

Heidegger's Mobile Assessment of Plato's Discourse on the Good
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There is a difference in emphasis between Heidegger's discussion of the allegory of the cave in the 1931-32 lecture course, *On the Essence of Truth*, and what at first looks like a simple résumé of this course in the 1940 essay, *Plato's Doctrine of Truth*. In the former he solicits the text enthusiastically in a phenomenological direction, showing that just as Plato's notion of Form is a breakthrough of the ontological difference, a naming of Being in its difference from beings, so the idea of the Good represents a still deeper phenomenological insight. If Form confers on an entity the aptitude to appear as what it is, so the Good is the aptitude of Being itself to be manifest in unconcealment; the Good is an empowering instance that confers on Being and unconcealment their worthy place. In what he says about the Good here, Heidegger is groping toward what he will soon call the *Ereignis*. Revisiting Plato after years of intensive engagement with the anti-Platonic Nietzsche, the 1940 essay stresses how Plato's account of the Good is already half way to the metaphysical subordination of the phenomenality of Being to abstract notions of 'meaning,' 'value,' 'the Ideal.' Unconcealment is seen as subjected to the yoke of the Idea.

Heidegger's strategy of pitting a phenomenological Plato against a rationalist Plato makes for a mobile and open-ended response to the text. Even the 1940 essay does not imprison Plato within the limits of metaphysics. Each of the major Platonic notions that Heidegger takes up is seen as Janus-faced, reflecting both an original Greek encounter with the phenomena and a proto-metaphysical occlusion of them. Thus dialectic may be celebrated in one place as disclosive of the phenomena, denounced at another as a flight from them into logical abstractions. The account of the Good in terms of empowerment and aptitude (*Tauglichkeit*) is at one moment a phenomenological reduction bringing the Good down to earth (as when one speaks of a 'good' pair of skis), at another it shows up a questionable metaphysical structure. When Plato is praised for phenomenological insight, this may be immediately qualified by a warning that metaphysical abstraction is already corroding this insight from within. Conversely, what reads as a peremptory denunciation of Plato's metaphysics may turn out on a second reading to be saving a phenomenological core in the Platonic text from absorption by the metaphysics of Plato himself or his interpreters.