Thinking in the Between with Heidegger and Plato

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Abstract
In this essay, I attempt first to clarify what non-metaphysical thinking as a thinking “in the Between” might mean for Heidegger, as presented in his Beiträge zur Philosophie. After determining this as the proper response to the self-concealment Heidegger sees as grounding the appearing of beings, I then attempt to show that the elenctic method of Socrates in Plato’s early dialogues exhibits something like the same dynamic. That is, Socrates attempts to situate himself and his interlocutors in a space defined both by the always prior appearance of ‘what virtue is’ to human beings and by the inevitable obscurity or withdrawal in that very appearing. In so doing, I hope to indicate that something as simple and familiar as Socratic elenctic conversation, although a relic of our tradition, might if properly understood provide us today with one model for how thinking could proceed after Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics.

Keywords
Heidegger, Plato, Socrates, phenomenology, aporia

You’ve got to accentuate the positive,
Eliminate the negative,
And latch on to the affirmative,
Don’t mess with Mister In-Between
Johnny Mercer, “Accentuate the Positive”

The In-Between has all the power always…
Aeschylus, Eumenides

Introduction
For the later Heidegger, it is Plato’s “theory of Ideas” that marks the definitive and fateful onset of metaphysical thinking. As Heidegger writes in a late

1) This paper was first presented in July of 2004 at the Heidegger Aussprache, Bergische Universität Wuppertal, Germany, organized and hosted by Peter Trawny and Eric Sean Nelson.
essay, “metaphysics is Platonism,” which, on the one hand, entails that the understanding of the meaning of Being throughout the entire history of Western thought has been implicitly directed by Plato’s definition of ‘what is’ as ἱδέα or εἶδος. On the other hand, the statement seems to say that the works of Plato already exhibit metaphysical thinking. That is, Plato is a metaphysician. It is this last claim that I would like to dispute, at least in part, in the following paper.

Surely, I would not be alone if I were to set myself the task of criticizing Heidegger’s interpretation of Plato, for there have been many scholars who have undertaken such a project. Paul Friedländer questions the etymology and transformation of ἀλήθεια or ‘truth’ as presented in Heidegger’s reading of the cave allegory. Gerhard Krüger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, both students of Heidegger, contradict various aspects of Heidegger’s reading of the dialogues in their own interpretations of Plato. Stanley Rosen criticizes Heidegger’s claim to have uncovered a τέχνη-based ontology in the turn to the Ideas. And both Robert Dostal and Adriaan Peperzak speak against Heidegger’s understanding of the Idea of the Good, specifically his approach to its status as ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας, or ‘beyond being’. And this is to name just a few of the critics of Heidegger’s Plato.

I have not chosen, however, to proceed in this essay by contesting the fine points of Heidegger’s interpretation of Plato as a metaphysical thinker. Rather, in the first part of the paper, I lay out as clearly and as briefly as possible Heidegger’s basic conception of non-metaphysical, or perhaps extra-metaphysical, thinking, as it is presented most fully in his Beiträge zur...