγαθόν, thus, is the self-transcending movement of being, i.e. the world in its being-here (*Dasein*). Such an understanding of transcendence is in line with Natorp's remark formulated in his postface to the second edition of *Platons Ideenlehre*: "ἐπέκεινα signifies ... the unity of the primitively living thing ... the whole ψυχή itself ... the primitive being of the ἀγαθόν" (Natorp 2004, 401–2; see *Tim.* 30c–31b, 33a–d, 92c).

Ἀγαθόν, therefore, is the horizon of *Dasein* understood as the πέρας, the limit of our being-here, that is to be transcended in the perpetual, world-forming movement of self-transcendence. In this constant movement of self-transgressing and self-overcoming ἀγαθόν is revealed. "The world shows itself to be that for the sake of which *Dasein* exists", since ultimately the world is that which has "the fundamental character of the 'for the sake of ...'" (Heidegger 1976, 157)²⁴. Therefore, ἰδέα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ²⁵ is τελευταία "in such way that ... it completes everything; it is that which embraces all beings as beings" (Heidegger 1978b, 143) as their world-forming horizon, not "as a finishing and going-no-further of something" but rather "as the all-encompassing, forming, determining limit" (Heidegger 1988, 95), granting not only being to beings (that they are) but also their εἶδος (what they are). Ἀγαθόν, then, itself barely visible (μόγις ὀραῖσθαι), grants visibility to beings, grants being to beings, but also it grants structure, imposes form upon beings, gives them their being as something. This is how Heidegger interprets ὀρθός and καλός in Plato's phrase πάντων αὐτῆ ὀρθῶν τε καὶ καλῶν αἰτία (517c2) not in the ethical but in the ontological sense. Ἀγαθόν empowers beings to be what they are: being [*Daßsein*, the fact that it is, *daß es ist*] and being-a-what [*Wassein*, *was es ist*, that it is something composed in this and that way] is assigned to beings by ἀγαθόν (Heidegger 1975, 404–5; Heidegger 1978b, 284; Heidegger 2001, 198–9). This empowerment constitutes the δύναμις of the ἀγαθόν, hence it surpasses beings in power (ἐπέκεινα δυνάμει). Such a surpassing empowerment of the ἀγαθόν "is not an indifferent lying over and above, situated somewhere or other for itself" but "empowerment for being, the making manifest of beings" (Heidegger 1988, 108).

24. Heidegger is referring here to the Aristotelian phrase οὗ ἕνεκα ("worumwillen", "umwillen", "for the sake of which"), used in a nominalized form τὸ οὗ ἕνεκα in *Met.* 1072b (Ross and Apostle translate it as the "final cause"; Sachs, in the Heideggerian manner, as "that-for-the-sake-of-which").

25. Heidegger sometimes speaks about the ἀγαθόν, sometimes about ἰδέα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ.

Ἄγαθόν, then, bestows upon the things not only their visibility, their understandability, knowability, but also their facticity and whatness, the fundamental fact that they are and what they are. In this granting (παρέχειν; 508e–509b) it surpasses them. Hence it, or rather she, ἰδέα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, is the mistress, *Herrin*²⁶, that determines and enables everything and in this mastery she holds sway (αὐτὴ κυρία, “sie ist selbst herrschend”, Heidegger 1993, 106). Such granting is not merely bestowing, but “both a bestowing and a holding—giving (and letting go), and in giving, holding”, hence “the good gives and it binds” in its mastery, in particular it binds, or yokes together ἀλήθεια (“that which pertains to the seen, openness”) with νοῦς (“the capacity for the understanding of Being”) and fulfils itself in free human beings (Heidegger 2001, 200). For it is the enablement (*Ermöglichung*) of beings in their unhiddenness, unconcealedness (ἀλήθεια), the coming of things out of hiddenness (concealment), in their being what they are. Ἄγαθόν, then, is the λήθη of ἀλήθεια, or, in other words, it is in such a relation to the beings it empowers “as λήθη belongs to ἀλήθεια”, “not as shadow to light, but as the heart of ἀλήθεια” (Heidegger 2007, 88; see DK 28 B 1.29: “the unshaken heart” of ἀλήθεια); it “withdraws in the face of beings in order that they might reveal themselves with respect to what and how they are” (Heidegger 1976, 188–9), it “withdraws in favor of the gift which it gives” (the being of things in their being what they are; Heidegger 2007, 12), “withdraws in revealing itself in [as] the world” (Heidegger 1977a, 337). But even though it is hidden behind its gift, ἀγαθόν still “somehow constantly stands in view wherever any beings at all show themselves” (Heidegger 1976, 228). But first and foremost, in the wake of its withdrawal, it makes place for beings, among them for the being-here of man, unveiling itself as being-in-the-world, in the projecting, self-transcending, world-forming activity of *Dasein*, in the ultimate gift of its own embodiment²⁷.

To summarize, in Heidegger’s interpretation we encounter theologoumena like self-negation and incarnation of the absolute, inscribed into the phenomenological reading of the Platonic *loci classici*²⁸. It is certainly remarkable to find such ideas in Plato, perhaps even (as Heidegger would see it) to discover the original meaning of Plato’s dialogues, against the misleading, deteriorated interpretation criticized by Heidegger²⁹, which could not

26. Heidegger seems to refer to the Parmenidean personification of the female goddess Ἀλήθεια; see Heidegger 1982, 7–8, 14.

27. Heidegger 1983a, 121: “Menschwerdung Gottes”; “Her-kunft des Gottmenschen”.

28. Heidegger 2012, 128: “*imago dei* without creation and the original sin”.

29. Of course there are exceptions, most notably in the pantheistic and monistic undercurrents of Western thought, of Platonism and the “Aristotelian left” (to use Ernst Bloch’s phrase).

retrieve the original content due to the misinterpretation of the fundamental concepts like ἀλήθεια and ἀγαθόν, now restored into their primordial splendour. To state it otherwise: the traditional interpretation of Plato (in theologico-political terms: katechonic³⁰) is based on dualistic, “metaphysical” oppositions, including the opposition of transcendence-immanence, of here and beyond. What Heidegger attempts in his (apocalyptic) reading, aiming to see the divine in everything, is a dismantling of these in order to diminish the distance, the metaphysical divide (χωρισμός) between the divine and the world, for the sake of, so to speak, divinizing the world³¹, and, ultimately, man, suggested already in the initial statement of *Sein und Zeit* that *Sein* (being itself) is given only as *Dasein* (the being of man), a far interpretative consequence of the Platonic ὁμοίωσις θεῶ. Such an identification of the divine with the world³² could be reconciled with Plato by recognizing that the divine light, after the philosopher's eyes get acquainted to its blinding splendour, in the liberatory revelation takes the shape of the world (the cave resplendent).

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30. See 2 Thessalonians 2 and its interpretations (Schmitt, 1921; Agamben 1987).

31. This goal is stated explicitly in (Heidegger 1977a, 269–70).

32. Suggested already by T. Sheehan (Sheehan 2010, 503); see Heidegger 1994a, 288–293; Heidegger 1994b, 73–77. Notabene, Heidegger's “last God” (“der letzte Gott”), identified by Sheehan with “the world as such”, may be none other than Natorp's “last Agathon” (Natorp 2004, 429: “The ultimate *agathon* [*das letzte Agathon*] is at bottom [*im Grunde*] nothing other than ultimate [*letzte*] ‘being’ and the ultimate [*letzte*] ‘one’ itself, as the only comprehensible goal towards which everything strives that is not itself the goal”). Natorp identifies it with the primordial world-forming, ever-creative power (λόγος) that manifests itself in Plato, Heraclitus and John (Natorp 1921, 176).

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