

Ralkowski, Mark A. 2009. *Heidegger's Platonism*. New York and London: Continuum Publishing, 212 + xx pp., hardbound, \$130, 978-144184894.

Plato exerts a significant, albeit not always obvious, influence on Heidegger's thought. Indeed, Heidegger's central work *Being and Time* begins with a quotation from Plato's *Sophist*: "For manifestly you have long been aware of what you mean when you use the expression 'being.' We, however, who used to think we understood it, have now become perplexed."¹ Although Heidegger throughout claimed that Brentano's dissertation *Von der mannigfachen Bedeutung des Seienden nach Aristoteles*² had been the main influence on his philosophy,³ one does not have to look far for traces of Plato's influence on his thought. In *Being and Time*, following the preface, Heidegger speaks of the challenge of a "rekindled γιγαντομαχία περί τῆς οὐσίας,"⁴ And while he acknowledges the necessity of such a struggle (and even welcomes the opportunity to "reawaken" an understanding of the meaning of the question of Being), he also makes it clear that in understanding the problem of Being "our first philosophical step" must lie in "not μῦθόν τινα διηγείσθαι, in not 'telling a story'."⁵ Both the quotation regarding the gigantomachy and that regarding the necessity and desirability of not telling a myth are from Plato's *Sophist* (246a and 242c).⁶ The shadow of Plato thus looms large

¹ Macquarrie/Robinson trans.; the passage is from Plato's *Sophist* 244a.

² Franz Brentano, *Von der mannigfachen Bedeutung des Seienden nach Aristoteles*. Freiburg: Herder, 1862.

³ See, for example, the autobiographical account in "Mein Weg in die Phänomenologie" (1963; since reprinted in volume 14 of the *Heidegger Gesamtausgabe, Zur Sache des Denkens* (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 2007)). The account has been challenged by many scholars as an idealized self-representation.

⁴ Note the "demythologization" at stake here, an idea that is given full prominence later in Bultmann's demythologizing project. Bultmann, of course, was among the theologians most deeply influenced by Heidegger.

⁵ Heidegger does not indicate the ellipsis here (the passage actually reads μῦθόν τινα ἕκαστος φαίνεται μοι διηγείσθαι), but in his *Plato's Sophist* lecture course from 1923 he quotes the full passage. His paraphrasing restatement is characteristic of his strategy of identifying the ontological difference, i.e., the distinction between Being and beings, as what has never been thought as such in the history of Western philosophy: "This says," he clarifies, "that the ancients, insofar as they dealt with *Being*, told stories about *beings*, said what happens to beings. Hence the ancients did not at all arrive at a position from which they could determine something about the Being of beings." Martin Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz & André Schuwer (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 305; emphasis in original.

⁶ Both passages are cited in Heidegger's 1923 lecture course on Plato's *Sophist* (see n. 5 above). Once again, Heidegger interprets the gigantomachy in characteristically idiosyncratic

over Heidegger's masterpiece. And when Heidegger ends his book with a discussion of Hegel, we can discern the faint but unmistakable echo of Plato yet again.⁷

Yet, surprisingly, the question of Heidegger's 'Platonism' has attracted little attention from scholars. Besides Gadamer, who develops his reading of Plato in explicit dialogue with Heidegger,⁸ few scholars have taken up the question. Apart from a few scholars who have dedicated essays to the topic,⁹ most Heidegger scholars skirt this issue.¹⁰ Among scholars of ancient philosophy, the silence is even more pronounced. With the exception of Stanley Rosen,¹¹ most scholars of ancient philosophy appear to consider a dialogue with Heidegger to be not worth

fashion. Asking rhetorically "what genuinely is at stake in this γιγαντομαχία περὶ τῆς οὐσίας?" he immediately supplies the following answer: "The issue is the disclosure of beings, the ones that genuinely satisfy the meaning of Being, and consequently the issue is the demonstration of the meaning of οὐσία itself. The way to demonstrate the meaning of οὐσία is to produce the beings which satisfy the meaning of Being. This latter task is not independent but is entirely included in the first. The question of the meaning of οὐσία is not alive for the Greeks as an ontological theme; instead they always ask only: which beings genuinely satisfy the meaning of Being and which ontological characters result thereby? The meaning of Being itself remains unquestioned." Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, 323.

⁷) Throughout his career, Heidegger insisted that Hegel was the most Greek of German thinkers; for relevant passages, see *Being and Time*, 22, 22-23; see also the critique of Hegel that runs through his 1919/1920 lecture course *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* (Martin Heidegger, *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 2010)).

⁸) See, for example, his *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies in Plato*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983) or his *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).

⁹) See, for example, Drew Hyland, "Heidegger's Plato," in *Questioning Platonism: Continental Interpretations of Plato* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004); see also Robert J. Dostal's historical survey of Heidegger's relationship to Plato in "Beyond Being: Heidegger's Plato," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 23,1 (January 1985): 71-98. More recently, Catalin Partenie and Tom Rockmore have produced the first volume of essays on the Heidegger/Plato relationship. While individually illuminating on various aspects of the relationship, the essays still do not amount to a comprehensive consideration of that relationship; Catalin Partenie and Tom Rockmore, *Heidegger and Plato: Towards Dialogue* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2005). See also the useful overview in Catherine H. Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

¹⁰) Excluding, of course, a slew of 'Heideggerianizing' interpretations of Plato, such as those of John Sallis and some of his students.

¹¹) See, for example, his "Heidegger's Interpretation of Plato," *The Journal of Existentialism* 8,28 (1967): 477-504 or the more recent *The Question of Being: A Reversal of Heidegger* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

the effort. Classical philologists, too, have largely ignored Heidegger.¹² This is regrettable, since both scholars of ancient philosophy and classical philologists could make rich contributions to the dialogue between contemporary philosophy and ancient Greek thought, while understanding the abuses to which Plato has been put in the history of philosophy is a significant intellectual topic in its own right.¹³

With his new book, Mark Ralkowski thus enters relatively uncharted territory. Many readers will welcome the chance to finally learn something about Heidegger's 'Platonism.' This reviewer deeply appreciates Ralkowski's efforts in drawing attention to this very important issue in Heidegger scholarship. However, because the issue is so important, it deserves a detailed and responsible response. So with gratitude and respect for Ralkowski, I would like to offer a critical evaluation of this work.

Contrary to the title *Heidegger's Platonism*, which suggests a comprehensive evaluation of Heidegger's philosophy in the context of Plato's thought, the book's actual aim is quite modest. In essence, Ralkowski suggests that Heidegger, notwithstanding all his criticism of Platonism as "metaphysics," borrowed central elements of Plato's thought. Specifically, Ralkowski aims to show that Heidegger's political theory is based on a misreading of Plato's *Republic*. Whereas Plato "thought it challenging enough to lead a single person out of the cave," Heidegger refashions the Platonic metaphor to reflect his own interests in a "nationwide, nihilism-ending educational reform" (xii).¹⁴ While this central thesis is persuasive enough, there are significant problems with Ralkowski's narrowly political approach.

¹² Glenn Most is the rare exception among philologists to take Heidegger's thought seriously; see his "Heidegger's Greeks" (*Arion* 10,1 (2002): 83-98), made especially memorable by the wry observation, "Heidegger's Greeks are Germans in togas." *Ibid.*, 94.

¹³ For a discussion of Western rationality that takes precisely this opposition between Plato and his philosophical successors into account, see Arbogast Schmitt, *Die Moderne und Platon: Zwei Grundformen europäischer Rationalität* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2008); see my forthcoming English translation *Modernity and Plato: Two Paradigms of Rationality* (Rochester: Camden House, 2012).

¹⁴ In this respect, the book belongs more in the long line of works that subject Heidegger's politics to a critical appraisal than representing a serious consideration of Heidegger's relationship to Plato. The most immediate forbearer of Ralkowski's book appears to be Jacques Taminiaux's "The Platonic Roots of Heidegger's Political Thought," *European Journal of Political Theory* 6,1 (January 2007): 11-29 (not cited in the bibliography; a more serious omission in a book dedicated to a comparison of Heidegger's and Plato's politics is the absence of S. S. Monoson's *Plato's Democratic Entanglements* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) from the bibliography.).

In chapters 1 and 2, Ralkowski presents the reader with a brief outline of what he considers to be "Platonism." In chapter 3, he then turns to Heidegger's interpretation of Plato. Chapter 4, the book's central chapter, is dedicated to a reconstruction of Heidegger's analysis of Plato's cave allegory. Chapters 5 to 8 examine Heidegger's political thought. Chapter 5 discusses Heidegger's writings from the 1930s, including his Rectoral Address and his *Nietzsche* lectures. Ralkowski shows how an acute consciousness of Germany's political and spiritual decline becomes central to Heidegger's thought in this period. Chapter 6 examines Heidegger's diagnosis of the decline. Ralkowski argues that Heidegger takes a decidedly pragmatic turn around this period: in place of the "revolutionary thinker," we now encounter a "utopian social engineer" (116 and *pass.*) committed to the spiritual renewal of the German university and the German nation. In chapter 7, Ralkowski attempts a partial rehabilitation of Heidegger's thought. Ralkowski argues that although "Heidegger's philosophy . . . called for radical humility in politics" (153), the thinker failed to heed his own insight. From Plato's perspective, Heidegger appears as "a failed philosopher, at best another Alcibiades, who shattered the hopes and future of Athens on the rocks of Sicily's coastline because he could not choose the love of wisdom over the love he felt from the *demos*" (156). This conclusion opens the way to a more critical consideration of Heidegger. In the eighth and final chapter, the ambitiously titled "How Heidegger Should Have Read Plato," Ralkowski offers some prescriptions: "Instead of forcing Plato's thought into the framework of ontotheology and the overarching narrative of historical decline, and instead of interpreting the cave allegory as an image of Germany's struggle to decide the essence of truth, Heidegger should have recognized a kindred spirit lying behind Plato's grand philosophical vision: a political pessimist who did not trust the *demos*, and a humble philosophical therapist whose model philosopher was a midwife of ideas, not a utopian social engineer who remade the world from the top down" (137).

Unfortunately, this is slim pickings for a book that bears the title *Heidegger's Platonism*. For example, the reader learns nothing about why Heidegger might have turned to Plato in the first place or about what the link between his ontology and his politics might be. Nor does Ralkowski offer much insight into Heidegger's changing attitudes to Plato over time.¹⁵ Among important questions the book leaves unanswered is that of why Heidegger, following the first phase of his work in which Aristotle clearly predominates,¹⁶ begins to turn increasingly to Plato in

¹⁵ For Heidegger scholars, one of the biggest problems of this book will be its tendency to conflate statements and doctrines from different stages of Heidegger's thought; in this respect, Dostal's 1976 article, cited above, still remains the standard.

¹⁶ In 1923, when he writes the first programmatic statement of his research project,

the 1930s. Thus, in order to understand the roots of Heidegger's interest in Plato, one needs to go further back than the works (mainly from the 1940s to 1960s!) Ralkowski examines.¹⁷ One cannot understand either Heidegger's relationship to Plato or his vacillation between Aristotle and Plato as his main intellectual foe unless one first grasps the context of his interest in the Greeks. Specifically, we first need to look at the earliest phase of Heidegger's philosophical activity—the period around 1920—in order to grasp his later interest in Plato.

To begin with, for both Plato and Heidegger, “politics” remains subordinate to a larger philosophical project. For Plato, this is an ontology, theology, and soteriology. What is the ultimate concern that drives Heidegger's political thought? As a number of scholars have shown,¹⁸ Heidegger's thought in the key years 1919-1922 was decisively influenced by Luther's idea of a *theologia crucis* or a “theology of the cross,” which he opposes to the *theologia gloriae* or “theology of glory” of the Church Fathers and of the pagans.¹⁹ For Luther, the “theology of glory” was an

Heidegger still held that the Western “idea of man and of the being of life” all had their origins “in the Aristotelian ‘physics,’ ‘psychology,’ ‘ethics,’ and ‘ontology.’” But, by the 1930s, he takes Plato rather than Aristotle to be the founder of the Western intellectual tradition. The history of philosophy now appears as the history of a fall into “metaphysics” that begins with Plato, specifically, with his re-interpretation of “truth” (ἀλήθεια, which Heidegger translates as “unconcealment”) as “correctness” (ορθότης). Martin Heidegger, “Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles: Anzeige der hermeneutischen Situation,” *Phänomenologische Interpretationen ausgewählter Abhandlungen des Aristoteles zur Ontologie und Logik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 2005), 369 (my trans.; an English translation is available in *Supplements: From the Earliest Essays to Being and Time and Beyond*, ed. John van Buren (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002)).

¹⁷⁾ Of the works Ralkowski examines, eleven are from the 1940s or later, six from the 1930s, and only six from the 1920s (and, of those, only two are from the period before *Being and Time*). Of these two, only one (the *Plato's Sophist* lecture course from 1919/1920) is early enough to cast any light on the inceptions of Heidegger's philosophical project.

¹⁸⁾ The earliest article to draw attention to the issue and still the standard reference is van Buren's “Martin Heidegger, Martin Luther,” in *Reading Heidegger from the Start*, ed. T. Kisiel & J. van Buren (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994) (see also his *The Young Heidegger: Rumor of the Hidden King* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994)). More recent treatments can be found in Benjamin Crowe, “On the Track of the Fugitive Gods: Heidegger, Luther, Hölderlin,” *Journal of Religion* 87,2 (2007): 183-205. Crowe's new book *Heidegger's Religious Origins: Destruction and Authenticity* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006) builds on his earlier work and makes the evidence for Heidegger's philosophical and personal debt to Luther all but unassailable.

¹⁹⁾ van Buren, who refers to this period of Heidegger's development as his “Protest-ant and Mystical phase,” notes that around this time Heidegger began to “model... his thinking especially on the young Luther's theology of the cross (*theologia crucis*) and its scathing

expression of man's *hubris* inasmuch as the ancients sought to know God through reason independent of God's self-disclosure. Indeed, the idea of being able to know God through one's reason implied that man was capable of attaining salvation on his own without the intercession of Christ. Against the pagan valorization of reason or of what I have elsewhere called a "rational soteriology,"²⁰ Luther asserted the claims of a radicalized Christianity, whose roots he found, above all, in Paul's "Epistle to the Romans." The central concept Luther used to deconstruct the Greek tradition of rational soteriology was that of the "hidden God" (*Deus absconditus*).²¹ By opposing the suffering, crucified, and humbled Christ to Greek notions of Being, Luther sought to expose and confound pagan pretensions to being able to know God through reason. As van Buren notes, "following Paul's dismantling of the Greek concept of being into not-being, Luther's deconstruction of the *theologia gloriae* and reduction to the facticity of 'the cross' reverses the Platonic valorization of the *ontos on* of the universal *eidos*, the radiant form and look of being, over against the *me on* of the concrete temporal world of particularity with all its privations."²² "Whereas the *theologia gloriae* of Greek and Scholastic metaphysics turns 'everything upside-down,' by seeing concrete historicity to be derivative of the ontotheological ground that it constructs speculatively, the destruction performed in Luther's *theologia crucis* sees such constructions to be derived from a falling away from the historicity of 'the cross.'²³

This background is especially significant to Ralkowski's thesis, as Heidegger's approach to Plato is not conducted under the auspices of what we, following

attack against the theology of glory (*theologia gloriae*) in Aristotelian Scholasticism and against the *philosophia gloriae* of the so-called 'blind heathen master Aristotle' himself..." van Buren, "Martin Luther, Martin Heidegger," 160-161.

²⁰) See my article "Initiation into the Mysteries: Experience of the Irrational in Plato," *Mou-seion*, series III, vol. 6 (2006): 407-423; see also Vishwa Adluri & John Lenz, "The Myth of Gyges in Plato and Herodotus: From Political Power to Salvation through Philosophy," in *Philosophy and Salvation in Greek Religion*, ed. Vishwa Adluri (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2012).

²¹) Interestingly, the Latin *abscondo* has the meanings of "to put away, conceal carefully, hide, secrete," "to make invisible or to cover," and "to put a place out of sight, to lose sight of, to depart from." Lewis and Short, s.v. "*abscondo*". In addition to these classical meanings, the word "abscond" has legal ramifications. As an intransitive verb it means "to withdraw" and "to hide oneself," specifically, in order to evade a legal process. These meanings (withdrawal, concealment, and flight (of the gods)) are precisely the terms Heidegger uses to characterize Being in his late works. Heidegger's characterizations of Being thus explore and exhaust the semantic range of Luther's *Deus absconditus*.

²²) van Buren, *The Hidden King*, 163.

²³) *Ibid.*

Strauss, might call “political readings of Plato.” In the 1920s, Heidegger still viewed Aristotle as the main influence on Catholic theology in addition, of course, to the tradition of Western metaphysics. By the 1930s, however, he becomes increasingly aware of Plato’s significance to both these traditions. While I cannot discuss the reasons for this shift here,²⁴ it is vital to note that it is as the preeminent *theologian* for the Greek, Hellenistic, Neo-Platonic, and medieval traditions that Plato begins to feature in Heidegger’s writings from the 1930s onward. Specifically, he begins to look at ways to “deconstruct” Plato’s ethics, epistemology, and ontology, by focusing on Plato’s allegory of the cave in Book VII of the *Republic*. What is at stake for him in this struggle with Greek philosophy is not the definition of politics, but the question of Being—a question that has deep theological implications for both the Athenian and the Meßkirchner. Thus, while it is legitimate to compare the two thinkers on political grounds, as Ralkowski does, such an approach must necessarily be too narrow and too simplistic, since Heidegger’s reading of Plato’s cave allegory is not primarily motivated by political concerns.

Ralkowski’s ignorance about this background becomes especially obvious in his discussion of Heidegger’s interpretation of the allegory of the cave. For example, he uncritically asserts, “Plato’s idea of the Good *is* Heidegger’s Being as such. Plato gave him the idea” (76; italics in original). However, there are many problems with this claim, not least the fact that Heidegger continuously changes his views on the Good. Heidegger discusses the Good in at least three places: the earliest reference occurs in the 1927 lecture course *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (not cited by Ralkowski), while the two most important occur in the 1931-32 lecture course *The Essence of Truth* and the 1931-32/1940 essay *Plato’s Doctrine of Truth*. But what he says in the three texts is quite different. In the earliest text, Heidegger identifies the Good with time or with temporality, whereas he later identifies it with the originary source of Being and truth (in *The Essence of Truth*) and still later as the highest metaphysical concept of Platonic thought (*Plato’s Doctrine of Truth* and the *Nietzsche* lectures (1936-46)). I cannot trace the history of the concept here, but note that Heidegger’s interpretation of the Good constantly shifts as he progresses from viewing temporality as the source of the intelligibility of Being (*Being and Time*, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*) to viewing concealment as the hidden essence of “unconcealment” (Heidegger’s translation of ἀλήθεια; *The Essence of Truth*) to dismissing the Good altogether as a reified

²⁴) For a discussion of this turn, see my paper “Heidegger’s Encounter with Aristotle: A Theological Deconstruction of Metaphysics,” *Proceedings of the Forty-Fourth Annual Meeting of the Heidegger Circle* (May 2010): 69-87 (a longer version of this paper will be appearing under the title “A Theological Deconstruction of Metaphysics: Heidegger, Luther, and Aristotle” in *Epoché* 16,2 (Spring 2012)).

concept (this occurs especially in the writings from *Plato's Doctrine of Truth* onward and reflects Heidegger's changing relationship to Plato; henceforth, Plato will be portrayed as the inaugurator of "metaphysical" thinking). Ralkowski's one-to-one equation of the Platonic notion of the Good with Heidegger's own conception of Being is therefore highly problematic. Apart from the fact that the question of what the Good means in Plato remains ambiguous, it is also an open question whether Heidegger ever had a consistent understanding of the concept within his own system.

Even this brief overview, however, shows that what is at stake for Heidegger in his reading of Plato's cave allegory is not the political existence of man, but identifying problems with Plato's central theological concept. Heidegger initially critiques Plato for identifying the Good with a being, instead of seeing in it a temporal structure closely dependent on and subordinate to man's finite temporality. The Lutheran origins of this critique could hardly be more transparent. In a second stage, Heidegger then claims that Plato reduces the Good to a being among other beings, when, in fact, the Good (so runs Heidegger's claim) cannot be reduced to the logic of present things characteristic of human reason. Thus, he repeatedly emphasizes that the Greeks failed to contemplate this "hidden" source of all truth and being: this mysterious Being that, even as it bestows the latter, withdraws itself from man. The notions of "withdrawal," "staying away," "concealment" (all terms Heidegger uses to characterize his mysterious Being) clearly have their origin in Luther's conception of the *Deus absconditus*, the hidden and unavailable God. With his critique of Plato, Heidegger thus attempts to replicate in relation to Greek ontology, what Luther already accomplished in relation to Catholic theology.

Apart from these issues of missing contextualization, Ralkowski's book also suffers from his uncritical acceptance of Heidegger's interpretation of Plato. For example, he argues that the "*the incompleteness and a-systematic character of the dialogues*" incarnates the "*image of man's wisdom, which is finite, incomplete, and incomplete-able*" (48; italics in original). However, Plato does not adopt the dialogue form as testament or tribute to man's essential finitude (this is a Pauline/Lutheran rather than a Platonic idea),²⁵ but as a means of leading the

²⁵) A notion of finitude *does* appear in Pre-Socratic philosophy (see, for example, Empedocles' "narrow channels" and his view of the soul taking many births). But this finitude appears epistemologically, existentially and soteriologically vis-à-vis a noetic ontology based on the principle of non-contradiction. For finitude with more political overtones, Greek thought exploited tragedy. Both, however, are a far cry from the finitude Heidegger wants to underscore: a finitude that is authentically oriented to death.

philosopher-initiate stepwise to the experience of participation in divine *nous*.²⁶ Plato's starting-point is not the solitary subject of Heidegger's *Dasein* setting out to seek the truth on his/her own, but the initiate under the guidance of a skilled pedagogue and midwife, whether Socrates or Diotima. Similarly, when it comes to the cave allegory, Ralkowski relies almost entirely on Heidegger's idiosyncratic interpretation of the Platonic text. Thus, the all-important chapter 4, "Heidegger's Platonism," reads as little more than a paraphrase of Heidegger's (mis)interpretation of Plato: compare Ralkowski's "they [i.e., the prisoners] are in contact with the *unhidden*" (65; italics mine) with Heidegger's "man . . . is set before the unhidden" (*The Essence of Truth*, 20). Phrases such as "while the shadows cast on the wall of the cave are not as *beingful* as the realities outside, they are nevertheless, as Plato describes them, *to alethês*, the unhidden" (65) and "Socrates assures him that it does not appear that way *to man in his everydayness* That is why . . . 'being human *also* means . . . to stand within the *hidden*, to be surrounded by the hidden . . .' (*ET* 21)" (65; italics in original) are typical of Ralkowski's conjunction of Platonic details with a Heideggerian idiom. Incidentally, Heidegger's repeated use of the term "hidden" here is the clearest sign of his background preoccupation with the Lutheran notion of the *Deus absconditus*. Altogether, Ralkowski grants Heidegger's claim that the "more strongly I [i.e., Heidegger] get into my work, the more securely I am invariably forced back into the great beginning among the Greeks" (63, the original citation is from Heidegger's letter to Blochmann, 19.12.1932) too much credence.

In effect, then, Ralkowski's book only continues to perpetuate the myth that Heidegger is the great re-discoverer of the ancients and the foremost exponent of Plato and Aristotle: a myth Heidegger himself along with his first generation of students such as Helène Weiss and Walter Bröcker did much to aid. In spite of criticism from scholars of 20th century phenomenology as well as philologists,²⁷ to say nothing of the work of van Buren and others in exposing the Lutheran

²⁶⁾ There is growing evidence for this in the work of Burkert, Riedweg, and Kingsley (as well in my own work; see n. 20 above). As these scholars have shown have shown, the Platonic dialogues closely imitate the structure of initiation into the mysteries. For Burkert's views, see especially his "Das Proomium des *Parmenides* und die Katabasis des Pythagoras," *Phronesis* 14 (1969): 1-30. An English translation by Joydeep Bagchee is to appear in *Philosophy and Salvation in Greek Religion*, ed. Vishwa Adluri (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012). For Riedweg's views, see his *Mysterienterminologie in Platon, Philon und Klemens von Alexandrien* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1987).

²⁷⁾ For a brilliant exposition of how Heidegger makes use of the distinction between "Geschichte" (which he terms "authentic history" in contradistinction to traditional fact-based historical scholarship) and "Historie" so as to deflect all criticism of his thought,

roots of Heidegger's philosophical project, this myth refuses to die.²⁸ While Ralkowski's book does make some useful contributions especially in its later chapters, it is on the whole too uncritical and too narrow in its approach to be a reliable guide to Heidegger's 'Platonism.'²⁹ Ralkowski's thesis suffers not only from insufficient contextualization of Heidegger and of Heidegger's interpretation of Plato, but also from insufficient contextualization of Plato himself. Thus, while the cave allegory is central to his thesis, he ignores the fact that it functions within a wider literary context. As Rosen has noted, "the theme of descent plays an important role in the dramatic structure of the *Republic*. To note only the obvious, Socrates and Glaucon descend from Athens to Piraeus at the very beginning of the dialogue; Book Seven begins with a descent from the sunlight into the cave of shadows that represents the subpolitical nature of the human soul; the dialogue closes with an account of the descent of Er into Hades. Each of these descents is described in considerably greater detail than the outstanding example of ascent to the Idea of the Good, or more properly, to its surrogate, the image of the sun."³⁰ Ralkowski's uncritical acceptance of Heidegger's interpretation of Plato, I suspect, is due as much to his lack of familiarity with the Platonic canon as it is as to his lack of familiarity with the background context of Heidegger's project. That said, the author does offer a timely plea for reconsidering Heidegger's political philosophy. Although his criticisms of Heidegger's politics are neither particularly new (writers from Farias to Safranski and Zaborowski have already dealt with the topic at much greater length) nor particularly nuanced, his warning against blindly following Heidegger on the ancients is a useful and important point. The attempt to rehabilitate aspects of Heidegger's thought and

see Gail Soffer, "Heidegger, Humanism, and the Destruction of History," *The Review of Metaphysics* 49,3 (Mar., 1996): 547-576.

²⁸) Franco Volpi is among those who continue to perpetuate this myth today; see his "*Being and Time: A 'Translation' of the Nicomachean Ethics?*," in *Reading Heidegger from the Start*, ed. T. Kisiel & J. van Buren (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994); also see his "Dasein as Praxis: The Heideggerian Assimilation and the Radicalization of the Practical Philosophy of Aristotle," in *Martin Heidegger: Critical Assessments*, vol. 2., ed. Christopher Macann (London: Routledge, 1992).

²⁹) For an example of careful scholarship that is sensitive both to the historical context of Heidegger's work and to the various phases in his thought, see Dimitrios Yfantis, *Die Auseinandersetzung des frühen Heidegger mit Aristoteles* (Berlin: Duncker & Humboldt, 2009). This book remains the standard by which any work on Heidegger's relationship to the ancients ought be judged.

³⁰) Stanley Rosen, *Plato's Republic: A Study* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 19.

to think of ways out of the political dead-end to which his philosophy leads is a worthwhile effort. Ralkowski has also collected much of the material pertaining to Heidegger's interpretation of Plato in one place, and for this as well as for reigniting the Heidegger/Plato debate we must be grateful to him.

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