# Heidegger on Plato, Truth, and Unconcealment: The 1931–32 Lecture on *The Essence of Truth*

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This paper discusses Heidegger's 1931–32 lecture course on *The Essence of Truth*. It argues that Heidegger read Platonic ideas, not only as stage-setting for the western philosophical tradition's privileging of conceptualization over practice, and its correlative treatment of truth as correctness, but also as an early attempt to work through truth as the fundamental experience of unhiddenness. Wrathall shows how several of Heidegger's more-famous claims about truth, e.g. that propositional truth is grounded in truth as world-disclosure, and including Heidegger's critique of the self-evidence of truth as correspondence, are first revealed in a powerful (if iconoclastic) reading of Plato.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Heidegger repeatedly offered lectures and seminars largely devoted to the topic of truth. His evolving thoughts on the nature and philosophical significance of truth, however, made their way into relatively few publications, and when they were published, they tended to come in an incredibly condensed and enigmatic form. The main published works from this period include ¶44 of *Sein und Zeit* (1927), and essays like 'Vom Wesen des Grundes' (1929), 'Vom Wesen des Wahrheit' (1930), and 'Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit' (1942).<sup>1</sup>

With the publication of Heidegger's notes from his lecture courses, it is now becoming possible to connect the dots and flesh out Heidegger's published account of truth.<sup>2</sup> These lecture courses are not just of historiographical interest, however. In them we find Heidegger working out an account of the way that propositional truth is grounded in a more fundamental notion of truth as world disclosure. He also struggles to develop a phenomenology of world disclosure, and it is in these lecture courses that Heidegger's later view on the history of unconcealment and being develops. He also argues that the phenomenologically enriched notion of truth has normative implications for the way that we conduct ourselves in the world. I review here some of Heidegger's thought on these matters as developed in a lecture course offered winter semester 1931–32: *The Essence of Truth: On Plato's Cave Allegory and the* Theaetetus (GA 34).<sup>3</sup>

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# I. Basic Themes of the Course

The stated purpose of the 1931–32 lecture course is to understand the essence of truth. The majority of the course is spent, however, in what might seem a more historical than philosophical endeavor – an encounter with, and appropriation of, Plato's views on knowledge and truth. But it is in the course of an interpretation of Plato's cave allegory from the *Republic* and a review of Plato's inquiry into knowledge and error in the *Theaetetus* that Heidegger develops the account of the nature and history of unconcealment that characterizes much of his later work.

Plato's famous allegory of the cave is a subject to which Heidegger returned repeatedly. He offered interpretations of it in lecture courses like this one, and the 1933 lecture course Vom Wesen der Wahrheit (GA 36/37), before publishing an account of it in 1942 ('Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit', GA 9/ 'Plato's Doctrine of Truth', in *Pathmarks*). In the published essay, as in the lecture course, Heidegger argues that contemporary representational accounts of truth as correspondence are an outgrowth of a change in thinking spurred by Plato's thought. This change, Heidegger argues, can be detected in an ambiguity in the cave allegory surrounding the notion of truth – an ambiguity between truth as a property of things, and truth as a property of our representations of things. For Heidegger the decision to focus on truth as a property of representational states has its root in the historical influence of Plato's doctrine of the ideas. Attention to the ambiguity in Plato's account, however, shows that what now seems a natural way to approach truth actually hides at its basis a decision – namely, the decision to consider truth only insofar as it is a property of propositions. One consequence of this decision is that, given the subsequent orientation of truth to ideas or concepts, we come to believe that 'what matters in all our fundamental orientations toward beings is the achieving of a correct view of the ideas' (Pathmarks, p. 179) - that is, a correct representation of things in terms of their essential or unchanging properties. Heidegger's interest in the cave allegory stems from his belief that, while it lays the ground for an account of propositional truth, it does so on the basis of a view of truth as a property of things. It thus presents an opportunity to rethink the now widely accepted approach to truth.

The *Theaetetus* was also a staple of Heidegger's lecture courses in the 1920s and early 1930s, figuring prominently not just in GA 34 and GA 36/37, but also in the 1924 course on *Plato's Sophist* (GA 19), and the 1926 course on *The Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy* (GA 22). One reason for his interest in this dialogue, as we shall see, was his belief that truth or unconcealment is a 'privative' concept, and thus needs to be approached by understanding its negation.<sup>4</sup> Heidegger argued that the Greek language reflects an awareness of this in the fact that Greek uses a privative

word-form (*a-lētheia*, un-concealedness) to name 'truth'. 'The awakening and forming of the word *alētheia*', he writes, 'is not a mere accident ... and not an external matter' (GA 34, p. 127). What it is to be unconcealed is thus determined in relationship to a positive state of concealment. The *Theaetetus* thus becomes of interest, given its focus on trying to understand the concept of, and discover the conditions of the possibility of, error. Error is, of course, one way to conceive of the opposite of truth. The account we give of error will therefore affect the understanding we have of truth. If we think of truth as a privative state, we will think of it as the absence of error. But Heidegger also wants to question the idea that error as conventionally understood ought to be the positive state from which truth is defined. To the contrary, he contends that the proper positive concept is concealment.

Before turning to the details of the lecture course, a final word of warning is in order. In this, like all of Heidegger's commentaries on other philosophers, it is not always easy to distinguish between views that Heidegger attributes to others in order to reject, and those that he is endorsing. This is, in part, a function of the fact that Heidegger's readings of philosophers are so often extremely unconventional; one tends to believe that, when Heidegger articulates a novel view, it must be his own view. This is a mistake, and one must not assume that Heidegger is endorsing all the positions that he attributes to Plato. Indeed, he thinks that with Plato's thought 'Western philosophy takes off on an erroneous and fateful course' (p. 12).

In addition, Heidegger is a notoriously violent reader of other philosophers – he reads them to discover the 'unsaid' in their thought. The unsaid is the background assumptions, dispositions, conceptual systems, etc., which ground the actual views they accept. 'In all genuine works of philosophy', he argues, 'the decisive content does not stand there in so many words, but is what brings into motion the *totality* of a living interpretation' (p. 140). When Heidegger offers a reading of Plato, then, it is not primarily oriented toward explaining what Plato actually thought or wrote but rather toward how what he thought and wrote was shaped by certain questionable background assumptions – assumptions which need to be revisited. In the course of his readings of philosophers, Heidegger ends up offering an interesting and philosophically important reconstruction of the logic that supports certain philosophical views. This is usually worth working through, even if one ultimately dismisses Heidegger's accounts as historically invalid.

I now turn to a review of some of the salient themes of the lecture course. Given space constraints, this will obviously be a selective review as I try to give a general sense of Heidegger's goal, and to focus on what I think are some of his more interesting contributions to thinking about truth.

# A. Setting the Stage: Truth, Essence, Self-Evidence

Heidegger begins the course by calling into question our everyday or 'selfevident' understanding of the notions of truth and essence. Obviously, we can't give an account of the essence of truth if we don't know what an essence is, and if we don't know what truth is. The tradition has ready-made answers to both questions.

When it comes to truth, for example, the generally accepted starting point for understanding truth, at least within the analytic tradition of philosophy, is an analysis of our use of the truth predicate. Moreover, most philosophers have followed Frege in only considering those uses of the truth predicate in which truth is predicated of propositions (or certain propositional states and acts like beliefs, sentences, assertions, etc.). The main theories for defining the truth of propositions take truth either as a correspondence of the propositional entity with a fact,<sup>5</sup> or a coherence of a proposition with a held set of propositions, or, finally, a kind of deflationism, in which it is pointed out that saying that a proposition.

But, Heidegger asks, why should we limit our considerations of truth to propositional truth in the first place? Frege, to his credit, recognized that he was dismissing other uses of the truth predicate, and gave some sort of reason for it. His purpose, he said, was to understand 'that kind of truth ... whose recognition is the goal of sciences'.<sup>6</sup> Most analysts are not self-conscious about the matter. So what happens if we revisit the decision to focus only on truth as predicated of propositions or collections of propositions? Think for a moment about the ways in which, in our common non-philosophical discourse, we actually use the 'truth predicate'. We are as likely to say 'she is a true friend' as 'what she said is true' - that is, we predicate truth of particular entities, not just sentences or propositions. Or 'truth' can also be used to name whole states of affairs or domains about which we think or speak (think Jack Nicholson's character in A Few Good Men: 'You can't handle the truth!'). In religious discourse, 'truth' is even less amenable to standard definitions. In the Gospel of John, for example, Jesus proclaims: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14:6), or better yet: 'he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God' (John 3:21). Whatever 'doing the truth' is, it's clearly not a matter of holding true beliefs or making true assertions. Such examples lend credence to Heidegger's view that, in understanding truth, we should not be too quick to focus exclusively on the truth of propositions. Indeed, Heidegger believes that propositional truth must be grounded in the truth or unhiddenness of entities: 'what is primordially true, i.e., unhidden, is not the proposition *about* a being, but the being itself – a thing, a fact. ... The proposition is true in so far as it conforms to something already true, i.e., to a

being that is unhidden in its being. Truth in this sense of *correctness* presupposes unhiddenness' (p. 86).

Just as he calls into question the self-evidence of our understanding of truth, Heidegger also argues that the self-evident idea of essences is problematic. The traditional approach to essences holds that the essence of a thing is 'just what makes it what it is', where this is understood as something universal, something that 'applies to *everything*' that is such a thing (p. 1). So the essence of truth will be whatever applies to every true proposition.

But what sort of 'whatever' are we looking for? Typically, essences are thought of either as a property or characteristic possessed by the particular things, or as a true description that can be applied to everything that shares that essence. So, we might think of the essence of gold as some physical property or characteristic, say, the atomic number, which all gold possesses, or we might think of the essence of table as a description that will apply to all and only tables. But truths are not, on the face of it, like tables or lumps of gold – that is objects with properties. On what basis are we justified in treating truths in the same way that we treat (physical) objects? The sort of thing we look for as the essence of an entity might actually depend on the kind of entity it is. Since the essence is the what-being of a thing – that is, what it is – we can't simply assume that the same understanding of essence applies to different kinds of beings. We first have to ask about being - in this case, what is the being of truths? Do they have the kind of being that objects do? At any rate, such considerations should give us pause before we confidently assume that we know what the essence of truth is, or look for an account of the essence in, for example, terms of a property that all true assertions possess (pp. 3–4).

Heidegger notes another important feature of essences - namely, that it seems we can't decide what the essence of a thing is unless we already know what it is (this is an argument he develops in more detail in GA 45). Suppose we want to know what the essence of a table is. We'll try to figure out what description applies to every table, what feature or property every table possesses. To do this, we need to round up all the tables and examine them. But we can't round them up unless we already know which things are tables and which are not. So, it seems, we can never *discover* the essence of a thing or ground it empirically; we can only act on the basis of a prior understanding of essence. 'Clearly we must necessarily already know the essence. For how otherwise could we know how to respond to the request to name [in this case] truths?' (p. 2). If this is right, then essences are neither something that can be discovered, nor something that can conclusively be proven and established to be true. But nor are they exempt from questioning and, in the lecture course that follows, Heidegger tries to think through the historical roots of our understanding of the essence of truth. Later in the course, Heidegger develops

the idea of such an understanding as something we strive for, rather than discover or deduce or prove (see section 3 below).

Finally, Heidegger attacks the very notion of self-evidence. First, he makes the obvious point that being self-evident doesn't necessarily constitute a good reason for accepting a proposition. Many things that have been thought self-evident in the past have turned out to be false. More importantly, he points out that self-evidence does not exist in itself – something is always self-evident *for* somebody. But that means that we can't judge the reliability of self-evidence without understanding who we are, and why certain things seem so self-evident to us. Thus, the observation that the essence of truth is self-evident *ought* to be the starting point of inquiry into why we are so constituted that this particular understanding of truth will strike us as so very self-evident. 'We must first of all ask how it comes about that we quite naturally move and feel comfortable within such self-evidences?' (p. 5).

# B. Why Plato?

The self-evident but nonetheless questionable nature of the essence of truth as correspondence is, Heidegger concludes, just another indication of a pervasive fact about human beings: when we become comfortable with something, it becomes invisible to us, so that we actually understand it very poorly. To justify our ready acceptance of the traditional notion of truth – if it can be justified – thus requires that we 'step back from it' (p. 5), that is, find a standpoint from which it no longer seems so obvious or natural. We will then be in a position to examine its foundations and search out its meaning. This is one of the motivations for turning to Plato, for, Heidegger claims, the understanding of the current self-evident understanding of the essence of truth was not yet taken for granted in Plato, but it is Plato's philosophy that first laid the foundations for our own notion of truth.

To understand what Heidegger is trying to accomplish with this historical return to Plato, we need to take a short detour through his philosophy of language. Heidegger believes that words accrue to articulations in a prelinguistically structured experience of the world. So our word 'desk', for example, succeeds in referring to a desk only because we have articulated a particular space (say, an office) in terms of certain tasks, relations between equipment, identities (or for-the-sake-of-whichs), in such a way that one of the things we do there is sit and write. Our word 'desk', then, accrues to this practically structured node in the overall context of equipment and activities.

One of the powers and dangers of language, however, is that it is possible for the word to refer to an object even without the rich experience of the world that articulated the object to which it refers. So it is possible for someone to refer to a desk with the word 'desk', even if he or she doesn't know how to comport him- or herself in an office. It is even possible that, without this original experience of the office, what we understand by and refer to with the word 'desk' could shift and drift over time, thus eventually obscuring what was originally understood.

This, Heidegger believes, is precisely what has happened with words like 'truth' and 'essence'. Of *aletheia*, the Greek word for truth, for instance, he claims that it 'loses its fundamental meaning and is uprooted from the fundamental experience of unhiddenness' (p. 99). Elsewhere he suggests that two quite different things are both named by the same word: 'truth as unhiddenness and truth as correctness are quite different things; they arise from quite different fundamental experiences and cannot at all be equated' (p. 8). But nor does this mean that the different things named by the word 'truth' are only accidentally related to each other (in the way that, for example, the machines and birds named by the English word 'crane' are). 'Truth' names these 'quite different things' because the different 'fundamental experiences' have a great deal to do with each other. The former (the experience of unhiddenness) is. Heideger believes, the historical and logical foundation of the latter. To recognize this, and to better understand our own notion of truth as correctness, Heidegger holds that we need to reawaken an experience of hiddenness and unhiddenness: 'instead of speaking about it [a return to the experience of unhiddenness] in general terms, we want to attempt it' (p. 7). That is the ultimate goal of the lecture course, and another reason for the return to Plato's thought. When introducing the Theaetetus, he notes that Plato's dialogue is simply the occasion for 'developing' and 'awakening' (p. 93) the question: 'for the immediate purpose of these lectures it is therefore not necessary for you to have an autonomous command of the Greek text. In fact you should also be able to co-enact the questioning itself without the text. ... The task and goal of the interpretation must be to bring the *questioning* of this dialogue to you in the actual proximity of your ownmost being [Dasein] ... so that you have *in yourselves* a question that has become awake' (p. 94).

One should note, as an aside, that this quote implies that inquiry into the nature of truth forces us to confront our own being or essence – a fact easily overlooked if truth is taken exclusively as a property of propositions. This is because, as Heidegger puts it, it is part of our essence that we are in the truth (see also *Sein und Zeit*, p. 221). To be in the truth means, at its most superficial level, that most or at least many of the things we believe are true. But this superficial fact is a consequence of the fact that we understand being and 'stand in the midst of beings' (p. 105), i.e., that we are always already in a world which we understand amidst entities with which we comport: (the only way in which we can really understand man is as a being bound to his own possibilities, bound in a way that itself frees the space within which he pursues his own being in this or that manner' (pp. 55–56). So, it is part of what it is to be a human being (at the first, most superficial level) that much of

what we believe is true, and (at the deeper, more profound level) that this is the case because to be human means that beings are discovered to us and a world is disclosed to us: 'it belongs to being human ... to stand in the unhidden, or as we say, in the true, in the truth. Being human means ... to comport oneself to the unhidden' (p. 20).

So far, this discussion of our essential being in the truth is merely an elaboration of Heidegger's views as presented in Sein und Zeit. But the 1931-32 lecture course adds a new twist to the relationship between our essence and truth - namely, Heidegger now claims that the history of our understanding of truth is connected to 'the history of man's essence as an existing being' (p. 105). This idea, that there is a history to our essence, becomes very important in Heidegger's later work. Heidegger comes to believe that essences are historical<sup>7</sup> – and this includes human essence. What it means to be a human being, or, put differently, that in the light of which something shows up as human, changes through history. This changing essence is tied to a change in truth and unconcealment, since the way that we understand ourselves is grounded in the way that the world discloses itself. So, once again, we can see that Heidegger's encounter with Plato is meant to do much more than provide a historical example of a different view of truth. Instead, he intends to discover in Plato's discussion of truth a different underlying experience of the world and sense for our human essence.

But, returning now to the question of what the word 'truth' names, we can see that, on Heidegger's view, it is a word that has been subject to historical change and drift. Because Heidegger uses 'truth' to refer to two 'quite different things', the careless reader is prone to mistakenly take Heidegger to be proposing a new definition of propositional truth: unconcealment rather than correspondence. The final reason for Heidegger's focus on Plato and the cave allegory in particular is that, Heidegger believes, Plato's work is the point at which the old fundamental experience, while still alive, is fading and the new experience is opened up. Thus, the cave allegory, on Heidegger's view, both lays the foundation for thinking truth exclusively as correspondence, but at the same time should be understood as an inquiry into the nature of unconcealment.

# II. Plato's Cave Allegory as an Account of Four Stages of the Occurrence of Truth (as Unhiddenness)

The cave allegory, as Plato's Socrates himself explains to us, is meant to illustrate *paideia*, education, or, as Heidegger translates it *Gehaltenheit*, obligatedness or beholdenness, being held to something.<sup>8</sup> In education, we learn new comportments, which consist in different ways of holding ourselves

out toward things in the world, thereby allowing those things to be uncovered in correspondingly different ways. We are then bound to the things as they show up. When one learns to drive a car, one becomes sensitive to all kinds of new features of the world (down-shifting situations, drivers who follow too closely, etc.), and one then experiences oneself as bound or obligated to respond to those things. It is in this sense that, in general, education in Plato's sense (and Heidegger endorses this) should be understood primarily in terms of learning comportments that allow us to disclose the world in a new way.

If the education is a good one, beings become more unhidden, more fully available for use and, consequently, more compellingly binding in the way that they appear to us. Central to Plato's thesis is that there is a highest or best way in which things can show themselves to us: namely, in the light of the ideas. Education, then, will be learning how to hold ourselves to objects in the light of the ideas.

Before looking in more detail at Heidegger's reading of the cave allegory, let me make another quick observation about Heidegger's translation of *alētheia* and related words in terms of unconcealedness or unhiddenness. In the context of the cave allegory, it is clear that the 'truth' or '*alētheia*' at stake has more to do with things than propositions. It is the things themselves that are true or more true than the shadows in the cave, and the ideas that are more true than the things themselves. That the 'truth' at issue here is not easily assimilable to propositional truth is reflected in the fact that a substantial number of, if not most, English language translators translate the Greek words *alēthes, alēthestera*, etc., as 'real', or 'more real', or 'having more reality', rather than 'true', or 'truer'.<sup>9</sup>

This shows that either Plato thinks that the 'locus' of truth – that of which 'truth' is most characteristically predicated – is not a propositional state or act, or he means something different than 'truth' with *alētheia*. Thus, given that the western tradition in philosophy has long since come to regard such uses of the predicate as, at best, parasitical upon the idea of truth as propositional correspondence, if one were to translate *alētheia* as truth, one would exploit an unfamiliar and unelucidated concept. 'Real,' on the other hand, is a potentially misleading interpolation. Of course, when a thing is a 'true' thing, we often say that it is real – we might say of a true friend, for instance, that 'she's a real friend'. But it would be a mistake to equate the true with the real, since a false friend is no less a real entity than a true friend. In this context, then, Heidegger's decision to translate *alētheia* as 'unhiddenness', then, seems to me no more contentious than translating it as 'reality', nor more opaque than translating it as 'truth'.

What is at stake, then, in the allegory of the cave, is, first (and tacitly), what it means for a thing to be genuinely unhidden (or real or true - i.e., available to us in its essence), and second (and explicitly), what is involved in our

preparing ourselves to apprehend things in their unhiddenness (reality, truth). The allegory, of course, discusses four stages in this process. Let me briefly review Heidegger's account of these stages in terms of unhiddenness.

*First stage*: the prisoners in the cave are forced to see only shadows. But they do not see the shadows as shadows (because they have no relationship yet to the things and the light that produce the shadows). They are entirely given over to what they immediately encounter – that means, they have no relationship to themselves as perceivers (p. 21).

This stage, Heidegger argues, is the 'everyday situation of man' (p. 22), and the things show themselves in terms of our everyday understanding or 'knowing our way around' the everyday situations that we encounter (p. 23). Our familiarity with the everyday world reveals beings in one particular way. But we are completely absorbed in the world with the everyday significance it holds for us, and thus are not aware that there could be any other way to uncover things. Thus, we don't know ourselves as uncoverers of beings.

*Second stage*: the prisoners are turned around and forced to look at the objects themselves, rather than the shadows. A new form of unhiddenness occurs as they learn the distinction between what is seen immediately and what can be shown to them when they are torn out of their everyday modes of comportment. For the prisoners at this stage, the shadows remain more unhidden (p. 25) – presumably because they have practices for dealing with the shadows, but don't know how to cope with things as they show up outside of their everyday way of dealing with things:

What kind of standard does the prisoner employ in wanting to return to the shadows and in claiming *them* as the more unhidden? There in the cave, turned to the shadows, he has no inkling of what will happen when he must see in the light; he has no pain in his eyes, and above all, there amidst the shadows he moves within that which, *ha dunatai*, he is capable of, which demands no great effort of him, and happens of its own accord so to speak. There amidst the shadows, in his shackles, he finds his familiar ground, where no exertion is required, where he is unhindered, where nothing recoils upon him, where there is no confusion, and where everyone is in agreement. The main standard for his estimation of higher or lower unhiddenness is preservation of the undisturbedness of his ordinary activities, without being set out to any kind of reflection, demand, or command. (p. 27)

For the liberator, however, the things are more unhidden than the shadows. The things, as opposed to the shadows, are articulated not according to our everyday practices, but according to the ideas. Since the prisoners don't yet have practices for dealing with the ideas, they will be confused by objects articulated in terms of ideas (p. 28). Thus, the liberation fails because it simply shows the prisoner things in a new light without also equipping the prisoner with the practices needed to be able to cope with the things so apprehended. Until the prisoner is given the practices and habits necessary to deal with the things

that are articulated according to the ideas – until he is liberated or set free for these things – he won't be able to give up the everyday situation (p. 28).

*Third stage*: The prisoners are removed from the cave, and forced to look at the objects in the higher world – the ideas themselves. This is the stage in which a true liberation for the idea-articulated world is effected. The liberation requires force, work, and exertion, strain and suffering to break out of our everyday orientation to the world (p. 32). It gives the prisoner a 'new standpoint' (p. 33), from which the everyday comportments of men are shown to be empty.

*Fourth stage*: The liberated prisoner returns to the cave, and, with his new orientation toward the ideas, learns to discern the truth of beings and of man. Only in the fourth stage, in the return from contemplation of the meaning on the basis of which or through which things are seen, to the seeing itself, does it become clear how everything hangs together. Without the return, the liberator would treat the ideas as beings – as things toward which she can comport, and nothing more. Only with the return do the ideas play their proper role – namely, they give us that intelligibility on the basis of which beings can appear as what they are.

It is at these stages that the 'struggle between the two concepts of truth' (p. 35) becomes most pronounced. Plato wants to judge between kinds of unhiddenness, and say that one is more unhidden than another. The 'shadows' in the cave, the everyday objects and situations with which we are familiar in our ordinary lives, are also unhidden (meaning available for comportment). What allows us to say that the objects and situations as they appear in the light of the ideas are more unhidden? Plato makes tacit use of a criterion for deciding when something is uncovered in a more real or true way - namely, the higher form of uncovering is the one which makes the lower form possible. In arguing that the world disclosed in the light of the ideas is more unhidden (or 'truer'), then, Plato is basing his argument on an assumption about the primacy of ideas and cognition over other practices or kinds of familiarity with the world. The result is that the kind of success that is characteristic of ideas - i.e., truth as correspondence - is given primacy over, for example, practical success in coping with a situation. It is only on some such basis that one could hold that, in learning to recognize the ideas explicitly (a skill developed at stage 3), and then in developing the ability to recognize how the ideas articulate the world (a skill developed at stage 4), we are given access to a more fundamental understanding of the world than the prisoners already possessed in the cave (see p. 48 ff.).

It is worth asking, at this point, which of the views Heidegger attributes to Plato are also views he can endorse.<sup>10</sup> They include the claims that:

- There are different modes of unhiddenness.
- There are higher and lower forms of unhiddenness.<sup>11</sup>

- The everyday mode of unhiddenness is a lower form.
- In our everyday comportment to the world, we are blinded to that in virtue of which a higher disclosure of the world and our essence could take place.
- For the higher disclosure of the world, we need to become oriented to something other than the everyday beings with which we are involved.

Heidegger's argument for the existence of higher and lower modes of unhiddeness is similar to the view he attributes to Plato in the way that it draws on the phenomenology of perception. Our ability to perceive anything at all – even everyday objects and states of affairs – depends, Heidegger argues, on our having an understanding of being, of essences. When I see something, I don't simply see the qualities to which the eye, as an organ, is physically responsive. I also see things as having a meaning or significance (I see not just colors, shapes, but also books, doors): 'However sharp and highly developed our tools for seeing, however excellent our sense of sight, we can never see a book through our sense of sight. We would never see anything like a book were we not able to see in another *more primordial* sense. To this latter kind of 'seeing' there belongs an *understanding* of what it *is* that one encounters' (p. 38).

But there are two important points at which Heidegger disagrees with his version of Plato. First, he rejects Plato's account of the content of this higher mode of comportment - for Heidegger, it doesn't consist in a grasp of ideas, at least not if ideas are conceived of in the way that Plato thinks of them (see p. 52: 'the whole problem of ideas was forced along a false track'). Heidegger agrees that the possibility of apprehending things depends on some kind of prior grasp of our understanding of what they are. But he rejects the notion that what enables being and perception is an idea, if this is taken to mean a conceptual grasp of things. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that Plato's addressing the idea of the good represents a depth of insight that Western philosophy has never again achieved: 'what this empowerment is and how it occurs has not been answered to the present day; indeed the question is no longer even asked in the original Platonic sense' (p. 80). Heidegger took for himself the project of addressing this failing in the form of his later work on unconcealment.

Second, Heidegger argues that, given the importance and the priority of hiddenness in Plato's account, it is essential that the allegory of the cave be followed up by an analysis of the nature of the hiddenness that prevails in the cave, and constantly threatens the understanding that we win through philosophy (p. 67). This is something that Plato doesn't do in *The Republic*, although there are suggestions on how the analysis would go in Plato's discussion of error in the *Theaetetus*.

# III. The *Theaetetus* and the Question Concerning the Essence of Untruth – How Unhiddenness Became Correctness

To summarize, Heidegger sees in the cave allegory the moment at which a primordial experience of unconcealment begins to fade (p. 87). Once unhiddenness is understood as produced through having a grasp of an idea, a kind of mental comportment toward things, then hiddenness consequently comes to be understood as the result of a failure on our part - namely, as a cognitive failure in which we distort the facts. The opposite of truth, *alētheia*, becomes distortion, pseudos. This is in contrast to the original experience of hiddenness, *lethe*, which was an occurrence having as much to do with things as with us. The original Greek experience of concealment, Heidegger claims, is that of the things refusing themselves, drawing into hiddenness (pp. 100-01).<sup>12</sup> The opposite of truth, in other words, was, prior to Plato, an objectively occurring unavailableness of things. With Plato's thought, however, hiddenness becomes a matter of having a distorted cognition, the opposite of which is having a correct representation of things (p. 103). And it is this background understanding of unhiddenness that underwrites truth as correspondence (p. 99).

Whether this account is historiologically accurate is, in some sense, irrelevant. As an account of the logic behind the notion of truth as correspondence, it is compelling. Note, however, that nothing in the account Heidegger offers is meant as a rejection of the idea of correspondence or the possibility of correspondence. Rather, it is an argument that focusing exclusively on correspondence will obscure the way to any other experience of concealment, and consequently will tend to occlude the possibility of thinking of other, perhaps better, modes of unhiddenness.

Thus, Heidegger concludes, unconcealment in Plato's cave allegory 'is a theme, and at the same time not a theme' (p. 90). The whole allegory is about the process by which we become capable of bringing things into unhiddenness, and yet unhiddenness as an event itself is not fully thematized. To fully make it a theme, Heidegger argues, we need to focus on the nature of hiddenness (p. 91). This focus is something Heidegger hopes to arrive at through Plato's *Theatetus*.

In turning to Heidegger's reading of that dialogue, we must note that he is trying to do two things simultaneously. He is, first, trying to discover the source for the traditional philosophical orientation toward cognition and conceptuality; second, he is trying to recover a more fundamental grasp of what is involved in our knowing being-in-the-world. The reading Heidegger offers of the *Theaetetus* thus both develops Plato's arguments in a phenomenological direction, and situates Plato in the history of philosophy. These two aspects of Heidegger's reading tend to pull him in different directions – on the one hand, to take the concepts which seem to have an

explicitly conceptual content in Plato, and reinterpret them in non-cognitivist or non-conceptualist ways; on the other hand, to see how Plato's doctrines lent themselves to the development of conceptualism or cognitivism.

In the Theaetetus, Socrates turns to the question of error within the context of a broader inquiry into knowledge as such. A consequence of the privilege given to correspondence in truth theories is, Heidegger argues, that a complementary privilege is accorded to scientific knowledge over other forms of knowing. The seeds of this latter privilege are laid by the platonic idea of a theoretical grasp of the ideas as providing the highest form of unhiddenness of things. But in the Theaetetus, at any rate, Heidegger argues that what is at stake is not scientific knowledge per se, but knowledge in the broadest sense as that comportment which makes us distinctively human (p. 114). To be human is to know – not in the scientific sense (as if we wouldn't be human if we lacked scientific knowledge), but in a broader sense of knowing how to comport oneself in the world. This, Heidegger argues, is the original sense of the Greek concept of knowledge: 'Epistamai means: I direct myself to something, come closer to it, occupy myself with it, in a way that is fitting and measures up to it. This placing of myself toward something is at the same time a coming to *stand*, a standing *over* the thing and in this way to under-stand it' (p. 111). Thus, the kind of knowledge at stake in the Theaetetus is knowledge in the general sense of knowing how to deal with something in a fitting manner: 'epistēmē originally means all this: the commanding knowing-one's-way-around in something, familiarity in dealing with something' (p. 112). 'All possible human activities and all possible domains' (p. 112) are characterized by this sort of familiarity; scientific knowledge is just one such way of knowing our way around (pp. 112-13). In fact. Heidegger wants to argue that the most fundamental sort of knowing as familiarity with the world cannot be captured in terms of the propositional/ logical structure and conceptual apparatus of scientific modes of knowing.

The a-conceptuality of fundamental knowledge has implications for the kind of philosophical enterprise Heidegger is engaged in. Philosophical thinking is, of course, a kind of conceptualization, and thus it consists in bringing a pre-conceptual understanding of things to a concept (see p. 151). But what kind of a concept can do this adequately? Not, Heidegger suggests, a type-name or type-concept (pp. 113–14) – that is, the ability to name some property that all X things have in common. Rather, 'the "concept" that is sought for ... [is] an attacking *intervention* in the essential possibility of human existence' (pp. 114–15). There is a play here on words formed from the German verb *greifen*, which means to take hold of or grasp. The word for concept, '*Begriff*', is formed from this root. Literally, a *Begriff* is a kind of grasp of a thing. Attacking intervention is '*angreifender Eingriff*'. '*Eingriff*' means an intervention or engagement in something; literally, it is a 'grasp on' something, the idea being that in intervening or becoming engaged, we're

getting into and getting a grasp on the situation. Likewise, 'angreifen' means to attack, but literally it is 'to grasp at', i.e., to try to get a hold on something, to bring something into one's grasp or control. So, a philosophical 'concept' for Heidegger isn't necessarily an abstract, logical content, but an attempt to come to grips with a thing or a situation in order to engage oneself with it. This can happen without exhaustively or determinately capturing the content of a thing. Indeed, the kind of content that will be appropriate will depend on the kind of thing which we are trying to cope with, and the kind of involvement we have with it.

Thus, knowledge, as a familiarity with things, always involves a kind of grasp of them – a 'concept' in the broad sense. But what kind of grasp is essential to knowledge? For the Greeks, and subsequently for the entire western tradition (according to Heidegger), there is a tendency to equate knowledge per se with the kind of grasp we get of things in seeing that such and such is the case (p. 116). This privileges the conceptual grasp in the narrow sense – what you see when you're merely seeing, where what is seen is taken in regard to what can be said about it. This is the kind of content that can be passed around and shared with a minimum of familiarity with it. This provides one with a kind of 'disposal over something in its presence and persistence' (p. 117), but not necessarily an ability to engage practically with it.

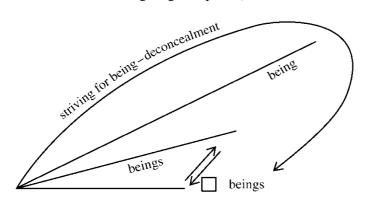
In Plato's dialogue, Theaetetus' first effort to define knowledge treats it precisely as a kind of perception. This definition fails, as Socrates gets Theaetetus to admit, if we think of perception as mere sensation, for sensation provides us only with certain sensory qualities, but not evidence of the being or truth (unhiddenness) of things (see *Theaetetus*, p. 186 c 9–e 12, and Heidegger's discussion at pp. 173–5). In other words, perception delivers knowledge (in either the broad or the narrow sense) only if it goes beyond sensation.

Theaetetus's next answer is that knowledge is a kind of *doxazein*, a kind of thinking or supposing or holding an opinion. Heidegger translates *doxazein* as 'having a view of or about something, which shows itself as such and such' (p. 183). The German term for a view or an opinion is '*Ansicht*', which is ambiguous between the view we have on the matter and the view the matter itself presents. Heidegger exploits this ambiguity to suggest that our familiar knowledge of something involves both our having a particular take on or orientation to it, and its offering itself to us as something, holding out to us a certain view of itself. The translation of *doxazein* as having a view also, once again, expands the consideration beyond the merely cognitive domain of making or entertaining judgments. A judgment is a 'view', but not all views are judgments ('from that point, one has a beautiful view of the valley' doesn't imply that at that point one must form a judgment about the valley). The *doxa* or view is capable of truth or falsity, but in a broader sense than the

correspondence of a judgment with a state of affairs. A true view is not just a correct one, but an undistorted one.

The possibility of error, and of hiddenness in general is, for Heidegger, attributable to the double structure implied in the idea of a view. Because having a view involves both a certain orientation on the viewer's part, and a certain giving of itself of the thing that is viewed, a distorted view occurs when either the viewer takes up an orientation to the thing which doesn't allow itself to show itself as it is, or it gives itself in some way that it is not.

In general, the double structure involves, on the viewer's part, an orientation which goes beyond or 'strives' beyond any particular object of knowledge. When I intend a chair, for example, my intention goes beyond what is given by any particular sensory experience of a chair (it includes the back side of the chair, as well as other chairs). In the lecture course, Heidegger discusses several other kinds of 'movement beyond' involved in unconcealment which also bear the same kind of double structure, and each of which has its own kind of characteristic hiddenness. They are summarized and condensed in the following diagram (p. 228):



Where the lines converge at the lower left of the diagram stands the knowing agent. The base line is the line of sensory connection with an entity (*aisthesis*), the next line up is the first kind of going beyond entities – the going beyond in an intentional orientation to an entity (a 'retention and making present', Heidegger's interpretation of the idea of *mnēmoneuein* in the *Theaetetus*, p. 220). The arrows going between the object as sensed and the object as intended show that it is possible to make a judgment, either that the object as sensed is such and such kind of object, or that the object intended is satisfied by such and such sensed object (see p. 220 ff.). This double structure makes an error possible because it allows, for example, that the sensed object is brought under an *idea* that is not appropriate for it (p. 224).

But there are more ways in which our understanding comportment goes beyond any particular object. In the diagram, these are represented in the third and fourth lines up from the bottom. The third line is a second kind of going beyond that grounds both sensory perception and intentional directedness – an understanding of being. Finally, this is grounded in a striving for being that goes beyond an understanding of being and back to beings.

The going beyond involved in the third line points to the fact that we perceive objects in the world on the basis of our having taken in advance an understanding of notions like being and non-being, identity and difference – these notions are *koina*, i.e., common to all the sensory modalities, but not sensed through any of them: 'so we see that the *koina* (being – non-being, sameness – difference) are precisely what allow us to grasp more concretely this region of *inner* perceivability. In their total constellation, it is precisely these *koina* which co-constitute the region of perceivability' (p. 141). Thus, for instance, I can see a table, because I have laid out in advance a region within which objects like tables are, and are what they are.

But what kind of a grasp do I have of such things? Most of us never form good concepts of being and non-being, sameness and difference (or even of tables, for that matter). If we don't have them in virtue of possessing a concept of them, then in what sense do we have them? Heidegger argues that we have them as a 'striving' for them, represented in the highest line in the diagram.

To get clearer about this, let's reflect on the natural experience of perception. It seems, on the face of it, that perception is anything but a striving. Rather, it is a kind of losing yourself in what is given to you, letting yourself be taken by the things that surround you. Heidegger illustrates this through the example of a person lying in a meadow, perceiving the blue sky and a lark's song:

In our situation, lying in the meadow, we are not at all disposed to *occupy* ourselves with anything. On the contrary, we *lose* ourselves in the blue, in what gives itself; we follow the song along, we let ourselves *be taken*, as it were, by these beings, such that they *surround* us. To be sure, *beings* surround us, and not nothing, neither anything imaginary. But we do not occupy ourselves with them *as* beings. (p. 158)

Indeed, Heidegger argues, to regard them *as* beings is to no longer lose ourselves in the perception of them, and thus to disregard them as we were previously taking them. 'In immediate perception', Heidegger concludes, 'beings are perceived, as we say, in a manner which is *non-regarding*' (p. 149). So my perception of things is anything but a kind of striving, an effort. Natural perception is, then, 'non-regarding and non-conceptual perceiving of beings – which means that we *occupy* ourselves neither with beings as such ... nor do we grasp their being conceptually. ... Perception is not *conceiving* of beings in their being' (p. 151). That is, in my everyday

perceptual experience of things, I neither regard them explicitly *as* beings, nor do I grasp them as instances of a concept. The chair that I sit in is, of course, perceived by me, but it is, in the normal course of sitting, neither thought of as a being, nor as a chair.

In his 1925 lecture course on logic (GA 21), Heidegger offers his best and most complete description of this kind of natural, everyday experience of objects. In our familiar dealings with the world, we experience things primarily in terms of their *Wozu*, translated in *Being and Time* as their 'towards-which' or their 'in-order-to', but perhaps it is most naturally rendered as their 'for-what' (in the sense of 'what one uses it for,' 'for what purpose it is employed'). My primary, familiar understanding of things, in other words, is not an understanding of them as satisfying some description or other, but rather simply in affording something else. As I walk through a building, the door is not there *as* a door as such, but it is there *for* going in and out, the chairs are there *for* sitting, the pens and desk and paper are there *for* writing (GA 21, 144). The structure of this understanding is, Heidegger argues, not 'primarily and properly given in a simple propositional assertion', (GA 21, 144), nor can it be 'thematically grasped', at least not as long as one is living in it (GA 21, 145).

This is because I understand how to do things with tables, doors, and all the other things with which I am familiar, only by being 'always *already further*' than what is physically present to me – for instance, in using the door, I am already at that for which it is: I'm already oriented to the room into which I am moving. When I grasp the thing explicitly *as* the thing it is, I do this by 'coming back from' that for which the thing is understood to the thing itself (GA 21, p. 147). So, in ordinary comportment, I understand the door not by focusing on the door per se, but by already directing myself beyond the door to the room on the other side. In grasping the door explicitly, I have to draw my intention back from the room beyond to the door itself. A grasp of being functions in the same way – I take something as a being precisely by not occupying myself with it as a being, but rather in terms of that for which it exists in my world.

In the natural, everyday perception, then, we understand what things are, their being, but we do not grasp their being as such. We lack a concept of it (in the narrow sense):

When we perceive what is encountered as something that is, we take it *in respect of* the being that belongs to it. In so doing, however, already and in advance, we understand this being of the being in a *non-conceptual* way. Precisely because we do *not* grasp being (most people never obtain a concept of being and yet they live at every moment in the understanding of being) we also cannot say how this being *belongs* to the being to which we attribute it. ... But despite this non-conceptual mode of understanding, we can accept, take in, and intend the beings in diverse aspects of their being and so-being. (pp. 149–50)

Our lack of a concept for what we understand is by no means a failure on our parts – indeed, it is only because we pay no regard to being that we are free to encounter beings in a fluid, everyday way. Thus, our understanding of the things around is a familiarity with ..., not a conceptualization of ....

So there is an important sense in which there is no 'striving' involved in much of my experience of things. There is no experience of effort at understanding, nothing which I am trying to grasp. At the same time, however, Heidegger argues that the easy familiarity with beings is rooted in a 'ground-stance', a historical taking a stand on being and the world. This taking a stand is not a thing that exists in the world, and thus cannot easily be taken in stride in our familiar dealings with the world. It is that toward which we need to strive in order to make possible all our everyday dealings with things.

What does it mean to say that we strive for a ground-stance that takes a stand on being? Heidegger distinguishes between two kinds of striving – an authentic and an inauthentic version (p. 153). An inauthentic striving is a 'mere chasing after what is striven for' (p. 154). It has as its object not our being, but some entity – 'a thing which as such can be taken into possession' (p. 155). We are inauthentically striving for being when we are 'ensnared' within a particular understanding of being, and thus feel compelled to chase after certain things which are presented as important or unimportant within that understanding of being.

The authentic striving does not try to take possession of a thing, but to own up to it as 'the measure and law for the striver's comportment to beings' (p. 155). I take a stand on the world, decide to be such and such a person, and strive after this way of being. I can never accomplish it, but by projecting it as that on the basis of which I will understand myself, it gives me a basis for my experience of beings.

So the way in which we 'have' an excess that then determines how we experience particular things is in a striving to be something, to take up a particular stance on the being of the world. This projecting toward something which is never present or possessed lays out a unified field (p. 160) within which I can have a bodily perception of things, because it gives a determinate view on things. It gives me a basis for reckoning with or coping with things (see p. 161). But we shouldn't think that this is a subjective projection, an act of will by which we impose intelligibility on the world. The things that we encounter themselves 'demand a comportment which takes them in as such' (p. 164; see also pp. 168–70). So the most fundamental basis for our making sense of the world is nothing natural, nothing fixed or necessary, but in it we are attuned by the natural world around us. This fact is represented in the diagram by the way the arrow curves back around to the beings themselves.

We are in the condition, then, of always striving to establish a particular understanding of ourselves and the world by using it – by projecting ourselves

into actions and possibilities, consequently comporting ourselves in particular ways, and thereby making sense of the objects and situations we encounter. This way of projecting ourselves (striving) will allow certain things and situations to make their appearance, but it will also conceal other things and situations that are incompatible with or irrelevant to our understanding. If one focuses on error as the opposite of truth, Heidegger believes, it makes one lose sight of this more fundamental interplay between revealing and concealing in our projective action in the world. Likewise, if one's orientation to the world is understood as mediated by linguistic or conceptual ideas, then failure to orient oneself correctly is naturally understood in terms of the application of an incorrect predicate to the subject involved. Plato's interpretation of the look or view of a thing in terms of logos, Heidegger argues, 'is important in so far as it [the "logos-character of doxa"] alone is retained in the later development of the *doxa* concept, so that the primordial elements of the *doxa* disappear behind this characteristic, and the *doxa*, as 'opinion', is linked to *assertion* and the genuine phenomenon disappears' (p. 202).

But Plato himself, Heidegger argues, points us in the direction of the phenomenon of hiddenness and unhiddenness itself. Thinking beyond Plato, then, Heidegger argues that we need to think through the way that unhiddenness and unconcealment in general occur. This, in fact, is the central project of most of Heidegger's later work.

#### NOTES

- 1 These essays are all published in *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1996), translated as *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- 2 Courses dedicated to truth include 'Logik. Die Frage nach der Wahrheit' (Winter Semester 1925–1926, GA 21), 'Vom Wesen der Wahrheit. Zu Platons Höhlengleichnis und Theätet' (Winter Semester 1931–1932, GA 34), 'Vom Wesen der Wahrheit' (Winter Semester 1933–1934, GA 36/37), and 'Grundfragen der Philosophie. Ausgewählte "Probleme" der "Logik"' (Winter Semester 1937–1938, GA 45). Virtually every other course taught during this period includes a significant discussion of the essence of truth. Particularly notable in this regard are 'Einleitung in die Philosophie' (Winter Semester 1928–1929, GA27), 'Nietzsches Lehre vom Willen zur Macht als Erkenntnis' (Summer Semester 1939, GA 47), and, a little later, the 'Parmenides' lecture course of 1942–1943 (GA 54).
- 3 'GA' references are to volumes of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann). Unless otherwise specified, parenthetical references in the text are to the English translation of GA 34: *The Essence of Truth*, trans. Ted Sadler (New York: Continuum, 2002).
- 4 For a more detailed discussion of truth as a privative concept, see my 'Unconcealment' in *The Blackwell Companion to Heidegger* (2004).
- 5 When Heidegger was writing and lecturing, the most widely accepted notion of propositional truth was that of correspondence. Like many others in the opening decades of the twentieth century, he questions whether we can arrive at a clear notion of correspondence at least as long as correspondence is taken as a relationship that holds between a representation and a state of affairs in the world. For further discussion of

Heidegger's views on correspondence, see my 'Truth and the Essence of Truth', in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, rev. ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2005), and 'Unconcealment', in *The Blackwell Companion to Heidegger* (Blackwell, 2004).

- 6 'The Thought', in *Logical Investigations*, ed. P. T. Geach (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), p. 2.
- 7 See my 'Truth and the Essence of Truth' in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, rev'd. ed.
- 8 See *Republic* 514 a. In the English translation of the lecture course, '*Gehaltenheit*' is rendered as 'positionedness' (see p. 83 ff.). The reasoning behind this, I suppose, is that in being educated, we take up a new position or stance among beings. But the emphasis here is on our being held to a certain relationship to things in virtue of our having taken hold of them in a particular way.
- 9 See, e.g., Waterfield's, Cornford's and Shorey's translations.
- 10 Perhaps the most striking difference between the lecture course and the later published essay on Plato's cave allegory is the extent to which Heidegger in the lecture course attempts to read Plato in phenomenological terms. This is one of Heidegger's most charitable and least critical readings of Plato.
- 11 Heidegger doesn't elaborate very much on this point in the lecture course. For an account of his views on a higher mode of intelligibility, see Hubert Dreyfus, 'Could anything be more intelligible than everyday intelligibility?' in *Appropriating Heidegger*, eds. James E. Faulconer and Mark A. Wrathall (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 155–74.
- 12 For more on this idea, see my 'Unconcealment' in *The Blackwell Companion to Heidegger*.

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