Gadamer's Socratic Plato

ROBERT J. DOSTAL, Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, USA

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Socrates provides the model for philosophy for Gadamer, who follows Plato and the example of Socrates with the claim that philosophy is dialectic and that dialectic is carried out through dialogue. The Socratic dialogues are exemplary in their open-endedness and their embrace of finitude. Gadamer is influenced by Heidegger's thought, yet he resists Heidegger's interpretation of Plato. The essay examines Gadamer's account of the proximity of the thought of Plato and Aristotle and Gadamer's claim that Aristotle's ethics can already be found in Plato. I argue that Gadamer does not adequately attend to the distinction of *logos* and *nous* in the thought of Plato and Aristotle.

In a late letter to Heidegger and in response to Heidegger's critical comment about his philosophical hermeneutics, Gadamer states that his life's work has always been guided by three things: 1) Heidegger's late thought, 2) an ongoing proximity to poetry, and 3) Plato (Gadamer – Heidegger 2024, 270; Letter no. 200 from 23.05.1973). We will see here how all three of these come together through Socrates, the very model of philosophy for Gadamer. The first of these, Heidegger's late thought, is both an inspiration and a problem for Gadamer. Heidegger is Gadamer's life-long mentor. Gadamer time and again states that he hopes that his work will turn the reader back to Heidegger.[1] Heidegger is very critical of Plato as the founder of Western metaphysics, something that

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[1] For example, in his late "Reflections on My Philosophical Journey" he writes, "my philosophical hermeneutics seeks precisely to adhere to the line of questioning of [Heidegger's "Origin of the Artwork"] and the later Heidegger and to make it accessible in a new way." In the same essay he writes: "My own intention…was precisely to blaze a trail to the later Heidegger" (Hahn 1997, 46 – 47).

Heidegger seeks to get beyond. Gadamer, however, resists this important aspect of Heidegger's thought and presents himself as a Platonist. Gadamer's Plato interpretation shows both the influence of Heidegger and a resistance against Heidegger. Above all, Gadamer's Plato is a Socratic Plato. Socrates enables Gadamer to bring together Plato and Heidegger and, at the same time, to reject Heidegger's sharp critique of Plato and Platonism.

I. Finitude and Language – Dialectic and Dialogue

Two themes, central to Gadamer's work, with which he brings Plato and Heidegger together, are finitude and language. These themes are closely related and connected to the figure of Socrates. The aporetic character of many of the Socratic dialogues and the Socratic ignorance by which Plato paradoxically praises Socrates in the *Apology* fit well with Heidegger's insistence on the finitude of *Dasein*: "it [*Dasein*] *exists finitely*" (Heidegger 2010, 303). Socrates' affirmation of ignorance comes in his embrace of his mortality, much like the treatment of finitude (*Endlichkeit*) in *Being and Time* as being-unto-death. The historical and situated character of *Dasein* is an important aspect of human finitude for Heidegger. Gadamer retrospectively writes that "the hermeneutics I developed was based upon finitude and the historical character of *Dasein*" ("The Heritage of Hegel," Gadamer 2007, 339; cf. Gadamer, GW 4, 477).[2] To be sure, historicity is not an aspect of Platonic thought and remains a distinguishing feature between Heidegger and Plato, and between Gadamer and Plato.

He goes on to say that "rather than follow [Heidegger] in the direction of…Hölderlin, …I returned to the open dialectic of Plato and relied upon the 'dampening down of subjectivity,'…that from early on attracted me toward Greek thought" (Gadamer 2007, 339). Gadamer, like Heidegger, finds subjectivism to be at the heart of much of modern thought.[3] His hermeneutics is meant, among other things, to overcome this subjectivism, and he finds a way via Plato and Socrates.

This concept of the "open dialectic" is central to Gadamer's reading of Plato and his understanding of philosophy. He accords this "open dialectic" to Socrates: "Philosophy is dialectic. This is expressly shown in the changing roles that Socrates plays." Gadamer explicates this flat assertion that philosophy is

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[2] In this article I use GW to refer to Gadamer's *Gesammelte Werke*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1986ff.

[3] See the account of Gadamer on subjectivism in my book *Gadamer's Hermeneutics* (Dostal 2022, Ch. I, 8 – 54).

dialectic by saying that "it is the art of leading a conversation, a conversation with the other or also the conversation of the soul with itself. The conversation is led by the question of the true and the good."[4] The Platonic and Socratic dialectic is both open and dialogical.

By "openness" he means that it is aware of its limitations. He contrasts the Socratic open dialectic to Hegel's dialectic which culminates in absolute knowledge (*absolutes Wissen*). In an unpublished lecture Gadamer makes the claim that dialectic is to be retrieved by hermeneutics. Heidegger cites this approvingly in a letter. He approves because he had always resisted dialectic. He calls any philosophical appeal to dialectic a sign of confusion and embarrassment, and, in this letter, he approves of the claim because "thereby is productively opened up for the first time a way towards getting over (*Verwindung*) dialectic" (Gadamer – Heidegger 2024, 260; Letter no. 193).[5] With this claim that dialectic is to be retrieved in hermeneutics Gadamer, however, does not mean to be done with dialectic. To "retrieve" (*zurücknehmen*) dialectic is to bring it back and sustain it. Gadamer here points to the superiority of the Platonic dialogue to Hegelian dialectic and to claim the example of Socrates for his own work.

The second theme for which we find Gadamer finding support in Plato and the model of Socrates is language. Socrates' telling of his development in the *Phaedo* is of central importance for Gadamer. He reports that he had been a follower of Anaxagoras and the cosmologists but comes to see their failures and embarks on a "second sailing" (99d) – a voyage that constitutes the proper Socratic way of life. It is a life of question and answer, a life of following the *logos* wherever it takes one, as he describes his life in the *Crito* (46b).

As noted above, Gadamer presents his work as leading to the work of the later Heidegger which is characterized by its turn to language: "*Die Sprache spricht*" ("Language speaks"). Gadamer's major work, *Truth and Method*, culminates with the proposition that "*Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache*" ("Being that can be understood is language" – Gadamer 1999b, 474; GW 1, 478). This proposition, central to Gadamer's hermeneutics, has sometimes been taken to indicate that Gadamer is a linguistic idealist—Being is language. This

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[4] Gadamer, "Socrates' Frömmigkeit des Nichtwissens" (GW 7, 107). Gadamer presented an abbreviated version of this paper in Boston in 1985. The published version of this presentation in English does not contain what is cited here: cf. Cleary (1986, 53 – 75).

[5] Gadamer discusses this letter in his essay "On the Heritage of Hegel" (Gadamer 2007, 456 – 457; GW 4, 479 – 480).

reading is mistaken inasmuch as it ignores the qualifying phrase "that can be understood." Gadamer is not claiming that Being is linguistic. He is rather claiming that all understanding is linguistic. In the essay "The Nature of Things [*Sache*] and the Language of Things [*Dinge*]" (1976a, 76; GW 2, 72) Gadamer writes:

> I believe we must ask if in the end language does not have to be called the "language of things" – the language of things in which the primordial correspondence of soul and being is so exhibited that finite consciousness too can know of it.

In this essay Gadamer goes on to say that "in the end the true being of things becomes accessible precisely in their linguistic appearance" (Gadamer 1976a, 77; GW 2, 73). Gadamer likes the expression "the language of things" because it indicates "the self-presentation of beings themselves" (Gadamer 1976a, 77; GW 2, 73). This is not idealism.

Here Gadamer once again makes reference to Socrates' second sailing in the *Phaedo*. We are to follow the *logos* where it takes us. And we do this by way of conversation—with others or with oneself. We come to an understanding of whatever is under discussion by engaging in a dialogue with its questions and answers. Gadamer calls this the "labor of the dialectic": "this labor of the dialectic, in which the truth of what is finally flashes upon us, is by nature unending and infinite." He identifies this labor with the life of philosophy and the life of Socrates: "As dialectic, philosophy never ceases to be tied to its origin in Socratic discussion" ("Dialectic and Sophism in Plato's Seventh Letter," Gadamer 1980, 121, 123; GW 6, 114 – 115). Socrates is the model philosopher for Gadamer, and it is Plato who has shown us the model.[6]

Gadamer's frequent emphasis on the Socratic model for philosophy with its inconclusiveness, its open-endedness, has led to an interpretation of Gadamer's approach to Plato as the "resocratization of Plato" (cf. Renaud 1999). There is a basis for such a characterization of Gadamer's Plato interpretation, yet we should recognize the one-sidedness of this characterization. Gadamer criticizes his own early work on Plato as insufficiently attentive to Plato's doctrines:

> Thus it came to pass that more and more, philosophers, in taking note of the dialogical character of Plato's work and of the inherent inconclusiveness and

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[6] In his "Reply to Davidson" in the Library of Living Philosophers book dedicated to Gadamer, Gadamer writes: "the point is that what both of us mean by philosophy is what we find in Plato" (in Hahn 1997, 433).

> open-endedness of dialogue, turned against establishing any doctrine of Plato's. This tendency went to an extreme, and on that count my own Plato book at the end of the 1920's must also be faulted. Using the tools of phenomenology, it attempted to tie Plato's dialectic to Socratic dialogue, but in so doing the basic theme of Plato's doctrine was pushed too much in the background. ("Plato's Unwritten Dialectic," Gadamer 1980, 125; GW 6, 130)

As this citation suggests, there is a development over the years in Gadamer's reading and presentation of Plato. Gadamer had spent his life studying Plato. He wrote his dissertation and habilitation on Plato. Many of his first publications were on Plato. His last published book again dealt with Plato. Three volumes of his collected works are dedicated to Greek philosophy, most of which concerns Plato. As Francisco Gonzalez (2022) has shown, prior to the publication of *Truth and Method* Gadamer emphasized the pedagogical function of the dialogues and the use of irony. He resisted finding doctrines such as a theory of the forms in Plato. In *Truth and Method* we find a sharp critique of Plato with regard to language. After this we find Gadamer commenting on a number of Platonic dialogues in a very positive way. In his late and mature work he develops his argument concerning the proximity of Plato and Aristotle, and he provides an account of what he takes to be Plato's unwritten doctrine of the indeterminate dyad. He never returns to his critique of Plato's treatment of language. We cannot detail this development here, but we can briefly attend to his mature treatment of Plato, especially his account of the unwritten doctrine, Plato's proximity to Aristotle, and the significance of the beautiful for Plato and for Gadamer.[7]

The unwritten doctrine is the doctrine of the One and the indeterminate Two. With this doctrine Gadamer finds an ontological basis for the open-endedness of the dialectic. What is, is both one and many. Gadamer concludes his account of this doctrine as follows: "Perhaps in the final analysis the indeterminacy of the Two is meant precisely to imply that for us there exists no clear, unambiguous structure of Being" ("Dialectic and Sophism in Plato's Seventh Letter," Gadamer 1980, 110; GW 6, 105). This ambiguity in Being itself is the basis for a productive ambiguity which is to be pursued dialectically. There is an oral tradition that points to this doctrine, but the primary source for the attribution of this doctrine to Plato is Aristotle. We find Gadamer taking what may appear at first glance the odd position of both rejecting Aristotle's critique of Plato and finding the key to Plato's doctrine in Aristotle.

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[7] For an excellent succinct account of this development, see Gonzalez (2022, 191 – 206).

II. Plato's Proximity to Aristotle

A common reading of Plato considers him to have developed a theory of ideas that requires there to be two worlds—the world of ideas (the really real) and the world of appearances. There is a split (*chorismos*) between these two worlds. Aristotle is the first proponent of such a reading. He makes much of this theory's inability to make sense of the relation of the ideas to our experience of things (appearances). Though this criticism does not play a large role in Heidegger's critique of Plato as he presents it in "Plato's Doctrine of Truth," he expressly adopts this criticism in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*:

> It was in the Sophists and in Plato that appearance was declared to be mere appearance and thus degraded. At the same time, being, as idea, was exalted to a suprasensory realm. A chasm, *chorismos*, was created between the merely apparent essent here below and real being somewhere on high. (Heidegger 1961, 89; Heidegger 1983, 113)

Gadamer rejects this interpretation of Plato by Aristotle and Heidegger. He argues that it is an invention of Aristotle who takes Plato's mythical and metaphorical writing about the ideas literally so that he can critique it.[8] Gadamer claims that Aristotle's critique of a two-world theory of ideas invented Platonism, the Platonism of the tradition which typically contrasts the idealist Plato with the realist Aristotle. According to Gadamer, Plato was not a Platonist.

Not only does Gadamer reject Aristotle's two-world Plato interpretation, he also argues that the Aristotelian ethic can be found already developed by Plato in his late dialogues – especially the *Statesman* and the *Philebus*. Gadamer points to Socrates' claim in the *Philebus* that the good life is a "mixed" life (27d, 61b). The mixture should be appropriately measured and proportioned. This measuring according to due proportion should also be timely. We find here the concept of the right occasion or the right time – *kairos* (66a). This rightly proportioned mixture is one of moderation and harmony (26a). In the *Statesman*, the Eleatic Stranger discusses the concept of measurement and directly relates this concept to the concept of the "mean," or what is "fitting" (*to metrion*; 283c–4d). Gadamer asserts that the account of the good life based on the concepts of measure, proportion, the fitting, and the mean does more than merely anticipate Aristotle's ethics: "Here one finds precisely the fundamental concepts of Aristotle's ethics" (Gadamer 1986, 123; GW 7, 197).

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[8] "Aristotle has a way of taking statements not as they were intended, but literally, and then demonstrating their one-sidedness" (Gadamer 1986, 60; GW 7, 161).

Gadamer, however, does not simply identify the Platonic ethic with the Aristotelian. What Aristotle adds to Plato's treatment of the good life is connecting these concepts to an ethos. Gadamer claims that Aristotle "became the founder of philosophical ethics by correcting the 'intellectualism' of Socrates and Plato without sacrificing their essential insights." He finds Aristotle superior in this regard, and he says that "we orient ourselves…with Aristotle" ("On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics," Gadamer 1999a, 28; GW 4, 182 – 183).

At the core of these "essential insights" into the ethos of the good life is the virtue of *phronesis* (practical judgment). Commenting on his life's work late in life, Gadamer makes the simple claim that "my whole philosophy is nothing but *phronesis*."[9] Gadamer calls his hermeneutics "practical" in the classical Greek sense of "practical."[10] His practical hermeneutics is a phronetic hermeneutics. Phronetic hermeneutics provides us with an ethics which is not a matter of following rules but making judgments that are "fitting." Gadamer was first made to see the significance of *phronesis*, especially in contrast to *techne* as these are distinguished in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* by Heidegger in his Marburg *Sophist* lectures of 1924. However much Gadamer is indebted to Heidegger for these lectures on Plato, he tells us that *phronesis* was never a concept of much importance for Heidegger.[11]

Gadamer's reading of the importance of *phronesis* for Plato and Aristotle differs importantly from Heidegger. Gadamer argues that *phronesis* "is really a Platonic concept" (Gadamer 2003, 22; Gadamer 2000, 25). The Aristotelian distinction between *phronesis* and *techne,* which is so important and fundamental for Gadamer, he finds already in Plato:

> Our preliminary review…has shown us that Plato himself saw that knowledge of the good cannot be understood using *techne* as a model….If one brings Aristotle's illuminating analyses of the modes of knowing…to

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[9] Gadamer (2003, 54); Gadamer (2000, 58). Gadamer writes similarly elsewhere that *phronesis* is the basic hermeneutical virtue ("*die hermeneutische Grundtugend*") and that it served as a model that shaped his own development of thought (*Gedankenbildung*) (GW 2, 328).

[10] See, for example, the essay "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy" in Gadamer (1981). Gadamer did not include this essay in his *Gesammelte Werke;* it can be found in Gadamer (1976b).

[11] In the interview with Dottori Gadamer tells us that "I even became initially aware of *phronesis*, the reasonableness of practical knowing through Heidegger (Gadamer 2003, 21). But in the same interview he also tells us that "I could actually have established quite clearly that Heidegger wasn't really interested in practical knowledge or *phronesis* at all" (Gadamer 2003, 20); for the German original, cf. Gadamer (2000, 23 – 24).

bear on this insight, and in particular his differentiation between technical and practical knowledge, the end result is not even surprising: we see how close the knowledge of the good sought by Socrates is to Aristotle's *phronesis*. (Gadamer 1986, 33; GW 7, 146)

In his criticism of Platonic metaphysics with its forgetfulness of Being, Heidegger identifies Plato and Aristotle as thinking of Being as "made" or "produced." The demiurge of the *Timaeus* makes the world. Aristotle's treatment of the four causes, according to Heidegger, suggests that everything has a cause. Heidegger argues that the treatment of causation by Aristotle makes everything an instance of making, of being produced. Metaphysics on this account is onto-theological: "Nietzsche was right in saying that Christianity is Platonism for the people" (Heidegger 1961, 90; Heidegger 1983, 113). Hence the prominence of technical thinking in our modern world. Gadamer is also quite critical of the dominance of technical thinking and the instrumentalization of reason in our modern world, but he rejects Heidegger's reading of the Western philosophical tradition. He argues for the priority of *phronesis* in contrast to *techne* for both Plato and Aristotle, and he finds traces of this priority even in modernity. He is critical of the demotion of *phronesis* in much of modern and contemporary thought to a kind of instrumentalized "prudence." He hopes that his philosophical contribution will help to restore the significance of *phronesis* and the Platonic-Aristotelian ethic for our contemporary world.

Time and again in his writings Gadamer tells us that it is useful to read Plato with Aristotle's conceptual apparatus. The last line of his *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, in which Gadamer provides his most extensive treatment of the proximity of Plato and Aristotle, is the summary claim that "in Aristotle's thought, what Plato intended is transferred to the cautious and tentative language of philosophical concepts" (Gadamer 1986, 178; GW 7, 227). As noted above, Gadamer finds a certain superiority in Aristotle's ethics inasmuch as it overcomes the "intellectualism" of Socrates and Plato. Francisco Gonzalez nicely points out some other important aspects of Gadamer's claims of the superiority of Aristotle. For example, Gadamer finds Aristotle's account of determining not-being as the not-yet-being of the idea or *eidos*, as the possibility of being, superior to Plato's account of not-being in the *Sophist*. Plato, according to Gadamer, has a numerical conception of *logos* while Aristotle models his conception of *logos* on the living thing—on nature,

not number (Gonzalez 2022, 197).[12] Yet, even so, Gadamer sees another sort of superiority in the work of Plato. In another late interview he says:

> Thus I would certainly adhere to the guiding thesis...that the Platonic dialogues can be depicted in their content on the conceptual level of Aristotelian teachings. Nevertheless, I would admit that the real involvement in a Socratic dialogue, composed by Plato, moves us closer to the subject matter than any conceptual fixation ever could ("Gadamer on Gadamer," Silverman 1991, 19).

As stated above, Socrates's dialectic, as exhibited in his conversations (dialogues) with others, is the model of philosophy for Gadamer. The "involvement" Gadamer speaks of here concerns the way that the reader is asked to join the conversation. The temporality of the conversation is contemporaneous with the reader, a feature of what Gadamer calls a "classic" text. The reader's living involvement in the dialogue is also a function of the harmony of word (*logos*) and deed (*ergon*) in Plato's Socratic dialogues. The dramatic action of the dialogue connects the conceptual to the lifeworld in a way that Aristotle's lecture notes cannot. Though Gadamer reads Plato through Aristotle, he finds the Platonic dialogue superior.[13] Gadamer's Socratism is to be located in the context of the proximity of Plato and Aristotle in which the Platonic dialogue has priority.

III. Socrates and the Beautiful: The Metaphysical Crux of Platonism

We have discussed the first two of the three things that guided Gadamer's life work—the later Heidegger and Plato. The third, poetry, is also connected to Heidegger and Plato. Heidegger's later writing is inspired, in part, by the poetry of Hölderlin. His own writing, in an extended sense, becomes poetic. Gadamer is often a commentator on and a critic of poetry. Two volumes of his collected works (vols. 8 – 9) are devoted to aesthetics and poetry. Poetry is a usage of words to express what is beyond words, beyond the propositional.

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[12] Gonzalez is here relying on Gadamer's essay "Plato und die Vorsokratiker," GW 6, 58 – 70, esp. 70.

[13] It's noteworthy that at the beginning of his Marburg lectures on the *Sophist* (1924 – 1925), which were influential for Gadamer, Heidegger states that he reads Plato through Aristotle. He adds that "we make the assumption that Aristotle understood Plato" (Heidegger 1992, 11). Gadamer, I am arguing, follows Heidegger in reading Plato through Aristotle, but rejects the Aristotelian critique of Plato's supposed two-world theory, a critique, as shown above, that Heidegger accepts.

The theme of the limits of language is important to Gadamer, and he finds an antecedent in Socrates whose aporetic dialogues constantly bump up against the limits of language. Gadamer follows Socrates and Plato's Seventh Letter in proclaiming the weakness of speech. He calls it "among Plato's keenest and most marvelous insights" (Dialectic and Sophism in Plato's *Seventh Letter*," Gadamer 1980, 126; GW 6, 110).

The limits of language in Plato are dramatically presented in the experience of the beautiful. Socrates in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* dramatically finds a profound revelation of the truth of the ideas in the experience of the beautiful. In the *Phaedrus* the sight of the lover awakens the memory, however dim it may be, of the direct experience of reality and its truth. The *Symposium* describes the ascent to the beautiful. The so-called late dialogues, the *Philebus* and the *Statesman*, connect their discussions of the proportioned mixture and the mean to the beautiful. Gadamer tells us that, for Plato, "beauty has the most important ontological function: that of mediating between idea and appearance. This is the metaphysical crux of Platonism" (Gadamer 1999b, 481; GW 1, 485). The hermeneutical ontology of *Truth and Method* follows Plato with its culminating affirmation of the analogous unity of the good, the true, and the beautiful. This unity is most brightly shown in the beautiful. This might be called the ontological crux of Gadamerian ontology.

The experience of the beautiful for Plato, for example in the *Phaedrus*, is a wordless seeing, a noetic vision. Gadamer likes to comment on the limits of language both for Plato and for his own philosophical hermeneutics. The experience of looking for the right word and sometimes not finding it is important to Gadamer. So too is the aesthetic experience of natural beauty or an artwork that is inexpressible. Language fails to capture it.

In a relatively late essay (1985) Gadamer addresses directly the limits of language. He is clearly sensitive to the charge of linguistic idealism. In this essay he recognizes the pre-linguistic (*Vorsprachliche*), the co-linguistic (*Nebensprachliche*), and the trans-linguistic (*Übersprachliche*). The limits of language point to a gap between what is said and what is intended. He writes that "what reaches the other through language, what has been said in words, is always less than [what] has been meant or was intended" ("Boundaries of Language," in Schmidt 2000, 9 – 17; GW 8, 350 – 361).

Though both Gadamer and Plato acknowledge the limits of language, Gadamer differs from Plato in two important respects: 1) he provides an account of language that does not rely on Plato, and 2) he identifies the noetic with language—something that Plato does not do.

IV. Beyond Plato: The Inner Word and the Neglect of the Noetic

While Plato provides a model for the use of language in the Socratic dialogue, he does not, according to Gadamer, provide an adequate account of language. In *Truth and Method*, he is negatively critical of the account of language provided in the *Cratylus*, the dialogue that most directly addresses language. He writes that "Plato avoids considering the real relationship between words and things" (Gadamer 1999b, 407; GW 1, 411). He finds Plato opening the way to an instrumental view of language. As he considers the *Cratylus* in *Truth and Method*, he comments on the *Seventh Letter* and says that Plato there considers language to be "external." In his extensive writing about Plato after the publication of his major work, we do not find him returning to this criticism.[14] At the heart of this criticism is the Platonic notion that there is a word-less grasp of things prior to the linguistic expression of the truth about the things of our experience. This wordless grasp of things would be called *nous*, an intuitive or noetic grasp of things.

For Gadamer, there is nothing prior to language. He finds in Augustine and in Thomas the concept of the "inner word" which provides a way to see how our immediate contact with the things of our experience is already linguistic. The inner word is something prior to articulated speech yet it is a "word"; and, as a word, it is language. Gadamer tells us that the inner word "cannot be simply the Greek 'logos'" (Gadamer 1999b, 421; GW 1, 425). In his treatment of the inner word, he speaks of the "language of reason" ("*Sprache der Vernunft*") which is not a language in the usual sense – "*keine Sprache für sich*"; and further, the inner word "is not utterance but thought" (Gadamer 1999b, 421 – 422; GW 1, 425 – 426). For Plato and Aristotle, what is prior to speech in our immediate contact with the world, is perception and an intuitive grasp of what is encountered. Like Gadamer, this might be called "thought" and "not utterance." But for Plato and Aristotle, this is not language. For Gadamer it is language.

In yet another late interview (1996) Gadamer points out the significance of the concept of the inner word for his view of language. This concept shows how all thought is discursive. Yet when pressed by the interviewer, Jean Grondin,

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[14] Donatella Di Cesare (2007, 142 – 145) claims that Gadamer later abandoned this criticism, though she does not point to an express statement of this abandonment. Perhaps Gadamer's later silence with regard to his criticism is tantamount to an abandonment; yet, as I argue here, Gadamer does not find an adequate basis in Plato or Aristotle for an account of language and turns to Augustine and Thomas and the concept of the inner word for this basis.

as to whether there is such a thing as "nonlinguistic understanding," Gadamer replies "Doubtless there is" (Gadamer 2007, 420). This seems to contradict the central claim that "Being that can be understood is language." Gadamer tries to explain the apparent contradiction by say that "language in words is only a special concretion of linguisticality" (Gadamer 2007, 420).

I would suggest that the only way to make sense of this exchange with Grondin is that Gadamer identifies linguisticality with intelligibility. The key to this identification is the concept of the "inner word." Gadamer cannot find a basis for this in Plato and Aristotle. Plato and Aristotle, I would argue, distinguish between intelligibility and linguisticality, between *nous* and *logos.* For them there is something prior to language. Gadamer identifies them. Here he goes beyond what he likes to call "Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy."[15] One cannot find in Gadamer any in-depth discussion of the concepts of *nous* and *logos.* For the most part he avoids any discussion of *nous.* In *Truth and Method*, as he prepares to lay out the "speculative structure" of language and show how it provides the horizon for hermeneutical ontology, he begins the section with a claim about "Greek metaphysics": "That human experience of the world is linguistic in nature was the thread underlying Greek metaphysics in its thinking about being since Plato's 'flight into the *logoi*.'" He goes on to say that we must interrogate the answer given there with regard to the question of Being. And then he says simply (Gadamer 1999b, 456 – 457; GW 1, 460):

> The answer is theological. In considering the being of beings, Greek metaphysics regarded it as a being that fulfilled itself in thought. This thought is the thought of *nous*, which is conceived of as the highest and most perfect being….We do not follow this way of thinking in its splendid self-forgetfulness, and so we will have to consider to what extent we can follow its revival based on the modern idea of subjectivity as found in Hegel's absolute idealism.

We cannot here take up the implications made by the reference to Hegel. But we do see here Gadamer's explicit break with Aristotelian *nous.*

One might argue that the break is not so much with the concept of *nous* but with the Aristotelian concept of the divine, but what is most objectionable for Gadamer is the notion of thinking without speech. Earlier in *Truth and Method* he makes the claim that for Aristotle "speech and thought are

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[15] For a more detailed and extensive account of Gadamer's appropriation of the concept of the inner word, see Arthos (2009). See also Dostal (2022, esp. 126 – 146 and 180 – 194).

completely unified" (Gadamer 1999b, 431; GW 1, 435). I would argue that for Aristotle, they are together but not unified.

Though Gadamer almost never addresses the question of the relation of *nous* and *logos*, he does so in response to a review of his work by Nicholas White in which Plato's *Seventh Letter* is discussed. Gadamer asserts that "the 'eye of the soul' [*nous*] is present only in the *logos* and can see only with the *logos* ("Reply to Nicholas P. White," in Griswold 1988, 262). This statement is effectively an identification of *nous* and *logos*.[16]

V. Conclusion

As noted above, Gadamer sees himself following Socrates' second sailing by which we are to follow the *logos* wherever it takes us. Gadamer argues that this "sailing" is not to be considered "second best." It is for Gadamer, the only way. Contra Gadamer, Joseph Cropsey in his commentary on Plato points out that this phrase is used three times in Plato works and twice in Aristotle's, and that in each case it does indeed mean "the second-best way of going" (Cropsey 1995, 206 – 207). For Plato and Aristotle, *logos* is second to *nous* (intuition). But both acknowledge that a life that is solely noetic is divine and impossible for us humans. We humans need to articulate our tentative grasp of the noetic, and the attempt to articulate what we experience awakens the noetic. This, as demonstrated by Plato's Socrates, is best done in conversation with others or oneself. Though Gadamer does not follow Plato with regard to the priority of the noetic, he does follow the Socratic example of dialectical conversation (dialogue) and the Platonic-Socratic recognition of its limits.

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[16] For a fuller discussion of Gadamer's treatment of *nous* and *logos*, see my book *Gadamer's Hermeneutics* (Dostal 2022, esp. 180 – 189).

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Robert J. Dostal
Bryn Mawr College
101 North Merion Ave.
Bryn Mawr, PA 19010-2899
USA
e-mail: rdostal@brynmawr.edu