

William Konchak, University of Iceland

Title: Rethinking *Truth and Method* in Light of Gadamer's Later Interpretation of Plato

Abstract: As is well known, Plato was a significant influence on Gadamer's thought. Nevertheless, Gadamer's interpretation of Plato changed through the years, and he became increasingly sympathetic towards Plato in his later works after 1960's *Truth and Method*. This article will examine how Gadamer's writings on Plato after *Truth and Method* may inform our interpretation of his *magnum opus*. I will present the case that this not only leads to rethinking Gadamer's relation to Plato, but also has wider implications for his hermeneutics and for potential reconsiderations of key aspects of the text. I point to the possibility that if we do not sufficiently appreciate these changes in Gadamer's interpretation of Plato, this may not only distort our understanding of Gadamer's reading of Plato, but perhaps more importantly neglect how Platonic conceptions may inform his own hermeneutic project as it is outlined in *Truth and Method*.

Keywords: Gadamer, Plato, hermeneutics, the beautiful, the good, dialogue, dialectic

As is well known, Plato was a significant influence on Gadamer's thought. Nevertheless, Gadamer's interpretation of Plato changed through the years, and he became increasingly sympathetic towards Plato in his later works after 1960's *Truth and Method*. This article will examine how Gadamer's writings on Plato after *Truth and Method* may inform our interpretation of his *magnum opus*. I will present the case that this not only leads to rethinking Gadamer's relation to Plato, but also has wider implications for his hermeneutics and for potential reconsiderations of key aspects of the text. I point to the possibility that if

we do not sufficiently appreciate these changes in Gadamer's interpretation of Plato, this may not only distort our understanding of Gadamer's reading of Plato, but perhaps more importantly neglect how Platonic conceptions may inform his own hermeneutic project as it is outlined in *Truth and Method*.

I will look at four main instances in *Truth and Method* in which Gadamer has seemingly changed his views on Plato from those expressed in his 1960 work. Firstly, I will consider how Gadamer moved beyond his criticism of Plato's thought being associated with the notion of a copy and thus distant from Gadamer's notion of an "increase of being"; secondly, I will re-examine Gadamer's strong criticisms of views he finds in Plato's *Cratylus* in light of his later thought; thirdly, I will examine how in the section "The Hermeneutic Relevance of Aristotle," Gadamer points to an opposition between Plato and Aristotle, whereas an important aspect of his later thought is how he reads them in harmony; and fourthly, I will explore how Gadamer in the third part of *Truth and Method* associates Platonic dialectic with statements rather than speculative language, and I point to how this may be surpassed by his later thought. I conclude by suggesting that in light of these changes in Gadamer's thought, there is a need to rethink aspects of *Truth and Method*.

1. Increase of Being

In *Truth in Method*, Gadamer makes a distinction between a copy and a picture. In Gadamer's (2004b: 130–38) presentational account of aesthetic experience, he points to the productive value of a *Bild* (image or picture) in contrast to a mere copy of an original. A copy is self-effacing and points back to an original, whereas an original appears through the picture as an experience of truth and is an "*increase of being*" (135, emphasis in original). This

notion of a copy being a mere imitation of an original is founded on the distinction between the world of forms or ideas as true being versus the weaker world of becoming as mere imitation or appearance, a view that is often associated with Plato. In Gadamer's conception of an increase of being, there is a productive element related to its presentation. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer associates Plato's views with a copy, although it should be noted there are tensions within *Truth and Method* itself on this issue.¹

In the late essay "Plato as Portraitist," Gadamer explains that Plato introduces the term *methexis* (participation) in place of the Pythagorean term mimesis (Gadamer 2007b: 311), and he maintains that for Plato appearances participate in ideas (314). Gadamer says that "replacing mimesis with participation, *methexis*, and taking part does not seem to me a bad way of describing the essence of the art of portraiture and of the portrait" (317). A portrait is not a mere mimesis or a passport photo, but something more, and Gadamer maintains that an *eidos* is drawn from individual appearance, and he asks, "are we not all, finally, in this sense Platonists?" (ibid.). Essences participate in and come into presentation in appearances, and in this case, in portraits as works of art, which would seemingly be aligned with his notions of a picture, increase of being, and presentational aesthetics more generally.²

According to Gadamer, in Plato's late dialogue the *Philebus*, the opposition between being and becoming does not have the final say for Plato, and Gadamer accordingly writes: "Being emerges from becoming!" (Gadamer 2007a: 209). Here we can see a productive role for becoming in Plato's thought, which Gadamer associates both with the mixture of the *Philebus* and the appropriate measure of the *Statesman*. James Risser (2012b: 66) draws connections between the art of weaving that is found in Plato's dialogue the *Statesman* "to language formation as such, to what occurs as the generative function of language that mirrors the 'becoming of being.'" In Risser's view, this "becoming of being," which Gadamer mentions in relation to the notion of mixture in the *Philebus*, has a connection to the

“increase of being” that we find in *Truth and Method* (Risser 2012b: 122n13, 71). In light of Gadamer’s later Plato interpretation, I think this is a very reasonable connection, and it again supports the notion that Gadamer is understanding Plato more dynamically than how he is presented in parts of *Truth and Method*, in line with his understanding of a picture, increase of being, and the notion of the beautiful that we find near the end of *Truth and Method* and elsewhere. Acknowledging transitions such as this helps us recognize that some views found in *Truth and Method* are not definitive.

2. The Severe Criticism of Plato in Relation to the *Cratylus*

We will now turn to a criticism of Plato that Gadamer makes in the section “Language and Logos” in the third part of *Truth and Method*. There Gadamer undertakes a critique of views that he finds in Plato’s *Cratylus* and more generally. Gadamer’s (2004b: 414) concern is that Plato is pointing to an extra-linguistic form of knowing based on the ideas being beyond all language, so that language is a distortion to be removed, as it is merely a sign that points beyond itself. In Gadamer’s account, this led to later efforts to exclude historical language in order to remove linguistic ambiguity through attempts at artificial languages, technical terminology, and mathematical symbolism. Gadamer claims that “Plato’s discovery of the ideas conceals the true nature of language even more than the theories of the Sophists, who developed their own art (techne) in the use and abuse of language” (408). Such a strong rebuke of Plato by Gadamer is unusual and surprising. According to Jean Grondin (2003: 132), “it is difficult not to see Heidegger’s shadow in this whole chapter in *Truth and Method*.” Such a shadow creates tensions with Gadamer’s reading of Plato, and, in his later works, as we shall see, Gadamer is generally far more charitable to Plato. For example, in his 1988 “Reply to Nicholas White,” which deals with Gadamer’s response to White’s views of

Gadamer's interpretation of Plato, Gadamer writes, "there is, of course, for us human beings no special power to perceive the thing itself without words and observation and inquiring discourse. Plato reminds us of that again and again," and he mentions the *Cratylus*, *Symposium*, *Parmenides*, and *Seventh Letter* in relation to this (Gadamer 2002: 261–62). This is, of course, a quite different emphasis from how he portrays the *Cratylus* and Plato's thought in the section in *Truth and Method* we are considering. An important part of this development can reasonably be attributed to his gradually stepping out of the influence of Heidegger, who is generally quite critical of Plato (see Renaud 2019: 352–53). This emphasis on finitude, language, and dialogue is a view that is brought out further in Gadamer's later Plato studies.³

Nicholas Davey maintains that although Gadamer draws upon Plato, there are important distinctions between Gadamer's and Plato's views. Davey writes that for Plato language is primarily representational and that, in contrast, for Gadamer it is presentational (Davey 2022: 67–68). This representational approach involves language only being a mere copy or representing another reality. However, this is a dualism that does not hold in Gadamer's later interpretation of Plato. Robert Dostal (2010: 47) points to the importance that Gadamer retrospectively gave to detaching the notion of a picture or image (*Bild*) from that of a copy (*Abbild*) in *Truth and Method*. According to Dostal (2010: 49), in Gadamer's critique of views found in Plato's *Cratylus* in *Truth and Method*, he criticizes Plato for not understanding the difference. Dostal (2010: 55) later says that Gadamer does not repeat these criticisms of Plato, namely that Plato "did not appreciate the difference between an image and a copy. Rather, he implicitly aligns Plato with his own treatment of image (*Bild*) in *Truth and Method*, in which the presentation of mimesis is always at the same time a transformation." As we have seen above, Gadamer's notion of an image or picture is aligned with his presentational account of aesthetics and an increase of being. According to Davey (2022: 69),

“Platonic dialogue and dialectic seeks to ascend to the truth of a form or subject-matter conceived within a pure intellectual intuition transcending linguistic articulation. However, for the Gadamerian mind, the truth of a subject-matter resides within language and not beyond it.” Although such a distinction between Plato and Gadamer could be supported by traditional interpretations of Plato or by Gadamer’s *Cratylus* reading in *Truth and Method*, it does not generally reflect Gadamer’s later reading of Plato.

3. The Contrast Between Aristotle and Plato

We will now turn to the section “The Hermeneutic Relevance of Aristotle” found in the second part of *Truth and Method*, in which Gadamer draws upon Aristotle’s ethics to develop his notion of application. Gadamer explains why he appeals to Aristotle’s ethics in relation to his hermeneutics (even though Aristotle is not considering interpretation). As he puts it,

what interests us here is precisely that he is concerned with reason and with knowledge, not detached from a being that is becoming, but determined by it and determinative of it. By circumscribing the intellectualism of Socrates and Plato in his inquiry into the good, Aristotle became the founder of ethics as a discipline independent of metaphysics. Criticizing the Platonic idea of the good as an empty generality, he asks instead the question of what is humanly good, what is good in terms of human action. His critique demonstrates that the equation of virtue and knowledge, arete and logos, which is the basis of Plato’s and Socrates’ theory of virtue, is an exaggeration. Aristotle restores the balance by showing that the basis of moral knowledge in man is orexis, striving, and its development into a fixed demeanor (hexis). (Gadamer 2004b: 310)

Here Gadamer is pointing to four things: firstly, Aristotle's ethics are separate from his metaphysics and incorporate becoming; secondly, Aristotle criticizes Plato's good as not being useful for practical action; thirdly, Aristotle shows that Plato's approach of equivocating virtue with knowledge is problematic; and fourthly, Gadamer is presenting Plato in contrast to Aristotle. These are all noteworthy, and, if we compare how Gadamer treats the connection between Plato and Aristotle in his 1978 *The Idea of the Good* and elsewhere in his later works, he presents the case for reading Plato and Aristotle in harmony rather than in contrast. Let us turn to consider these four points in more detail.

3a) Practical Wisdom Is Separate from Metaphysics

The first point is that Aristotle separates ethics from metaphysics and incorporates becoming in a way that moves beyond Plato. However, in his later thought Gadamer looks to later Platonic dialogues such as the *Statesman* and its conception of the appropriate measure to point to a practical experience of the good, which according to Gadamer (2007a: 205) anticipates Aristotle's ethical doctrine of the mean between extremes. And, in *The Idea of the Good*, Gadamer maintains that Aristotle's practical philosophy incorporates theoretical aspects and has similarities to Plato's philosophy, and he points to the interconnection between *theoria* and *praxis*:

Naturally Aristotle does not speak of practical philosophy in the context of his metaphysics. But insofar as the world of human practice is located within the entirety of what exists, the whole sphere of human praxis (action) and poiēsis (doing) has its place within the realm of nature. Not only art imitates nature. Human practice does so too insofar as it aims at nothing other than the highest fulfillment of human existence itself. (Gadamer 1986: 172)

Therefore, this strict separation between ethics and metaphysics gives way to a more unified perspective in both Plato's and Aristotle's thought, and Gadamer points towards a mediation between being and becoming. Francis Ambrosio explains that Gadamer expands upon his treatment of Aristotle given in *Truth and Method* in *The Idea of the Good*. In Ambrosio's account, in response to criticisms that his hermeneutics was conservative and unable to articulate norms for social critique, Gadamer turned to Aristotle, not this time to separate the practical from the theoretical, but to unify them. Gadamer elaborates on the unity of Plato's and Aristotle's thought, which was not given in his account of *phronesis* in *Truth and Method*, but which Ambrosio (1988: 176) claims "he clearly was presuming in the earlier discussion." This points to an important elaboration of Aristotle's thought with a more theoretical orientation that is related to practice, an account that is beyond what was given in *Truth and Method* and harmonizes in important ways with Plato. Given the contrast between Aristotle and Plato that Gadamer indicates in "The Hermeneutic Relevance of Aristotle" section we are considering, as well how we have seen above that Gadamer has moved beyond some of his criticisms of Plato, although Gadamer may well have been presuming to some extent such a unity as Ambrosio characterizes, I would also point to the possibility that, at least to some degree, this is a development in his later thought. Be that as it may, the important thing is that in his later thought Gadamer emphasizes what Plato and Aristotle have in common.

When this commonality is not emphasized, this may lead to unnecessarily separating Gadamer from Plato's thought. For example, Monica Vilhauer points to the importance of ethics for Gadamer's hermeneutics. However, she aligns Gadamer's views of seeking the practical good with Aristotle, drawing upon Aristotle's critique of Plato's good to show Aristotle's distance from Plato (Vilhauer 2010: 122–23). A potential problem with this

approach is that in *The Idea of the Good* Gadamer does not agree with Aristotle's critique. Plato has important resources for Gadamer's hermeneutics in respect to the practical good, as does Aristotle, which is why it is so important to bring greater awareness to the harmonized reading of Plato and Aristotle that we generally find in Gadamer's later writings.

Given the practical emphasis in Gadamer's interpretation of Plato and the commonality he finds between Plato and Aristotle, it is arguable that Gadamer's understanding of Aristotle's *phronesis* and practical philosophy should be seen as closely related to Plato's thought. For example, Enrico Berti (2004: 299) mentions that Gadamer observes that the foundation of Aristotle's practical philosophy is developed from the conception of knowledge put forward in Plato's *Statesman* and corresponds with Aristotle's *phronesis*;⁴ Jamey Findling (2005: 125) points to the importance of Plato for Gadamer's hermeneutics and suggests "even while it is Aristotle who provides the conceptual resources behind this characterization of hermeneutics as practical philosophy, it is more properly Plato who first opens up the way of thinking that leads to and legitimates it"; and Risser (2012a: 89), drawing on a late conversation between Gadamer and Riccardo Dottori, explains that Gadamer's conception of *phronesis* is more Platonic than Aristotelian.⁵ According to Risser, this involved a subtle shift from an Aristotelian conception of *phronesis* toward a Platonic conception based on dialogue, although he explains that for Gadamer there is not a large separation between the two. Even if this is only a subtle shift, this indicates a change in emphasis in Gadamer's later thought towards Plato. Given the importance of both *phronesis* and practical philosophy for Gadamer's thought, these connections with Plato and these Aristotelian conceptions reinforce the importance of Plato for Gadamer's thought, including, but also well beyond, his notion of dialogue.

3b) The Good is Useless for Practical Considerations

The second point is Gadamer's presentation of Aristotle's view that Plato's good is useless in relation to practice. However, in *The Idea of the Good*, Gadamer (1986: 57) makes it quite clear that for Plato the good is relevant to practice, which he relates to making choices that we need to justify. He also maintains that "in the end, any talk about the universal idea of the good always takes as its point of departure this *human* question: What is the good for us?" (30, emphasis in original). Contrary to the good being unrelated to practice, it is a crucial aspect of practice.

For Gadamer, Plato's idea of the good is not associated with being a separate objective structure in another realm, but rather is beyond being and both within everything and yet transcending and shining forth through everything (Gadamer 1986: 115–16). It is both one and many (31–32), is of relevance to our everyday lives, and is something that humans and all things strive for. We should seek the good that is relevant for us. However, we should also seek the good that transcends our understanding, which also is of practical importance (see Gadamer 2004a: 36–37). Whether we focus on the good for us or the good that is transcendent and beyond being, the good is relevant to practice.

3c) Socrates/Plato Equate Virtue with Knowledge

The third point is that Gadamer says that Aristotle considers Plato equating virtue with knowledge to be an exaggeration. However, in *The Idea of the Good*, Gadamer maintains that Plato and Socrates do not equate virtue with knowledge, and that Aristotle in his criticisms interprets Plato too literally. According to Gadamer (1986: 61), "in linking logos to ēthos, Aristotle only further formulates what Plato had in mind." An important aspect of Aristotle's view is the role the habituation of character plays in the formation of practical wisdom, as

opposed to virtue purely being knowledge. Gadamer questions how it could be that Plato underestimated ethos when he creates an entire city (that is, the utopia of the *Republic*) to habituate virtue (ibid.). This is a compelling point, one that supports the notion that developing positive habits plays an important role alongside knowledge for Plato.

3d) Gadamer Interprets Aristotle in Contrast to Plato

The fourth point is that Gadamer generally emphasizes the contrast between Plato and Aristotle in the section “The Hermeneutic Relevance of Aristotle.” For example, Gadamer (2004b: 311) writes: “In contrast to the theory of the good based on Plato’s doctrine of ideas, Aristotle emphasizes that it is impossible for ethics to achieve the extreme exactitude of mathematics. Indeed, to demand this kind of exactitude would be inappropriate.” Gadamer explains that a sketch or outline is all that is necessary for Aristotle. For Aristotle’s purposes of seeking the good that is relevant to ethics and becoming good, an exact theoretical understanding is unnecessary.

However, as we have seen, Gadamer in his later writings finds commonality between Aristotle and Plato. For example, he explains: “One must approach the Aristotelian ethics not so much with the question, in what respect does Aristotle distinguish himself from Plato and the Platonic Socrates, but rather how Aristotle attempts to take up and integrate into this thinking the intellectual legacy that he received from Socrates through Plato” (Gadamer 2015: 97). This is a different trajectory from what we find in parts of *Truth and Method*. And, although Gadamer recognizes the mathematical emphasis in Plato’s thought in *The Idea of the Good*, he sees Aristotle as being influenced by Plato’s views and working out viewpoints through an emphasis on physics rather than mathematics. Thus, he finds some commonality between Plato and Aristotle despite their differences, as each develop an understanding of the

subject matter with different emphases. Gadamer more generally emphasizes the dialogical aspect of Plato's thought, although he does also acknowledge a mathematical aspect, but presents a dynamic understanding of number through a conception of the *arithmos* and the one and indeterminate two, which he relates to language (see Gadamer 1980c, 1986).

However, there are tensions with how Gadamer presents mathematics in relation to Plato and how this is received in the secondary literature. For example, Drew Hyland (2004: 178–79) characterizes Gadamer's thought as embracing Plato's mathematics, albeit in a different way than Plato is usually understood, so that rather than guaranteeing absolute certainty, mathematics in Gadamer's interpretation reflects the indeterminacy and incompleteness of human knowing. In contrast, P. Christopher Smith finds a problematic aspect to Plato's mathematics in Gadamer's reading. According to Smith, despite Gadamer's overall emphasis on a dialogical Plato and the notion of the *arithmos* as a mathematical conception that shows Plato is cognizant of human finitude and indeterminacy, there remains an aspect of the *arithmos* that leads to a mathematical abstraction. This mathematical purification problematically abstracts from the context or the mode of speaking of what is said, distorting Plato's understanding of the *logos* and creating a shift away from original experience to reflection, and Smith explains that Gadamer turns to Aristotle, for whom the “model for the *logos* is the living thing” (Smith 1981: 228, see 226–29). In his assessment, Smith mainly draws upon the *Cratylus* critique of *Truth and Method* and upon Gadamer's 1968 essay “*Amicus Plato Magis Amica Veritas*” (Gadamer 1980a) in order to distinguish a “critical” Plato of mathematical abstraction. However, he also finds a “dialogical” Plato that is true to the original experience of language. As an example of problematic mathematical abstraction, Smith (1981: 228) explains that thinking circularity apart from a given circle abstracts from our lived experience of the world. However, if we turn to Gadamer's late essay “On the Way Back to the Beginning,” Gadamer (2019: 263) considers Plato's example of a

circle in the *Seventh Letter*, which he says is “the paradigmatic example for the authentic seeing of being.” A drawn circle has imperfections and has some straight aspect to it, whereas the mathematical circle is perfectly circular. Far from seeing this as problematic, Gadamer maintains “that this also constitutes the proper essence of our experience with language: while thinking we see through all that is said and similarly in conversing with one another we ‘contemplate’ something that is not in the words and not in the models and illustrations of the putative ‘facts’” (263). Here Gadamer draws connections between mathematical abstraction and discernment through language and seeing through distortions. This later view of Gadamer’s suggests that mathematical abstraction should not be seen in contrast to the dialogical, but rather that it supports it. In my view, it is not so much that mathematics and abstraction is problematic, but rather that it becomes so when it is excessive. This is why *methexis* (participation) is so important in Gadamer’s reading of Plato, as there is a connection between the ideas and sensible reality, which allows for a productive interplay between separation (and critical distance) and immanent participation.

Grondin (2010: 152–55) maintains that Gadamer overemphasizes the importance of the one and the dyad (two) and underemphasizes the mathematical aspect in Plato’s thought. Grondin’s concern is that he feels Gadamer plays down the role that mathematical orderliness plays in reality for Plato and does not extend it to becoming and the human world, which he sees as a hermeneutically tinged reading of Plato (Grondin 2010: 154).⁶ However, in the essay “Idea and Reality in Plato’s *Timaeus*,” Gadamer (1980b: 191) explains that the *Philebus* moves beyond the *Timaeus* to explicitly link the dialectic of the ideas and that order of reality to human reality. Gadamer notes that not only in the *Timaeus*, but also in the *Philebus*, “the Good and the order of reality as a whole are the real concern” (192). And Gadamer remarks on how in the *Timaeus* we are to look to the order of the cosmos to order our souls (192–93). These notions suggest that the mathematical order running through

reality has some impact on human life.⁷ It should be recalled that with the one and indeterminate two, the one relates to order and determinate knowledge, whereas the two relates to indeterminacy, so there is an interplay between order and indeterminacy, and the good is both one and many. As such, it is arguable that Gadamer does recognize a more traditional role that mathematics plays in relation to order for Plato, at least to some extent, which in my view strengthens his Plato interpretation. Be that as it may, for the purposes of this article, the main point is that Gadamer understands Plato as a thinker who has a role for what is appropriate in a given concrete situation, such as through the appropriate measure of the *Statesman* and the mixture of life in the *Philebus*. Therefore, this stronger contrast between a mathematical Plato and a practical Aristotle that we find in *Truth and Method* does not hold.

4. Speculative Language and Plato's Dialectic

Let us now turn to the fourth main difference that we will consider between how we find Plato characterized in *Truth and Method* and in his later thought. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer makes an important distinction between a statement and speculative language. He explains that “meaning . . . reduced to what is stated is always distorted meaning” (Gadamer 2004b: 464). In contrast, language has a speculative quality, which he relates to understanding, and to say what one means and be understood “means to hold what is said together with an infinity of what is not said in one unified meaning and to ensure that it is understood in this way” (ibid.). Gadamer maintains that someone speaking in such a manner may use common words to express the unsaid, and he writes, “someone who speaks is behaving speculatively when his words do not reflect beings, but express a relation to the whole of being” (465). According to Gadamer, speculative language is epitomized by the

poetic word. Of note, Gadamer claims that both Hegel's and Plato's dialectic subordinate language to the statement (464). Leaving the question of Hegel aside, the important question for the purposes of this article is whether this separation of Plato's dialectic from the speculative is the last word for Gadamer on this issue.

In Gadamer's 1990 essay "Towards a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language," he explains that there is a questioning and answering in human interactions that extends beyond what is verbalized and involves a seeking of what is in common. According to Gadamer, this does not always mean finding a common definition and, even less, a final explanation from which to prove everything. Gadamer explains:

The basis is rather a firm looking towards what is truly common, to which one belongs and to which we attempt to adhere. There can be no doubt here that such a looking forward always lies beyond the actually expressed. It is something like the idea, and especially the Form of the Good, that Plato's Socrates untiringly sought, without being able to doubt it. This is not the postulation of something that can find its justification in an unconditional universality or in the claim of scientific certainty. (Gadamer 2000: 46)

When Gadamer characterizes something beyond what is expressed, this is reminiscent of the unsaid and its association with speculative language and its relation to the whole of being found in *Truth and Method* that we have considered above. But here, this is associated with Plato's idea, and particularly the form of the good, which makes sense, as according to Gadamer the good is beyond being (that is, it is not a structural object, and so it is different from the other forms). Gadamer clarifies that what he is pointing to is not in the line of empirical science and a provable final foundation, and he maintains that "Plato knew quite well why he called the step over the provable 'dialectic' and entrusted it to the art of conversation" (Gadamer 2000: 47). In *The Idea of the Good*, Gadamer remarks on how

dialectic is a rigorous attempt at seeking real justification that involves the good and that impacts our self-understanding in practice. Gadamer's understanding of Plato seems to suggest a midpoint between conversation and dialectic, in which genuine dialogue, or perhaps what we might call dialogical dialectic, includes aspects of fluidity, limitation, and rigor, through which understanding and the good are sought out in a manner that is befitting our human finitude. This is an important change in emphasis from *Truth and Method*, as now, instead of criticizing the limits of Plato's dialectic, a dynamic form of dialectic in pursuit of the good may be seen as complementary with the poetic word.

Further support for this change in emphasis is found when we consider Gadamer's interpretation of Plato's forms and the idea of the good. For Gadamer, Plato's ideas are not isolated entities in a second world, but rather there is *methexis* (participation) of both the individual and the soul in the idea, and, ultimately, of the ideas with each other (see Gadamer 1986: 88). This interconnection itself would seem to indicate that when the eidetic aspects of what is under consideration is experienced through language, this cannot be limited to understanding through statements. This view is further supported by his understanding that the idea of the good is beyond being. Furthermore, Gadamer's affirming the importance of the one and the indeterminate two for Plato's thought lends credence to the view that his understanding of Plato involves relationality and transcendence that moves beyond statements and discursive thought. According to Gadamer, Plato is a thinker of finitude, so different aspects of what is under consideration come into our awareness rather than a complete understanding of the whole. Gadamer remarks on the discrepancy between the human and the divine, which has implications for dialectic in relation to the open-ended and ongoing nature of human knowing (Gadamer 1980c: 154). In Risser's (2012b: 85) view, despite Gadamer's apparent separation from Plato as indicated in his association of dialectic with statements, the incapacity of language means that Gadamer does not surpass Plato.

According to Risser, the *aporia* between the one and the many in relation to the one and the indeterminate two and the potential to not-be means that there can never be a complete understanding. All of the points considered above indicate the possibility of a more creative and fluid conception of Plato's dialectic with a closer connection to the speculative than is presented in *Truth and Method*.

5. Discussion

Let us step back and review how what we have covered regarding Gadamer's later interpretation of Plato suggests that a reconsideration of his views in *Truth and Method* is warranted. Gadamer's later thought presents a more dynamic reading of Plato in harmony with his notion of an increase in being and is aligned more generally with the importance of language. We have considered how certain criticisms of Plato associated with Aristotle that we find in *Truth and Method* are surpassed by Gadamer's later thought. Aristotle's conception of *phronesis* is of importance for Gadamer's thought, but we have also seen how the notion the appropriate measure in Plato's thought has commonalities with it. There are also commonalities between Aristotle's practical philosophy and Plato's philosophy, which include the importance of the connection between *theoria* and *praxis* and how seeking for the good is both a practical and theoretical concern for both thinkers. We have pointed to evidence that Gadamer may have moved beyond associating Plato's dialectic with the limitations of statements. These are all reminders of the importance of Plato for Gadamer's thought, which was further developed after *Truth and Method*. This also has important repercussions for our understanding of his hermeneutics, such as how Plato's notions of the

appropriate measure and mixture provide practical approaches that complement and supplement Gadamer's account of *phronesis*, the transition towards Plato's notion of *phronesis* in his later thought, and the interconnection he finds between *theoria* and *praxis*. It is a reminder of the importance of Plato's dialectic and indicates that Gadamer's association of hermeneutics with practical philosophy not only has connections with Aristotle's thought, but Plato's as well.

As we have seen, in his writings after *Truth and Method* Gadamer draws important connections between how Aristotle and Plato are seeking the good. What I want to consider is how Gadamer's understanding of Plato's good may have implications for Gadamer's overall project of seeking truth within *Truth and Method*. Gadamer (2007a: 205) points to how in Plato's *Philebus*, three aspects of the good are truth, beauty, and measure. And, as is well known, Gadamer draws upon the beautiful near the end of *Truth and Method* to support his probabilistic notion of truth, and although he notes the connection between the beautiful and the good and truth, and how the good appears through the beautiful, the treatment of the good is relatively brief, and there is a stronger emphasis on the beautiful. The overall effort to follow the subject matter and respect the other in dialogue, which is a pursuit of truth, could be seen as a practical way of seeking the good. Put another way, seeking truth is a way of experiencing an aspect of the good, and seeking the good supports the pursuit of truth. Of course, for Gadamer, this will never be a perfect or exact knowing of the good, but rather is the striving for the good and is a dynamic attempt to bring truth and goodness (and beauty and measure) into both word and deed. This practical effort and what has been considered overall in this article is suggestive that Gadamer's interpretation of Plato's good informs his hermeneutic notion of truth and self-understanding and has other important ramifications, such as emphasizing the ethical implications of his hermeneutics, as well as pointing to a certain distance of Gadamer's position from Heidegger's.⁸

To give another telling example of a change in Gadamer's views on Plato, in his 1965 essay "Hermeneutics and Historicism," he criticizes Leo Strauss in respect to how "the extreme contrast that exists between Plato and Aristotle with regard to the nature and the significance of the good does not seem to cause him any trouble" (Gadamer 2004b: 536). This is noteworthy, for, as we have seen, Gadamer's later interpretation of Plato and Aristotle emphasizes the commonality between Plato and Aristotle, and in a footnote added to later editions, Gadamer says that in *The Idea of the Good* he "tried to resolve this alleged contradiction, with which Leo Strauss was presumably quite content" (Gadamer 2004b: 545n65). This points to an important transition in Gadamer's later thought. We also no longer find Gadamer's interpreting Plato and the good through Aristotle's criticisms.⁹ What role might Plato's good now play given that it is no longer seen as a type of metaphysical abstraction divorced from applicability to human affairs, as per Aristotle's critique and how Gadamer draws upon this critique in *Truth and Method*? How might these changes impact his account of *phronesis* in *Truth and Method*? And what are the implications for Gadamer's hermeneutics?

It is important to be aware of the changes in Gadamer's thought, or else we run the risk of overemphasizing aspects of Gadamer's thinking that are bound to a certain time. This could lead to thinking not only that he was more critical of Plato than his position in his later thought suggests, but to potentially overlooking the commonality between Plato and Aristotle and key Platonic conceptions such as the appropriate measure, dialectic, and the good that we find in Gadamer's later reading of Plato and that are arguably relevant to his hermeneutic project. Drawing upon the good has important resonances and practical consequences that could shift meanings, emphases, and viewpoints found in *Truth and Method*, if we rethink these in light of Gadamer's later views.

As we have seen above, there is a sense of rigor associated with Plato's conception of dialectic. This is clearly seen in *The Idea of the Good*, in which Gadamer points to a close connection between Plato's conception of *phronesis* and dialectic. According to Gadamer, Plato expands *phronesis* to include dialectic and transcends the difference between practical and theoretical knowing. Dialectic relates to real justification rather than self-justification and "is not so much a *technē*—that is, an ability and knowledge—as a way of being" (Gadamer 1986: 39). Dialectic is rigorous, but practical, and it is employed in our everyday world and relates to self-understanding. Let us turn to consider how this emphasis may inform our understanding of Gadamer's hermeneutics.

Gadamer explains that Plato relates dialectic to real reasonableness and to holding to what one sees as right, which goes beyond prevailing opinions. He also relates dialectic to the question of the good and maintains that a person cannot "defer to the authority of another. One has to ask oneself, and in so doing, one necessarily finds oneself in discussion either with oneself or with others" (Gadamer 1986: 41–42). Here we can discern a stronger emphasis on listening to oneself and going beyond prevailing viewpoints and authority than found in *Truth and Method*. Ingrid Scheibler (2000: 88) explains that in *The Idea of the Good* "we see that Gadamer's emphasis on practical wisdom, *phronesis*, looks not so much, as it is more conventional, to Aristotle's account of *phronesis* (*Nicomachean Ethics*) but to Plato's own development of the notion of dialectic."¹⁰ This is an important change from *Truth and Method*, where, as we have seen, Gadamer draws upon Aristotle's conception of *phronesis*. As we have seen, there are seemingly stronger notions of the possibility of truth, discernment, and moving past prevailing opinions with this Platonic conception.¹¹ Engaging in genuine conversation and dialectic and looking to the good are important approaches that support Gadamer's notion of genuine dialogue and help combat charges that Gadamer advocates unreflectively accepting conventional and traditional viewpoints.¹² The emphasis in

Gadamer's interpretation of Plato is no longer, as we found in the *Cratylus* critique in *Truth and Method*, on truth being found in ideas outside of language, but rather on how truth can emerge through dialectic within the everyday world.

In closing, to the extent that *Truth and Method* is taken as Gadamer's authoritative work and is considered to have the final say on certain interpretive issues, this is potentially problematic. As we have seen, changes found in his writings on Plato after *Truth and Method* are not merely cosmetic, but relate to truth, *phronesis*, Plato's dialectic, and the practical role of the good for Plato and Aristotle. Furthermore, these changes emphasize the commonality between Plato and Aristotle, and they relate to central concerns of Gadamer's hermeneutic theory, such as his account of language, and specifically of speculative language. I believe that the transitions in Gadamer's thinking on Plato after *Truth and Method* should be taken seriously, and further work needs to be done to understand the full implications of these writings for his hermeneutic thought.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank an anonymous reviewer of this journal for their helpful comments. I also want to thank David Vessey for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article. This work was supported by the Icelandic Research Fund, grant number 207185-051.

Notes

¹ We find a more positive assessment in Gadamer's account of the beautiful near the end of *Truth and Method*: "Where Plato appeals to the evidentness of the beautiful, he does not need

to insist on the contrast between ‘the thing itself’ and its copy. It is the beautiful itself that both creates and supersedes this contrast” (Gadamer 2004b: 482).

² Gadamer’s also draws upon Aristotle to extend and supplement Plato’s views in places (for example, see Gadamer [2007a], in which he, through views he finds in Aristotle, aligns his reading of Plato with his presentational account of artwork). See Dostal (2010) for an account of Gadamer’s interpretation of Plato which explores the role of mimesis, anamnesis, *methexis*, the connection between Plato and Aristotle, and tensions in Gadamer’s views.

³ Renaud (2019: 353n21) explains: “In his later Plato-studies, Gadamer endeavors to explore and insist upon this consciousness of finitude, namely the dependence of thinking upon language and the fundamental and irreducibly dialogical character of all authentic thinking.” Drew Hyland (2004: 173–83) points to the transition from Gadamer’s more Aristotelian scientific reading of Plato (which was influenced by Heidegger) in *Plato’s Dialectical Ethics* to Gadamer’s more existential reading of Plato as a thinker of finitude in his later thought, where one finds more explicit criticisms of Heidegger’s interpretation of Plato.

⁴ In Berti’s (2005: 286, 299) view, Gadamer tends to identify practical philosophy with *phronesis* despite their differences.

⁵ Risser (2012a: 89) explains that this concept of *phronesis* “is a rationality that is inseparable from dialogue and thus dialectics.”

⁶ Grondin points to instances where Gadamer diminishes the importance of mathematics for Plato and more generally, and he hypothesizes that this is due to Gadamer’s concerns over the methods of science and therefore mathematics, and that his hermeneutics is a corrective against this.

⁷ See Andrew Fuyarchuk (2017: 105–10), who argues for the importance of Pythagoreanism, mathematics, and numbers and their connection to reality in Gadamer’s reading of Plato.

⁸ See Brice Wachterhauser (1999) and Lauren Barthold (2010) for explorations of Gadamer's understanding of Plato's good and connections with his hermeneutics. Wachterhauser (1999: 198–99) points out that Gadamer's emphasis on the good is a difference between his and Heidegger's thought.

⁹ As a part of bracketed material added in later editions, Gadamer (2004b: 541n29) says that he doubts that Plato ever understood the idea of the good in that way that Aristotle characterizes it in his criticism. As Gadamer writes in 1976: "Of course, one cannot read Plato's works through the eyes of the Aristotelean critique" (Gadamer 1994: 87).

¹⁰ As we have seen above, Risser explains that there is a transition in Gadamer's thought from Aristotle's notion of *phronesis* towards Plato's with its notion of dialogue and dialectic.

¹¹ It is not that Gadamer's hermeneutics is devoid of critical resources, despite critics who have suggested this; as Scheibler argues, there is a role for critical reflection. She associates Gadamer's use of Aristotle's conceptions of *phronesis* and *prohairesis* (making choices) with making critical judgments, and she points to the connection between hermeneutics and practical philosophy (Scheibler 2000: 88).

¹² For example, Scheibler (2000) finds the connection between dialectic and *phronesis* relevant to Gadamer's understanding of the social domain and of the role of critical judgement to counter Jürgen Habermas's and Gianni Vattimo's critiques of Gadamer's thought.

References

- Ambrosio, Francis J. 1988. "Gadamer and Aristotle: Hermeneutics as Participation in Tradition," in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association: Hermeneutics and the Tradition*, ed. Daniel O. Dahlstrom, 174–82. Washington, D.C.: The American Catholic Philosophical Association.
- Barthold, Lauren Swayne. 2010. *Gadamer's Dialectical Hermeneutics*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books
- Berti, Enrico. 2004. "The Reception of Aristotle's Intellectual Virtues in Gadamer and Hermeneutic Philosophy," in *The Impact of Aristotelianism on Modern Philosophy*, ed. Ricardo Pozzo, 285–300. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America.
- Davey, Nicholas. 2022. "Dialogue, Dialectic and Conversation," in *The Gadamerian Mind*, ed. Theodore George and Gert-Jan van der Heiden, 61–77. London: Routledge.
- Dostal, Robert. 2010. "Gadamer's Platonism: His Recovery of Mimesis and Anamnesis," in *Consequences of Hermeneutics: Fifty Years After Truth and Method*, ed. Jeff Malpas and Santiago Zambala, 45–65. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Findling, Jamey. 2005. "Gadamer and the Platonic Contribution to Practical Philosophy," in *Internationales Jahrbuch für Hermeneutik*, vol. 4, *Schwerpunkt: Platon und die Hermeneutik*, ed. Günter Figal, 125–39. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Fuyarchuk, Andrew. 2017. *The Inner Voice in Gadamer's Hermeneutics: Mediating Between Modes of Cognition in the Humanities and Sciences*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1980a. "Amicus Plato Magis Amica Veritas," in *Dialogue and Dialectic*, trans. P. Christopher Smith, 194–218. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1980b. "Idea and Reality in Plato's *Timaeus*," in *Dialogue and Dialectic*, trans. P. Christopher Smith, 156–93. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1980c. "Plato's Unwritten Dialectic," in *Dialogue and Dialectic*, trans. P. Christopher Smith, 124–55. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1986. *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, trans. P. Christopher Smith. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1994. *Heidegger's Ways*, trans. John W. Stanley. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 2000. "Towards a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language," trans. Lawrence K. Schmidt and Monika Reuss, in *Language and Linguisticity in Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, ed. Lawrence K. Schmidt, 19–50. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 2002. "Reply to Nicholas White," trans. Roger C. Norton and Dennis J. Schmidt, in *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings*, ed. Charles L. Griswold Jr., 258–66. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 2004a. *A Century of Philosophy: Hans-Georg Gadamer in Conversation with Riccardo Dottiori*, trans. Rod Coltman with Sigrid Koepke. New York: Continuum.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 2004b. *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. London: Continuum.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 2007a. "The Artwork in Word and Image: 'So True, So Full of Being!'," in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, ed. and trans. Richard E. Palmer, 195–225. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 2007b. "Plato as Portraitist," trans. James Findling and Snezhina Gabova, in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, ed. Richard E. Palmer, 294–321. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 2015. "The Socratic Question and Aristotle," trans. Carlo DaVia, *Continental Philosophy Review* 48: 95–102.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 2019. "On the Way Back to the Beginning," in *Hermeneutics Between History and Philosophy: The Selected Writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Pol Vandavelde and Ayun Iyer, 247–70. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Grondin, Jean. 2003. *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, trans. Kathryn Plant. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Grondin, Jean. 2010. "Gadamer and the Tübingen School," in *Hermeneutic Philosophy and Plato: Gadamer's Response to the Philebus*, ed. Christopher Gill and François Renaud, 139–56. Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag.
- Hyland, Drew A. 2004. *Questioning Platonism: Continental Interpretations of Plato*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Renaud, François. 2019. "Form and Language: Gadamer's Platonism," in *Brill's Companion to German Platonism*, ed. Alan Kim, 349–78. Leiden: Brill.
- Risser, James. 2012a. "Finding the Measure of Reason in Gadamer's (Platonic) Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutic Rationality/La rationalité herméneutique*, ed. Maria Luísa Portocarrero, Luis António Umbelino, and Andrzej Wierciński, 87–96. Berlin: Lit Verlag.
- Risser, James. 2012b. *The Life of Understanding: A Contemporary Hermeneutics*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Scheibler, Ingrid. 2000. *Gadamer: Between Heidegger and Habermas*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Smith, P. Christopher. 1981. "H.-G. Gadamer's Heideggerian Interpretation of Plato," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 12(3): 211–30.

Vilhauer, Monica. 2010. *Gadamer's Ethics of Play: Hermeneutics and the Other*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Wachterhauser, Brice R. 1999. *Beyond Being: Gadamer's Post-Platonic Hermeneutical Ontology*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.