Phenomenological Resonances in Plato's Theory of Ideas

Plato’s Socrates represents a peculiar and perhaps also seemingly double-faced figure: on the one hand, he is an exemplar of epistemic humbleness due to his canonical disavowal of any knowledge; on the other hand, he is the first to propose the Theory of Ideas and the concomitant notion of the ideal (distinctly philosophical) life. This Socrates’ understanding of Being as one, eternal and selfsame became the definitional horizon of philosophical inquiry for almost the entire history of philosophy. More precisely, Socrates’ disavowal of any knowledge and his later upholding of the Theory of Knowledge and the epistemological claim this seems to entail, i.e. that human beings can attain a perfect or at least satisfactory grasp of the Ideas if they use their intellect as abstracted from their senses result in a tangible contradiction. Yet, how exactly does one Socrates relate to the other? Is the difference between the two Socratic positions as radical as it appears? Or is there an internal logic in the transition from the earlier stance of ignorance to the later stage which seems to be the unambiguous upholding of theoretical knowledge? What is at stake here is the denial of the possibility of knowledge and the reverse, i.e., its affirmation. In my attempt to address these questions and the stakes involved, the trajectory of my present essay is then as follows: I will first look at Plato’s early dialogues to discuss (1) the role of the incalculable and unforeseeable in Socratic questioning; and (2) a recognition of ontological distance between the subject and what truly is. I will then shift my discussion to the middle dialogues, namely The Republic, in order to address the origination of the Platonic Theory of Ideas. The main concern of my paper is the way in which the very possibility of asking “What is x?” and our intrinsic inability to answer it are first brought together and sustained in Socratic discourse but yet later are said to be transformed into a rigid ontological demarcation between Being and appearance. I suggest that we look at the emergence of this ontological demarcation from a very specific angle
alluded to a moment ago: as the ground out of which two epistemic extremes, mysticism and skepticism, later come forth.

Plato’s *Charmides* depicts a meeting between Socrates, Charmides, and Critias. Upon meeting Charmides, Socrates says, “I saw inside his cloak and caught on fire and was quite beside myself” (*Chrm.* 155d). The phrases “caught on fire” and being “beside myself” describe Socrates as an individual not altogether dissociated from desires and appearances. In fact, quite the opposite is the case as we find him dazzled by Charmides’ beautiful physical appearance. Yet Socratic desire differs from others’ desires for two reasons: one is that Socrates is initially open to whatever desire discloses to him and the other is that he withholds the potentially overwhelming passion he feels and this withholding allows the appearance he is presented with to open up a space for questioning the nature of beauty or virtue. In an attempt to grasp the essence or the being of the given appearance, Socrates is brought to the limits of appearing. Thus, holding back in the face of desire provokes the question of what in fact makes the object of desire beautiful or virtuous. The failure of the given appearance provides the answer to this question and points to the need to look for the answer elsewhere, beyond this or that appearance. Socrates is attracted to the physical brilliance of Charmides and by virtue of that attraction he begins to wonder what shines through Charmides. What this means is that Socratic philosophical inquiry begins in earthly desire insofar as he does not immerse himself in it but rather steps back. This desire establishes Socrates in the shared world of appearances, which in its turn suggests that the questions Socrates uncovers in the communal world are already there. In other words, he is ready to be swept away by or charmed by appearances.

In Plato’s *Letter VII*, we also find the metaphor of fire. First I would like to note that inasmuch as the

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2 We recall the challenge by the Delphic oracle: Socrates was said to be the wisest man (*Ap.* 21a) and thereby was drawn into questioning the oracular statement and all manifestations of wisdom along with it.
3 The limits being seen as the absence of the being *in* this particular appearing.
Letter VII was probably written during a later period in Plato’s career than the Charmides, the theories found in it are much more fully developed than they are in the earlier dialogues such as the Apology and Charmides. Nonetheless, this later articulation can help to illuminate a fundamental dynamic already present in Plato’s early thought. There Plato explains why it is impossible to communicate his ideas in the form of a treatise and why his philosophy resists being propositionally fixed in any way. Whatever knowledge is disclosed in Socratic inquiry, it is disclosed “suddenly, like light flashing forth when a fire is kindled” (Letter VII, 341c-d). It presents itself as a “flaring up in the soul” (ibid) that grants a fortuitous vision of the way things truly are. This sudden light is, however, preceded by a theoretical reflection, which will result in an interesting contrast as will be seen in a moment. The theoretical reflection revolves around the three things that are necessary if one is to know “a real being”: the name, the definition, and the image (ibid 342b). It attempts to locate and grasp these things in one given object in order to gain knowledge (epistêmê) of the object in question. Yet the threefold path to knowledge is not as unproblematic as it may at first glance seem. Names, definitions, and images are dependent upon the senses and deficiencies of language. Knowledge as epistêmê must be the endpoint of inquiry. What is given to us by the senses are contradictory appearances that do not add up to any definition. What is reflected in the language is precisely the conflicting data of our senses. Unending fluidity of appearances offers no hope of epistemological stability. Thus our inquiry seems to come to a halt. It is at this moment of frustrated theoretical cognition that the light appears. If we think of what primarily characterizes fire (phlegein), we notice the way in which it bursts into existence out of nothing. That is, there is nothing that visually precedes its blinding brilliance. It seems that the coming-into-existence of fire cannot be anticipated. Platonic light is not related to the philosophical inquiry that comes before it as an effect to a cause. Such knowledge has the character of the incalculable, for it may or may not burst forth as philosophical inquiry is carried out. It is not necessitated by inquiry itself and cannot be relied upon.
Before I say more about the significance of the metaphor of fire, I shall say a few words about Socratic elenchus itself. Socrates asks his interlocutor, “What is ‘x’?” insisting that he or she gives his or her own opinion about the way ‘x’ appears to this person. After his interlocutor has given Socrates a definitional answer, Socrates asks more questions or, to be more precise, he calls his interlocutor’s attention to other instances of ‘x.’ It turns out that ‘x’ is found in many different phenomena that contradict each other. For example, virtue is found in quick and slow things. The interlocutor’s assent that ‘x’ appears in contradictory things entails the falsehood of his or her original definition of ‘x’. The attempted definition therefore crumbles into opposites.

The metaphor then brings into sharper relief the distinction between Socrates’ activity as practice and propositional knowledge, and indicates the insufficiency of what I will call the logical in Socratic elenchus. What is at work in this questioning can be summarized as follows: Socrates’ argument consists of premises and usually self-contradicting conclusions. When Socrates is presented with the premise that temperance is knowledge (Ch. 165a-b) and this knowledge is of knowledge as such (ibid 166b), he proves that temperance (if knowledge itself is its sole object) is unable to tell what that knowledge is knowledge of (ibid 168-171). Such a conclusion is necessitated by Socrates’ unvoiced reliance upon the principle of non-contradiction. Something cannot be what it is (knowing) and not be what it is (un-knowing) at the same time. The role of the logical here is not to define Being by way of formal knowledge and thus gain mastery over it, but rather to point to what is beyond any logical discourse. Socrates questions his interlocutor’s opinions and thereby paves the way for the moment when his interlocutor sees something that he or she did not see before. Such questioning needs to be carried out step by step and therefore can never be replaced with any ideas fixed in the form of a treatise. The discursive part which readies the interlocutor for the moment in which reality loses its

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4 At 159b, Charmides defines virtue as quietness or slowness and is refuted when Socrates proves that virtue is found in things slow and quick alike (159c-160d).
familiar character and becomes questionworthy is, in turn, what I mean by the logical. The onset of Socrates’ questioning is his reflection upon the conflicting nature of appearances. Sometimes virtue is found in quiet or slow things, sometimes it is found in quick things, yet the true character of virtue remains obscured. Socrates then needs logical reasoning in order to be able to demonstrate that appearances are opposed to one another and that there must be something that underlies their multiplicity. The very recognition of the conflicting nature of appearances introduces the awareness of the inaccessible Being exceeding each appearance and thus of something incalculable.

When Socrates asks what virtue itself is, he investigates any offered definition of virtue and then points out that it is inconsistent with other instances of virtuous comportment thereby proving it to be untrue.

The further question is then: What is the Socratic understanding of truth? To answer this, we need to examine the notion of truth as un-forgetting or un-concealment (alêtheia). Forgetting suggests at least two things. First, it presupposes a prior relation to that which has been forgotten. One cannot forget what was never in any way present to him or her. In the question “What is x?”, ‘x’ has never been completely withdrawn. It is already tied up with appearing, or presenting itself in one way or the other. Forgetting then means that ‘x’ has rather been covered over, temporarily lost in the flux of changing appearances. Second, it shows that there is no gap between the objective reality of ‘x’ and its reality as presented in our everyday opinions. If ‘x’ is tied up with appearing, this means that the true reality of ‘x’ is essentially connected with its initial appearances. One un-covers ‘x’ in the realm of

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5 The second definition of virtue that Charmides proposes (the definition authored by Critias) is that virtue means minding one’s own business (161b). The definition is variously exposed by Socrates as untenable throughout the rest of the dialogue.

6 This method of refutation seems to strive for a truth radically different from the idea of truth as correspondence of the mind and reality (adequatio rei et intellectus), ever so prominent since the Middle Ages. It is different insofar as Socrates’ thinking is not marked by the radical split between appearance and Being. Although Socrates does distinguish between appearance and true reality, he still sees them as essentially interrelated.
everyday life by clarifying the given opinions about it. The notion of truth as un-forgetting is thus inherently related to appearing.

Yet what is it that is un-concealed as true by what was earlier described as the illuminating force of fire? Is not Socrates always emphatic about not having any knowledge whatsoever about the being of ‘x’? A further implication of the character of Socratic inquiry if understood correctly is that truth is not reducible to a present object or a proposition. This leads to the important notion of distance. What is un-concealed in truth is precisely the distance between the being of ‘x’ and the way it appears to us, the distance which cannot be bridged. The true reality of ‘x’ is indeed not something that can ever be discovered. What can be discovered, however, is its fundamentally withdrawn character, its absence. Once again, it is worth emphasizing that the absence in question is not altogether beyond the world of appearances. We cannot reduce truth to a proposition (that is, we cannot say, “Virtue is this as opposed to that”) precisely because the only way we can relate to Being or ‘what is’ is by acknowledging its distance from us.7

The question “What is ‘x’?” invites realization on our part that ‘x’ is essentially withdrawn. Such realization cannot be equated with any propositional knowledge, for what is revealed to us in the experience provoked by Socratic elenchus is precisely the concealed nature of the being of ‘x.’ Thus the challenging task of Socratic dialogue: it must affect the interlocutor, it must “happen” in the thick of the common world. Socrates’ inquiry accomplishes its task in a twofold way. On the one hand, it proceeds by logically pointing out inadequacy of others’ opinions. One sees the inherent insufficiency of the attempted definition when this definition and its puzzling consequences are enacted in speech, in logos. On the other hand, it needs an incalculable intervention from the outside in order to: (1) get started, and (2) experience a kind of knowledge that borders on the experience of the lack of the true being in

7 “[T]his relation is proper precisely insofar as it acknowledges the self-concealment of ‘what is’ as it is, according to which virtue in its very Being both appears to us and withdraws from our grasp.” Kirkland, Sean. Thinking in the Between with Plato and Heidegger, Research in Phenomenology, vol. 37, no. 1, Spring, 2007.
things, the withdrawal of true reality.

Now I would like to turn to *The Republic* where we get the canonical articulation of the Theory of Ideas. I will address the following issues: In what sense is the Theory of Ideas the resolution of the tension between distance and appearance, the tension disclosed in the midst of appearances and always necessarily tied to them? Moreover, what is it that calls for the resolution as such?

The word *eidos* means the look of the thing, the way it appears to us, and it is usually translated as “idea.” The very meaning of the word “look” implies that there must be somebody to see this thing, “it is that which presents itself to a seeing.”

The look is what it is as long as there is a gaze. What becomes essential here is the decisive moment of interpretative reception of the look. The nature of appearance as such allows for two different approaches. One is to emphasize the identity of appearance and ‘what is’; that is, to say that the appearance is the appearance of ‘what virtue is,’ the appearance that grants us the very access (no matter how indirect it is) to the Being of ‘what virtue is.’ On the other hand, it is to say that appearance is something different from what virtue is.

The passages (475a-476a to 480a) in the *Republic* will help us to articulate the steps taken to extract ideas from their distant yet always intrinsically related to appearances position and turn them into ontologically independent entities.

I would like to start with Socrates’ discussion with Glaucon regarding philosopher-kings as ideal rulers of the city where he makes a distinction between philosophers and lovers of sights and sounds. The distinction is that a philosopher “desires the whole” of wisdom (475b), whereas a lover of sights desires a particular appearance, he or she is discriminate in his or her desire. It is this similarity in and of desire that Glaucon presumably has in mind when he says that if this is the case and desire does indeed designate a philosopher, “then many strange people will be philosophers” (475d). Yet

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desire of a particular appearance translates into a love of experience of the thing and not the thing itself. Philosophical desire, on the other hand, is directed toward the thing itself, that which grounds the appearance. It is, in other words, not sated with the appearance of the thing.⁹

The distinction between the philosopher and non-philosopher is important for understanding the two ways of representing the Theory of Ideas: the esoteric and exoteric arguments. At 475e, Socrates claims that the Theory is best explained to those who are already initiated into Socratic discourse (Glaucon, for one) presumably because the very exposure of the initiated to ontological distance provides space for any such theory. In other words, recognition of the being of ‘x’ as withdrawn opens up a way to an (however tentative and theoretical) explanation as to why this might be the case. The exoteric argument is marked by the question, “What if the person who has opinion without knowledge gets angry with us and disputes the truth of what we are saying? Is there some way to console him and persuade him gently, while hiding from him that he isn’t in his right mind?” (476e). The former argument thus begins with the already-disclosed asymmetry between Being and appearance, while the latter begins with the equation of knowledge with ‘what is’ in opposition to the ‘person who has opinion’.

Following the esoteric argument at 476a, we see that “since the beautiful is the opposite of the ugly, there are two” (Rep.), that is, each is one. The oneness of the beautiful is necessary for it to be what it is, that is, the opposite of the ugly. However, we learn that each eidos is one, yet always appears (phainesthai) as many different appearances (phantazomena). This does not mean, however, that here Socrates posits two distinct entities or two regions of access as appropriate to the eide and appearing

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⁹ We could think that Socratic dialogical practice exposes ontological distance and is in a very peculiar sense a way of absorbing it, making it a part of oneself, which suggests the weirdly inverted but yet most appropriate kind of assuaging the philosopher’s desire. Once this experiential binding to ontological distance that is enacted in the temporally charged space of the dialogue is replaced with knowledge in the form of a treatise, the philosophical desire is open to other forms of assuagement, the unfortunate ones.
(the physical and the transcendental). Rather, we see here a similar kind of relatedness that was initially derived from the word *eidos* itself, which is the relatedness of an appearance and to whom it appears as well as the coming forth of the *eide* out of particulars. The *eidos* is insofar as it appears to someone. Consequently, there are two ways of discussing the *eidos*: the idea and the particular instantiation of it.

If we look at Sallis’ reading of this passage, we will find that he interprets this distinction as the distinction between what an *eidos* is and what it shows itself as. Sallis asserts that the *eide* are characterized by “two different modes of showing” when he says that “though each *eidos* is itself one, it can, nevertheless, *show itself* in such a way as to look like many.”10 The distinction is then between a showing in which an *eidos* shows itself as it is (one) and a showing in which it shows itself as it is not (many), as something other than itself.11 While it is questionable whether there are indeed two modes of showing at this point in the dialogue and not just one that is marked by its intrinsic twofoldness, this distinction indicates something more fundamental than the distinction between the intelligible and the sensible.

We have already seen the important moment that paves the way to the ontological distinction between *eide* and appearances as it occurs in the midst of everyday appearances. It is the elenctic moment when Socrates disrupts our unproblematic attitude to everyday appearances by pointing out their conflicting multiplicity. He thus disavows his interlocutor’s assumption that the multiple appearances of virtue amount to the actual being of virtue and exposes the character of the being of ‘x’ as essentially withdrawn and questionworthy. The experience of ontological distance that arises out of withdrawing of the being of ‘x’ from immediacy constitutes the second moment.

Although it has been emphasized throughout this paper that the notion of ontological distance to

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10 *Being and Logos*, 384.
11 ibid.
which Socrates seems to appeal\textsuperscript{12} does not indicate the radical separation of the being of ‘x’ and appearances, the dual structure of appearance (the look and the one it appears to, the being of the \textit{eidos} as appearing) opens up a possibility of further differentiation between the two.

We could approach this differentiation by unpacking the notion of duality that is found in the language of appearance: appearance is the appearance of ‘what is’ and at the same time, understood as an image of something, appearance points to the missing original, gestures toward a hidden image-creating force.\textsuperscript{13} This accentuation of duality helps us to see the originary unity of appearance as defined by its twofold structure out of which one meaning is drawn and becomes privileged.

Esoteric argument marks a more pronounced understanding of difference as duality in the distinction between appearance and \textit{eidos} by shifting its language of distance to the language of likeness, imitation, and participation. One way to address the argument is to go back to the distinction of the philosopher and the non-philosopher described by the metaphor of wakefulness. The one “who believes in beautiful things, but doesn’t believe in the beautiful itself” is “living in a dream rather than a wakened state” (\textit{Rep.} 476c). Socratic wakefulness means seeing the \textit{eidos} and its instantiation together by recognizing their difference and necessary concurrence. Slumbering non-philosophers, on the other hand, are not able to perform the visual extraction of the idea (the beautiful itself) from its singular appearance. Although both are initially presented with the same appearance, drawing out of the idea seems to have a definitional aspect to it: philosopher \textit{is} defined as such in the moment of his or her response. The language of wakefulness and dreaming suggests the ability or inability to differentiate between the image and original, absence and presence. It is important to note the two closely interrelated constituents of this discussion: the image and original distinction which is ontologically

\textsuperscript{12} Socratic appeal to the experience of ontological distance is described by multiple vocabularies. The vocabulary presented in this paper is that of remove, the telling absence of the being of ‘x,’ our essential inability to arrive at any propositional truth.

\textsuperscript{13} Note that “image” comes from from Latin “imago,” related to “imitate.”
descriptive of reality as such and the philosopher and non-philosopher distinction which indicates the
two possible “responses” to this ontological condition. The former is linked to the notion of
participation in the eide, i.e., the eide which explain our being able to refer to things as “beautiful” or
“ugly.” The multiple instances of the beautiful are gathered and sustained in their ontologically
uncertain way of being by the beautiful itself. While this is very similar to something we have seen in
the early dialogues (i.e., to Socrates pointing out the self-concealing reality behind all multiple
appearances), the emphasis shifts. The implicit ontological opposition, as it becomes articulated in
accordance with its own internal logic, moves into a more epistemologically bipolar territory: if
appearances are multiple, temporal, changing, then their corresponding ideas gradually become defined
as one, eternal, selfsame. We need to heed the logic of appearances as images as it is “embodied” in the
philosopher and non-philosopher distinction in order to grasp the “if-then” core of the argument.

As we saw earlier, the non-philosopher desires multiple, always changing appearances or
images of (for instance) the beautiful. The object of the non-philosopher’s desire is dispersed into the
many sights. What he or she fails to do is to posit the missing original underlying the multiple images.
The philosopher, on the other hand, is able to recognize image and original as different. Once a
philosopher is “awakened” to the difference by an intervention of the incalculable, the withdrawn
original acquires a very different kind of visibility. The philosopher is drawn towards the eidos of, e.g.,
the many beautiful appearances and in this movement from the many appearances to the eidos, the
latter becomes unmistakable in its oneness, selfsameness. What we can note about philosophical seeing
is that (1) it occurs exclusively in thought\(^{14}\) and that (2) it is markedly fleeting, uncertain. As Socrates
says at 476c-d, the one who believes in the beautiful itself “can see both it and the things that
participate in it.” Socrates’ statement seems to suggest that the philosopher’s seeing is essentially

\(^{14}\) Conversely, the thought of the lovers of sights and sounds, Socrates says at 476b, is “unable to see and embrace the
nature of the beautiful itself.”
characterized by the ability to see precisely both appearances and the eide. This underscores the intrinsic difficulty of Socrates’ philosophical stance: he is directed to the beyond of appearances and yet he can never free himself from appearances in their perceptual immediacy.\textsuperscript{15}

The discussion transitions from the distinction between the philosopher and the non-philosopher to that between knowledge and opinion, thus indicating the onset of the exoteric argument. At 477a, Socrates contends that “knowledge is set over what is, while ignorance is of necessity set over what is not” and at 478d proceeds to say that “opinion is intermediate between those two.” Opinion then is a mixture of ‘what is’ and ‘what is not.’ I would like to discuss Socrates’ contention with a view to the function of logos. If we look at 479b, we find the following exchange of remarks

What about the many doubles? Do they appear any the less halves than doubles? Not one.
So, with the many bigs and smalls and lights and heavies, is any one of them any more the thing someone says it is than its opposite? No, each one of them always participates in both opposites.

What we notice here is the insistence on “saying” or even “naming.” It is once we start naming or ordering ‘what is’ in accordance with logos that we first encounter the oppositions. The beautiful first needs to be articulated in order to become the opposite of the ugly. The ongoing change of appearances becomes problematized only after it is said, revealed in the linguistic medium. Logos here functions as the moment of the incalculable we have seen earlier for the following reason: it “opens up a distance between being and appearance, insofar as it points to the being of ‘x’ as the withdrawn possibility condition for the appearances ordered, gathered and separated according to names.”\textsuperscript{16} That is, logos names a thing and it is in the named space, that things first appear as opposites. Again, there is something to be noted about the double aspect of logos. On the one hand, it constitutes the essential

\textsuperscript{15} Note that at 476b Socrates claims that “there are very few people who would be able to reach the beautiful itself and see it by itself.”

\textsuperscript{16} Kirkland, Sean. Logos as Message from the Gods: On the Etymology of ‘Hermes’ in Plato’s Cratylus.
way we relate to the world by ordering it. *Logos* first allows us to see a being as this or that, it puts an ontological value on a particular being by distinguishing it from other beings. It is the shared space of humans as such and is therefore the logical, almost perfectly quotidian core of Socratic elenchus. On the other, it posits appearances as problematic and thus stirs our untroubled relation to them.¹⁷

Let me summarize the main points of my discussion in order to underline their relevance in thinking the ground out of which the epistemic polarity will later emerge. First, Socratic discourse centers on the duplicity of appearance: it starts from the way appearance shows itself in the everyday world and proceeds to point out its unsatisfactory character insofar as appearance fails to answer the “What is ‘x’?” question. Appearance always exceeds itself and in its failure to accommodate the being of ‘x’ or ‘what is’ points to something beyond itself. The beyond is described in terms of ontological distance, as that which necessarily eludes our understanding. Second, the mode of appearance of ‘what is’ is self-concealing. Ontological distance is characteristic of the locus of co-existence of opposites, appearing and concealing, showing as withdrawing, the locus in which we always find ourselves. At the same time, it is the locus of tension needed to be resolved in order to ever be able to grasp what is justice or virtue. Third, the unsatisfactory character of appearance can only be disclosed by an intervention from the outside, the moment of the incalculable. Understanding needs to be stirred. The stirring-function is *logos*. The incalculable moment of stirring and the rational pointing to contradictions in the naturally inhabited linguistic space converge in the paradoxical ambiguity of *logos* itself. The resolution of the above-articulated tension is the Theory of Ideas, the drawing of ontological distinction between Being and appearance.

What I attempted to emphasize, however, is the equivocal and complicated character of what first seems to be an assured transition from the professed inability to arrive at any propositional

¹⁷*Itself being double-sided, *logos* is then a kind of path that leads to the recognition of the intrinsic double-sidedness of the image-original schema.*
knowledge to a portrayal of metaphysical reality, the portrayal that harbors in itself both the promise of final knowledge and violation of the boundaries. As I see it, the emergence of the ontological distinction between Being and appearing cannot be separated from its two crucial aspects. One is the increasing emphasis on the philosopher as distinct from the non-philosopher and the corresponding emphasis on the object of philosophical seeing. The other is the cluster of persistent ambiguities. Double is the *logos* of questioning and naming, dual is the seeing of both appearances and the *eide*.

Platonic ontological distinction appears to be the key moment in relation to the very possibilities of knowledge as such, the way these possibilities become enunciated and stabilized. The two poles of this distinction will be the correlates of the two epistemic poles, the mystic and the skeptic one. The former replaces the feeling of distance with a feeling of something radically different, something that reaches beyond the distance and results in the unspeakable knowledge of the beyond. The main problem with mysticism is its tendency to discard logic altogether, to do away with any reasoned investigation for the sake of inexpressible feeling or Dionysian frenzy. The former ultimately confirms that no knowledge is indeed possible for a human being. What it does not confirm is the idea of distance, the idea that even though we as human beings are barred from truth, truth, or rather the relation to truth still remains necessarily relevant to us. A skeptical position is synonymous with the assumption that knowledge must and can be final. The failed attempts to ground knowledge in absolute certainty lead to strikingly reduced epistemological ambitions, skeptical doubts in the possibility of any knowledge. In this case, logic becomes the privileged way of attaining and securing knowledge.

Although it is certainly not possible to do any explicatory justice to the subjects of mysticism and skepticism coupled with subsequent nihilism here, I nonetheless suggest that it is important to attend to the experiential ground that gave rise to the ontological distinction between Being and

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18 Therefore, it seems as though that the clearer formulation of the *eide* were precipitated by the formulation of the philosophical “I,” not the other way around.

19 Understood in the sense that our highest values are metaphysically groundless.
appearance insofar as this ground that was essentially characterized by a number of ambiguities and dualities.

Works Cited

