



[Issue Eight](#)

The Philosopher and the Sophist

A Review Article of Martin Heidegger. *Plato's Sophist*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003. ISBN 0-253-21629-X.

Jasmin Chen, Monash University

For manifestly you have long been aware of what you mean when you use this expression "being." We, however, who used to think we understood it, have now become perplexed. [\[1\]](#)
Plato, *Sophist*

The *Sophist* Lecture Course and its Influence

Despite, or more likely in view of, the manifold critiques raised both against, and in defence of, the early work of Martin Heidegger, his writing continues to be the source of both great controversy and intellectual influence. Heidegger's impact on the Western tradition is, perhaps, in no small part due to the conscious and idiosyncratic intimacy his philosophical work shares with the origins of the tradition itself, insofar as one might most immediately situate them in the writing of Plato and subsequently Aristotle. For although Heidegger's understanding of 'the Greeks' remains a source of bemusement for many classical scholars, the radicality of his interpretation, and its consequent implications, cannot be so readily dismissed.

The singularity of Heidegger's approach to philosophy, or rather thinking, was already clearly evident to those who were witness to his lectures. Reflecting on her early philosophical education as one of his former students, Hannah Arendt, in a paper delivered in 1969 to mark the occasion of Heidegger's eightieth birthday, recalled that "the rumour" that attracted students "to the young professor at Marburg, had it that there was someone who was actually attaining 'the things' that Husserl had proclaimed." As she further recalled in her contribution to his *Festschrift*,

People followed the rumour about Heidegger in order to learn thinking. What was experienced was that thinking as pure activity – and this means impelled neither by the thirst for knowledge, nor by the drive for cognition – can become a passion which not so much rules and oppresses all other capacities and gifts, as it orders them and prevails through them. [\[2\]](#)

Amongst those of Heidegger's lecture courses which have been reconstructed and published, a course that he taught on Plato's late dialogue the *Sophist* in the Winter semester of 1924- 1925 at Marburg holds particular interest in relation to the way in which the young Heidegger understood thinking as intrinsically related to the project of Being. First published in German as *Platon: Sophistes* by Vittorio Klostermann, the course has been carefully translated into English, in the form of *Plato's Sophist*, by Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer. In fact, this translation has been available since 1997, however the title's recent reprinting in paperback, already suggestive of its recognised significance amongst Heidegger's early work, affords us another opportunity to consider its value for Heideggerian scholarship, particularly with respect to his principal treatise, *Being and Time* [*Sein und Zeit*].

Given Heidegger's opening remark that the "lectures will make it their task to interpret two of Plato's late dialogues," [\[3\]](#) his memorial to Paul Natorp, [\[4\]](#) and the subsequent title the editors have chosen for this publication, one might expect *Plato's Sophist* to be indicative less of Heidegger's fundamental project of ontological *Dasein* than of his charismatic approach to teaching and his idiosyncratic apprehension of 'the Greeks.'

While the lecture course is of particular interest for its painstaking exegesis and methodical interpretation, it also has a much more fundamental importance within the wider context of Heidegger's theoretical development. For not only can one trace, throughout the course of Heidegger's lectures, the working out of his fundamental ontology but, as I wish to suggest here, an equally fundamental orientation which goes some way towards understanding Heidegger's later work, or that recognised as succeeding his famous *Kehre*, as a continuous trajectory of his earlier thought. [\[5\]](#) This orientation lies in Heidegger's radical reappropriation of the *bios theoreticos*, loosely put, the life of contemplation, or the life devoted to thinking.

One could be forgiven for anticipating that Plato is the pivotal figure within the lecture course. Yet despite the fact that

Heidegger ostensibly presents *Plato's Sophist* as a close reading of two of Plato's later dialogues, *Sophist* and *Philebus*, [6] at least the first third of the lecture course is, in fact, devoted solely to an equally close reading of Aristotle. Heidegger seemingly approaches Aristotle with a purely propaedeutic motive. Indeed, he makes it clear that his decision to move backward, from Aristotle to Plato, "follows the old principle of hermeneutics, namely that interpretation should proceed from the clear into the obscure." [7] Thus, insofar as Heidegger identifies Aristotle's thought with that moment "within Greek logic where the determination of truth reached its culmination," [8] a preliminary inquiry into the *Nichomachean Ethics* seems the clearest orientation for a correctly situated interpretation of Plato.

Yet it is this early section of the lecture course which has most immediately guaranteed the *Plato's Sophist's* relevance for Heideggerian scholarship. Indeed, it is generally accepted that Heidegger's theory resonates much more clearly with Aristotelian philosophy than with Platonic ideas, [9] which is reinforced by the striking resemblance his preparatory reading of the *Nichomachean Ethics* bears to the fundamental structure of *Being and Time*, revealing the particularity of Heidegger's indebtedness to Aristotle. In this respect, *Plato's Sophist* has been taken up in support of the growing consensus that Heidegger is ultimately most influenced by Aristotle's "practical philosophy," to the extent that commentators such as Franco Volpi and Jacques Taminiaux argue that within Heidegger's interpretation of Book Six, "what he takes to be Aristotle's ontology of *Dasein*... indicate[s] the very structure of Heidegger's own analytic... which is the first stage of his fundamental ontology." [10]

However, it remains vitally significant that Heidegger is looking towards the further horizon of Plato, not only within the parameters of the lecture course, but, I would suggest, throughout the course of his entire intellectual career. For whilst the influence of Aristotle's writing on Heidegger's theoretical development should not be underestimated, it is ultimately Plato, in the *Sophist*, to whom Heidegger ascribes a "revolution" in the conceptualisation of Being. Revealed in the figure of the sophist who "deals in deception" and, by speaking about that "which is not as he shows it to be," [11] proves the existence of that which is not, Plato's recognition of 'non-being' as a form of Being itself is "nothing else than a more radical conception of the meaning of Being itself and of the character of the 'not' enclosed therein." [12] Moreover, as Heidegger explains,

This more radical grasping and founding of research into Being entails at the same time a more fundamental interpretation of this research itself, i.e., of philosophising. Thus the path of a thematic consideration of the Being of non-beings leads back to a consideration of a new, *more proper*, existence, that of the philosopher. [13] [my emphasis]

Thus, it is in opposition to the sophist that Heidegger argues we come to understand the philosopher, and likewise it is in opposition to something like *doxa* [>*>"] or opinion, that Heidegger, like Plato, contrasts *aletheia* [•802g4"] or truth. The opposition between these two figures recalls and highlights Heidegger's understanding of the constant struggle of the disclosure of beings in their Being, which are not proximally available, but rather must be wrested from hiddenness. Indeed, the privative structure of the word itself is central in this 'Greek' conception of truth, which can both be uncovered and covered over again. For Heidegger, who talks at length on the theme of *logos* [λόγος] in *Plato's Sophist*, this characterises a quandary particular to human understanding, insofar as we are that 'Being which has speech' [ζῆ@< 8` (@< §P@<]. For it is precisely in language that the Being of beings can be both 'authentically' disclosed, and can be covered over, or become prevailing opinion insofar as one "can repeat propositions and understand them without having an original relation to the beings of which [one]... is speaking." [14] In this sense Heidegger notes that although "[*]>" is not false without further ado; it *can* be false, it can distort beings." [15]

In this sense, if *aletheia* is to be translated as "truth" for Heidegger, it is not a truth founded upon universal agreement but is instead the correspondence or relation of the proposition, or moreover of *Dasein* itself, with the object of concern. Here, one might already perceive a correlation between the figures of the philosopher and the sophist and what Heidegger first describes in *Being and Time* as 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' *Dasein*, later abandoning these terms for a distinction between the "thinkers" and those who live "according to inherited opinion." [16] For bearing in mind the still divided views concerning the importance of authenticity within Heidegger's theoretical schema, we can certainly say that at least in Heidegger's view, the philosophical work of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle was to "struggle against rhetoric and sophistry," [17] against the 'inauthenticity' of prevailing opinion.

What emerges within Heidegger's treatment of both Aristotle and Plato is a clear connection between the life of the philosopher and the disclosure of Being. Indeed, whilst strong arguments have been mounted for the central importance of Heidegger's reappropriation of Aristotle and Plato relatively independently of each other, what seems most interesting is that taken as a whole, both positions in their specific discussion of what it means to live the life of the philosopher seem to be subsequently taken up, transformed, and refused in certain aspects of Heidegger's ontology in a way that contributes to the complexity of any discussion that marks him as siding with either one or the other. In this sense, taken as a sustained rumination on the role of the philosopher him or herself, *Plato's Sophist* offers an invaluable insight into the singular way in which Heidegger reinvigorates the process of thinking itself. Whilst the lecture course is as dense and

systematic as Heidegger's written work, for the purposes of outlining the course, it will need to suffice here to pick cursorily through the analysis the points which most clearly indicate the value of the text for Heidegger's subsequent thought.

Heidegger's Interpretation of Aristotle as preparation for reading the *Sophist*

It is important to remember that Heidegger's discussion of the *Nichomachean Ethics* is principally exegetical, if not preparatory for what he is to argue in relation to *Plato's Sophist*. Indeed, to some extent we may only infer Heidegger's position from his later theorisation of *Dasein* – our interpretation “must go beyond what can be found in the text at first glance,” [18] just as Heidegger argues in relation to Aristotle's *Ethics*. However, the importance of Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* for Heidegger lies in the necessary grounding it offers in regards to his understanding of *aletheia*. In this light his decision to restrict his commentary almost exclusively to the sixth book is quite clear, for it is here that one finds Aristotle's clearest articulation of the multiplicity of the various possibilities of *aletheia*, upon which, as is well known to readers of *Being and Time*, Heidegger's own theorisation of Being hinges heavily. Indeed the importance of the sixth book of the *Nichomachean Ethics* perhaps stems ultimately from the opening line of Book Zeta in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: “being is said in many ways,” [19] which, it has often been remarked, inspired Heidegger's fundamental project and his continuing consideration of the imperative for ontological research, posed by Aristotle in this passage, as the “sole theoretical duty” [20] of the philosopher.

It is thus neither surprising that Heidegger would give such particular attention to the *Nichomachean Ethics*, which would seem to offer a more developed examination of the multiplicity of ways of saying ‘that which is,’ nor that Aristotle's writing was to have such a profound influence upon Heidegger's own project. Yet even in this most detailed exegesis of Aristotle's text, the particularity of Heidegger's reading comes immediately to bear on the way we are being asked to understand the *Nichomachean Ethics* – Aristotle's investigation is, for Heidegger, one concerned specifically with “the determination of the Being of human *Dasein* itself.” [21] Indeed we might note, along with many other commentators, the need to distinguish between Heidegger's reappropriation of Aristotelian concepts and Aristotle's own project, for not only does Heidegger engage with its central concerns but “at the same time reinterprets and transforms them to a great extent.” [22] The notorious difficulty of separating Heidegger's thought from that which he perceived to be the work of Aristotle has been eloquently described by another former student, Hans-Georg Gadamer:

We in Marburg were at that time so fascinated by Heidegger that he appeared to us an Aristotle *redivivus* who brought metaphysics on to new paths ... At that time we were all too naive and took Heidegger's concretizations of Aristotle for his philosophy. [23]

Whilst Classical scholarship has often been critical, if not confounded by Heidegger's reading of ancient Greek philosophy, it perhaps suffices to say that we are here reading neither Aristotle nor Plato, but Heidegger's Aristotle and Heidegger's Plato.

Thus one need not come to the lecture course with any particular grounding in Aristotle or Plato, unless a comparative analysis were intended. Heidegger himself begins a methodical line-by-line analysis of Book Six of the *Ethics* without explicitly assuming any previous understanding of the preceding arguments, and without further elucidating its context within Aristotle's wider program. His concern instead simply begins with those modes of knowing the truth, or of having ‘right desire,’ insofar as they elucidate Aristotle's conception of Being, at the epitome of ‘Greek’ ontology. Aristotle begins his examination of the intellectual virtues described in Book Six insofar as they contribute to his systematic inquiry into the greatest good or highest ‘end’ for human life. Importantly, the ‘good’ or *agathon* [•(“2” <], as Heidegger implies through his brief discussion of *eudaimonia*, or living well, ultimately relates not to any moral or normative good that one might hold to or hope for, but rather denotes an ontological priority concerning Being itself. Thus whilst Aristotle's effective hierarchy of the five modes of *aletheia*, or *alethein* “know-how [*techne*], science [*episteme*], circumspection (insight) [*phronesis*], understanding [*sophia*] and perceptual discernment [*nous*],” [24] could be crudely dismissed as an attempt to edify his own profession, Aristotle's argument, as Heidegger insists, does not necessarily make more than purely ontological claims, leaving the question of its practical relevance for living open to interpretation. [25]

Yet it is precisely this ontological argument that interests Heidegger and bears directly on his own development of a concept of *Dasein*. For the privilege that Aristotle ultimately awards *sophia* as the highest mode of human *aletheia* is not simply based upon the fact that it uncovers the Being of beings – for all modes of *aletheia* uncover Being to some degree – but rather upon the extent to which it uncovers and most effectively preserves the ‘highest form’ of Being. Thus Aristotle's decision would seem to rest on the particularly Greek conception of human existence as “oriented purely toward the meaning of Being itself.” [26] In this sense Heidegger argues that *eudaimonia* must be understood as equivalent to *telos*, that is, “insofar as it concerns the Being of man as its finished state, as the proper Being of man's highest ontological possibilities.” [27] Moreover, that which constitutes *eudaimonia*, cannot be in this sense a mere possibility or potentiality of Being, but “this possibility in its presence,” [28] it must be pure and abiding presence, which in its highest form is that which always is, the eternal.

For Heidegger this specifically Greek formulation privileges eternal life over all other forms of Being. That which most properly has Being, he argues, is for the Greeks, "that which dwells in the now," [29] not in any now, or any number of nows, but has constant presence as Being. Actual, rather than potential being, as Aristotle reasons in Book Theta of *The Metaphysics*, must have priority as a superior mode of Being; moreover, "actuality has priority not only over potentiality but over every principle of process," [30] insofar as it relies upon nothing but itself, nor is oriented towards anything outside itself. Interestingly, this follows the same requirements Aristotle sets out for the highest good; it must be good for its own sake, and require nothing outside itself. The greatest good must then maintain a certain 'self-sufficiency' regarding its own Being. That is to say, it must incorporate within its own Being, specifically as Being and not mere potentiality for Being, both its own origin, its *arche*, or first cause, and its *telos*, or end; and moreover it follows that they must be self-identical. In short, it must require nothing beyond itself. It is that "being that always is so, that which did not become, that which was never not and never will not be" [31] which for the Greeks characterises being in its most proper sense. Hence, Heidegger argues that Aristotle understood *Dasein* as "properly attained only if it always is what it can be in the highest sense, ie. when it tarries in the highest degree as long as possible and most nearly always in the pure pondering of what is everlasting." [32] Although human existence is a mortal one, by abiding in the eternal one comes closest to the possibility of immortality.

Sophia most effectively accomplishes this tarrying, or, one might conjecture, "dwelling," insofar as it takes up the eternal as the object of its uncovering in the manner of "pure speculation" – *sophia* does not seek to demonstrate anything but is "merely *4 JÎ gÆ*X<"4," [33] for the sake of seeing. Indeed as Heidegger argues, drawing on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, *sophia* stems from the two primary moments of "wonder"[2"L:V.g4<] and impenetrability [*4"B@DgÃ<], literally, the inability to get through. [34] Aristotle explains wonder as an original phenomenon of *Dasein* – our amazement "when something cannot be made intelligible by means of what is most known and at one's disposal" [35] – which leads to the determined search or interrogation of that which is obscured, which Heidegger asserts demonstrates "the extent to which *Dasein* in itself aims at an uncovering of Beings simply for the sake of uncovering." [36] This attitude or disposition of *Dasein* towards uncovering is thus born out in its highest form as the work of the philosopher, who pursues understanding in the face of obscurity and ignorance by 'presentifying' the determinate matter at issue" [37] to himself as a pure 'onlooking.'

In this respect, Heidegger argues that the Greek privilege given to eternal Being is that which necessitates the priority given to *sophia*, as "that consideration by which the Greek philosopher, who lives in the \$@H 2gTD0J46`H [*bios theoretikos*], immortalises himself or reaches gÛ*"4:@<" [*eudaimonia*]." [38] Yet it is at this point that Heidegger importantly asks how *sophia* can be the highest possibility of *eudaimonia*, "since it does not have to do with human *Dasein*?" [39] Within the course of Heidegger's analysis, it has become quite clear that *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, rather than *sophia*, speculative wisdom, is the mode of uncovering proper to human *Dasein*, a point which has been taken up by many commentators seeking to reinvigorate Heidegger as ascribing to Aristotle's "practical philosophy." One may in fact already hear intimations towards Heidegger's later theorisation of 'authentic' *Dasein* in his wonder at the fact that Aristotle will argue that *sophia* has priority over *phronesis* as the highest mode of Being, since "the theme of *sophia* is beings which always are, whereas *phronesis* aims at and makes transparent precisely the ... Being of human *Dasein*," [40] that is, a being which is both finite and inconstant.

Yet if Heidegger draws influence from *phronesis*, which he tellingly translates as circumspection [*Umsicht*], [41] it is not without a radical transformation of Aristotle's own philosophy. Indeed ultimately I would argue that although Heidegger shares strong methodological affinities with Aristotle's practical philosophy, he would seem to maintain *sophia*, or wisdom, as the highest mode of disclosure for human beings, [42] albeit reconfigured to take up the finite time of human Being-there, rather than the eternal time the Greeks had held up as paramount. For Heidegger, the ontological question remains paramount for the philosopher and indeed, to the extent that it is only by constantly thinking Being that one can live authentically, for authentic *Dasein* itself.

Both the difficulty and fascination of this preparatory analysis here becomes most obvious, for without appealing to Heidegger's own ontology and assuming that its conclusions already shape his lecture course, *Plato's Sophist* itself remains opaque as to what affirmations of the text were Heidegger's own. Thus one struggles to find either the support or confirmation of any positive statements which might be discerned within Heidegger's own analysis. Nor is one aided, with respect to this current translation, by any accompanying translator's notes in reference to the original German, which has been taken up as evidence of direct correlations between Aristotelian concepts and Heideggerian formulations. It is precisely the question of Aristotle's influence that has brought *Plato's Sophist* most immediately to attention. However, the debate that surrounds it is often waged around either the figure of Aristotle, or of Plato. I would like to suggest that taken as a whole the structure of the lecture course itself would seem to suggest that Heidegger's affinities lay neither with one more so than the other, but ultimately with the abstract figure of "the philosopher" itself, and thus with *sophia* and the *bios theoreticos*.

Plato and the *Sophist*

Despite the fact that Heidegger's preliminary interpretation of Aristotle's *Ethics* in fact involves a general survey of both "the structures and presuppositions of the entire Aristotelian philosophy," [43] including relevant digressions into detailed analyses of specific sections of the *Metaphysics*, *Topics* and *Physics*, he makes it very clear that his reading of Aristotle "will be conducted only far enough for us to learn... the general orientation of the *Sophist*." [44] Indeed, although Heidegger admits that his reading of the *Nichomachean Ethics* has elucidated the mode of access to beings in their Being, he now turns to the *Sophist* to consider the "corresponding thematic field: namely, the very research into Being." [45] This is precisely the intention of Heidegger's inquiry into Plato's *Sophist*, in which the Being of non-beings is made clear, and consequently the meaning of Being is itself clarified further, implying "a more original appropriation of the theme of philosophical research." [46]

I would thus suggest that it is ultimately the philosopher, in his or her singular relationship to Being, rather than the sophist who most interests Heidegger. Indeed, contrary to his contemporaries, who maintain that the *Sophist* was to form part of an unfinished trilogy which would treat sophistry, statesmanship and philosophy individually, Heidegger insists that through the figure of the sophist, as Heidegger argues, Plato offers us an implicit definition of what it is to be a philosopher. This is carried out, not through any positive determination, but rather through the process of genuine philosophising itself, and importantly, Heidegger suggests in this way that both the thematic field of Being, and the discussion of the sophist is intimately connected to the structure and method in which Plato carries out his dialogue; namely, through dialectic.

The radicality of Plato's discovery, or rather, slow realisation about the nature of non-Being is carried out in language. Indeed, for Heidegger, the figure of sophist and philosopher perfectly embody the two possibilities of speech [8` (@H] in their most extreme manifestations – speech is both that which can uncover beings in their Being, and that which can cover over and moreover deceive. However, what Heidegger finds so important is the fact that these two possibilities of speech mirror the nature of Being itself, which Plato discovers in his recognition that every 'not' in speech still uncovers something about the nature of Being, even if it be simply that it is something else. As Heidegger clarifies,

Every "not," in every saying of "not," whether explicitly expressed or implicit, has, as a speaking about something, the character of exhibition. Even the empty "not," the mere exclusion of something over and against something arbitrary, shows, but it simply shows that on which the negation is founded, thus what, in saying "not," is delimited against the nothing... Plato's advance in the determination and clarification of beings corresponds to a new possibility of a radical conception of 8` (@H, as in fact occurred for the first time in the *Sophist*. [47]

In this respect the role of the philosopher, as the "anti-sophist," speech and Being are intimately tied together in the dialogue through Plato's dialectical method. What the basic dialectical consideration has gained, through this more radical apprehension of the nature of Being, is the possibility of philosophising. Thus Heidegger writes:

[Plato] does not show this [what the philosopher is] by setting up an empty program, i.e., by saying what one would have to do to be a philosopher, but he shows it by actually philosophising. For one can say concretely what the sophist is as the authentic non-philosopher only by actually *living in philosophy*. [48]
[my emphasis]

The *Sophist* course thus calls its listeners, and now its readers, to a way of thinking, both through the example of Plato, and more significantly, through the example of the lecture course itself which likewise seeks to properly philosophise rather than to take up superficially the themes of philosophy. Yet in this respect Heidegger's entreaty is clearly already a call to think Being. Indeed, this is implicit within the dialogue itself, for the Stranger and Theaetetus both agree that in seeking a definition of the sophist they are attempting to reach agreement about the nature of the being to which the name refers, rather than merely what the word means. For what distinguishes sophistry, or feigned philosophy from 'true' philosophy is in final analysis the appropriate orientation towards the Being of beings, and only one who has "attained a mode of existence guaranteeing him the possibility of such a look," [49] that is, such a vantage to discern the fraud from the true philosopher, can consequently make the sophist visible in his existence.

One might thus sense that Heidegger will uphold *sophia* as the highest form of Being available to human *Dasein*, to the extent that it takes up properly the theme of Being, even if he will do so only insofar as *sophia* is to be reconceived as the thinking of Being within the framework of human mortality. In this respect, although what is at issue for Heidegger, namely, the most effective means by which human *Dasein* might disclose the Being of beings, is grounded in a temporal distinction which is pivotal to Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle, a second, closely related dichotomy emerges – that between the philosopher, who alone "is purely given over to beings insofar as they are purely sighted," [50] that is, as disclosed, in their very being, as Being, and other ways of Being. For, as readers of Heidegger know, ontology remains paramount for Heidegger as the project of existence itself. This connection, which is not apparent in his reading of

Aristotle, comes through in the dialectical definition of the philosopher, in the intrinsic connection Heidegger draws between Being and a way of Being. For equally essential to Heidegger's interpretation is the realisation that the disclosure of Being is not inherent in beings themselves, but intimately connected to the *being which discloses*. The uncovering of Being is a way of Being itself, and this is most properly the life of philosophy, or later, thinking.

One might quickly realise that Heidegger's interpretation of Plato is thus, as much as that of Aristotle, intimately tied to the development of his own ontology. Indeed, as Rojcewicz notes in his foreword, *Being and Time* opens with a line from the *Sophist* which, as Heidegger himself later emphasised, served greater purpose than "mere decoration." [51] Thus, as Rojcewicz observes, supported by the temporal proximity of the lecture course and the writing of *Being and Time*, first published in 1927, [52] one can clearly trace a deep connection between the two, to the extent that one could comprehend *Being and Time* "as a single protracted meditation revolving around this one sentence from Plato." [53] Moreover the theme of the "nothing" is taken up subsequent to *Being and Time* in both his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, and his *Letter on Humanism*, amongst others, suggesting an increasingly recognised unity in Heidegger's thought. Of course, this is not to suggest that Heidegger is in any sense a platonist. As Catherine H. Zuckert argues, although one might certainly aver that Heidegger's interpretation of Plato is central to his own thought, it is "emphatically nontraditional" [54] in its understanding and approach.

Most striking about this "nontraditional" exegesis, is that Heidegger ostensibly rejects dialectic, viewing it as only ever laying the ground for the purer form of "seeing" he finds in Aristotle. Indeed as he states, "dialectic is not something like a higher level of what is known as thinking... but, quite to the contrary, the only meaning and only intention of dialectic is to prepare and develop a genuine original intuition, passing through what is merely said." [55] Just as commentators such as Taminioux, in comparing Aristotle and Heidegger, have charged his reading with a "Platonic bias," [56] Francisco Gonzalez, in his discussion of Heidegger and Plato has claimed that an Aristotelian horizon dominates Heidegger's interpretation. [57] I would suggest that ultimately, what Heidegger draws from both is the privilege of the philosopher. Rejecting Platonic dialectic, which involves the give-and-take of interlocutors, and seemingly transforming Aristotelian *phronesis* from a mere branch of philosophy into an entire project of existence, [58] both philosophies are rendered somewhat unrecognisable.

In this respect, *Plato's Sophist* serves as more, and less, than an elucidation of either Aristotle or Plato. For it is Heidegger's voice that impresses itself most strongly upon his audience, reminding one again that his interpretations always extend "beyond what can be found in the text at first glance." [59] It is a sentiment to which the particularity of the lecture course attests, insofar as it seeks not only to understand the original meaning of these ancient ideas, but "to penetrate through to [the] foundational context of phenomena ... not explicitly investigated... but still operative." [60] Heidegger thus perceives himself to be undertaking something much more radical than either Aristotle or Plato, and, depending upon one's position, one may well agree. Nevertheless, the themes investigated within the *Sophist* lectures mark the essential bearings from which the entire course of Heidegger's intellectual career proceeds. As the growing commentary surrounding this publication indicates, if we, as readers, follow Heidegger's advice to go beyond first glance, then by interpreting this early text we may come closer to understanding Heidegger's motivations and presuppositions, as he implies of Plato's philosophy, better than himself.

In order to view the ancient Greek in this article, you may have to install in your computer the WP Century font. This font is available from [Corel](#) , or, you can simply download it by clicking [here](#).

[1] This citation constitutes the very first lines of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 1.

[2] Hannah Arendt, "Martin Heidegger at Eighty," in Michael Murray (ed.), *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy: Critical Essays* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 297.

[3] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 5.

[4] See Ted Sadler, *Heidegger and Aristotle: The Question of Being* (London: Athlone, 1996), pp. 32-3.

[5] For other arguments suggesting a unity of Heidegger's thought see David Farrell Krell, "Nietzsche in Heidegger's 'Kehre'," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 13 (1975), pp. 197-204, and Frederick A. Olafson, "The Unity of Heidegger's Thought", in Charles B. Guignon (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 97-122.

[6] The lecture course does not, in fact, include an interpretation of the *Philebus* as Heidegger initially proposes here.

[7] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 8.

[8] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 10.

[9] This is of course, the subject of much debate. For comparison, see Sadler, *Heidegger and Aristotle*, and Catherine H. Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 33-69.

[10] Jacques Taminiaux, "Nothingness and the Professional Thinker: Arendt versus Heidegger," in Reginald Lilly (ed.), *The Ancients and the Moderns* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 200. See also Taminiaux, *The Thracian Maid and the Professional Thinker: Arendt and Heidegger*, trans. and ed. Michel Gendre (Albany: SUNY, 1997), and Franco Volpi, "Being and Time: A Translation of the Nichomachean Ethics," in Theodore Kisiel and John van Buren (eds.), *Reading Heidegger From the Start* (Albany: SUNY, 1994), p. 200.

[11] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 132.

[12] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 133.

[13] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 133.

[14] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 18.

[15] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 15.

[16] See Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos*, p. 48.

[17] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 11.

[18] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 52.

[19] See Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) and Theodore Kisiel and John van Buren (eds.), *Reading Heidegger from the Start: Essays in his Earliest Thought* (Albany: SUNY, 1984).

[20] Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 169 [1028b].

[21] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 16.

[22] Volpi, "Being and Time: A Translation," in Kisiel and van Buren, *Reading Heidegger*, p. 200.

[23] Gadamer, "Erinnerungen an Heideggers Anfänge," quoted in Sadler, *Heidegger and Aristotle*, p. 13.

[24] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 15.

[25] See Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 116, where he writes, "Aristotle is saying, first of all, that the question about which of the two modes is more decisive is inappropriate as long as we do not consider these modes of Being precisely as modes of Being."

[26] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 122.

[27] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 118.

[28] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 118.

[29] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 23.

[30] Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, Book Theta, p. 277.

[31] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 23.

[32] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 23.

[33] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 89.

[34] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 87.

[35] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, pp. 86-87.

[36] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 88.

[37] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 88.

[38] Taminiaux, "Nothingness", p. 202.

[39] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 115.

[40] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 43.

[41] *Umsicht* becomes an important term in *Being and Time*. See Sadler, *Heidegger and Aristotle*, p. 149.

[42] This is a position shared both by Sadler in *Heidegger and Aristotle*, pp. 141-58, and Taminiaux in *The Thracian Maid*, pp. 34-55.

[43] Sadler, *Heidegger and Aristotle*, p. 145.

[44] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 129.

[45] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 134.

[46] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 133.

[47] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 396.

[48] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, pp. 8-9.

[49] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 168.

[50] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 367.

[51] See Rojcewicz, "Translator's Foreword", in Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. xxv.

[52] Rojcewicz reminds readers that *Being and Time* was substantially complete a year before publication. Thus, he argues, the development of the themes of the lecture course and the writing of *Being and Time* were relatively contemporaneous.

[53] Rojcewicz, "Translator's Foreword," p. xxv.

[54] Catherine H. Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 1.

[55] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 137.

[56] Taminiaux, *The Thracian Maid*, p. 46.

[57] Francisco Gonzalez, "Dialectic as 'Philosophical Embarrassment': Heidegger's Critique of Plato's Method," *Journal of History of Philosophy*, 40.3 (2002), pp. 361-89.

[58] Sadler, *Heidegger and Aristotle*, p. 149.

[59] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 53.

[60] Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, p. 406.

Copyright © Monash University 2003. All rights reserved.

[about](#) | [current issue](#) | [archives](#) | [acknowledgements](#) | [submissions](#) | [contact us](#) | [links](#)

This page has been approved by the [Colloquy Editors](#).
Last Date Modified : 04 May 2005 - [Caution](#) - [Monash Home](#)