The Platonic and Aristotelian Mimetic Paradigms In Light of Gans and Heidegger

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In Chapter 8 of *Originary Thinking*, entitled “High Art and the Classical Esthetic,” Eric Gans notes the importance of classical Greek art in the formation of fully differentiated secular—humanly self-referential—culture:

The creation of independent esthetic institutions reflects the emergence of the esthetic as a discovery procedure for human self-understanding. The classical is the first historical esthetic because it opens the history of art as an independent vehicle of anthropological knowledge. (132)Esthetic institutions do not, of course, emerge *sui generis*, but out of the context of pre-classical ritual culture, with its intricate interweaving of military, religious, political, and economic institutions. The question of the place of esthetic practices and institutions within the Greek *polis* becomes a contested issue in Plato and Aristotle, one that is recognized in their work as raising fundamental questions for political and ethical life. What is more, art practices and traditions occupy cultural territory within which the practice of philosophy must define and articulate itself as a form, at least in part, of esthetic practice in its generic function as reflection. That a dedicated discourse of reflection is needed is one of the most persistent themes of Plato’s work, from the earliest to the latest dialogues. That this discourse of dedicated reflection and inquiry should receive the name philosophy, the love of wisdom, rather than simply *sophia*, wisdom itself, is frequently touched on, for instance, at the conclusion of *Phaedrus*:

Now you go and tell Lysias that we came to the spring which is sacred to the Nymphs and heard words charging us to deliver a message to Lysias and anyone else who composes speeches, as well as to Homer and anyone else who has composed poetry either spoken or sung, and third, to Solon and anyone else who writes political documents that he calls laws: If any one of you has composed these

things with a knowledge of the truth, if you can defend your writing when you are challenged, and if you can yourself make the argument that your writing is of little worth, then you must be called by the name derived not from these writings but rather from those you are seriously pursuing. . . . To call them wise, Phaedrus, seems to me too much, and proper only for a god. To call him wisdom's lover—a philosopher—or something similar would fit him better and be more seemly. (278b-d)Philosophy shares with esthetic practice the act of reflection, but at the same time it has a distance, a greater degree of independence, than does poetry or drama from the older hieratic and ritual context of sacrificial religious practices, and also a proximity to the practical milieu of the institutions of legal and political life within which decisions and judgements about the conduct of civic life take effect.(1) The central role played in Plato's *Republic* by the argument against the poets and by the question of poetic *mimēsis*—as disproportionate in the context of political theory as it seems from a modern perspective—speaks to the scenic domain of culture that is in contention between philosophy and poetry, to what Socrates refers to in Book X as "an ancient quarrel between [poetry] and philosophy" (607b). Since the quarrel is by no means ancient in the *historical* sense for Socrates or Plato, and since poetry clearly holds the ground as a primordial institution in Greek life, for the Socrates of the *Republic* the contest between philosophy and poetry is clearly one for discursive rather than historical primacy. The argument in the *Republic* for the centrality of philosophy and of philosophical training for the ruler of the ideal *polis* is an assertion not so much of the specifically political importance of philosophy as for the importance of philosophy to the conduct of the good life as such, in all its communal dimensions. The rationale for banishment of the poets from the city in *Republic* is that the poets nourish the conflictive, rather than the contemplative and peacemaking, emotions. As Plato has Socrates observe in a central passage in Book VI: "[A] man who has his understanding truly turned toward the things that *are* has no desire to look down toward the affairs of human beings and to be filled with envy and ill will as a result of fighting with them" (500b-c).

In other words, for Plato the ideal values of the philosophical city are at the same time practical and ostensibly effectual in ensuring the safety and peace of the community. In this sense, Plato reflects the concern in Generative Anthropology to ground the understanding of human culture in its practical intentionality: the avoidance of the violence that pits members against one another in non-cooperative hierarchies based on threats and demonstrations of violence, violence that continues no less to threaten and determine the presence or absence of well-being for communities in our own, as much as in Plato's time. If Generative Anthropology shares this theoretical common cause with the vocation of philosophy at its Platonic inception, it remains in conversation with the philosophical tradition in its own generation. Questions of what is specific to human intentionality, and what makes for its qualities as specifically human, remain at the core of philosophical and

cultural preoccupations in the 20th as much as the 5thcentury BCE. In exploring in what follows the role of *mimesis* in Plato's argument in *Republic*, I will engage with Heidegger's way of reading Plato in recent times, so as to reflect on one aspect in which Generative Anthropology takes up its theoretical place in cultural debate.

With respect to the fight for discursive pre-eminence in the Greek city-state, a striking shift, very nearly an about-face, occurs in the way poetry is addressed in the work of Aristotle. It receives a single treatise, one of Aristotle's shortest, though a text incisive enough to provide poetics a theoretical foundation that will underwrite close on 2000 years of poetic theory, persisting until the late 18th century Romantic estheticians awaken poetics from its dogmatic slumbers, abandoning Platonic and Aristotelean mimeticism for theories of the creative imagination that constitute an original amalgam of Platonist and Aristotelian traditions of art theory. Early in the *Poetics*, in direct contrast to Plato, Aristotle approves the root poetic function of *mimēsis* not only as a distinguishing feature of human nature and intelligence, but the source of a crucial human advantage over animal species. Human beings learn first by means of *mimēsis*, and they also find it natural "to delight in works of imitation" (1448h 9-10), quite apart from the content of those mimetic representations. Later in the *Poetics*, in apparently deliberate contrast to Plato's "ancient quarrel," Aristotle asserts kinship between philosophy and poetry, affirming affinity between them greater than that, for instance, with historical discourse in being occupied not with the particularities of life as they have actually occurred, but with the universalities of the possible and probable imaginative forms that Aristotle had earlier defined as serving to purge and heal the aversive and attractive passions of fear and sympathy. Later in the chapter in *Originary Thinking* cited above, Gans notes this paradigmatic opposition in the status of the properly esthetic realm afforded by Plato and Aristotle:

Throughout history, Plato's qualms about the subversive nature of art alternate with the cathartic claims of Aristotle. . . . The relative importance of the Platonic and Aristotelian attitudes depends upon the balance of centrality and decentralization within a given society. . . . But the degree of subversion on the one hand or catharsis on the other cannot be fixed a priori; the controversy is undecidable because the action of deferral is itself undecidable. To defer violence now is to render possible greater violence later; the blame to be cast on one deferral or another is indeterminate. (136).This character of indeterminacy and undecidability of purpose attaches to all aspects and all levels of the esthetic domain. Indeed, the function of the esthetic realm is to create such an in-between dimension of culture, a space for reflection and the play of the imagination. The question of the purpose or value of that liminal realm will depend on the way it is understood, configured, and actively pursued within a given set of social, political, and historical—and indeed intellectual—circumstances. The esthetic domain is essential to culture not

in its content but in its function, as a domain withdrawn from action in order to explore language as such, its character as difference, deferral, and re-presentation, a relatively safe zone of questioning as to how the community should configure and conduct itself in its social, political, and economic institutions. The earliest forms of esthetic practices are strongly implicated in religious interpretations of the world and of the community's relations, broadly speaking, to the state of nature. But these religious implications of esthetic experience are clearly in crisis for Plato, along with the social and pedagogical formations of the more specifically esthetic traditions of epic poetry and tragic drama. In order to extend the reflective space of esthetics so as to create room for the more deliberate and pointed inquiry of philosophy, the whole network of cultural traditions must come under scrutiny in order to create appropriate discursive space for the practice of philosophy. The *polis* itself must be re-examined from the ground up, thus the definitive place in Plato's work held by the *Republic*.

The paradigmatic opposition in Plato and Aristotle in the ways in which the reflective and mimetic function characteristic of the esthetic realm should be understood in relation to social praxis configures the tensions and contradictions embodied in the paradoxical nature of the originary scene of representation as Gans illuminates it. For Gans, the mimetic function of the originary scene establishes a pivotal and inherently tension-ridden difference between the object as appetitively consumed and the object as represented. That act of differentiation creates the space of a human culture, an interval that enables a specifically human form of distribution of resources and also, most practically, a deferral of conflict and competition over them. How necessarily scant resources should be valued arises directly from the founding question of how they can be safely apportioned. Beyond the basic needs of survival and persistence, what precisely is the value of the object of representation—the value of the referent and of the act of signifying—as thing possessed or as thing that in our need for it captivates us? An engagement with this question of language, enabled by the act of representation and deferral of an action, requires that both the object and the act of representing it be considered, weighed, and agreed upon by the community if the ostensible—and ostensive—purpose of representation, the deferral of violence, is to succeed.

For Plato, the mimetic character of the act of representation, in its pleasurable indulgence of the passions, must be constrained to its primary purpose of deferral of action, the purpose that finds its full expression not in the temporal, temporary pleasures of the reception of poetic representations (encapsulated by Aristotle in poetic *catharsis*), but in the form of a searching inquiry into the significance of what they represent characteristic of the emerging discourses of science and philosophy. In the *Republic*, Plato has Socrates argue that the purpose of esthetic deferral cannot be properly achieved by the traditionally dominant Athenian cultural and

pedagogical traditions of epic and tragic poetry, with their pleasing portrayal of the contradictory behavior of gods and heroes, but rather by the more disciplined philosophical search for a conception of the good life that in its formal consistency can sustain the *polis* into the future, on the basis of a stable and unchanging knowledge of value, a common understanding of and approach to the idea, and thence to a practical distribution of, justice. For Aristotle, the goal of the generically esthetical act of deliberation on the good life is conceived rather differently than in Plato. For Plato the standard of knowledge is understood not to reside primarily in *noēsis*, pure intellection, but rather in the application of that knowledge in practice that is characteristic of *phronēsis*, that is to say, in practical rather than purely theoretical wisdom. In Book X of the *Republic*, true knowledge of things is possessed neither by the artistic imitator nor by the actual craftsman, but by the expert user, the one who knows how to apply the object effectively to the purpose for which it is intended. As Socrates argues: “Therefore, a maker [or craftsman, whether of real or artistic artifacts]—through associating with and having to listen to the one who knows—has right *opinion* about whether something he makes is fine or bad, . . . [but] *the one who knows is the user*” (602a; my emphasis). For Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, on the other hand, the goal of knowledge is not found in *praxīs* but in the pure contemplation of the real that alone resides with *sophia* and *theōria*. As Aristotle observes in the final chapter of the *Ethics*:

So if among virtuous actions political and military actions are distinguished by nobility and greatness, and these are unleisurely and aim at an end and are not desirable for their own sake, but the activity of reason, which is contemplative, seems both to be superior in serious worth and to aim at no end beyond itself, and to have pleasure proper to itself (and this augments the activity), and the self-sufficiency, leisureliness, unweariedness (so far as this is possible for man), and all the other attributes ascribed to the supremely happy man are evidently those connected with this [contemplative] activity, it follows that this [the exercise of contemplative reason] will be the complete happiness of man. (1177b 16-26)On the basis of such a clear hierarchical differentiation between the active and contemplative lives, it is comparatively easy, then, for Aristotle to affirm the positive value of poetry in its relative proximity to the exercise of philosophical reason, since, while the reception of the art work is contemplative in its disengagement from ethical action, the superior rational object of philosophical contemplation holds poetic *mimēsis* firmly in subordination to the exercise of pure reason. None of the perplexities of *phronēsis* in its attempt to apply the fruits of poetic reception to worldly ethical *praxīs* disturb Aristotelian poetics. Contemplative *catharsis*, in restoring the relative health and balance of emotions leaves the audience of the artwork freed of troubling passions. While, unlike the discourse of history, poetry entertains universal ideas, fully rational, theoretical contemplation—and therefore true knowledge of being—is never represented by

Aristotle as the goal or purpose of poetical works. For Plato, however, the goal of philosophy is not pure contemplative impassivity but the task of integrating philosophical insight, in *phronesis*, into effective social *praxīs.*

In banishing the poets from the ideal *polis* in the *Republic*, Socrates views the poets as similar to the Sophists, in that the poets do not strive for a consistent understanding of virtue or justice, but are content with the kind of passionate identification on the part of their audiences that Aristotle views as cathartic, but which Socrates sees as feeding and nurturing, rather than cleansing, the passions that make disinterested rational inquiry into justice impossible. On the basis of a philosophical training lasting well into middle age, and crowned by a transcendental conception of justice rooted in the ideal vision of the Form of the Good, the philosophically trained ruler only later in life begins active leadership of the community, at around the age of 50. An all-important phase of the training of the philosopher-ruler had previously followed on the foundational vision of the good. After the experience of noetic illumination by the Form of the Good has been absorbed into his/her view, the philosopher-trainee is then expected to re-enter and re-connect with everyday life and to adapt his or her philosophical vision to the murky cave-like conditions that prevail in the everyday world. To truly know the justice to which the philosopher has been introduced, he or she must demonstrate understanding of how that vision of ideal and absolute justice can find expression in the day-to-day exercise of actual political leadership and responsibility. Justice is only truly known and understood, in the *Republic*, in the real-world context of *phronēsis*, that is to say, of practical wisdom that applies the ideal of justice in the midst of the tensions, contradictions, and accommodations of worldly affairs. In order to create room for such a philosophically-trained leadership, Socrates exiles the poets, making their admittance to the ideal republic conditional on the conduct of a reasoned argument for their right to inclusion. Socrates reasons:

Therefore, isn’t it just that such poetry should return from exile when it has successfully defended itself, whether in lyric or any other meter? . . . Then we’ll allow its defenders . . . to speak in prose on its behalf and to show that it not only gives pleasure *but is beneficial both to constitutions and to human life*. Indeed, we’ll listen to them graciously, for we’d certainly profit if poetry were shown to be not only pleasant but also beneficial. (607d; my emphasis)The poets and their defenders, then, must accept the discipline of reasoned argument in defense of the political and social benefit that poetic *mimēsis* has to offer the community.

Mimēsis figures as a central construct in Plato’s subsequent twin dialogues, the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*. Further light is thrown by these dialogues on the overall range of *mimēsis* as a construct in Plato’s work and on the ways in which his view of it has been appropriated by the tradition. Both of these later dialogues feature a

visiting philosopher from Elea, who never receives a name but is simply referred to as the Eleatic Visitor or the Stranger. Falling apparently close on after the public denunciation of Socrates for impiety and corruption of youth, Socrates is portrayed in these two dialogues as preferring to quietly listen, but with a sharp ear tuned for material that will help him answer in court to the trumped up but highly dangerous accusations leveled against him by his fellow citizen, Meletus. This sobered and preoccupied Socrates is present in these dialogues, making only a brief appearance in the preliminary discussion of each, and his comments to the Eleatic Stranger provide clear indications of his interest in the proceedings. In the *Sophist*, Socrates sets the topic for discussion that stretches over the two dialogues, and asks the Stranger to identify his preferences for the kind of discourse he prefers to undertake, whether dialogic, as is the custom in Athens, or rather in a long monologic speech after the manner of debate common in Elea. In deference to his Athenian hosts, the Stranger rather reluctantly chooses to speak in dialogue with an interlocutor, on condition that he can choose someone compliant and cooperative, rather than challenging and assertive. Socrates himself would clearly not fit that bill, and the young student Theaetetus is chosen as the Stranger's partner in dialogue. The question for discussion is set by Socrates, namely, whether there are differences of role and identity for three key figures of public life: the sophist, the statesman, and the philosopher, with the focus of the *Sophist* on the distinction between sophist and philosopher, and of the *Statesman* devoted to that between statesman and philosopher.

In his response to Socrates' interest in the way the roles of the sophist, the statesman, and the philosopher are understood in Elea, the Stranger uses a method of inquiry that lends itself better to monologue than to dialogue, the so-called method of division (*diairesis*) in which distinctions are made between qualities shared and not shared by a given category of beings. At the conclusion of a long, painstaking, and at times dry exposition, the key division between the sophist and the philosopher falls on the ways in which each employs the function of *mimēsis*: that is to say, whether the object of imitation is chosen on the basis of belief and opinion or on the basis of genuine knowledge. As the Stranger puts it:

Some imitators know what they're imitating and some don't. And what division is more important than the one between ignorance and knowledge? . . . What about the character of justice and all of virtue taken together? Don't many people who are ignorant of it, but have some beliefs about it, try hard to cause what they believe it is to appear to be present in them. . . . I think we have to say that this person, who doesn't know, is a very different imitator from the previous one, who does. . . . [L]et's distinguish them by calling imitation accompanied by belief "belief-mimicry" and imitation accompanied by knowledge "informed mimicry." . . . . Then we need to use the former term [for the sophist], since the sophist isn't one of the people

who know but is one of the people who imitate. (267b-e)Two things are instructive in this passage regarding the use of *mimēsis* as a means to establish a clear distinction between the sophist and the philosopher: first, both philosopher and sophist, as he on the one hand who knows and on the other who relies on mere opinion, are held to be practitioners of *mimēsis*; second, the concluding observation in this passage, that “the sophist isn’t one of the people who know but is one of the people who imitate,” reverts from a bivalent and undecidably positive and/or negative denotation of the function of *mimēsis* to a singularly negative and monovalent distinction between knowledge and *mimēsis*. The sophist who does not know is deemed the one who imitates when in fact the distinction has already been established to be between a knowing *mimēsis* and a *mimēsis* of mere opinion. This tendency to foreclose on the more positive significations of *mimēsis* is also observable in the *Republic*, where it is argued that philosophical understanding, in its search for knowledge of the transcendent forms, draws—similarly to artistic representation—on mimetic relations between knower and known, but, in like fashion to what we observe here in the *Sophist*, in Book X of the *Republic* the term *mimēsis* is restricted to the less than rational imitation of outward and changeable forms on the part of the artist. *Mimēsis* is clearly, then, a type of *pharmakon*, capable of functioning as both medicine and poison, knowledge and mere opinion, reasoned representation of the good or mere rhetorical manipulation designed to persuade in the absence of reasoned argument. We are reminded here of the way in which this instability of signs as such is a key element of the model of human culture in Generative Anthropology. In illuminating this foundationally paradoxical, bivalent character inherent to signs, Generative Anthropology provides in the minimal model of the originary scene a clear demonstration of the paradoxical structure and ethos of human community, of the complex utility and instability of signs, and consequently of the political and legal institutions which they enable.

To recoup the thread of my argument: I began with Gans’ observation that classical art as “the first historical esthetic . . . opens the history of art as independent vehicle of anthropological knowledge” (1997 132), and further that the esthetics of Plato and Aristotle point to an inherent indeterminacy in the way we integrate the esthetic domain into our social structures and our understanding. Gans points to a dialectic of Platonic concern with mimetic subversion and Aristotelian embrace of mimetic catharsis. I have argued that the indeterminacy and inevitable alternation between these strategies of control and inclusion contains potential weaknesses in their tendency to foreclose on, rather to probe more deeply into, richly suggestive, and ultimately unavoidable indeterminacies. In holding art close to philosophy, Aristotle renders it firmly subordinate and external to the discourse of reason and knowledge, thereby weakening its potential contribution to our understanding of the complex ways in which questions of value are configured in the context of everyday personal, social, and political decision and policy. Plato, on the other hand, in his

concern over the inherently pleasurable, distracting, and rhetorically and ideologically obfuscating powers of artistic representation, tends to foreclose on the deeper potential partnership that is inherent to the mimetic character of all signification, shared equally and in complex fashion by rational and by artistic modes of reflection and representation.

To conclude, I would like to refer to an example of the way in which Aristotelian affirmation of *mimēsis* and concomitant instrumentalization of artistic catharsis can contribute to lines of interpretation and models of culture that reflect current concerns with questions of the human, the humane, and of the place of the humanities. I return to Plato's *Sophist* and bring to bear the interpretation of this text by Martin Heidegger in the only work of his that treats at length with a Platonic dialogue, the reconstruction of his 1924-25 lecture course that forms Vol. 19 of the collected works, translated into English in 1997 under the title *Plato's Sophist*. This text runs to 500 pages of close-grained analysis. For that reason and for the perspective it brings to Heidegger's strategies in his reading of Plato, I draw for my purposes here on the 1997 article by the Plato scholar Francisco J. Gonzalez entitled "On the Way to *Sophia*: Heidegger's Dialectic, Ethics, and *Sophist*." The most widely read text by Heidegger on Plato is his essay-length study "Plato's Doctrine of Truth," published in 1947 in a volume containing his "Letter on Humanism" (see Heidegger, *Pathmarks* 380-381). The association of the essay "Plato's Doctrine of Truth" with his topical "Letter on Humanism"(2) indicates the key position statement that Heidegger considered himself to be making in his reading, in the former, of Plato's cave analogy. The essay is one of Heidegger's most concise explications of his overall critique of metaphysics as the "forgetting of being" and of the ontological difference between being and beings. The juxtaposition of this key position statement in criticism of Plato with his critique of a humanist interpretation of existential phenomenology is a major progenitor of later poststructuralist and current posthumanist theoretical positions.

Gonzalez' analysis of Heidegger's study of *Sophist* explores the deeper roots of Heidegger's reading of Plato and the comparative rôle played by Aristotle's criticism of his teacher in Heidegger's interpretation and in his work generally, especially in the formative period leading up to *Being and Time* in 1927. One of the key issues in Plato scholarship regarding the interpretation of the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* is what to make of the reduced rôle played by Socrates in these late dialogues. Does it signify a change in Plato's thinking, reflected in a changed view of his relationship to the figure of Socrates in Plato's later work? Gonzalez argues, that several assumptions implicit in Heidegger's interpretation of the *Sophist* reveal themselves in his valuation of the argument of the Eleatic Stranger and his method of division (*diairesis*). Heidegger fails to notice that Socrates, in his brief appearance at the beginning of the *Statesman*, makes a veiled but highly significant criticism of the

Stranger's use of that method in his previous attempt to clearly distinguish between the sophist and the philosopher in the *Sophist*. Gonzalez argues that Heidegger's view is that Plato moves significantly away from concern about the good in his later philosophy. Heidegger sees evidence for this in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*, where he identifies the Stranger and the method of division with the authorial intentions of Plato. The inability of the method of division to make differentiations regarding value and worth is evidence for Heidegger of Plato's turn away from questions of value toward distinctions of being. Gonzalez argues that Heidegger ignores the weight of Socrates' criticism in the *Statesman* of the Stranger's argument in the *Sophist*, and its failure to make distinctions of value between the three identities of sophist, statesman, and philosopher. Socrates reproaches the Stranger's host, the mathematician Theodorus, in the opening lines of the *Statesman*: "[Y]ou assumed that each of the three were to be assigned equal worth, when in fact they differ in value by more than can be expressed in terms of mathematical proportion" (257b). In a long and detailed argumentation that I can only summarize, Gonzalez contends that Heidegger, throughout his reading of the *Sophist*, displays a strong alignment with Aristotle's criticism of Platonic dialectic and the latter's privileging of ethics over ontology. In a representative passage, Gonzalez argues:

Heidegger sees the Stranger's method as approximating, though still falling short of, the level of Aristotelian ontology, an ontology uncontaminated by any practical conception of the good or by the unclarity and tentativeness of Socratic dialectic. But it is only with the question of *why* Aristotle is made the standard here that we arrive at the crucial point: Heidegger finds in both Aristotle and the Stranger, and *not* in Socrates or the earlier Plato, his own conception of what philosophy should be. The reason why he defends, without argument and even at the cost of inconsistency, the view that Plato in the later dialogues abandoned the idea of the good along with the ethical orientation of Socratic dialectic is his belief that this is what Plato *should* have done. (47).Gonzalez finds in Heidegger's clear alignment with an Aristotelian reading of Plato the source of Heidegger's rejection of all questions of ethics in relation to his phenomenological ontology. The seminal influence of the Heideggerian critique of humanist concern with questions of value, I suggest, carries with it Heidegger's strong preference for an Aristotelian disjunction between questions of value and questions of being, between *phronesis* and *theōria*, and a structural bias toward a conception of theory as ontological science, abstracted from questions of ethical value.

To speak emblematically, in conclusion, the perplexing and disturbing course of Heidegger's own political alignments should give us serious pause regarding the potential implications of such an aggressively non-ethical theoretical orientation. While the complexities, paradoxes, and indeterminacies of ethical reflection may

have the potential to subvert confidence in our clear grasp of truths and decisiveness about issues, there is no real refuge from the social, political, and indeed personal process of ethical debate and pursuit of a constitutively elusive consensus regarding values. Generative Anthropology situates itself in this uneasy tension—explicit from the beginning of the theoretical tradition, and still exemplary of it—between theoretical analysis and the questioning of values. GA's preoccupation with the practical rootedness of theory and of value in the avoidance of violence and the task of community situates it in conversation with its philosophical tradition.

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Notes

1. On the significance of the break on the part of philosophy with mythic thought and integral relation to the emergence of the legal and political institutions of the *polis*, see Jean-Pierre Vernant, *The Origins of Greek Thought*: “The desacralization of knowledge, the advent of a kind of thought foreign to religion—these were not isolated and incomprehensible phenomena. In its form, philosophy is directly linked to the spiritual realm that we have seen give order to the city, and which was so distinctly characterized by the secularization and rationalization of social life. But philosophy’s dependence on the institutions of the *polis* is no less marked in its content” (107-108). (back)

2. “Letter on Humanism” is a response to a number of questions addressed to Heidegger by Jean Beaufret, provoking a rare engagement of Heidegger with the work of another contemporary philosopher. Both Beaufret’s questions and Heidegger’s response refer to Jean-Paul Sartre’s, *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (Paris: Nagel, 1946). (back)