

THE OBVIOUS UNSAID: AN INQUIRY INTO HEIDEGGER'S DOCTRINE VIA DERRIDA

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Abstract. In his essay “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” Heidegger posits that a thinker’s doctrine resides not in their explicit articulations but in what remains unsaid within the said, in the gaps and interstices of their thought. This paper examines the question of Heidegger’s own doctrine through a Derridean lens, with particular attention to “Sending: On Representation.” It argues that Heidegger’s philosophy, through its various turns, remains underpinned by the conception of Being as transcending signification, which cannot be but a representational mode of thinking even if truth (ἀλήθεια) is thought of as unhiddenness. As a result, Heidegger’s doctrine emerges, paradoxically, as the very concept of doctrine – a recursive matrix mirroring his critique of metaphysics.

Keywords: Heidegger; Derrida; doctrine; truth;

During the 1920s and 30s, Heidegger was extensively preoccupied with the problem of truth. His several lecture courses on the topic condensed in a few publications, mostly in the form of essays. One of such essays, published in 1940, is titled “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” and it begins as follows:

The knowledge that comes from the sciences is usually expressed in propositions and laid before us as conclusions that we can grasp and put to use. But the “doctrine” [Lehre] of a thinker is that which remains unsaid within what is said, that to which we are exposed so that we might expend ourselves on it.

In order to experience and to know henceforth what a thinker left unsaid, whatever that might be, we have to consider what he said. To properly satisfy this demand would entail examining all of Plato’s “dialogues” in their interrelationship. Since this is impossible, we may let a different path guide us to the unsaid in Plato’s thinking.

What remains unsaid in Plato’s thinking is a change in what determines the essence of truth. The fact that this change does take place, what it consists in, and what gets grounded through this transformation of the essence of truth – all of this can be clarified by an interpretation of the “allegory of the cave.” (Heidegger 1998, p. 155)

This dense and enigmatic opening passage raises two main questions: 1. If a doctrine is what a thinker doesn't articulate in their own thought but what nevertheless shows through, then what would be Heidegger's own doctrine? and 2. What is the guiding path to uncovering a thinker's doctrine, according to Heidegger, if the interrelations between his numerous instances of saying, the totality of utterings, are, in principle, impossible to be exhaustively examined?

The goal of this paper is to answer these two questions and show their interrelatedness by subjecting Heidegger to a Derridean reading that will ultimately conclude that Heidegger's doctrine is, in fact, the doctrine of a doctrine. Its scope will be limited to Derrida's line of argumentation as it is developed in "Sending: On Representation" (Derrida 1982) since this particular lecture is thematically close to Heidegger's essay, but a similar conclusion can be drawn, albeit via a different path, through any of his texts that deconstruct the Heideggerian project.

First, one must note that Plato is not the only philosopher that Heidegger's *Destruktion* grasps through the doctrine lens – Kant and Nietzsche, to name a few, undergo exactly the same treatment¹, which can and should be performed, according to Heidegger, for all "genuine works of philosophy"². This task is a distinctly hermeneutical one – what characterizes a good interpreter³ after all is the success of understanding a philosopher better than they understand themselves. What should be sought after in this process is not one great thought, not even an *un-thought*, but the *un-thought* [*un-gedacht*] in a body of work⁴ – that which is there in a manner that Derrida describes as "non-negative" (Derrida 1991, p. 9). Because Heidegger repeats this same gesture several times, Derrida is also able to continuously critique it on different occasions.⁵ Moreover, the *unthought* that forms the cores of the thinkers Heidegger is explicitly occupied with: Kant's transcendental imagination, and Nietzsche's eternal recurrence, are thought of as inherently shaped by Platonism, along with the whole metaphysical tradition, because they continue thinking of truth as correctness. So, uncovering the unsaid in Plato has a decisive stake – it is an attempt to definitely go beyond and leave behind the whole metaphysical endeavor by dismantling its centerpiece. Hence, its failure is all the more tragic.

Let's begin by investigating the blatant gap that opens up towards the end of the essay's first section. Heidegger, after claiming that an overview of the interrelationship of all of Plato's dialogues is impossible and one must find a different path to uncover his doctrine, doesn't give any guidelines or clues for finding it but goes straight to its result instead – that Plato's thinking performs a change in what determines the essence of truth. Later in the essay, he describes this at length as the movement from truth as ἀλήθεια or unconcealment to truth as correspondence. The "allegory of the cave" is not just any allegory; hence, it is put under quotation marks.⁶ It marks the spot where the Greek understanding of unhiddenness is lost. While Heidegger agrees with Plato that there are different modes of unhiddenness and that understanding means a passing through, a reorientation towards higher disclosure, what he finds

problematic is the idea as granting a conceptual grasp of all things. From the moment the wise man returns to the cave and sees how the light, the objects, and the shadows are all tied together – that the light gives the objects both their visibleness in the realm outside the cave and the ability to cast shadows – truth begins to be thought as correspondence between statements and essential properties, so it is always representational, propositional and signification. With the supremacy of the ideas and the idea of the Good as the all-encompassing, the idea of the idea, the opposite of truth becomes not hiddenness, λήθη, but ψεῦδος, distortion. What is lost is the actual opposite of truth, the primal unavailability of beings and Being, their refusal that is not related to or caused by an error of judgment.

But all of this argumentation, Heidegger insists from the start, is only a clarification. The unsaid is both the starting and the end point of the hermeneutical analysis. The circular enclosure that a doctrine makes possible is what always already determines the path that has to be taken to uncover it. The said doesn't give shape to the unsaid by leaving gaps and openings, but, on the contrary, the unsaid determines what can be said as its foundational matrix. Moreover, the unsaid is not something that a thinker deliberately omits or hides. A thinker simply cannot say what he cannot say; he cannot not avoid saying it precisely because every thinker only thinks of the truth as correctness. While the definition of truth has historically changed, Heidegger argues, the essence of truth has always remained the same since Plato. Thus, the unsaid, the other meaning of truth, must be distilled so that a thinker can be simultaneously understood and overcome. The analysis of the allegory of the cave is a demonstration of what Heidegger, thinking of himself as standing outside of the metaphysical enclosure, was already able to reach: a return to the cave where both the reader and Plato, despite his insights, are still stuck.

This gesture of return (Zurückkehren) is telling in the sense that in it Heidegger openly mirrors Plato's wise man from the allegory by retelling it and pinpointing the decision that made it all go wrong in the history of philosophy⁷. It allows the performance of yet another turn (Kehre), this time oriented towards Heidegger himself so that his treatment of Plato's allegory of the cave can serve as the case study and ground for uncovering his own doctrine as entrapped in the *mise en abyme* of metaphysical thinking. Moreover, the maneuver of turning Heidegger's thought "upside down" (Umgekehrt) by Derrida once again after Heidegger himself had done it to Plato's, doesn't revert the later to its original position but rather shows the limits of what Heidegger, announcing the end of the metaphysical epoch but still belonging to it, is capable of achieving⁸.

The unsaid is not unsayable but un- or rather a-conceptual, if we think of the concept as relating to an essence or stable content. To say the unsaid is to start using language as an intervention, not representation, or as Heidegger says elsewhere, to look for the originary words (Urwörter) as means to free language from a fixed origin and end (Heidegger 1982). According to him, language is principally meta-

phorical beyond and before any rhetoric – the metaphor is the primordial linguistic event that does not transfer preexisting meaning but originates it. (Heidegger 2000, pp. 51 – 55). Uncovering the originary words means, therefore, simultaneously uncovering the truth of language and that of Being, or as Derrida puts it, to uncover the truth of Being as “always already buried” (Derrida 2016, p. 62). A “pure” and proper meaning of Being can never be achieved as it cannot be thought at all, at least in the strict sense. This is so because Being transcends signification. It cannot be contained in it. Achieving that liberation would therefore mean the end of philosophy, as Plato sets it to be. Moreover, the uncovering of his doctrine seems to match with the act of reappropriation of truth, with the gaining back of ἀλήθεια. A thinker that is already in ἀλήθεια then, in this sense, cannot have a doctrine since if he did, he would be aware of it, so it wouldn’t be a doctrine at all. Heidegger undoubtedly thinks of himself as such a thinker⁹.

His quest of finding the origin of language is rooted in his preoccupation with the arche-origin in a more general sense. Throughout the various turns in the trajectory of his thinking, he remains focused on this. Derrida describes it as a primordial “yes” that opens up the possibility of the question of Being and remains axiologically superior to any type of end or closure, even when, in the texts from the 50s for instance, Heidegger starts thinking of the end as preceding the beginning¹⁰. This arche-origin, however, cannot not be tied to language and its ever-breaking promise¹¹.

There is a certain teleology and historicity in Heidegger’s view of the representational mode of truth that ultimately makes his whole reading challengeable in principle, as Derrida shows in “Sending [Envoi]: Of Representation” (Derrida 1982). Representational truth is thought of as an epoch in the history and destiny [Geschick] of Being. It is the one that is the furthest away from the truth as ἀλήθεια yet the one that contains the potentiality of its revelation. That means that there is something of the ἀλήθεια that remains in representation, albeit negatively. That something must be uncovered so that the ἀλήθεια can be regained. This is what Derrida calls “the other side of nostalgia, [...] the Heideggerian *hope*”. (Derrida 1985, p. 27) That something, the unconcealment of truth or the unsaid in a doctrine, however, has the same characteristics of the idea of the ideas that was supposed to be overcome: it is semantically unitary, indivisible, grounding and showing through or present (albeit present as absence). The relation of these characteristics is not conjunctive but biconditional. If ἀλήθεια is unitary, then it’s indivisible. If it’s indivisible, then it’s grounding. If it’s grounding, then it shows through. And if it shows through, then it’s unitary. This circle would remain intact if we were to change the order of implication of the characteristics. They form an interdependent but simultaneously interchangeable chain that’s ultimately one of signifiers as they don’t define but point to the presence-absence of what, in principle, refuses all signification. The being-present of each of these various characteristics leads in its specific way to the always already answered question of Being.

What underlines the endeavor of dismantling representation, then, is ultimately a form of self-presence, an envoi, a transcendental signified, that, although free of all connections to the circle of signifiers, nonetheless makes it possible. It remains their ultimate point of reference and authority. So, Heidegger appears caught in the particular situation of a negative theologian. Much like in Plato's case, what is the most unhidden (the light that illuminates the objects that make the shadows possible) is that which appears to be ontologically or just logically antecedent to everything else that appears, although temporally it must be uncovered last, so as to explain everything that has preceded it. Truth is thought of as sent out from an origin; it's vectorial, it has a destiny and a destination, although this destination can only be advanced towards as a sending-back, as a renvoi¹². To think of representative truth as an epoch means to have a preliminary interpretation of it already, to have a presumption. And a presumption cannot be but representational since it relies on the correspondence between what's thought in it and the actual state of affairs of things, whatever that might be. As Derrida puts it, "This interpretation of representation would presuppose a representational pre-interpretation of representation, it would still be a representation of representation." (Derrida 1982, p. 320) Representation in Heidegger's view of ἀλήθεια can be thought of as, as he says of Plato and unconcealment, "a theme and at the same time not a theme." (Heidegger 2013, p. 101) The reversal of metaphysics, its turn upside down, doesn't achieve an overcoming but remains trapped in a mirror image of its pitfall. It persists as a repetition, albeit a most elegant one. Hence, Heidegger's doctrine cannot be but the doctrine of a doctrine.

As Hannah Arendt beautifully puts it in her essay "Heidegger the Fox": "Once upon a time there was a fox who was so lacking in slyness that he not only kept getting caught in traps but couldn't even tell the difference between a trap and a non-trap... [...] In his shocking ignorance of the difference between traps and non-traps, despite his incredibly extensive experience with traps, he hit on an idea completely new and unheard of among foxes: He built a trap as his burrow. [...] Alas, no one would go into his trap, because he was sitting inside it himself. And so it occurred to our fox to decorate his trap beautifully and to hang up unequivocal signs everywhere on it that quite clearly said: "Come here, everyone; this is a trap, the most beautiful trap in the world." From this point on ... many came. Everyone except our fox could, of course, step out of it again. It was cut, literally, to his own measurement. But the fox who lived in the trap said proudly: "So many are visiting me in my trap that I have become the best of all foxes." And there is some truth in that, too: Nobody knows the nature of traps better than one who sits in a trap his whole life long." (Arendt 2005, pp. 361 – 362)

NOTES

1. See, e.g. “Now, if an interpretation [Interpretation] merely gives back what Kant has expressly said, then from the outset it is not a laying-out [Auslegung] , insofar as the task of such a laying-out remains framed as the making visible in its own right of what Kant had brought to light in his ground-laying over and above the explicit formulation. Kant himself, however, was unable to say more about this. But with any philosophical knowledge in general, what is said in uttered propositions must not be decisive. Instead, what must be decisive is what it sets before our eyes as still unsaid, in and through what has been said.” (Heidegger 1997, p. 140) and “That Nietzsche interpreted and experienced his most abysmal thought in terms of the Dionysian only speaks for the fact that he still thought it metaphysically, and had to think it solely in this way. Yet it says nothing against the fact that this most abysmal thought conceals something unthought, something which at the same time remains a sealed door to metaphysical thinking.” (Heidegger 1991, p. 233)
2. ‘In all genuine works of philosophy the decisive content does not stand there in so many words, but is what brings into motion the totality of a living interpretation’ (Heidegger 1998, p. 140)
3. This problematic is obviously intertwined with that of translation.
4. “What is unthought in a thinker’s thought is not a lack inherent in his thought. What is un-thought is there in each case only as the un-thought.” (Heidegger 1968, p. 76)
5. See, e.g. (Derrida 1991, pp. 91–92, 110–112; Derrida 1989; Derrida 1998).
6. For the significance of the quotation marks in Heidegger, see (Derrida, 1991).
7. Cf. The return towards the true blow of the soul in the interpretation of Trakl (Heidegger 1982, pp. 159 – 199).
8. See (Heidegger 2003, p. 85) and Derrida’s commentary in (Derrida 2016, pp.63, 145).
9. The different crossings out of words in his later texts can be thought of as self-reflexive gestures in that direction.
10. See (Derrida 1991, pp. 90 – 94).
11. The eschatological and theological undertones of this should not be overlooked.
12. It’s interesting to note that authentic time, according to Heidegger ever since *Being and Time*, follows the same movement on the microscope of Dasein – the future is, in a sense, sent back to the past in order to construct the present.

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