MARTIN HEIDEGGER

P L A T O ' S D O C T R I N E O F T R U T H

English translation
by
Thomas Sheehan

Published in
Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks,*
ed. William McNeill
Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998
pp. 155-182
(here slightly revised)

[Bracketed page numbers refer to pages in *Wegmarken*, Gesamtausgabe, Band 9. In that edition, pages 204, 206, 208, 210, and 212 contain the Greek text of the Allegory of the Cave, which is not presented here.]

[203] The knowledge that comes from the sciences is usually expressed in propositions and laid before us as conclusions that we can grasp and put to use. But the "doctrine" of a thinker is that which remains unsaid within what is said, that to which we are exposed so that we might expend ourselves on it.

In order to experience and to know henceforth what a thinker left unsaid, whatever that might be, we have to consider what he said. To properly satisfy this demand would entail examining all of Plato's "dialogues" in their interrelationship. Since this is impossible, we may let a different path guide us

to the unsaid in Plato's thinking.

What remains unsaid in Plato's thinking is a change in what determines the essence of truth. The fact that this change does take place, what it consists in, and what gets grounded through this transformation of the essence of truth -- all of this can be clarified by an interpretation of the "allegory of the cave."

The "allegory of the cave" is presented at the beginning of the seventh book of the "dialogue" on the essence of the πόλις (*Republic*, VII, 514 a, 2 to 517 a, 7). The "allegory" tells a story. The tale unfolds in the conversation between Socrates and Glaucon. Socrates presents the story, Glaucon shows his awakening astonishment. The translation that we provide for the text includes phrases that go beyond the Greek in an effort to elucidate it; these we have put in parentheses. **[end 203]**

****

[205] "Imagine this: People live under the earth in a cave-like dwelling. Stretching a long way up toward the daylight is its entrance, toward which the entire cave is gathered. The people have been in this dwelling since childhood, shackled by the legs and neck. That is why they also stay in the same place so that the only thing for them to look at is whatever they encounter in front of their faces. But because they are shackled, they are unable to turn their heads around. Some light, to be sure, is allowed them, namely from a fire that casts its glow toward them from behind them, being above and at some distance. Between the fire and those who are shackled (behind their backs, therefore), there runs a walkway at a certain height. Imagine that a low wall has been built along the length of the walkway, like the low curtain that puppeteers put up, over which they show their puppets."

"I see," he [Glaucon] said.

"So now imagine that along this low wall people are carrying all sorts of things that reach up higher than the wall: statues and other carvings made of stone or wood and many other artifacts that people have made. As you would expect, some [of the carriers] are talking to each other (as they walk along) and some are silent.

[Glaucon:]"This is an unusual picture that you are presenting here, and these are unusual prisoners."

"They are very much like us humans," I responded. "What do you think? From the beginning people like this have never managed, whether on their own or with the help by others, to see anything besides the shadows that the glow of the fire (continually) projects on the wall in front of them."

[Glaucon:] "How could it be otherwise," he said, "since they are forced to keep their heads immobile for their entire lives?"

[207] "And what do they see of the things that are being carried along (behind them)? Don't they see only these (namely the shadows)?"

[Glaucon:] "Certainly."

"Now if they were able to say something about what they saw and to discuss it, don't you think that they would regard what they saw on the wall as beings?"
[Glaucon:] "They would have to."

"And now what if this prison also had an echo reverberating off the wall in front of them (the wall that they always and only look at)? Whenever one of the those walking behind the people in chains (and carrying the things) would make a sound, do you think the prisoners would imagine that the speaker were anyone other than the shadow passing in front of them?"

[Glaucon:] "Nothing else, by Zeus!"[1]

"In no way, then," I responded, "would those who are chained in this way ever consider anything else to be the unhidden except the shadows cast by the artifacts."

"That would absolutely have to be the case," he [Glaucon] said.

"So now," I replied, "watch the process whereby the prisoners are set free from their chains and, along with that, cured of their lack of insight.[2] Moreover, consider what sort of lack of insight it must be if the following were to happen to those who were chained. Whenever any one of them was unchained and forced to stand up suddenly, to turn around,[3] to walk, and to look up toward the light, in each case the person would be able to do this only with pain; and because of the flickering brightness he would be unable to look at those things whose shadows he saw before. (If all this were to happen to the prisoner), what do you think he would say if someone were to inform him that what he saw before were (mere) trifles but that now he was much nearer to beings; and that he also saw more correctly as a consequence of now being turned toward what is more in being? And if someone were (then) to show him any of the things that were passing by, and forced him to answer the question about what it is, **[209]** don't you think that he would be at wit's end and in addition would also consider that what he saw before (with his own eyes) is more unhidden than what is now being shown (to him by someone else)?"

---

[1]The Greek, μὰ Δί´ οὐκ ἔγωγ´, ἔφη, more literally would be: "'By Zeus, not I,"' he said." (There are only so many ways one can express agreement in a Platonic dialogue.) [Translator's note.]

[2]*Einsichtlosigkeit*: ἀφροσύνη. [Translator's note.]

[3]Literally: to turn his neck around [*den Hals zuzuwenden*, περιάγειν τὸν αύξένα]. [Translator's note.]

"Yes, absolutely," he said.

"And if someone even forced him to look into the glare of the fire, wouldn't his eyes hurt him, and wouldn't he then turn away and flee (back) to what he is capable of looking at? And wouldn't he decide that (what he could see before without any help) is in fact clearer than what is now being shown to him?"

"Precisely," he said.

"Now, however, if someone, using force, were to drag him (who had been freed from his chains) away from there and to pull him up the cave's rough and steep ascent and not let go of him until he had dragged him out into the light of the sun, would n't the one who had been dragged like this feel, in the process, pain and rage? And when he got into the sunlight, wouldn't his eyes be filled with glare, wouldn't he therefore be incapable of seeing anything that is now revealed to him as the unhidden?"

"He would be entirely incapable of doing that," he said, "at least not right away."

"It would obviously take some getting accustomed, I think, if it is a matter of grasping with one's eyes what is up there (outside the cave, in the light of the sun). And (in this process of getting accustomed) he would first and most easily be able to look at shadows and thereafter at the images of people and of other things as they are reflected in water. Later, however, he would be able to view the things themselves (the beings, instead of their dim reflections). But within the range of such things, it might be easier for him to contemplate whatever there is in the heavenly dome, and the dome itself, by doing so at night by looking at the light of the stars and the moon, (easier, that is to say,) than by looking at the sun and its glare during the day."

[Glaucon:] "Certainly."

[211] "But I think that finally he would be in a condition to look at the sun itself, not just at its reflection, whether in water or wherever else it might appear, but at the sun itself, as it is in and of itself and in the place proper to it, and to contemplate of what sort it is."

"It would necessarily happen this way," he said.

"And having done all that, by this time he would also be able to gather the following about it (the sun): that it is what grants both the seasons and the years and what governs everything that there is in the (now) visible region (of sunlight), and moreover that it (the sun) is also the cause of all those things that the people (who dwell below in the cave) in some way have before their eyes."

"It is obvious," he said, "that he would get to these (the sun and whatever stands in its light) after he had gone out beyond those (that are merely reflections and shadows)."

"And then what? If he again recalled his first dwelling, and the 'knowing' that passes as the norm there, and the people with whom he once was chained,[4] don't you think he would consider himself lucky because of the transformation (that had happened), and by contrast feel sorry for them?"

[Glaucon:] "Very much so."

"However, if (among the people) in the previous dwelling place (i.e., the cave) certain honors and commendations were established for whoever most clearly catches sight of what passes by (i.e., things that happen every day) and also best remembers which ones normally come first, which ones later, and which ones at the same time, and for whoever (then) could most easily predict which ones might come next -- do you think that he (who had gotten out of the cave) would (now still) envy those (in the cave) and want to compete with those (there) who are esteemed and have power? Or wouldn't he much rather wish upon himself the condition that Homer speaks of: 'To live on the land (above ground) as the **[213]** paid menial of another destitute peasant'? And won't he prefer to put up with absolutely anything else rather than associate himself with those opinions (that hold in the cave) and be that kind of human being?"

"I think," he said, "that he would prefer to endure everything rather than be that kind of human being (the cave-dwelling kind)."

"And now," I responded, "consider this: If this person who had gotten out of the cave were to go back down again and sit in the same place as before, wouldn't he find in that case, coming suddenly out of the sunlight, that his eyes ere filled with darkness?"

"Yes, very much so, he said.

"If he now once more had to engage himself with those who had remained shackled there in the business of asserting and maintaining opinions about the shadows -- while his eyes are still weak and before they have readjusted, an adjustment that would require quite a bit of time -- wouldn't he then be exposed to ridicule down there? And wouldn't they let him know that, yes, he had gone up but only in order to come back (into the cave) with his eyes ruined, and so it certainly does not pay to go up? And if they can get hold of this person who undertakes to free them from their chains and to lead them up, and if they could kill him, will they not actually kill him?"

"They certainly will," he said.

---

[4]Literally: "those who were chained with him in those days" [*der damals mit ihm Gefesselten* / τῶν τότε συνδεσμωτῶν]. [Translator's note.]

***

What does this story mean? Plato himself provides the answer: he has the interpretation immediately follow the story (517 a8 to 518 d7).

The cave-like abode is the "image" for τὴν . . . δἰ ὄψεως φαινομένην ἕδραν, "the place of our dwelling, which (in an everyday way) is revealed to sight as we look around." The fire in the cave, which burns above those who dwell there, is the "image" for the sun. The vault of the cave represents the dome of the heavens. People live under this dome, assigned to the earth and bound to it. What surrounds and concerns them there **[214]** is, for them, "the real" ["*das Wirkliche*"], i.e., that which is. In this cave-like dwelling they feel that they are "in the world" and "at home" and here they find what they can rely on.

On the other hand, the things that the "allegory" mentions as visible outside the cave are the image for what the proper being of beings [*das eigentlich Seiende des Seienden*] consists in. This, according to Plato, is that whereby beings show up in their "visible form" Plato does not regard this "visible form" as a mere "aspect." For him the "visible form" has in addition something of a "stepping forth" whereby a thing "presents" itself.[5] Standing in its "visible form" the being itself shows itself. In Greek "visible form" is εἰδος or ἰδέα. In the "allegory" the things that are visible in the daylight outside the cave, where sight is free to look at everything, are a concrete illustration of the "ideas." According to Plato, if people did not have these "ideas" in view, that is to say, the respective "appearance" of things -- living beings, humans, numbers, gods -- they would never be able to perceive this or that as a house, as a tree, as a god. Usually they think they see this house and that tree directly, and the same with every being. Generally they never suspect that it is always and only in the light of the "ideas" that they see everything that passes so easily and familiarly for the "real." According to Plato, what they presume to be exclusively and properly the real -- what they can immediately see, hear, grasp, compute -- always remains a mere adumbration of the idea, and consequently a shadow. That which is nearest, even though it has the consistency of shadows, holds humans captive day after day. They live in a prison and leave all "ideas" behind them. And since in no way do they recognize this prison for what it is, they consider that this everyday region under the dome of the heavens is the arena of the experience and judgment that provide the sole standard for all things and relations and that fix the only rules of their disposition and arrangement. **[215]**

Now if human beings, considered in the terms of the "allegory," were suddenly, while still within the cave, to glance back at the fire whose radiance produces the shadows of the things being carried back and forth, they would immediately experience this unaccustomed turning around of their gaze as a disruption of customary behavior and of current opinion. In fact, the mere suggestion of such a strange stance, to be adopted while still within the cave, is rejected, for there in the cave one is in clear and complete possession of the real. The people in the cave are so passionately attached to their "view" that

---

[5]Heidegger's note in the *Geistige Überlieferung* edition, 1942: "Being present-to, i.e., present-unto [*An-, d.h. herzu -wesen*]."

they are incapable of even suspecting the possibility that what they take for the real might have the consistency of mere shadows. But how could they know about shadows when they do not even want to be aware of the fire in the cave and its light, even though this fire is merely something "man-made" and hence should be familiar to human beings. By contrast, the sunlight outside the cave is in no way a product of human making. In its brightness things that have grown and are present show themselves immediately without needing adumbrations to represent them. In the "allegory" the things that show themselves are the "image" for the "ideas." But in the sun in the "allegory" is the "image" for that which makes all ideas visible. It is the "image" for the idea of all ideas. This latter, according to Plato, is called ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα, which one translates with the "literal" but quite misleading phrase "the idea of the good."

The allegorical correspondences that we have just now enumerated--between the shadows and reality as experienced everyday, between the radiance of the cave fire and the light in which the habitual and closest "reality" stands, between the things outside the cave and the ideas, between the sun and the highest idea -- these correspondences do not exhaust the content of the "allegory." In fact the proper dimension of it has not even come into our grasp yet. Rather than just reporting on the dwelling places and conditions of people inside and outside the cave, the "allegory" recounts a series of movements. The movements that it recounts are **[216]** movements of passage out of the cave into the daylight and then back out of the daylight into the cave.

What happens in these movements of passage? What makes these events possible? From what do they derive their necessity? What issue is at stake in these passages?

The movements of passing out of the cave into the daylight and then back from there into the cave require in each case that the eyes accustom themselves to the change from darkness to brightness and from brightness back to darkness. Each time, in so doing, the eyes experience confusion, indeed for opposite reasons in each case: διτταὶ καὶ ἀπὸ διττῶν γίγνονται ἐπιταράξειξ ὄμμασιν (518 a2). "Two kinds of confusion come about for the eyes, and for two reasons."

This means that there are two possibilities. On the one hand people can leave their hardly noticed ignorance and get to where beings show themselves to them more essentially, but where initially people are not adequate to the essential. On the other hand people can fall out of the stance of essential knowing and be forced back into the region where common reality reigns supreme, but without their being able to recognize what is common and customary there as being the real.

And just as the physical eye must accustom itself, slowly and steadily at first, either to the light or to the dark, so likewise the soul, patiently and through an appropriate series of steps, has to accustom itself to the region of beings to which it is exposed. But this process of getting accustomed requires that before all else the soul in its entirety be turned around as regards the fundamental direction of its striving, in the same way as the eye can look comfortably in whatever direction only when the whole body has first assumed the appropriate position.

But why does this process of getting accustomed to each region have to be slow and steady?

The reason is that the turning around has to do with one's being and thus takes place in the very ground of one's essence. This means that the normative bearing that is to result from this turning around must unfold from a relation that already sustains our essence, and develop into a stable comportment. **[217]** This process whereby the human essence is reoriented and accustomed to the region assigned to it at each point is the essence of what Plato calls παιδεία. The word does not lend itself to being translated. As Plato defines its essence, παιδεία means the περιαγωγὴ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς, guiding the whole human being in turning around his or her essence. Hence παιδεία is essentially a movement of passage, namely from ἀπαιδευσία into παιδεία. In keeping with its character as a movement of passage, παιδεία remains always related to ἀπαιδευσία. The German word *Bildung* ["education," literally "formation"] comes closest to capturing the word παιδεία, but not entirely. In this case, of course, we need to restore to *Bildung* its original power as a word, and we have to forget the misinterpretation to which it fell victim in the late nineteenth century. *Bildung* ["formation"] means two things. On the one hand formation means forming people in the sense of impressing on them a character that unfolds. But at the same time this "forming" of people "forms" (or impresses a character on) people by antecedently taking measure in terms of some paradigmatic image, which for that reason is called the proto-type [*Vor-bild*]. Thus at one and the same time "formation" means impressing a character on people and guiding people by a paradigm. The contrary of παιδεία is ἀπαιδευσία, lack of formation, where no fundamental bearing is awakened and unfolded, and where no normative proto-type is put forth.

The "allegory of the cave" concentrates its explanatory power on making us able to see and know the essence of by means of the concrete images recounted in the story. At the same time Plato seeks to avoid false interpretations; he wants to show that the essence of παιδεία does not consist in merely pouring knowledge into the unprepared soul as if it were some container held out empty and waiting. On the contrary, genuine education takes hold of our very soul and transforms it in its entirety by first of all leading us to the place of our essential being and accustoming us to it. That the "allegory of the cave" is meant to illustrate the essence of παιδεία is stated clearly enough in the very sentence with which Plato introduces the story at the beginning of Book Seven: Μετὰ ταῦτα δή, εἶπον, ἄπεικλασον τοιούτῳ πάθει τὴν ἡμετέραν φύσιν παιδείας τε πέρι καί ἀπαιδευσίας. "And after that, try to conjure up for yourself from the kind **[218]** of experience (to be presented in the following story) a view (of the essence) both of 'education' and of the lack of education, which (as belonging together) concern the very foundation of our being as humans."

Plato's assertion is clear: The "allegory of the cave" illustrates the essence of "education." By contrast, the interpretation of the "allegory" that we are now going to attempt intends to point out the Platonic "doctrine" of truth. Are we not then burdening the "allegory" with something foreign to it? The interpretation threatens to degenerate into a reinterpretation that does violence to the text. Let this appearance stand until we have confirmed our insight that Plato's thinking subjects itself to a transformation in the essence of truth that becomes the hidden law governing what the thinker says. According to our interpretation, which is rendered necessary by a future need, the "allegory" not only illustrates the essence of education but at the same time opens our eyes to a transformation in the essence of "truth." If the "allegory" can show both, must it not be the case that an essential relation holds between "education" and "truth"? This relation does, in fact, obtain. And it consists in the fact that the essence of truth and the sort of transformation it undergoes here first make possible "education" in

its basic structures.

But what is it that links "education" and "truth" together into an original and essential unity?

Παιδεία means turning around the whole human being. It means removing human beings from the region where they first encounter things and transferring and accustoming them to another realm where beings appear. This transfer is possible only by the fact that everything that has been heretofore manifest to huamn beings, as well as the way in which it has been manifest, gets transformed. Whatever has been unhidden to human beings at any given time, as well as the manner of its unhiddenness, has to be transformed. In Greek, unhiddenness is called ἀλήθεια, a word that we translate as "truth." And for a long time now in Western thinking, "truth" has meant the agreement of the representation in thought with the thing itself: *adaequatio intellectus et rei*. **[219]**

But if we are not satisfied with merely translating the words παιδεία and ἀλήθεια "literally," if instead we attempt to think through the issue according to the Greek way of knowing and to ponder the essential matter that is at stake in these translations, then straightaway "education" and "truth" come together into an essential unity. If we take seriously the essential content of what the word ἀλθειήα names, then we must ask: From what perspective does Plato approach his determination of the essence of unhiddenness? For the answer to this question we are referred to the proper content of the "allegory of the cave." The answer will show both the fact that and the way in which the "allegory" deals with the essence of truth.

The “unhidden” and its “unhiddenness” designate at each point what is present and manifest in the region where human beings happen to dwell. But the "allegory" recounts a story of passages from one dwelling place to another. Thus this story is divided in a general way into a series of four different dwelling places in specific gradations of up and down. The distinctions between the dwelling places and stages within the movement of passage are grounded in the different kinds of ἀληθές normative at each level, that is, the different kinds of "truth" that are dominant at each stage. For that reason, in one way or another we have to think out and designate what the ἀληθές, the unhidden, is at each stage.

In stage one, people live chained inside the cave, engrossed in what they immediately encounter. The description of this dwelling place ends with the emphatic sentence: παντάπασι δή ... οἱ τοιοῦτοι οὐκ ἄν ἄλλο τι νομίζοιεν τό ἀληθές ἢ τάς τῶν σκευαστῶν σκιάς (515 c1-2). "In no way, then, would those who are chained like this ever consider anything else to be the unhidden except the shadows cast by the artifacts."

Stage two tells about the removal of the chains. Although still confined to the cave, those imprisoned are now free in a certain sense. Now they can turn around in every direction. It becomes possible to see the very things that were **[220]** previously carried along behind them. Those who before looked only at shadows now come μᾶλλον τι ἐγγυτέρω τοῦ ὄντος (515 d2), "a little nearer to what is." The things themselves offer their visible form in a certain way, namely, in the glow of the man-made fire of the cave, and they are no longer hidden by the shadows they project. As long as one encounters nothing but shadows, these hold one's gaze captive and thus insinuate themselves in place of the things

themselves. But when one's gaze is freed from its captivity to shadows, it becomes possible for the person who has been freed to enter the area of what is ἀληθέστερα (515 d6), "more unhidden." And yet it must be said of him who has been freed: ἡγεισθαι τὰ τότε ὁρώμενα ἀληθέστερα ἢ τὰ νῦν δεικνύμενα (ibid.). "He will consider that (the shadows) he saw before (without any help) are more unhidden than what is now being shown (to him, by someone else in fact)."

Why is this so? The glow of the fire, to which their eyes are not accustomed, blinds those who have been liberated. This blinding hinders them from seeing the fire itself and from apprehending how its glow illuminates the things and thus lets these things appear for the first time. That is why those who have been blinded cannot comprehend that what they previously saw were merely shadows of those things, cast by the light from this very fire. Certainly those who have been liberated now see other things besides the shadows, but all these appear only in confusion. By contrast, what they see in the reflected light of the still unseen and unknown fire, namely, the shadows, appears in sharp outline. Because it can be seen without confusion, this consistency with which the shadows appear must strike those who have been freed as being "more unhidden." Therefore the word ἀληθές occurs again at the end of the description of stage two, and now in the comparative degree: ἀληθέστερα, the "more unhidden." The more proper "truth" is to be found in the shadows. So even those who have been freed from their chains still assess wrongly in what they posit as true, because they lack the prior condition for "assessing," namely, freedom. Certainly removing the chains brings a sort of **[221]** liberation, but being let loose is not yet real freedom.

Real freedom is attained only in stage three. Here someone who has been unshackled is at the same time conveyed outside the cave "into the open." There above ground all things are manifest. The looks that show what things are now no longer appear merely in the man-made and confusing glow of the fire within the cave. The things themselves stand there in the binding force and validity of their own appearance. The open into which the freed prisoner has now been placed does not mean the unboundedness of some wide-open space; rather, the open sets boundaries to things and is the binding power characteristic of the brightness radiating from the sunlight, which is also seen. The looks that show what things themselves are, the εἴδη (ideas), constitute the essence in whose light each individual being shows itself as this or that, and only in this self-showing does the appearing thing become unhidden and accessible.

The level of dwelling that has now been reached is, like the others, defined in terms of what is normatively and properly unhidden at this level. Therefore right at the beginning of his description of stage three Plato speaks of τῶν νῦν λεγομένων ἀληθῶν (516 a3), "of what is now addressed as the unhidden." This unhidden is ἀληθέστερα, even more unhidden than were the things illuminated by the man-made fire in the cave in distinction to the shadows. The unhidden that has now been reached is the most unhidden of all: τἀ ἀληθέστατα. While it is true that Plato does not use that word at this point in the text, he does mention τὸ ἀληθέστατον, the most unhidden, in the corresponding and equally important discussion at the beginning of Book VI of *The Republic*. There (484 c5 ff.) he mentions ... εἰς τὸ ἀληθέστατον ἀποβλέποντες, "those who gaze upon the most unhidden." The most unhidden shows itself in each case in the whatness of a being. Without such a self-showing of the whatness (i.e., the ideas), any and all specific things -- in fact, absolutely everything -- would remain hidden. "The most

unhidden" is so called because it is what **[222]** appears antecedently in everything that appears, and it makes whatever appears be accessible.

Already within the cave, to shift one's gaze from the shadows to the glow of the fire and to focus on the things manifest in firelight was a difficult task that proved unsuccessful; but now being freed into the open that is outside of the cave requires fully every bit of endurance and effort. Liberation does not come about by the simple removal of the chains, and it does not consist in unbridled license; rather, it first begins as the continuous effort at accustoming one's gaze to be fixed on the firm limits of things that stand fast in their visible form. Authentic liberation is the steadiness of being oriented toward that which appears in its visible form and which is the most unhidden in this appearing. Freedom exists only as the orientation that is structured in this way. But what is more, this orientation as a turning toward... alone fulfills the essence of παιδεία as a turning around. Thus the fulfillment of the essence of "education" can be achieved only in the region of, and on the basis of, the most unhidden, i.e., the ἀληθέστατον, i.e., the truest, i.e., truth in the proper sense. The essence of "education" is grounded in the essence of "truth."

But because the essence of παιδεία consists in the περιαγωγὴ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς, then insofar as it is such a turning around, it constantly remains an overcoming of ἀπαιδευσία. Παιδεία includes within itself an essential relation back to lack of education. And if, according to Plato's own interpretation, the "allegory of the cave" is supposed to clarify the essence of παιδεία, then this clarification must also make manifest precisely this essential factor, the constant overcoming of lack of education. Hence the telling of the story does not end, as is often supposed, with the description of the highest level attained in the ascent out of the cave. On the contrary, the "allegory" includes the story of the descent of the freed person back into the cave, back to those who are still in chains. The one who has been freed is supposed to lead these people too away from what is unhidden for them and to bring them face to face with the most unhidden. But the would-be liberator no longer knows his way around the cave and **[223]** risks the danger of succumbing to the overwhelming power of the kind of truth that is normative there, the danger of being overcome by the claim of the common "reality" to be the only reality. The liberator is threatened with the possibility of being put to death, a possibility that became a reality in the fate of Plato's "teacher," Socrates.

The return into the cave and the battle waged within the cave between the liberator and the prisoners who resist all liberation, of itself makes up stage four of the "allegory,"where the story comes to a conclusion. Admittedly the word ἀληθές is no longer used in this part of the story. Nonetheless this stage also has to deal with the unhidden that conditions the area of the cave that the freed person now visits once again. But was not the "unhidden" that is normative in the cave -- the shadows -- already mentioned in stage one? Yes, it was. But two factors are essential to the unhidden: not only does it in some way or other render accessible whatever appears and keep it revealed in its appearing, but it also constantly overcomes a hiddenness of the hidden. The unhidden must be torn away from a hiddenness; it must in a sense be stolen from hiddenness. Originally for the Greeks[6] hiddenness, as an

---

[6]Heidegger's note in the *Geistige Überlieferung* edition, 1942: "Heraclitus, fragment 123."

act of self-hiding, permeated the essence of being and thus also determined beings in their presentness and accessibility ("truth"); and that is why the Greek word for what the Romans call "*veritas*" and for what we call "truth" was distinguished by the alpha-privative (ἀ-λήθεια). Truth[7] originally means that which has been wrested from hiddenness.[8] Truth is thus a wresting away in each case, in the form of a revealing. The hiddenness can be of various kinds: closing off, hiding away, disguising, covering over, masking, dissembling. Since, according to Plato's "allegory," the supremely unhidden **[224]** must be wrested from a base and stubborn hiding, for this reason one's movement out of the cave into the open and into the light of day is a life-and-death struggle. Stage four of the "allegory" gives us a special glimpse of the fact that "privation"-- attaining the unhidden by wresting it away --belongs to the essence of truth. Therefore, like each of the three previous stages of the "allegory of the cave," stage four also deals with ἀλήθεια.

This "allegory" can have the structure of a cave image at all only because it is antecedently co-determined by the fundamental experience of ἀλήθεια, the unhiddenness of beings, which was something self-evident for the Greeks. For what else is the underground cave except something open in itself that remains at the same time covered by a vault and, despite the entrance, walled off and enclosed by the surrounding earth? This cave-like enclosure that is open within itself, and that which it surrounds and therefore hides, both likewise refer to an outside, the unhidden that is spread out in the light above ground. Only the essence of truth understood in the original Greek sense of ἀλήθεια -- the unhiddenness that is related to the hidden (to something dissembled and disguised) -- has an essential relation to this image of an underground cave. Wherever truth has another essence, wherever it is not unhiddenness or at least is not co-determined by unhiddenness, there an "allegory of the cave" has no basis as an illustration.

And yet, even though ἀλήθεια is properly experienced in the “allegory of the cave” and is mentioned in it at important points, nonetheless in place of unhiddenness another essence of truth pushes to the fore. However, this also implies that unhiddenness still maintains a certain priority.

The presentation of the "allegory," along with Plato's own interpretation of it, understands the underground cave and the area outside almost self-evidently as the region within which the story’s events get played out. But in all this what are essential are the movements of passage: the ascent from the realm **[225]** of the light of the man-made fire into the brightness of the sunlight as well as the descent from the source of all light back into the darkness of the cave. The illustrative power of the "allegory of the cave" does not come from the image of the closedness of the subterranean vault and imprisonment of the people within its confines, nor does it come from the sight of the open space outside the cave. For Plato, rather, the expository power behind the images of the "allegory" is concentrated on the role played by the fire, the fire’s glow and the shadows it casts, the brightness of day, the sunlight and the

---

[7]Heidegger's note in the *Geistige Überlieferung* edition, 1942: "in the sense of that which is true." [*im Sinne des Wahren*].

[8]Heidegger's note in the *Geistige Überlieferung* edition, 1942: "[from a] hiding" [*Verbergung*].

sun. Everything depends on the shining forth of whatever appears and on making its visibility possible. Certainly unhiddenness is mentioned in its various stages, but it is considered simply in terms of how it makes whatever appears be accessible in its visible form (εἶδος) and in terms of how it makes this visible form, as that which shows itself (ἰδέα), be visible. This reflection proper focuses on the visible form's appearing, which is imparted in the very brightness of its shining. The visible form provides a view of that as which any given being is present. The reflection proper aims at the ἰδέα. The "idea" is the visible form that offers a view of what is present. The ἰδέα is pure shining in the sense of the phrase "the sun shines." The "idea" does not first let something else (behind it) "shine and appear" [*"erscheinen"*]; it itself is what shines, it is concerned only with the shining of itself. The ἰδέα is that which can shine [*das Scheinsame*]. The essence of the idea consists in its ability to shine and be seen [*Schein- und Sichtsamkeit*]. This is what brings about presencing, specifically the coming to presence of what a being is in any given instance. A being becomes present in each case in its whatness. But after all, coming to presence is the essence of being. That is why for Plato the proper essence of being consists in whatness. Even later terminology shows this: *quidditas*, and not *existentia*, is true *esse*, i.e., *essentia*. What the idea, in its shining forth, brings into view and thereby lets us see is -- for the gaze focused on the idea -- the unhidden of that as which the idea appears. This unhidden is grasped antecedently and by itself as that which is apprehended in apprehending the ἰδέα, as that which is known (γιγνωσκόμενον0 in the act of knowing (γιγνώσκειν). Only in this Platonic revolution are νοεῖν **[226]** and νοῦς (apprehending) first get referred essentially to the "idea." The adoption of this orientation to the ideas henceforth determines the essence of apprehension [*Vernehmung*] and subsequently the essence of "reason" [*"Vernunft"*].

"Unhiddenness" now refers to the unhidden always as that which is accessible thanks to the idea's ability to shine. But insofar as the access is necessarily carried out through "seeing," unhiddenness is yoked into a "relation" with seeing, it becomes "relative" to seeing. Thus toward the end of Book VI of the *Republic* Plato develops the question: What makes the thing seen and the act of seeing be what they are in their relation? What spans the space between them? What yoke (ζυγόν 508 a1) holds the two together? The "allegory of the cave" was written in order to illustrate the answer, which is set forth in an image: The sun as source of light lends visibility to whatever is seen. But seeing sees what is visible only insofar as the eye is ἡλιοειδές, "sun-like" by having the power to participate in the sun's kind of essence, that is, its shining. The eye itself "emits light" and devotes itself to the shining and in this way is able to receive and apprehend whatever appears. In terms of what is at stake, the image signifies a relationship that Plato expresses as follows (VI, 508ff): τοῦτο τοίνυν τὸ τὴν ἀλήθειαν παρέχον τοῖς γιγνωσκομένοις καὶ τῷ γιγνώσκοντι τήν δίναμιν ἀποδιδὸν τὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέαν φάθι εἶναι. "Thus what provides unhiddenness to the thing known and also gives the power (of knowing) to the knower, this, I say, is the idea of the good."

The "allegory" mentions the sun as the image for the idea of the good. In what does the essence of this idea consist? As ἰδέα the good is something that shines, thus something that provides vision, thus in turn something visible and hence knowable, in fact: ἐν τῷ γνωστῷ τελευταία ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα καί μόγις ὁρᾶσδαι (517 b 8). "In the sphere of what can be known the idea of the good is the power of visibility that accomplishes all shining forth and that therefore is properly seen only last, **[227]** in fact it is hardly (only with great pains) really seen at all."

We translate τὸ ἀγαθόν[9] with the apparently understandable term "the good." Most often we think of it as the "moral good," which is so called because it conforms to the moral law. This interpretation falls outside Greek thought, even though Plato's interpretation of the ἀγαθόν as idea offers the occasion for thinking of "the good" "morally" and ultimately for reckoning it to be a "value." The notion of value that came into fashion in the nineteenth century in the wake of the modern conception of "truth" is the last and at the same time the weakest offspring of ἀγαθόν. Insofar as "value" and interpretation in terms of "values" are what sustains Nietzsche's metaphysics -- in the absolute form of a "revaluation of all values" -- and since for him all knowledge takes its departure from the metaphysical origin of "value," to that extent Nietzsche is the most unrestrained Platonist in the history of Western metaphysics. However, insofar as he understands value as the condition of the possibility of "life," a condition posited by "life itself," Nietzsche has held fast to the essence of ἀγαθόν with much less prejudice than those who go chasing after the absurdity of "intrinsically valid values."

Moreover if we follow modern philosophy and think the essence of the "idea" as *perceptio* ("subjective representation"), then we find in the "idea of the good" a "value" present somewhere in itself, of which in addition we have an "idea." This "idea" must naturally be the highest because what matters is that everything run its course in the "good" (in the well-being of prosperity or in the orderliness of an order). Within this modern way of thinking there is absolutely nothing more to grasp of the original essence of Plato's ἰδέα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ.

In Greek thought τὸ ἀγαθόν means that which is capable of something and enables another to be capable of something. Every ἰδέα, the visible form of **[228]** something, provides a look at what a being is in each case. Thus in Greek thinking the "ideas" enable something to appear in its whatness and thus be present in its stability. The ideas are what is in everything that is. Therefore, what makes every idea be capable as an idea -- in Plato's expression: the idea of all ideas -- consists in making possible the appearing, in all its visibility, of everything present. The essence of every idea certainly consists in making possible and enabling the shining that allows a view of the visible form. Therefore the idea of ideas is that-which-enables as such, τὸ ἀγαθόν. It brings about the shining of everything that can shine, and accordingly is itself that which properly appears by shining, that which is most able to shine in its shining. For this reason Plato calls the ἀγαθόν also τοῦ ὄντος φανότατον (518 c9), "that which most shines (the most able to shine) of beings."

The expression "the idea of the good" -- which is all too misleading for modern thinking -- is the name for that distinctive idea which, as the idea of ideas, is what enables everything else. This idea, which alone can be called "the good," remains ἰδέα τελευταία, because in it the essence of the idea comes to its fulfillment, i.e., begins to be, so that from it there also first arises the possibility of all other ideas. The good may be called the "highest idea" in a double sense: It is the highest in the hierarchy of making possible; and seeing it is a very arduous task of looking straight upward. Despite the difficulty of

---

[9]Heidegger's note from the 1947 edition: "The ἀγαθόν is certainly an ἰδέα, but no longer present-unto, and therefore hardly visible." [ἀγαθόν *zwar* ἰδέα, *aber nicht mehr anwesend, deshalb kaum sichtbar*].

properly grasping it, this idea which, granted the essence of idea, must be called "the good" in the Greek sense, somehow always constantly stands in view wherever any beings at all show themselves. Even where people see only the shadows, whose essence still lies hidden, there too the fire's glow must already be shining, even though people do not properly grasp this shining and experience it as coming from the fire, and even though here, above all, they are still unaware that this fire is only an offspring (ἔκγονον, VI 507 a3) of the sun. Within the cave the sun remains invisible, and yet even **[229]** the shadows live off its light. But the fire in the cave, which makes possible an apprehending of the shadows that is unaware of its own essence, is the image for the unrecognized ground of any experiencing of beings that intends them without knowing them as such. Nevertheless, by its shining the sun not only bestows brightness upon everything that appears, and, along with that brightness, visibility and thus "unhiddenness." But not just that. At the same time its shining radiates warmth and by this glowing enables everything that "comes to be" to go forth into the visibility of its stable duration (509 b).

However, once the sun itself is truly seen (ὀφθεῖσαδέ) -- or, to drop the metaphor, once the highest idea is caught sight of, then συλλογιστέα εἶναι ὡς ἄρα πᾶσι πάντων αὖτη ὀρθῶν τε καί καλῶν αἰτία (517 c), "then one may draw the conclusion -- gathered together (from the highest idea itself) -- that obviously for all people this [idea of the good] is the original source [*Ur-sache*] both of all that is right (in human comportment) and of all that is beautiful" -- that is, of that which manifests itself to comportment in such a way as to bring the shining of its visible form to appearance. The highest idea is the origin, i.e., the original source [*Ur-sache*] of all "things" [*"Sachen"*] and their thingness [*Sachheit*]. "The good" grants the appearing of the visible form in which whatever is present has its stability in what it is. Through this granting, the being is held within being and thus is "saved."

As regards all forms of prudential insight informing practical activity, it follows from the essence of the highest idea ὅτι δεῖ ταύτην ἰδεῖν τὸν μέλλοντα ἐμφρόνως πράξειν ἢ ἰδίᾳ ἢ δημοσίᾳ (517 c4/5), "that anyone who is concerned to act with prudential insight, either in personal matters or in public affairs, must have this in view (namely, the idea that, insofar as it is the enabling of the essence of idea, is called the good)." Whoever wants to act and has to act in a world determined by "the ideas" needs, before all else, a view of the ideas. And thus the very essence of παιδεία consists in making the human being free and strong for the clarity and constancy of insight into essence. Now since, according to Plato's own interpretation, the "allegory of the cave" is supposed to provide a concrete image of the essence of παιδεία, **[230]** it also must recount the ascent to the vision of the highest idea.

But is it not the case that the "allegory of the cave" deals specifically with ἀλήθεια? Absolutely not. And yet the fact remains that this "allegory" contains Plato's "doctrine" of truth, for the "allegory" is grounded in the unspoken event whereby ἰδέα gains dominance over ἀλήθεια. The "allegory" puts into images what Plato says about ἰδέα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, namely, that αὐτὴ κυρία ἀλήθειαν και νοῦν παρασχομένη (517 c4), "she herself is mistress in that she bestows unhiddenness (on what shows itself) and at the same time imparts apprehension (of what is unhidden)." Ἀλήθεια comes under the yoke of the ἰδέα. When Plato says of the ἰδέα that she is the mistress that allows unhiddenness, he points to something unsaid, namely, that henceforth the essence of truth does not, as the essence of unhiddenness, unfold from its proper and essential fullness but rather shifts to the essence of the ἰδέα. The essence of truth gives up its fundamental trait of unhiddenness.

If our comportment with beings is always and everywhere a matter of the ἰδεῖν of the ἰδέα, the seeing of the "visible form," then all our efforts must be concentrated above all on making such seeing possible. And that requires the correct vision. Already within the cave, when those who have been liberated turn away from the shadows and turn toward the things, they direct their gaze to that which, in comparison with the mere shadows, "is more in being": πρὸς μᾶλλον ὄντα τετραμμένος ὀρθότερον βλέποι (515 d3/4), "and thus turned to what is more in being, they should certainly see more correctly." The movement of passage from one place to the other consists in the process whereby the gaze becomes more correct. Everything depends on the ὀρθότης, the correctness of the gaze. Through this correctness, seeing or knowing becomes something correct so that in the end it looks directly at the highest idea and fixes itself in this "direct alignment." In so directing itself, apprehending conforms itself to what is to be seen: the "visible form" of the being. What results from this conforming of apprehension, as an ἰδεῖν, to the ἰδέα is a ὁμοίωσις, an agreement of the act of knowing with **[231]** the thing itself. Thus, the priority of ἰδέα and of ἰδεῖν over ἀλήθεια results in a transformation in the essence of truth. Truth becomes ὀρθότης, the correctness of apprehending and asserting.

With this transformation of the essence of truth there takes place at the same time a change of the locus of truth. As unhiddenness, truth is still a fundamental trait of beings themselves. But as the correctness of the "gaze," it becomes a characteristic of human comportment toward beings.

Nevertheless in a certain way Plato has to hold on to "truth" as still a characteristic of beings, because a being, as something present, has being precisely by appearing, and being brings unhiddenness with it. But at the same time, theinquiry into what is unhidden shifts in the direction of the appearing of the visible form, and consequently toward the act of seeing that is ordered to the visible form, and toward what is correct and toward the correctness of seeing. For this reason there is a necessary ambiguity in Plato's doctrine. This is precisely what attests to the heretofore unsaid but now sayable change in the essence of truth. The ambiguity is quite clearly manifested in the fact that whereas ἀλήθεια is what is named and discussed, it is ὀρθότης that is meant and that is posited as normative -- and all this in a single train of thought.

The ambiguity in the determination of the essence of truth can be seen in a single sentence taken from the section that contains Plato's own interpretation of the "allegory of the cave" (517 b7 to c5). The guiding thought is that the highest idea yokes together the act of knowing and what it knows. But this relation is understood in two ways. First of all, and therefore normatively, Plato says: ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ [the idea of the good] is πάντων ὀρθῶν τε καὶ καλῶν αἰτία, "the original source (i.e., the enabling of the essence) of everything correct as well as of everything beautiful." But then it is said that the idea of the good is κυρία ἀλήθειαν καὶ νοῦν, "the mistress who bestows unhiddenness as well as apprehension." These two assertions do not run parallel to each other, such that ἀλήθεια would correspond to the ὀρθά (what is correct) **[232]** and νοῦς (apprehending) would correspond to the καλά (what is beautiful). Rather, the correspondence works in crisscross fashion. Corresponding to the ὀρθά, what is correct and its correctness, there is correct apprehension, and corresponding to what is beautiful there is the unhidden; for the essence of the beautiful lies in being ἐκφανέστατον (cf. *Phaedrus*), that which, as most of all and most purely shining of and from itself, shows the visible form

and thus is unhidden. Both sentences speak of the primacy of the idea of the good as enabling both the correctness of knowing and the unhiddenness of the known. Here truth still is, at one and the same time, unhiddenness and correctness, although unhiddenness already stands under the yoke of the ἰδέα. The same ambiguity in the determination of the essence of truth still prevails in Aristotle as well. In the closing chapter of Book IX of the *Metaphysics* (*Metaphysics*, Θ, 10, 1051 a34 ff.) where Aristotelian thinking on the being of beings reaches its peak, unhiddenness is the all-controlling fundamental trait of beings. But Aristotle can also say οὐ γάρ ἐστι τὸ ψεῦδος καὶ τὸ ἀληθὲς ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν...ἀλλ' ἐν διανοίᾳ (*Metaphysics*, E, 4, 1027 b25 ff.). "In fact, the false and the true are not in things (themselves) . . . but in the understanding."

The intellect's judgment and assertion is now the place of truth and falsehood and of the difference between them. The assertion is called true insofar as it conforms to the state of affairs and thus is ὁμοίωσς. This determination of the essence of truth no longer contains an appeal to ἀλήθεια in the sense of unhiddenness; on the contrary ἀλήθεια, now taken as the opposite of ψεῦδος (i.e., of the false in the sense of the incorrect), is thought of as correctness. From now on this characterization of the essence of truth as the correctness of both representation and assertion becomes normative for the whole of Western thinking. As evidence of that, let it suffice to cite the guiding theses that typify how the essence of truth is characterized in the main epochs of metaphysics. **[233]**

Thomas Aquinas' thesis holds good for medieval scholasticism: *veritas proprie invenitur in intellectu humano vel divino* (*Quaestiones de veritate*, quaestio I, articulus 4, responsio): "Truth is properly encountered in the intellect, whether human or divine." The intellect is where truth has its essential locus. In this text truth is no longer ἀλήθεια but ὁμοίωσις (*adaequatio*).

At the beginning of modern times Descartes sharpens the previous thesis by saying: *veritatem proprie vel falsitatem non nisi in solo intellectu esse posse* (*Regulae ad directionem ingenii*, *Regula* VIII, *Opuscula posthuma* X, 396). "Truth or falsehood in the proper sense can be nowhere else but in the intellect alone."

And in the age when the modern era enters its fulfillment Nietzsche sharpens the previous thesis still further when he says, "*Truth is the kind of error* without which a certain kind of living being could not live. In the final analysis, the value for *life* is what is decisive." (Note from the year 1885, *The Will to Power*, number 493.) If for Nietzsche truth is a kind of error, then its essence consists in a way of thinking that always, indeed necessarily, falsifies the real, specifically insofar as every act of representing halts the continual "becoming" and, in erecting its established facts against the flow of "becoming," sets up as the supposedly real something that does not correspond -- i.e., something incorrect and thus erroneous.

Nietzsche's determination of truth as the incorrectness of thinking is in agreement with the traditional essence of truth as the correctness of assertion (λόγος). Nietzsche's concept of truth displays the last glimmer of the most extreme consequence of the change of truth from the unhiddenness of beings to the correctness of the gaze . The change itself is brought about in the determination of the being of beings (in Greek: the being present of what is present) as ἰδέα.

As a consequence of this interpretation of beings, being present is no longer what it was in the beginning of Western thinking: **[234]** the emergence of the hidden into unhiddenness, where unhiddenness itself, as revealing, constitutes the fundamental trait of being present. Plato conceives being present (οὐσια) as ἰδέα. However, ἰδέα is not subordinate to unhiddenness in the sense of serving what is unhidden by bringing it to appearance. Rather, the opposite is the case: it is the shining (the self-showing) that, within its essence and in a singular self-relatedness, may yet be called unhiddenness. The ἰδέα is not some foreground that ἀλήϑεια puts out front to present things;[10] rather, the ἰδέα is the ground that makes ἀλήϑεια possible. But even as such the ἰδέα still lays claim to something of the original but unacknowledged essence of ἀλήϑεια.

Truth is no longer, as it was qua unhiddenness, the fundamental trait of being itself. Instead, as a consequence of being yoked under the idea, truth has become correctness, and henceforth it will be a characteristic of the knowing of beings.

Ever since, there has been a striving for "truth" in the sense of the correctness of the gaze and of the correctness of its direction. Ever since, what matters in all our fundamental orientations toward beings is the achieving of a correct view of the ideas. The reflection on παιδεία and the change in the essence of ἀλήϑεια belong together and belong within the same tale of the passage from one abode to another, the tale that is recounted in the "allegory of the cave."

The difference between the two abodes, the one inside and the one outside the cave, is a difference of σοφία. In general this word means being astute about something, being skilled at something. Properly speaking σοφία means being astute about that which is present as the unhidden and which, as present, perdures.[11] Astuteness is not the equivalent of merely possessing knowledge. It means inhering within an abode that everywhere and primarily has a hold in what perdures. **[235]**

The kind of astuteness that is normative down there in the cave -- ἡ ἐκεῖ σοφία (516 c5) -- is surpassed by another σοφία. This latter strives solely and above all else to glimpse the being of beings in the "ideas." This σοφία, in contrast to the one in the cave, is distinguished by the desire to reach out beyond what is immediately present and to acquire a basis in that which, in showing itself, perdures. In itself this σοφία is a predilection for and friendship with (φιλία) the "ideas," which bestow the unhidden. Outside the cave σοφία is φιλοσοφία. The Greek language already knew this word before the time of Plato and used it in general to name the predilection for correct astuteness. Plato first appropriated the word as a name for the specific astuteness about beings that at the same time defines the being of beings as idea. Since Plato, thinking about the being of beings has become -- "philosophy," because it is a matter of gazing up at the "ideas." But the "philosophy" that begins with Plato has, from that point on, the distinguishing mark of what is later called "metaphysics." Plato himself concretely

---

[10]More literally: "...is not the presenting foreground of ἀλήϑεια" [*"Die* ἰδέα ist nicht ein darstellender Vordergrund der ἀλήϑεια . . ."]. [Translator's note.]

[11]Heidegger's note in the *Geistige Überlieferung* edition, 1942: "Cf. Heraclitus, fragment 112."

illustrates the basic outline of metaphysics in the story recounted in the "allegory of the cave." In fact the coining of the word "metaphysics" is already prefigured in Plato's presentation. In the passage (516) that depicts the adaptation of the gaze to the ideas, Plato says (516 c3): Thinking goes μετ᾽ ἐκεῖνα, "beyond" those things that are experienced merely in the form of mere shadows and images, and goes εἰς ταῦτα, "out toward" these things, namely, the "ideas." These are the suprasensuous, seen with a nonsensuous gaze; they are the being of beings, which cannot be grasped with our bodily organs. And the highest in the region of the suprasensuous is that idea which, as the idea of all ideas, remains the cause of the subsistence and the appearing of all beings. Because this "idea" is thereby the cause of everything, it is therefore also "the idea" that is called "the good." This highest and first cause is named by Plato and correspondingly by Aristotle τὸ θεῖον, the divine. Ever since being got interpreted as ἰδέα, thinking about the being of beings **[236]** has been metaphysical, and metaphysics has been theological. In this case theology means the interpretation of the "cause" of beings as God and the transferring of being onto this cause, which contains being in itself and dispenses being from out of itself, because it is the being-est of beings.

This same interpretation of being as ἰδέα, which owes its primacy to a change in the essence of ἀλήθεια, requires that viewing the ideas be accorded high distinction. Corresponding to this distinction is παιδεία, the "education" of human beings. Concern with human being and with the position of humans amidst beings entirely dominates metaphysics.

The beginning of metaphysics in the thought of Plato is at the same time the beginning of "humanism." Here the word must be thought in its essence and therefore in its broadest sense. In that regard "humanism" means the process that is implicated in the beginning, in the unfolding, and in the end of metaphysics, whereby human beings, in differing respects but always deliberately, move into a central place among beings, of course without thereby being the highest being. Here "human being" sometimes means humanity or humankind, sometimes the individual or the community, and sometimes the people [*das Volk*] or a group of peoples. What is always at stake is this: to take "human beings," who within the sphere of a fundamental, metaphysically established system of beings are defined as *animal rationale*, and to lead them, within that sphere, to the liberation of their possibilities, to the certitude of their destiny, and to the securing of their "life." This takes place as the shaping of their "moral" behavior, as the salvation of their immortal souls, as the unfolding of their creative powers, as the development of their reason, as the nourishing of their personalities, as the awaking of their civic sense, as the cultivation of their bodies, or as an appropriate combination of some or all of these "humanisms." What takes place in each instance is a metaphysically determined revolving around the human being, whether in narrower or wider orbits. With the fulfillment of metaphysics, "humanism" (or **[237]** in "Greek" terms: anthropology) also presses on to the most extreme -- and likewise unconditioned -- "positions."

Plato's thinking follows the change in the essence of truth, a change that becomes the history of metaphysics, which in Nietzsche's thinking has entered upon its unconditioned fulfillment. Thus Plato's doctrine of "truth" is not something that is past. It is historically "present," not just in the sense that his teachings have a "later effect" that historians can calculate, nor as a reawakening or imitation of antiquity, not even as the mere preservation of what has been handed down. Rather, this change in the essence of truth is present as the all-dominating fundamental reality -- long established and thus still in

place -- of the ever-advancing world history of the planet in this most modern of modern times.

Whatever happens with historical human beings comes in each case from a decision about the essence of truth that happened long ago and is never up to humans alone. Through this decision the lines are always already drawn regarding what, in the light of the established essence of truth, is sought after and established as true and likewise what is thrown away and passed over as untrue.

The story recounted in the "allegory of the cave" provides a glimpse of what is really happening in the history of Western humanity, both now and in the future: Taking the essence of truth as the correctness of the representation, one thinks of all beings according to "ideas" and evaluates all reality according to "values." That which alone and first of all is decisive is not which ideas and which values are posited, but rather the fact that the real is interpreted at all according to "ideas," that the "world" is weighed at all according to "values."

Meanwhile we have recollected the original essence of truth. Unhiddenness[12] reveals itself to this recollection as the fundamental trait of beings themselves.[13] Nonetheless, recollection of **[238]** the original essence of truth must think this essence more originally. Therefore, such recollection can never take over unhiddenness merely in Plato's sense, namely as yoked under the ἰδέα. As Plato conceives it, unhiddenness remains harnessed to a relation to looking, apprehending, thinking and asserting. To follow this relation means to relinquish the essence of unhiddenness. No attempt to ground the essence of unhiddenness in "reason," "spirit," "thinking," "*logos*," or in any kind of "subjectivity," can ever rescue the essence of unhiddenness. In all such attempts, what is to be grounded -- the essence of hiddenness itself -- is still not adequately sought out. What always gets "clarified" is merely some essential consequence of the uncomprehended essence of unhiddenness.

What is first required is an appreciation of the "positive" in the "privative" essence of ἀλήθεια. The positive must first be experienced as the fundamental trait of being itself. First of all what must break in upon us is that exigency whereby we are compelled to question not just beings in their being but first of all being itself (that is, the difference). Because this exigency stands before us, the original essence of truth still lies in its hidden origin.

End

---

[12]First edition, 1947: "' Αλήθεια is a name for *esse*, not for *veritas*." [*"Die* ἀλήθεια *ist ein Name für* esse, *nicht für* veritas.*"*] [Translator's note.]

[13]First edition, 1947: "that is, as beyng [*d.h. als das Seyn*]."