

Hegel on Plato's Dialectics

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INTRODUCTION

I. HEGEL'S CONCEPT OF PHILOSOPHY

Hegel's attitude to Plato in general, and to Platonic dialectics in particular, is intertwined with his overarching view of the entire history of philosophy where all philosophers are figures representing and articulating something higher than their individual positions: "Being speaks of itself in the discourse which man holds upon Being," or, to put it more precisely: "Being existing as Nature is what produces Man who reveals that Nature (and himself) by speaking of it" (Kojève 1980, 173; cf. Descombes 1980, 41). Hegel expresses this in various ways in his introductions to the *History of Philosophy* lectures: in the 1816 Heidelberg inaugural address, published first by Michélet in the second edition of the lectures (Hegel 1840, 3–6; cf. Hegel 1892, xi–xiii), and especially in the Berlin 1819–1931 introductions, published first, partially by Hoffmeister in 1938 (Hegel 1938), and completely only in 1993 by Jaeschke (Hegel 1993). Thus, in Hegel's view, history of philosophy is "a succession of noble minds, a gallery of heroes of thought, who, by the power of Reason, have penetrated into the being of things, of nature and of spirit, into the Being of God" (Hegel 1892, 1). Their achievements are the better, the less they are "accorded to the particular individual," and the more they belong to pure, free thought, to a subject devoid of any particularity (Hegel 1892, 1–2). Only such a purified subject has "the power to receive the true, eternal and divine, the power to consider and to grasp the highest" (Hegel 1892, xiii), and thereby, having "received the higher call . . . to be

the conserver of this holy flame just as the Eumolpidae in Athens had the conservation of the Eleusinian mysteries” (Hegel 1892, xii), so that in the “higher inward life” of a philosopher, “the spirit... may return within itself, come to itself again” (Hegel 1892, xiii). Hence, philosophy “deals with what is single, what is existent as present to itself, ... of onefold character” (Hegel 2009, 264), i.e. Being itself, realized, preserved, and passed on in a conceptual form. “The history of philosophy labors to bring forth this treasure” (Hegel 2009, 288), and “spirit has the absolute goal of bringing to consciousness what is in its concept” (Hegel 2009, 289). This concept, which stands for what is ultimate and true, both logical and real, is expressed, represented in various forms in the history of philosophy, e.g. as God, Universe, the One, Being, or Spirit (Hegel 2009, 264, 288). Ultimately, whether we say “God is the One,” “I am the one,” or “I am one with myself,” we are conceptualizing the absolute subject “as what is perfectly onefold; nothing is as simple as this I. Yet we know that, within itself, this I is at the same time a world of representations, drives, and so forth, that it is an infinitude. Each person has a world (the whole world) within; in this onefoldness each person is an abyss enclosing an endless multitude within it. ... So the I is what is wholly onefold and is at the same time such a multitude or abundance within itself. When we say ‘spirit’ in place of ‘I,’ then from the outset we have the representation not of an abstraction, but of a living organism” (Hegel 2009, 264). Such insight into the ultimate unity of the singular subject constitutes absolute knowledge grasped as a concept, which is nothing else than reality itself understood conceptually, and history of philosophy proceeds in stages of its development: “A higher consciousness recognizes that they [stages] are only elements. In this sense the principles of all the philosophies are embraced” and “necessarily maintained” (Hegel 2009, 267). In his ultimate statement, on the day of his death, November 14th 1831, Hegel stated in the introduction to his last lecture course: “The objects for philosophy are God, the world, and spirit. ... I wish to look around in the world but I cannot see ‘the world.’ ... We already have these things within us. . . . The I is the well containing all this. ... The human spirit is wholly simple. The I is what is simplest, and yet it is so infinitely rich within itself, therefore concrete. The I is not an aggregation of external elements but a unity with manifold characteristics” (2009, 288–9; 1993, 355–7). In other words, by attaining “absolute knowledge, I am at once, of necessity, God myself” (Bataille 1988, 108). Or, to put it in Hegel’s words, by “grasping in all its truth the great principle that ultimate reality lies in consciousness,” that “the absolute is in thought, and all reality is thought” (Hegel 1892, 1), that Being is essentially not only in consciousness, but it is the essence

of consciousness to be the consciousness of itself, as Being's reflective, speculative self-consciousness.

II. HEGEL'S LECTURES ON THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

Hegel gave his lectures on history of philosophy nine times, first in Jena (1805–1806), then twice in Heidelberg (1816–1818), and finally six times in Berlin (1819–1931). The tenth course, begun in Berlin, was cut short by his untimely death. As the first editor of Hegel's lectures Karl Ludwig Michelet reports, "he had just begun his winter lectures ..., showing the greatest eloquence in the two hours he had devoted to her, when suddenly death¹ called him" (Hegel 1840, v). David Friedrich Strauss, who was there in person, noted down: "On the evening of November 14th, Hegel died of cholera" (Hegel 2009, 289; cf. Hegel 1993, 357; Strauss 1831, 11). His epochal lectures were exemplary for the subsequent paradigm of modern historiography of philosophy. Piaia and Santinello, in their *Models of the History of Philosophy*, call the modern period of philosophical historiography "the Hegelian Age" (Piaia et al. 2022). Hegel lectured from his notebooks, improvising his spoken word upon the basis of previously prepared notes. Unfortunately, both the Jena and the Heidelberg notebooks are now lost, even though Michelet still had access to them when working on his *editio princeps*. In this uncritical edition he conflated all available materials without marking the sources into one continuous text, accordingly called *mixtus compositus*. The majority of currently available editions of Hegel's lectures follow this edition, including the twenty volume *Theorie-Werkausgabe*, edited by Moldenhauer and Michel (Hegel 1969–1971), often using Michelet's erroneous first edition (Hegel 1833) instead of the corrected second version (Hegel 1840, 1842). To give an example, in the first edition, Plato's lost systematic work is mistakenly entitled "On philosophy or On Ideas" (Hegel 1833, 179).

1. Death was present in Hegel's life already earlier, at the outset of his philosophizing. It is the figure underlying crucial ideas of Hegelian ontology such as negativity: "Man is the Nothingness [*Nichts*] that annihilates given-Being existing as World, and that annihilates itself ... in and through that annihilation of the given" (Kojève 1973, 155). The idea of death is, ultimately, the idea of the absolute. Thus, Hegel had to annihilate himself in order to attain the knowledge of the absolute: by "destroying the particularity within [himself], thus completing the negation of oneself, becoming absolute knowledge ... he saw himself, in a profound sense, becoming dead" (Bataille 1988, 110), and "becoming a Wise Man by that final acceptance of death, he published a few years later the *First Part of the System of Science*, entitled *Science of the Phenomenology of the Spirit*" (Kojève 1980, 168). A similar transformative event happened to Mallarmé while reading Hegel in 1867, as attested in his letter to Cazalis: "I am perfectly dead ... I have become impersonal, and am no longer the Stéphane that you knew, but rather an aptitude which the Universe has for seeing and developing itself through what was formerly me" (Descombes 1980, 45).

This error is repeated in the *Theorie-Werkausgabe* (Hegel 1971, 21), and in the Polish translation of the lectures (Hegel 1996b, 14), although the second edition of Michelet not only corrects it to “On the Good,” stating that it denotes Plato’s ἄγγραφα δόγματα, attributing “On philosophy or On Ideas” to Aristotle’s lost works, but also expands the passage, either on the basis of Hegel’s own marginal notes, or listener’s notebooks available to the editor (Hegel 1842, 156). Not only because of editorial errors and inadequacies, but also because of the discrepancies between subsequent lecture courses, both in the famous introductions given by Hegel at the beginning of the course, as well as in the presentation of particular philosophers, the lectures have to be edited critically from the preserved manuscripts.

III. CRITICISM OF MICHELET’S EDITION

Hegel’s early English translator, Elisabeth S. Haldane, claimed in her introduction that “this edition is derived from no one set of lectures in particular, but carefully prepared by Michelet—himself one of Hegel’s pupils—from all available sources, including the notes of students” (Hegel 1892, v–vi). We can no longer consider this statement true. Hoffmeister was the first to speak out about the imprecision of Michelet’s account (Hegel 1938, viii–xiii). They were based, at least partially, on Hegel’s own text, the Jena notebook which Michelet called “the foundation—but only the foundation—or, so to speak, the skeleton, on which the tasty meat of the later fullness of thought found its place” (Hegel 2009, 18; cf. Hegel 1840, xi–xii), “the skeleton which was afterwards to be clothed with flesh” (Hegel 1892, vi), and the Heidelberg notebook, “a shorter outline of the history of philosophy ... worked out in a concise language ... designed to be expanded upon in oral delivery” (Hegel 2009, 16). They were supplemented by “a number of individually inserted sheets ... containing only thoughts jotted on paper in sketchy fashion ... of inestimable value, because they document in his own hand the extremely abundant additions to all the lectures of later years” (Hegel 2009, 16). Nevertheless, this material proved insufficient, since Hegel used it only as a point of departure for “free delivery,” or “extempore speaking,” i.e. “thoughts formulated ad hoc, in the classroom, revealing in their content and form the passion aroused during the lecture ... often brilliant and profound, of which there is no trace in the written sketches” (Hegel 1833, viii–ix). Michelet admitted of drawing from only three lecture transcripts: Kampe’s 1829–30 notebook, Griesheim’s 1825–26 notebook, and his own 1823–24 notes (Hegel 1833, vii). Because of his method, this material, now partially lost, is no longer identifiable as to its source. Only Griesheim’s notebook was preserved and subsequently published in a critical edition,

first by Vieillard-Baron (Hegel 1976), then by Garniron and Jaeschke (Hegel 1986b, 1989, 1994, 1996a). In addition to it, many other notebooks, not used by Michelet, have surfaced since then, and have been recently published by Klaus Grotzsch as volumes 30.1–30.3 of the monumental edition of Hegel's *Gesammelte Werke*, comprising the lectures of 1819–1826 (Hegel 2016, 2020, 2023). Three more volumes are planned, encompassing the remaining years of 1827–1830. Three of these notebooks are preserved in Polish archives: two in Cracow, at the Jagiellonian Library in Cracow (Hube 1823/24) and at the Polish Academy of Sciences (Helcel 1825/26), and one at the Legnica State Archive (Dove 1825/26). Grotzsch reconstructed the plausible content of each of these lecture courses, noting the differences between available transcripts in the footnotes.

IV. HEGEL'S ATTITUDE TO PLATO

Hegel is dialectically dependent on Platonic philosophy. On the one hand he rejects any possible attempt to reconstitute Platonism: "Today it would be a vain undertaking to seek to resurrect the Platonic philosophy anew. Platonism has had its day, and it sufficed for what was needed at that time." (Hegel 2009, 265). On the other hand, Hegel's own philosophy radicalizes and repeats the fundamental traits of Platonism: "the principles ... are necessarily maintained" (Hegel 2009, 267). Hegel's attitude to Plato is, nevertheless, different not only from the common textbook approach to Plato's philosophy, but also from contemporary literature on Platonism. Already Diogenes Laertios mentions the ancient quarrel on the question of Plato's alleged dogmatism (Diogenes Laertios III.50), resulting from the inconclusiveness of the literary form of the dialogue, from the polyphony of characters, and from the absence of Plato's extant dogmatic work. Despite Plato's reservations in *Letter VII* concerning possibility of committing the highest teachings to writing, Hegel acknowledges the existence of such a dogmatic, systematic scripture, and identifies it, following Brandis, with Plato's lecture *On the Good* (Hegel 1894a, 11; cf. Brandis 1823; Brandis 2005). Its absence, however, is not an obstacle to the reconstruction of Plato's teachings. To reconstruct the Platonic system, dialogues are entirely sufficient, since they contain a dialectical movement of thought out of which the truth emerges, which should be recognized as Plato's position. Therefore, it is not the case that regardless of dialogues, considered as an incomplete, external, exoteric form of science, there exists a hidden, true, esoteric form of it (Hegel 1894b, 11–2). Such a theory was advanced, among others, by Leibniz, according to whom the esoteric teaching was "taught in secret to closest and ablest disciples," and consisted in the pansychist doctrine

about one omnipresent divine being, unifying the subordinate multitude by means of the principle of concomitance, where one single universal spirit is concomitant, i.e. accompanying, or attending to all of its pluriforms (Leibniz 2014, 592–5, 54–60; cf. Boas 1953; Szlezák 2003; Melzer 2014). Curiously, this hidden teaching resembles Hegel’s own doctrine of spirit. Nevertheless, according to Hegel, the inner, esoteric system is contained within the outer, exoteric, published, dialogical form. This hermeneutical claim is correlated with an ontological thesis: being and appearance are one and the same, for it is in its nature to manifest itself (Hegel 1969, 19; 1970, 21). There is nothing hidden. Being is not only rational but also visible, it is its own self-manifestation. Therefore, there is no hidden teaching of Plato, there is and cannot be any difference between exoteric and esoteric philosophy, as long as we are dealing with true philosophy. Truth in philosophy, Hegel argues, is like the secret of the Eleusinian Mysteries: it is an open secret, because all initiates—i.e., all Athenians—were in possession of it (Hegel 1892, 79). To summarize, one can regard Hegel’s interpretation of Plato as (1) a systematic presentation of Plato’s philosophy upon the basis of his non-systematic presentation in the dialogues; (2) a reconstruction of Plato’s lost systematic scripture; (3) a prefiguration of Hegel’s own system, dialectically pointing towards the same goal.

V. HEGELIAN AND PLATONIC DIALECTICS

Dialectics is the movement of consciousness coming back to itself via a detour of self-estrangement from its own unconscious, identifying the object as a moment of its own objectified subjectivity, reappropriated from its alienation into otherness. This process occurs on various levels: of logic, ontology, psychology, all correlated with each other. Hegel conflated the logical, ontological, and theological discourse: in *The Science of Logic* he explicitly states that logic is “the presentation of God as he is in his eternal being” (Hegel 2010, 29; cf. Descombes 1980, 44). Thus, “when logic describes the categories of being, it actually describes the stages of God’s development” (Bakradze 1965, 219). Already in the early *Philosophical Propaedeutic* (1808–1811), §76, Hegel states that “God is the Absolute Spirit, i.e. he is the pure Being that makes himself his own object and in this contemplates only himself, or who is, in his other-being, absolutely returned into himself and self-identical” (Hegel 1986a, 53). Thus, dialectics is the process of the objectifying self-differentiation and reunification of the subject, of its coming out of itself and returning to itself. In other words, “because real concrete Being is not only Identity (with itself) but also Negativity (of itself) that this Being is at the same time subject and object, that is to say, being revealing

itself to itself” (Kojève 1970, 22–3). Dialectics as a logical relation is par excellence ontological precisely due to the fact that this relation pertains to Being itself: logic “is dialectical only in the sense that it describes a dialectic of reality” (Kojève 1980, 186). As an ontological process, dialectics is “an eternal creation, eternal vitality, and eternal spirit,” as well as “eternal vision of itself in the other” which “constantly divides and distinguishes the self-identical from the differentiated, the subjective from the objective, the finite from the infinite” (Hegel 1874, 308 [§214]). By means of both recognizing and positing itself in its otherness, “self-consciousness knows itself implicit in the object. ... To this activity the object, which implicitly and for self-consciousness is self-less, can make no resistance. ... Thus, while the given object is rendered subjective, the subjectivity divests itself of its one-sidedness and becomes objective to itself” (Hegel 1894b, 54 [§427]). Consciousness of this ultimate identity is self-consciousness, or absolute knowledge, i.e. the knowledge of the absolute subject that posits itself in the object: “Absolute knowledge is the science of the identity of subject and object (or [in Parmenidean terms] of thought and being),” resulting in “the end of [objective] adversity, the term which adequately translates Hegel’s *Gegenständlichkeit*” [Desc. 27–28]. Exactly for this reason “the goal of the dialectical movement does not run to infinity, but strives for the *eschaton*, where it finds fulfillment, ... its end, ... its full form ... in absolute knowledge, *plenitudo intellectus*” (Taubes 2009, 93–4), in the recognition of the subject in the dialectics of Being.

Also for Plato dialectics is a process, a synoptic ascent, via a series of positions (e.g. the hypotheses in Plato’s *Parmenides*) toward an ultimate end (*Phaedo* 101d, *Resp.* 511e), the unhypothetical first and highest ontological principle, which subsumes in itself the lower hypotheses (*Resp.* 533cd), identified with the Good in the *Republic*, and the One in *Parmenides*. Thus, a dialectician is “he who can view things in their connection [ὁ συνοπτικός διαλεκτικός],” i.e. who can see all things as one, “he who cannot, is not [a dialectician]” (*Resp.* 537c). The One is, therefore, not only a figure of being itself, the single being apart from which nothing exists, but also of the unity of all that exists, attainable by means of a synoptic glance, as a result of the dialectical process. Such an insight is achieved by means of a logical method of collection and division (συνάγειν καὶ διαίρειν, *Phdr.* 266b), which has an ontological undertone (*Phdr.* 247c; 250c), leading to a “unity of unity and non-unity,” and ultimately, “once the logical thought sublates itself” to a nondiscursive mental insight (Gaiser 2004, 331), comparable to a spark (*Ep. VII* 341cd), plausibly equivalent to Nietzsche’s “*intuitio mystica*—the goal of all philosophizing” (Nietzsche 1974, 230), an *Evidenz-Erlebnis*,

allegedly experienced by Plato himself (Gaiser 2004, 332). According to Hegel, the fundamental insight of Plato was “that ultimate reality lies in consciousness, since, according to him, the absolute is in thought, and all reality is thought” (Hegel 1894a, 1). For this reason, Hegel both rejects and in a certain sense sustains the Neoplatonic claim that the dialectics of Plato’s *Parmenides*, in particular the first hypothesis, is an expression Platonic theology, the disclosure of the secrets of divinity. On the one hand he criticizes Neoplatonists’ stance because “they took what with Plato is in the form of the Notion for the expression of Absolute Being—the theory of Being in the *Parmenides*, for instance, for the knowledge of God—just as if Plato had not himself drawn a distinction between the” (Hegel 1894a, 19). Similarly in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he claims that “Plato’s *Parmenides* (surely the greatest artistic achievement of the ancient dialectic) was regarded as the true disclosure and positive expression of the divine life, and ... this misunderstood ecstasy was in fact ... nothing else than the pure Notion” (Hegel 1977, 44 [§71]). On the other hand, in the *History of Philosophy* lectures he describes “the Absolute of Plato as being the one in itself and identical with itself, ... at the same time concrete in itself, in that it is a movement returning into itself, and is eternally at home with itself” (Hegel 1894a, 30). The difference is best grasped by Kojève: “Man becomes conscious of himself. But he does it in the mode of re-presentation [*Vor-stellung*]. That is, he projects himself outside himself, re-presents himself [*stellt sich vor*], and, no longer recognizing himself in this projection, he believes that he is in the presence of a transcendent God” (Kojève 2014, 29–30). This is what some of the Neoplatonists did: they took the self-knowledge of the absolute subject as a manifestation of a transcendent God. In fact, such a position is not far from attaining absolute knowledge. It is enough to overcome the projection by grasping it as a projection of the subject onto an object out of their ultimate overarching unity: as the dialectics of the subject.

VI. HENOSIS AS THE END OF DIALECTICS

Dialectics is only one of the methods leading to such a singular insight. Contemporary studies of mystical experiences prove that their common trait is a unifying vision, a unitary consciousness, a sense of unity: “the apprehension of an ultimate nonsensuous unity in all things” (Stace 1960, 14), where “we both become one with the Absolute and we become aware of our oneness” (James 1902, 419). In such a state the subject perceives all things as one (as in the Platonic σύννοψις), and itself as one with its object, as expressed by Plotinus: “Seer and Seen were then not two but one,” “He was then himself One, without inward difference, without difference

from the rest of Being" (*Enn.* VI.9.11). Such an insight can even be considered the ultimate goal of life: "to achieve this unitive knowledge of the Godhead is the final end and purpose of human existence" (Huxley 1948, 34). We can identify the experience of such an insight with the synoptic goal of Platonic dialectics, and hear its echoes in Christianity (the become Christian is to become "He to whom all things are One, and who draws all things into One, and sets all things in One, and desires but One" [Thomas á Kempis *De Imitatione* I.III]), in Sufism (*wahdat al-wujud*), generally in Islam ("Where-soever you look, there is the Face of God; everything is perishing except the One Face"; *Surah Baqarah* 2:115), in Hinduism ("He who seeth Me everywhere, and seeth everything in Me ... He who, established in unity, worshippeth Me abiding in all beings ... seeth the Self abiding in all beings, all beings in the Self; everywhere he seeth the same" and "beholds the whole universe, divided into manifold parts, standing in one in the body of the Deity of Deities" [*The Bhagavad-Gita* VI.27–29, XI.13]; cf. the Upanishadic *aham sarvam, aham brahmasmi* [*Br.* 1.4.10]), in Taoism ("For what they cared for could be reduced to One, and what they did not care for to One also. That which was One was One, and that which was not One was likewise One. In that which was One, they were of God; in that which was not One, they were of Man" [Giles 1889, 73–4]) and in Western Metaphysics ("Thus God alone is the primitive unity, or original simple substance, which produces all created or derivative monads, which are born, so to speak, by continual fulgurations of the divinity" [Leibniz 2014, 23, par. 47]). This ultimate unity as the goal of dialectics is what Hegel refers to when he states that "Philosophy has one thought, one reality, as its foundation," "the one in itself and identical with itself, ... at the same time concrete in itself," "and nothing can be put in the place of the true knowledge of this ...; it must of necessity make itself evident [in all true philosophy]" (Hegel 1894a, 13, 30). Thus, consequently, it is also the core of Platonic philosophy (according to Porphyry): "Plato conceived and expressed the dogma of the oneness of God. No name suits Him, human knowledge cannot apprehend Him, and the names applied to Him from the lower beings improperly designate them. If, in any case, we are to dare to use the words at our disposal to speak of God, we must use the word 'one' and the word 'good'" (Gaiser 1963, 532–3). Nevertheless, such knowledge is not merely objective, referring to an external transcendent object, but also, due to its unity, resulting in a speculative identification of the subject of such thought with its knowledge: "That is the result which spirit reaches at the end of its course ... It leaves behind all forms ... which still contain the opposition of consciousness and its object. ... Absolute knowing is thus the result

of a purification in the sense that ... the transcendental I emerges not merely as being a subject, but rather ... as all of reality" (Gadamer 1982, 76–7). Interestingly, it seems that Hegel himself attained such a goal in the experience of attaining absolute knowledge, conceived as the identity of subject and object, between the ages of twenty-five and thirty, as a consequence of implementing in his life the speculative utterance "I am everything which is," whereupon the subject "is the totality of Being; and he is 'God' only in the sense that ... he is effectively all that is; he says it; and he is everything he says; his Being is his Knowledge of his being; he is the Revelation of Being because he is Being revealed" (Kojève 1947, 326; cf. Descombes 1980, 45; cf. *De Anima* 431b20: ἡ ψυχὴ τὰ ὄντα πῶς ἐστὶ πάντα). Thus Hegel abolished his particularity, became one with all Being, and due to the attempt of sublating his own individual singularity, "in the experience of being God, he believed for two years that he was going mad" (Bataille 1988, 110; cf. Descombes 1980, 45), ultimately "reconciled himself with all that is and has been" (Kojève 1980, 168). This event is attested by Hegel's letter to Windischmann from May 27, 1810, where he describes his initiatory "descent into dark regions ... where glimmerings of light flash everywhere but, flanked by abysses," having "suffered from this hypochondria to the point of exhaustion," "a turning point in his life, the nocturnal point of the contraction of his essence" (Hegel 1984, 17, 561). The attainment of this ultimate "nocturnal point of contraction" is described in similar metaphors as "the task of philosophy" in Hegel's 1801 *Differenzschrift*: "The Absolute is the night and the light which is newer than the night, and is the difference between them, like the projecting of the light out of the night; an absolute difference ... out of which all Being, all multiplicity of the finite, has proceeded." Attaining it is the end of dialectics, its "final moment: contraction ..., *cum-trahere* = *zusammen-ziehen* [i.e.] drawing together of all the opposites into the highest unity of the Absolute," where "the Absolute is *die unentzweiteste Identität*, the most unsevered [undifferentiated] identity," and although "the Absolute must be in view at every step of the dialectic, but as not yet unfolded," nevertheless at its end one perceives in a synoptic glance "the union of all the oppositions in the light of the most unsevered [undifferentiated] identity, which is no longer in any way a relative identity," attaining "a unity such that it contains in itself all of the opposites," "which does not make the opposites disappear, but preserves them in their opposition at the heart of their *Vereinigung* [union]," in "an infinite intuition of the world whose expansion at the same time has contracted into the richest and simplest identity" (Heidegger 1980, 31–2, 7). If it is indeed the case that Hegel attained such a synoptic insight in a transformative

event of his formative years, then one could also identify Plato's *Evidenz-Erlebnis* with it, thereby making Hegel a true successor to Plato not only discursively and speculatively, but also experientially, countering the claim that "Hegel is the fulfillment of what Plato and Aristotle could only pray for" (Kojève 1980, x). He did not even have to pray for it, since he attested it in the "forty pages of arid dialectic" of the *Parmenides*, where he "anticipates and beats Hegel at his own game" (Shorey 1933, 287). Or, to put it mildly, "Hegel's completion of metaphysics entails a return to its glorious [Platonic] beginnings" (Gadamer 1982, 34). Whatever the case may be, certainly it is in Plato that we find a classical prefiguration of the concept of dialectics understood in the Hegelian way, and this is precisely why Hegel's narrative on this subject is of utmost importance. We can only presume that both Plato and Aristotle, as well as Hegel many centuries later, achieved the state of being "the being-that-thinks-being-that-is-being-that-thinks, i.e. God" ("L'Être-qui-pense-l'Être-qui-est-l'Être-qui-pense est Dieu") (Kojève 2016, 155). In this speculative formula, paraphrasing Aristotle's ἡ νόησις νοήσεως νόησις (*Met.* XII.1074b), or, in Hegel's words, "the thinking, which is the thinking of thinking" (Hegel 1894, 151), dialectics reaches its ultimate end: for it is no longer Hegel, Plato, or Aristotle thinking, it is pure thought which by thinking itself posits its own being. Such an end was posited already at the outset of thought by Parmenides himself in the speculative identity of νοεῖν and εἶναι (DK 28 B 3), of being that is nothing other than the ταυτότης of thinking.

TRANSLATION OF HEGEL'S LECTURES

I. 1819 LECTURES²

The idea is first defined as the universal, as the good, the beautiful, etc., and this is very often where one stops in understanding the Platonic Idea. But the truly speculative moment lies here in something quite different, which makes Plato epochal in the consciousness of the universal spirit, and which became a few centuries later the fundamental element in the fermentation of the world spirit. This further determination is that Plato took up the triad of the Pythagoreans, but left out the form of the number, and the determinations of this one, which is concretely differentiated in itself, so that the thoughts are the moments. Plato opposed the being of Parmenides to non-being. In the dialogue "Sophist," Plato shows how one

2. Hegel 2016 (GW 30.1), 94–6.

must cross this boundary of Parmenides. But here both principles do not stand in opposition to each other in a dualism, but they are absolutely connected, so that truth is the unity of both, as he also combined the principle of Heraclitus, who stated that neither being nor non-being is. In a derogatory way, it has been said of Plato that he is an eclectic, but in fact, every true philosophy contains the previous ones. Therefore, the earlier philosophies disappear after him because, when viewed from a deeper standpoint, they collapse. In his greatest masterpiece, „Parmenides,” he puts his own expression into the mouth of Parmenides himself. “Timaeus” is, as it seems, only the writing of such a Pythagorean expanded by Plato himself. In the “Sophist,” he explicitly refutes the statements of Parmenides, but nevertheless lets Parmenides himself speak out the deeper truths in the dialogue „Parmenides.” This speculative moment is also represented in the „Philebus,” but it is presented most independently and most perfectly in the „Parmenides.” This idea is present not only in these, but in all dialogues with a positive result.

The details are as follows. He calls dialectics the knowledge of what exists in and for itself. Socratic dialectics merely stops at the confusion of refutation, as also Plato did at times, but the dialogues mentioned above present this more purely, and move on to the speculative moment itself. First of all, he says: the essence is to be considered in and for itself. That which exists in and for itself is pure thought, τὸ ὄν [being] and τὸ οὐκ ὄν [non-being], the one and the many. This already contrasts very much with the usual idea of the loveliness of Platonic representations. In the “Parmenides,” Plato has Socrates advise that it is commendable that he strives to recognize the nature of the beautiful, etc., but he must also go further, to that which only is (οὐσία [beingness], τὸ ὄν [being], τὸ ὄντος ὄν [true being]). He must take the opposites, the same and the not-same, the one and the many, being and non-being, etc., and regard the things under them both. This is what Plato considers and this is what makes the difference between his philosophy and that of the Sophists, who do not depart from the principles. The one and the many are recognized as identity, but as an ideal identity, and that is the idea. Plato speaks very definitely about this idea as an abstraction and says that one should not stop there.

In the “Sophist,” he speaks of two views, one that nothing is, except what one can grasp with one’s hands; the other, that there is ideal being, to which the sphere of change is opposed. The friends of the idea see the determinations of activity and passivity as something that does not pertain to the idea. Furthermore, he admits that the νοῦς [mind] cannot be in anything that is unmoved. Next, he adds that non-being is as essential

as being, or that τὸ ἕτερον [the other] is equal and different with itself, that it is not a matter of these determinations; that being and the other go through everything and through each other. He often speaks about the meaning of the one and the many and shows the awareness of how this can be taken wrongly and superficially. In the "Sophist," the stranger is concerned that one might be held back by the fact that the one is the many. On one way of understanding this, Socrates says in the "Parmenides:" If someone tells me that I am many, I am not surprised, for I have diversity. Then he can show that I am one among the seven of us. (Reflection admits this, but also connects it through that.) But I would be surprised if someone first determined the opposites and then showed them to be equal.

In the "Sophist:" If someone were to be glad that he drew the thought from one to the other, this is not knowledge, but only a product of those who are just beginning. But the hardest thing is to show that what is one is also the other, and indeed in the same direction. This is the deepest method in Plato. In the "Philebus, or about pleasure," that which is in and for itself is also here the unity of the finite and the infinite. The infinite is the indeterminate in itself, the elementary. But the other is πέρους, the limit. Only pleasure is the unity of the indeterminate with the limiting. The result in the "Parmenides" is that the one both is and is not, it is for itself as well as for others, it is both identical and not identical. The idea of exoteric and esoteric philosophy belongs here. Nothing can be more internal than this consideration of the idea, and yet Plato shares it with everyone. The Neoplatonists saw in these expressions the revelation of the secret nature of God. This is the basic idea of Plato's philosophy, and everything in Plato can be grasped with it.

II. 1820/21 LECTURES³

Plato has Socrates affirm that the spirit is eternal through the nature of the soul, which consists in being intelligence, pure thought; the corporeal contains the transient. The truth is only known by means of separating the soul from the corporeal. The immortality of the soul is what in more specific terms can be described as the eternity of the spirit. The spirit is not subject to the sensible and external. The changeable, the mortal begins where there is a separation, where I relate myself to another. The relationship to the truth is therefore not a reception from outside.

The next thing is now the idea in its movement, the cognition of the idea as such. With this, the properly logical, i.e. the speculative philosophy of Plato begins, whose essential character is dialectics. For Plato, dialectics

3. Hegel 2016 (GW 30.1), 328–31.

is a movement within pure concepts. Here scientific knowledge begins to take shape and to differentiate itself into three parts: into logic, natural philosophy, and philosophy of spirit. We will recognize the truly logical element even in nature.

First of all, from logic as such. The truly deep and truly speculative belongs here. This is precisely what is usually least understood in the discussions with Platonic philosophy. This is the case with Tennemann⁴ and even more so with Tiedemann.⁵ He talks for a while on Plato, but where the speculative begins, he argues that this is all empty and that we know better. It was Plato who first grasped the absolute as the being of being, as the absolute identity with itself, but then as the unity of the opposites, whereby the becoming of Heraclitus is united with that unity of being. The differences are conceived in a rather Pythagorean fashion. Plato therefore recognizes freedom in the absolute.

The absolute is the unity of being and nothing, of one and many, of finite and infinite. It can also be said that Plato, inasmuch as he truly grasps the idea, did not carry its development to such a degree of determinacy that beauty, justice, etc. are recognized as necessary. Inasmuch as Platonic dialectics dwells entirely in pure thoughts, this is what Plato calls beholding the objects in and for themselves. Once we hear something like this, it turns out to contrast very much with what we often imagine of the beautiful and graceful, the emotional nature of Plato's philosophy.

In the "Parmenides," the consideration of thinking as such is demonstrated in particular. The aim is to investigate what happens to the many, as well as what happens to the one. Likewise with regard to identity and non-identity, becoming and passing away, etc. Through such exercises, the essential truth is achieved. In speculative philosophy, it is not a matter of amusing oneself, nor of expanding the heart, but only of pure thought. This is an aspect that leaves many people very dissatisfied with the study of Platonic philosophy. One expects to be introduced to philosophy in a graceful way. It is like with the young man and Christ, who wants him to sell his possessions.⁶ Even if one means it so well and one's heart is fully aware that it is concerned about the truth, it still happens frequently that when it comes to such objects, one turns back.

4. W.G. Tennemann, *System der Platonischen Philosophie*, Leipzig 1792–1795; *Geschichte der Philosophie*, Bd. 2, Leipzig 1799.

5. D. Tiedemann, *Argumenta dialogorum Platonis* (Zweibrücken 1786); *Geist der speculativen Philosophie* (Marburg 1791–97).

6. Matthew 19:16–22.

The main dialogue is the "Parmenides," then the "Sophist" and "Philebus." To some extent speculative investigations also occur in other dialogues. In the "Sophist," Plato examines the idea of movement and rest, being equal to itself and different. He proves that non-being is, and that unity has a part in multiplicity. He clearly distinguishes this knowledge from the common concept of dialectics. First of all, one says that a thing is one and many in a completely different respect. The difficulty is to show that what is other (τὸ ἕτερον) is also the same and that what is the same is also other in one and the same respect—that is, in the same aspect in which the one was posited, the other must also be posited. This means, therefore, that the idea is expressed as the indifference of the difference, the unity of the many, the unity of being and non-being, etc. Plato knows very well this beginning, superficial dialectics, which only goes from one to the other and back again, but does not come to the unity of both. This is the true logic.

These investigations are found primarily in the "Sophist" and the "Philebus." Their highest representation is in the "Parmenides," the dialogue that has the pure idea as its subject. Here it is shown of the one that if it is, just as well as if it is not, it is equal to itself and not equal to itself: moving and at rest, becoming and passing away, not becoming and not passing away. This is the core of Plato's philosophy. The dialectical execution would require a whole lecture on Plato. The truth is thus that the one is the many, and the many is the one, the truth is the unity of both.

In the "Parmenides," we see the pure thoughts; the historians of philosophy may well consider this as an abstract, ontological game. The Neoplatonists, however, have rightly seen in this the true revelation of all the secrets of the divine life. They have regarded dialectics as nothing else than the knowledge of God. Divine life takes place in the movement of the pure entities. In everyday life, everything is regarded as thoughts, one does not know why thought essentially revolves around these concepts. One says: I think about this house, I have all sorts of thoughts, just like thoughts about anger, or about compassion. One deals with an empirical substance.

Such concepts as law, virtue, or beauty certainly have their origin in thought, even more that what is called God. The crucial thing, however, is whether they are taken in the way of thought. If we say God, then the content is a thought, but not the form. These concepts only exist in the form of thought, if they are recognized in their movement. Thus, conceptual thinking is thought in its movement. This is the thinking that Plato had in mind. When we speak of God, we have a presupposition; we attribute qualities to him: goodness, justice; in front of us we see matter on which he has just acted and wonder whether this is appropriate for God. We only reason,

but we do not think in a speculative way. This is what Plato calls ἄνοια. Thus, God is only in the way of representation, he is only a hypothesis from which we go to results without ascending to the principle itself. The idea, however, is to be recognized and understood in this speculative way.

III. 1823/24 LECTURES⁷

The true is the general, thought directed against the sensible. The content of many dialogues is only to show that what is as the individual, what is as the many, cannot be that which is true. In the individual one must consider only the general. Plato called this general ἴδεα, but also εἶδος. This is not a general idea, nor what is isolated in the idea, but that which is generic, the genus itself. What are these general thoughts that one refers to? What are pure thoughts? Plato distinguishes them from διάνοια. One can have thoughts about many things if one has thoughts at all. Plato does not take the ἴδεα in this sense, and this is the speculative epoch-making greatness of Plato. The movement in pure thought is called dialectics. Many of his dialogues fall under dialectics. Such pure thoughts are being and non-being (τὸ ὄν καὶ τὸ οὐκ ὄν), the one and many, limited and unlimited, finite and infinite. The movement within these concepts is a purely logical, abstract consideration. Plato establishes the pinnacle of philosophy in this. Parmenides praises Socrates in the dialogue of the same name for occupying himself with the idea of the beautiful and the good: „Your business,” he says,

is beautiful and divine, but you must go even further than yourself into what the crowd calls chatter and babble. It is said that Plato discussed this with Aristotle, he said: practice what is called teeth-sharpening. Such concepts are the same and the unequal, the one and the many, of which it is to be considered what follows when one presupposes the many, and takes it in relation to itself as well as to the one; and likewise with the one, what follows when the one is not for the many and one. Similarly with identity, becoming and passing away, with being and non-being. By practicing yourself in this perfectly, you will find the essential truth.⁸

To consider such objects is true knowledge according to Plato. The sophists, on the other hand, also consider appearance with thought, but not pure thought. Some of Plato's works end unsatisfactorily. A pleasant introduction suggests something enjoyable, popular philosophy; but this soon finishes,

7. Hegel 2020 (GW 30.2), 588–91.

8. *Parm.* 135d.

and then comes the rigidity, as they say, then abstract determinations come about, thoughts on the one and the many, hence we have to inquire how Plato sought the knowledge of truth in them. There are many who know the content of Plato's works, but are unfamiliar with these pure thoughts.

This movement within thought has a relationship to the general, to the ἴδεα. This relationship refers to the determination of the idea. It is the general, albeit the concrete, self-determining general, and this concretion only comes about in the dialectical movement through such thoughts that contain opposites, differences. The idea is, then, the unity of differences and, thus, a determined and, in fact, general idea determined in itself. This is the main aspect of Platonic knowledge. Socrates stopped at the abstract good, at the general thought only concrete in itself. He did not develop it, he did not show it in its development. One would obtain the definite idea through the dialectical movement and reduction of it to the unity of the result. But the defect of Plato is now that both fall apart. On the one hand, he speaks of justice, of good, of truth. But in doing so, their origin, their genesis is not shown; they do not appear as a result but as immediately taken assumptions. Consciousness has the immediate conviction that they are the highest purpose. But their determination as this purpose is not found, not discovered as a result. On the other hand, many dialogues only contain the negative aspect of dialectics, insofar as they, as Socratic conversations, confuse the individual's ideas of purpose and their opinions in order to awaken the need for deeper knowledge. This leaves us dissatisfied, because confusion is the ultimate moment, and furthermore, because they are still not pure thoughts but concrete representations of the material. Other dialogues, however, contain the dialectics of pure thought, for example the "Parmenides." Neoplatonists understood this dialogue as a revelation of the mystery of divine being. The "Parmenides" contains the pure theory of ideas of Plato. It concludes with the statement that 'the one and the many, as well as all the other determinations (being, appearing, becoming) both for themselves and for each other, all both are and are not, appear and do not appear to be.'⁹ For us, such a result has a negative content, since the summation of the opposites within the one and the expression of these opposites as a concrete unity is lacking to us. In other dialogues, Plato expresses this unity once again. These are, for example, the "Philebus" and the "Sophist." Plato proves in it, against Parmenides, that non-being is. Of the sophists he says that they stopped at non-being, and then refutes the sophists, whose entire standpoint is: non-being, sensation, the many.

9. *Parm.* 166b.

Plato has now defined the general in such a way that the true is a unity of the opposites, for example, of the one and many, of being and non-being. At the same time, however, he strove to avoid the ambiguity that lies within it, when we speak, for example, of the unity of being and non-being, and to place the main emphasis on the unity, so that the difference, insofar as we seem to abstract from it, disappears. Plato also sought to preserve the difference. The “Sophist” is the further development of being and non-being. All things are, they have οὐσία; but in the same way also the οὐκ ὄν pertains to them, for insofar as they are different, one the other of the other, each the non-being of a being, and therein lies the determination of negativity. Plato therefore says: „That which is has a part in being, as well as in non-being—thus, that which participates is the connecting unity. This is, then, also just as different from itself, it is being and non-being.”¹⁰ Furthermore: „If someone enjoys drawing thoughts from one thing to another, he does nothing worthy.”¹¹ Namely, he shows the lack of the negative in the thing, and then goes on to the other, „because that is neither excellent nor difficult.”¹² The sophists, among others, stated that big and small are relative determinations; that the same thing is sometimes big and sometimes small. Plato, on the other hand, said: „The difficult and true thing is this: to show that something is the same as the other, and the other the same as the something, and indeed in one and the same regards; that in the same aspect that one thing comes into being, the other also appears in.”¹³ That is the way of those who seem to touch the essence only when they separate the aspects. Such a pursuit of the opposites is untrue, it is the process of an unphilosophical consciousness. Thus Plato takes the path of the concrete, but often, as we said, this dialectics has a negative result. In the “Philebus” the contrast of infinite and finite, of limited and unlimited (ἄπειρον and πέρας) is examined. Initially, πέρας, the limit, seems to be the worse, and ancient philosophers considered it so. In Plato, however, it appears the other way around. Here πέρας is higher than the abstract indeterminate. The limited is the excellent. All selfhood, I, all which is living and true has determination within itself. And even higher is that which determines and limits itself. Only Νοῦς is self-determining. The absolute is therefore that which is determinate and indeterminate, which is finite and infinite in one unity.

10. *Soph.* 255d-259b.

11. *Soph.* 259c.

12. *Soph.* 259c.

13. *Soph.* 259cd.

IV. 1825/26 LECTURES¹⁴

The first is the logical, dialectical. It has already been noted earlier with regard to Socrates that part of the interest of Socratic education was to bring the universal to consciousness in man. We can consider this as a matter of course from this point on, and only note that many of Plato's dialogues are only concerned with bringing a general idea to consciousness, which we have no further trouble with. Plato's prolixity, verbosity, and long-windedness often causes boredom and makes us weary. Nevertheless, it gives a deep insight into Plato's philosophy. It makes us tired because of its vastness. It is the complexity that is excessive for us. It's a big step when you come to this point of view. That being is the universal may seem an insignificant insight. In our consciousness, there is initially the individual, the immediate individual, the sensibly real, and there are also conceptual determinations that we consider to be final, and true. We thus take the external, sensible, real in contrast to the ideal. However, the ideal, the universal is completely real, it is the most real, the only real, and the fact that it is the only real is Plato's insight: the universal is the ideal. The universal is initially undetermined; it is the abstraction and not concrete in itself as such, but it is essential to further determine the universal in itself. Plato now calls the universal the idea, εἶδος,¹⁵ which we initially translate as genus, species. It is indeed such, and the idea is also the genus, the species, but it is rather to be grasped by thought, it is for the thought. However, one must not therefore think of an idea as something transcendent, faraway; it is nothing transcendent, completely outside. The beautiful, the true, the good that is for itself, is genus. If, however, our understanding assumes that genus is only this, that the external is summarized for us as a characteristic, for convenience, that it is a summary of similar determinations, of several individuals, made by our reflection, then we indeed conceive the universal in a very external form. The animal is genus; it is alive, that is its genus, vitality is its substantiality, truth, reality, if you take life away from the animal it is nothing. Plato's goal was now to give this universal a determination. To bring the general into consciousness was the endeavor of Socrates and Plato, of the dialogues. The next insight is that the sensible, the immediately existing, the things that appear to us are not true things, because they change, they are determined by something other, not by themselves, but by the general. This is a fundamental premise from which Plato often starts and to which he returns on many occasions. The sensible,

14. Hegel 2023 (GW 30.3), 1061–73; Hegel 1996a, 21–36.

15. *Resp.* 507b; cf. *Euthyphr.* 6d; *Phdr.* 265de; *Phd.* 78d–79a; *Parm.* 129c.

limited, finite is that which is only in relation to another, it is only relative. It is not true in the objective sense, even if we have perfectly true ideas of it. It is not true in itself, it is only relative, it is both itself and the other, which is also regarded as being. It is thus a contradiction and an unresolved one; it is and the other has power upon it. The dialectics of Plato is particularly directed against this form of finitude, against the sensible, that it is not something that exists in and of itself, it is not true in itself. It has already been mentioned earlier that the Platonic dialectics has the purpose of confusing and dissolving the finite notions of people in order to arouse the need for true knowledge, an intention in their consciousness towards that which is, towards the true. Many of Plato's dialogues have this purpose and they end without an affirmative content. A content that he treats very often is that he shows true knowledge in virtue, that only one virtue, that only one is the true, and then he makes the general good emerge from the particular virtues.¹⁶ Insofar as the dialectics has the interest, the effect of confusing the particular, which occurs by showing its finiteness, the negation that is present in it, that it is not in fact what it is, but passes into its opposite, that it has a limit, a negation of its own that is essential to it, then if this is shown and held fast, this dialectics passes away, it is something other than what it was assumed to be. Such dialectics is the movement of thought, it is essentially necessary in an external way for the reflective consciousness to allow for the emergence of the universal, which is immortal, in and for itself, unchangeable. The dialectics that dissolves the particular and thus produces the universal is not yet the true dialectics, not yet in its true intent. It is a dialectics that Plato shares with the sophists, who understood very well how to dissolve the particular. The further dialectics, then, has to determine the universal that emerges through the confusion of the particular in itself and to dissolve the contradictions in it, so that this resolution of the contradiction is affirmative. Thus, the universal is determined as that which dissolves the contradictions, the opposites in itself, that is, as concreteness, as the concrete in itself. The dialectics in this higher determination is that which is essentially Platonism, such dialectics is thus speculative, not ending with a negative result, but showing the unification of the contradictions that have been annihilated. Here is where the difficulty for the understanding begins. Plato himself is also dialectical in a discursive way, the form of the method is not yet purely developed for itself. His dialectics is often just discursive, starting from individual perspectives, often only with a negative result, often without any result. On

16. *Meno* 72c, 73d–74a, 79a–e; *Prot.* 349a–c; *Th.* 160–183.

the other hand, Plato himself opposes to this merely discursive dialectics, but one can see that it is not without difficulty. It is difficult for him to highlight this difference properly. As for the speculative dialectics of Plato, it is the most interesting but also the most difficult thing in his works. So, one usually does not learn it by studying Platonic writings. It requires an uninterested, indifferent spirit to study Plato's dialogues. His introductions are extremely graceful. When one starts to read a dialogue, one finds a wonderful introduction, beautiful scenes, uplifting, especially appealing to the youth. The end of the dialogues is just as attractive, burning the fire of youth even higher. It's all very graceful and many who claim to have read Plato are content with it. Others go further, they read about Plato's ideas and this is particularly uplifting for young people, but what remains is the actual dialectic. In between lies the speculative, which is largely rolled over. Only once we are taken in, lifted up by the enthusiasm, we come to the actual dialectics. For example in the "Phaedo," if one goes into such a wondrous scene, the beautiful meeting, and the final noble ending, the last scene of Socrates' death, the end worthy of him, then the middle, speculative part is often left out, containing the speculation about the immortality of the soul. It is usually skipped over completely or only read through cursorily. Mendelssohn modernized the dialogue and transformed into Wolffian metaphysics, so when one compares the two works, one finds its metaphysics far inferior to Platonic. The beginning and end are uplifting and beautiful, while the middle part contains the dialectics. Having been uplifted by those beautiful scenes, elevated by the idea of something higher and divine, one must now forego them, become completely indifferent to the beautiful, and let oneself be led into the thorns and thistles of metaphysics, be pricked by them, if one wants to find the speculative aspect. If you just immerse yourself in the beautiful rendering of his scenes, you won't even notice it. It requires very heterogeneous moods to go through Plato's dialogues and an indifference to the varied interests. If one reads with an interest in speculation, then one skips over what is considered the most beautiful. When one has an interest in the uplifting, elevating aspect, one skips over the thorny part of speculation and finds it inappropriate to one's interest. It is like with the young man in the Bible who asked Christ what one should do to follow him and to gain eternal life, but the Lord commanded him to sell his possessions and throw everything away to join him. So there it doesn't mean there that he shouldn't keep anything, and here it doesn't mean that one shouldn't delight in the beautiful. This is how enthusiasm is put up with in the Platonic works, but that is not how one is meant to make an effort through dialectics.

This dialectics primarily fights against two things: first, against general dialectics, dialectics in the ordinary sense. We have already spoken of this, and examples are found especially in the sophists, to whose dialectics Plato often returns. Protagoras, for example, says: „There is nothing in and for itself, bitter is nothing objective, neither is great, small, etc. The great is small under other circumstances, the small is great, so no determination is fixed.”¹⁷ Plato explains himself against this by saying: „To draw the thought from one determination to another is not difficult. Whoever takes pleasure in this and believes to have found something worthy with it is in error.”¹⁸ That dialectics which abolishes one determination by establishing the other is an incorrect one. To show of something that it is in some way another, that the other is the same, that the great is small under other circumstances, and to take pleasure in this in the thought of always bringing forth the opposite is not insight, reveals itself as a product of those who are just beginning to touch the essence, reveals the beginner.¹⁹ Plato therefore speaks out decisively against this dialectics of knowing something to refute according to any point of view, etc. The second thing against which Plato directs himself is the dialectics of the Eleatics and their proposition which, in its own way, is also a proposition of the sophists, namely: „There is only being and non-being is not at all.”²⁰ For the sophists, as Plato indicates, this means: the negative is not, only being is. Instead, now this means: there is nothing false, being is true, everything that is, is true, whatever we perceive, imagine, and feel, whatever goals we set ourselves, it is all affirmative, everything is true, nothing is false. Plato accuses the sophists of having thus abolished the difference between true and false by saying, as the sophists used to, that there is nothing false, everything is right, everything is true.²¹ According to the understanding of the sophists, the teaching of the Eleatics is as follows: that what is not is not at all, and from this follows that the meaning that every opinion and every purpose is something affirmative and in this respect something true.

This higher development, for it is only the difference between various levels of consciousness that has remained, thus gives what the sophists promised to give, namely that everything is true, what the individual sets himself as his goals, makes himself into a purpose according to his belief,

17. *Tht.* 151e–152d.

18. *Soph.* 259d.

19. *Soph.* 258d–259d.

20. *Soph.* 237a, 241d–249d.

21. *Euthydem* 285–288d.

his opinion, it is all affirmative, true, right. According to this, one cannot say that something is wrong, immoral, criminal, for this would entail that the maxim of such an action is false. One cannot say that some opinion is deceptive, for according to the belief of the sophists, this principle entails that every purpose, every interest is affirmative, insofar as it is mine, and therefore true and right. The principle in itself looks quite abstract and innocent, but one only realizes what one is dealing with in case of such abstractions when one sees them in concrete form. In its concrete meaning, this innocent principle entails that there is no wrong opinion, no vice, no crime, etc. What the individual sets for his own purpose is true; therefore, according to this, there is no vice, no deception; for such a falsehood does not exist at all. The vice is something affirmative because the subject wants it, and hence it is true and good, so there is no crime.²² Platonic dialectics differs essentially from this kind of dialectics.

In Plato's understanding, what is more important is to take the idea, the true, good, and beautiful in and for itself. The myth that I have already mentioned already points toward this direction, that one must not consider a good deed, a beautiful person, or the subject whose such determinations are predicates, but instead what appears in such representations or intuitions only as a quality, property, predicate, must be taken for itself and this is the truth in and for itself. This is connected with the method of dialectics that has been mentioned. One can say that an action is just when taken according to a certain perspective, while from another perspective one can also predicate opposite determinations on it, but the good, the true for itself is to be taken without such particulars, without such empirical concreteness, and this alone is that which truly is. The soul, as the myth says, having enjoyed the divine spectacle, fallen into matter, into the earthly world, according to the divine drama, rejoices over the just and beautiful, happy to see something beautiful and good, but the truth is virtue, justice, beauty in and for itself, this alone is true.²³ This universal, general in and for itself is what is more closely determined by the Platonic dialectics. Several forms of this occur, but these forms are themselves still very general and abstract. The highest form in Plato is the identity of being and non-being,²⁴ where the truth is being, τὸ ὄν, τὸ ὄντως ὄν,²⁵ but this being is not without

22. *Tht.* 166a–168c.

23. *Hipp. mai.* 286.

24. *Soph.* 241d.

25. *Phd.* 78d; *Resp.* 511c; *Phdr.* 247e.

negation.²⁶ Plato thus shows that non-being also is and that the simple, self-identity takes part in otherness, and that the unity takes part (μετέχει) in multiplicity, to which the Pythagoreans gave the expression: imitation (μέθεξις). This unity of being and non-being is also found in the doctrines of the sophists, although this alone does not make them agree with each other. Nevertheless, Plato expresses it as follows: what this otherness (τὸ ἕτερον) is, is the negative in general, and it is also the sameness (ταυτότον), the identity with itself. The otherness is the non-identity, it is also the sameness, and the sameness is also the otherness, indeed in the same aspect. They are not in such a way that they refute each other and there is contradiction in them, but on the same side they are identical. If one shows: affirmation and negation, then this is an unresolved contradiction. They are alike in one and the same aspect, they are identical in this aspect. These are not different aspects, remaining in contradiction, they are this unity, identity according to the same aspect. And according to one aspect one of them is posited.²⁷ This is the main determination of the peculiar dialectics of Plato.

The idea of the divine, eternal, beautiful, the being-in-and-for-itself is the beginning of the elevation of consciousness towards the spiritual, and to the consciousness that the universal is true. For the imagination, it may suffice to be inspired, to be satisfied by the image of the beautiful, the good, etc., but thought, thinking cognition asks for the determination of the eternal, divine, and this determination is essentially only a free determination, a determination that does not restrict the universality at all, it is a limitation, for every determination is a limitation, which also leaves the universality in its infinity free for itself. Freedom lies precisely in this, in the return to oneself regardless of all distinctions. The undifferentiated is the lifeless; the active, living, concrete universal is therefore that which differentiates itself in itself, but remains free in it.²⁸ Now, this freedom to differentiate, freedom of determination consists in the fact that the one is identical with itself in the other, in the many, in the differentiated. This is what constitutes the true, the only true, and the only interesting object for cognition in the so-called Platonic philosophy, and if one does not know it, one does not know the fundamental thing. In Plato's own formulation: that which is the other is the same, it is the self-identity with itself, the other that is not self-identical is also the same, the self-equality is also the other, and indeed in the same respect. This unity is not there if one says,

26. *Soph.* 256d–257a.

27. *Soph.* 257b–c, 259c–d.

28. *Soph.* 248e.

for example, I am one, or Socrates is one, or everyone is a unity, but he is also a plurality, he has many members, organs, properties, etc., he is unity and also plurality. So one can say of Socrates that he is one, equal in himself, and also another, many, unequal in himself.²⁹ This is an insight, an expression that occurs in the most ordinary consciousness, one takes it so, he is a unity, and after another consideration also a plurality. One thus lets both thoughts fall apart, but speculative thinking consists in bringing these thoughts together, linking, and connecting them. One must bring them together, this is the crucial part, bringing together of the different, being and non-being, one and many, etc., so that it is not just a transition from one to the other. This is the innermost, true greatness of Platonic philosophy. However, Plato does not arrive at this result in all of his dialogues. This higher meaning is contained particularly in "Philebus" and "Parmenides." It is the esoteric part of Platonic philosophy, the other is the exoteric, but one must differentiate them as if Plato had two philosophies, one for the world, for the people, the other, the inner, saved up for insiders, for his trusted friends, which he didn't share with everyone. The esoteric is the speculative that is written and printed and yet remains hidden for those who do not have the interest to exert themselves,³⁰ it is not a secret and yet it remains hidden. These two dialogues belong to it.

In the "Philebus," the first object is the sensible, the pleasant. Plato defines pleasure as that which is infinite, ἄπειρον. For straightforward reflection, ordinary consciousness, infinity is noble, highest, τὸ ἄπειρον, ἀπείραντον. But infinity is precisely the general indeterminacy in itself. It can be determined, of course, in many ways, but this determinate thing exists then as an individual, it is the particular.³¹ Under pleasure, we now understand that which is immediately individual, which is sensible, but it is also that which is indeterminate in the respect that it is not self-determining itself, only the idea is what self-determines itself, the identity with itself;³² pleasure is thus that which is indeterminate and Plato opposes to it that which limits, the limit, πέραις, limit at all. And likewise the finite, limited thing in order to establish itself needs matter. Thus, πέραις is what we call form, and the ἄπειρον is the formless. The "Philebus," then, deals especially with the

29. *Phlb.* 14c–e; cf. *Soph.* 251bc.

30. Cf. Aristotle's letter to Alexander: "You wrote to me concerning my esoteric works, thinking that they ought not to have been published. Know, therefore, that they are published and not published. For they can be understood by my auditors alone" (Plut. *Vit. Alex.* 7, 4–5; *Simpl. In. Phys.* 8, 21–29; Gellius 20, 5, 11–12).

31. *Phlb.* 11bc, 27e–28a.

32. *Phlb.* 12c, 16c–25b; *Soph.* 253d.

contrast between the finite and the infinite.³³ If we consider this, we do not claim that the knowledge of the nature of the infinite, indeterminate, implies a decision about pleasure, which appears as individual, sensible, finite, while the former belongs to metaphysics. But these pure thoughts are the substance through which everything both concrete and distant is decided, which also determines pleasure. When Plato considers pleasure and wisdom as opposite, he deals with the contrast between the finite and the infinite. The infinite is the indeterminate that is capable of more or less, that can be more or less intense, cold, warm, dry, wet, etc. The finite, on the other hand, is the limit, the proportion, the measure, the immanent free determination, with which and in which freedom lasts, which moreover lets freedom be.³⁴ He considers this further. The infinite is that which is to pass over to the finite. The finite, the limiting requires matter in order to set, to establish, to realize itself. By positing itself, it determines itself in the formless. Insofar as it posits itself, so that it is something differentiated, it is other than the limited. Thus, the infinite is the formless. The finite, *πέρας*, is form, free form as activity. To give an example, through the unity of these two, health, warmth, coldness, dryness, humidity, etc. are now created, as well as the harmony of music from high and low tones, from faster and slower movements. In general, everything beautiful and perfect is created through the unity of such opposites. Health, beauty, etc., are thus a product insofar as the opposites are interrelated in it, they appear as a mixture of opposites.³⁵ Instead of individuality, the ancients often used the terms mixture,³⁶ participation,³⁷ etc., for us these are indefinite and inaccurate expressions. So health, happiness, beauty, etc., appear as something that comes to being, through the connection of such opposites. But Plato says: what is thus produced presupposes something third that produces it, a cause, and this is superior to it as that through whose effectiveness it arises. Therefore, we have four concepts:³⁸

- 1) the unlimited, indefinite;
- 2) the limited, measure, determination, boundary, to which wisdom belongs;
- 3) the mixture of both, that which is only produced;

33. *Phlb.* 24c–25d.

34. *Phlb.* 24ab, 24e–25a, 25c–e.

35. *Phlb.* 25e–26b.

36. *Phlb.* 23d.

37. *Soph.* 255b, 256a, 259a.

38. *Phlb.* 26e–27c, 30ab.

- 4) the cause, and in it precisely lies the unity of the different, the subjectivity, power, rule over the opposites, it has the power to endure the opposites in itself;³⁹ the powerful, strong, spiritual is what can endure the opposition in itself; the spirit can endure the highest contradiction; the weak, bodily, cannot; it disappears as soon as the other comes to it. This cause is now the Νοῦς that presides over the world, the beauty of the world has come into being through it.⁴⁰

The most famous masterpiece of Platonic dialectics is the dialogue "Parmenides." Parmenides and Zeno are presented there as meeting with Socrates in Athens,⁴¹ but the main thing is the dialectics that is put into the mouth of Parmenides and Zeno. Right at the outset, the nature of this dialectics is further specified in the following way. Parmenides praises Socrates for the practice of determining, ὀρίζεσθαι (ὄρος, *finis*, *definitio* is the main thing later for Aristotle) the nature of the beautiful, just, good, etc. together with Aristotle, who is chronologically someone else than the famous one. This practice is a beautiful and divine business. He says that he should exercise himself more and more in his youth in what seems useless to the crowd, in the so-called metaphysical tongue-twisting and loquacity (ἄθυρογλωττία, ἀδολεσχία), otherwise the truth would escape him, and he should consider what thinking grasps, for this alone is.⁴² I have already noticed that people have always believed that the truth can only be found through reflection; in reflection, one attains the thought, and transforms into thought what one has before oneself in the way of representation, or belief. Socrates now replies to Parmenides:

When I considered the like and the unlike and other general thought determinations in this way, I did not believe that I was getting the right insight.⁴³

Parmenides replies:

If you start from such a determination, you must not only consider what follows from it, the similarity, equality, but you must also add what follows if you presuppose the opposite of it. When you assume that the many are,

39. *Phlb.* 23ce.

40. *Phlb.* 30a–d.

41. *Parm.* 127a–c.

42. *Parm.* 135c–e.

43. *Parm.* 135e.

you have to investigate what happens to the many in relation to itself and in relation to the one, it will thus become the opposite of itself, the many turns into the one when it is considered in the determination in which it is to be considered and this is the wonderful thing that one encounters in thinking when one sets such determinations for oneself. What happens now to the one in relation to itself and in relation to the many, this is to be considered, but it is also to be considered that the many are not, what then follows for the one and for the many, both for themselves and against each other. Similar considerations are to be made with regard to identity and non-identity, rest and movement, becoming and passing away, being and non-being, both in themselves and in relation to each other. In practicing this perfectly, you will recognize the essential truth.⁴⁴

Plato places such great stress on dialectical consideration, it is not a consideration of the external, but only of what is to be considered as a determination. These are pure thoughts, living, moving, active. They are the content, their consideration is alive, they are not dead, they move and the movement of these pure thoughts is that they make themselves into the other of themselves and thus show that only their unity is what is truly justified, enduring, concrete, and true, thereby showing that only the one is the truth, τὸ ἓν, whether it is or not, the one itself. Thus, the result of the dialectics in the “Parmenides” is as follows: the one is and is not, both for itself and for the other ideas, rest, movement, becoming, passing away, etc., both for itself and in relation to others—all this both is and is not, appears and appears not.⁴⁵ This result, that the one, which is, also is not, may seem strange. In our ordinary understanding, we are very far removed from taking these truly abstract determinations as ideas, the one, being, non-being, appearing, rest, movement, etc. But Plato takes these universals as ideas. They manifest themselves dialectically, they are essentially the identity with their otherness,⁴⁶ and this is the truth. An example is the Heraclitean becoming. In becoming, there is being and non-being. The truth of both is becoming. It is the unity of both as inseparable and yet also as different, for being is not becoming and neither is non-being. Still, being is in the process of becoming and so is non-being. Therein lies the difference and the undivided freedom. This result still appears to us here to be of a negative nature, so that as truly first, *prius*, it is not as an affirmation, and it is not as a negation

44. *Parm.* 135e–136c.

45. *Parm.* 166c.

46. *Parm.* 155e–157b (hypothesis III).

of the negation. This affirmation is not expressed here. Such a result of the "Parmenides" may not satisfy us, but the Neoplatonists, especially Proclus, see this movement of the "Parmenides" as true theology, as a true revelation of all the mysteries of the divine being.⁴⁷ For the divine being is the idea in general, as it is either for sensible consciousness or for the intellect, for thinking. Insofar as the idea is that which thinks itself absolutely, it is the activity of thinking in itself, and dialectics is also nothing other than the act of self-thinking in itself. The Neoplatonists see this connection only as metaphysical and they have recognized in it theology, a development of the mysteries of divine being. However, Plato's dialectics cannot be recognized as complete in every respect. It is especially important to show in it that, for example, when one posits only the one, the determination of multiplicity is contained in it, or that the determination of unity is contained within the many when we consider it. It cannot be said that this strict, rigorous way is present in all of Plato's dialogues, since often external considerations have an influence on his dialectics. He often brings two ideas together and develops them further. For example, Parmenides says: the one is.⁴⁸ It follows from this that the one is not synonymous with being, so that the one and being are different, both are different from each other. Thus, difference is already in the statement: the one is. Hence, the many are within it and with the one I already imply the many.⁴⁹ This dialectics is correct but not totally pure, as it starts from a connection of two determinations, of the one and of being.

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47. *Theol. Plat.* I.7; 16: "The *Parmenides* enkindles in the lovers of Plato the whole and perfect light of the theological science" (tr. T. Taylor).

48. *Parm.* 137c–160b (hypotheses I–IV).

49. *Parm.* 142b–143a.

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