



## On Heidegger's appropriation of Aristotle's practical philosophy, especially regarding the concept of Phrónesis

*Sobre a apropriação de Heidegger à filosofia prática de Aristóteles, em especial  
quanto ao conceito de Phrónesis*

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### ABSTRACT

The theme of the article is the Heideggerian appropriation of Aristotle's practical philosophy, and how this would imply the concept of "phrónesis"; The question is what role this Aristotelian concept would play in his investigations in the 1920s. The aim is to indicate how this is thought of in two important works from this period, the Natorp Report and Plato's Sophist. A related goal is to understand how the concept appears within the scope of phenomenological interpretations of the Stagirite, especially in Nicomachean Ethics. The aim is to indicate that phrónesis (treated as circumvision and bringing with it the genesis of the existential care) is what can practically guide us in our behavior, providing a vision of the open and implying interaction with our being. It will be necessary to indicate how phrónesis is linked to a way of uncovering being-there and to highlight how the entity that we are is given to Heidegger's future existential phenomenology.

**Keywords:** Heidegger; phenomenological interpretations of Aristotle; practical philosophy. Phronesis; circumvision.

### RESUMO

O tema do artigo é a apropriação heideggeriana da filosofia prática de Aristóteles, e como isso implicaria no conceito de "phrónesis"; questiona-se sobre qual seria o papel reservado a este conceito aristotélico em suas investigações na década de 1920. Objetiva-se indicar como esta é pensada em duas importantes obras desse período, o *Relatório Natorp* e *Platão: Sofista*. Meta relacionada é compreender como o conceito aparece no âmbito das interpretações fenomenológicas sobre o estagirita, especialmente na *Ética a Nicômaco*. Pretende-se indicar que a phrónesis (tratada como *circunvisão* e trazendo em si a gênese do existencial *cuidado*) é o que pode nos orientar praticamente em nossos comportamentos, proporcionando uma visão do aberto e implicando na interação com nosso ser. Caberá indicar como a phrónesis está ligada a um modo de descobrimento do ser-aí e evidenciar como o ente que somos se dá à futura fenomenologia-existencial de Heidegger.

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## Introduction

Stories about Heidegger filling classrooms and leaving a significant impression on the listeners of his lectures in the 1920s are always inspiring. Among them, the most illustrative is that of Gadamer, found in the preface to the French edition of the *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle (Natorp Report)*, where he tells us the following:

These interpretations made such an impression on Leo Strauss, a listener at the Freiburg course, that he, like many others, was so enthusiastic that he began to spread the word everywhere that it was not Werner Jaeger, the truly great specialist in Aristotle, nor Max Weber, who at that time certainly represented the strongest scientific temperament in the German chair, both of whom seemed like two orphan boys in comparison [to Heidegger] (Gadamer, 1992, p.13, free translation).

However, if we take seriously Weber's (1994) warning about "crowded classrooms" and the fact that students sometimes seek out a private tutor for reasons that have nothing to do with science, we should focus on another passage in this book, the narrative contained in this preface about the above-mentioned Freiburg lecture from the winter semester of 1921/22, which applies to the surrounding texts as well as to the document of the same name popularized as the Natorp Report (1922). Here Gadamer (1992) again highlights it: "Heidegger works here with energetic verve, with the ideal of 'knowing more' (*Mäλλον ειδέναι*), which emerges from the facticity of human life." (p.13, free translation) More than the impulses of the young Heidegger or the ideal of more knowledge (*mehr Wissens*), we must pay attention to the source from which both springs. Unlike other themes in philosophy, facticity is not a mere object in a delimited meaningful context and both are amenable to theorization. What is at stake here is a characteristic of our own human experience and, as could not be otherwise, of the philosopher's own life, combined with this experience and dependent on being understood on such ground.

Heidegger's path in the phenomenological description of the "human fact" (*Faktum*) is long; of the "factual life" (*faktisch Leben*), as an enlightened version of this fact; of the "facticity" (*Faktizität*), as a determination of this life and figure that, after progressively gaining centrality in investigations that went from 1919 to 1925, traced a broad course, leading to what would later be called the fundamental analysis of being-there. (*Fundamentalanalyse des Daseins*)<sup>1</sup> In the flow of these developments, Aristotle's philosophy gains prominence, providing elements for what Heidegger intends to treat as a clarification of facticity in traditions and the resumption of a lost facticity and, later, the appropriation of the practical component of this philosophy as a stimulus to an existential

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<sup>1</sup> As the description of these moments does not fit within the scope of this article, we recommend a text in which we have already discussed this: Cf. Kahlmeyer-Mertens (2023).

philosophy, a philosophy of the dynamics of becoming in existence. In this effort to appropriate fundamental concepts of Aristotelian philosophy, the notions of *sophía* (Verstehen, understanding), *téchne* (Sich-Auskennen, expertise), *noûs* (vernehmendes Vernehmen, pure apprehension), *epistémē* (Wissenschaft, science), and *phronesis* (Umsicht, circumspection) are revisited through the investigative lens of the young Heidegger's phenomenology, among others. These concepts emerge in a repertoire of works that illustrate Heidegger's interpretive engagement with that ancient philosopher, namely: *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle: Introduction to Phenomenological Research* (1921–1922), *Natorp Report* (1922), *Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity* (1923), *Introduction to Phenomenological Research* (1923–1924), *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy* (1924), *Plato's Sophist* (1924–1925), and *History of the Concept of Time* (1925).

Focusing on the concept of *phronesis*, this article seeks to delve into the contexts of the *Natorp Report* and *Plato's Sophist* to provide an overview of how the concept is articulated within Heidegger's interpretations of Aristotle's practical philosophy, particularly in *Book VI* of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

## 1. Aristotle in the *Natorp(-Misch)* Report

Heidegger's biographical records document that he became an early reader of Aristotle, initially driven by the clerical requirements of his education. However, as Heidegger himself asserts, these readings soon became integral to his philosophical inquiry (Heidegger, 2009). Nevertheless, we should not be mistaken: Heidegger's appropriations of Aristotle from 1921 onward are markedly distinct from earlier interpretations (Buren, 1994). These earlier readings followed the Aristotelian-Thomistic orientation prevalent in Christian circles of the time. During a period when Neo-Realism was consolidating its position in scholastic studies and Neo-Kantians were focusing on *On Interpretation* and the *Analytics* (Aristotle, 1938) with a particular interest in Aristotle's doctrine of propositions<sup>2</sup>, traces of these tendencies were undoubtedly present in Heidegger's work. However, his later interpretations bear the clear imprint of phenomenology. Deconstructing the established translations of Aristotle, Heidegger sought to uncover the factual experience obscured by centuries of contextual reduction imposed by tradition. This aim was aligned with his broader project of arriving at an original understanding of facticity, a radicalization of the pursuit of an originary science of life, which he had envisioned as early as 1919 in *The Fundamental Problems of Phenomenology* (Heidegger, 1993).

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<sup>2</sup> As an example of *Kommentar zu Immanuel Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft* and what can be found from page p.94 onwards. Cf. Cohen (2000) in our references.

An emblematic text from this phase is *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle: Indication of the Hermeneutical Situation* (Natorp Report, 1922). Sharing its title with a lecture delivered in the previous semester (1921–22) – which had already laid the groundwork for subsequent developments through a detailed analysis of the main features of traditional interpretations of Aristotelian philosophy up to that time, highlighting the historical sedimentations that obscure references to the factual-original ground preserved in Aristotelian thought – this brief report presents a work that is, at the very least, striking.

Heidegger had written the report, somewhat hurriedly, with a pragmatic purpose; it is a document through which he, then a *Privatdozent*, hoped for an appointment to a university chair. As far as we know, he sent the document to more than one full Professor in the hope of acceptance (it is known that it was to the neo-Kantian Paul Natorp in Marburg and to the Diltheian Georg Misch in Göttingen). Although the document did not have the expected effect (after all, it was not that time that Heidegger achieved the desired position),<sup>3</sup> it served to show what the philosopher had in hand, as reported by Gadamer (1995): “[...] in 1922, my own teacher Paul Natorp gave me to read a manuscript that Heidegger had sent him, an introduction to the interpretations of Aristotle. Reading this manuscript [...] touched me like an electric shock” (p. 4, our translation). Now, if Natorp had not recognized the value in it, he would not even have recommended reading it to his young student who was aspiring to be a philosopher.

A look at the text of the Natorp Report and we soon see that it is not an extensive work; with just over fifty pages, we have Heidegger talking about his phenomenology in two thirds of its length, with Aristotle appearing only in the third and last part<sup>4</sup>. From the analysis of these, it is possible to infer that more than a canonical interpretation of Aristotle, we have this thought giving encouragement to what would later become Heidegger's fundamental ontology, a philosophical project of which the Natorp Report is an outline. As a research program, this document lists a series of intended readings, which would be: “Books A, B and I”, of Physics, in the search for the concept of movement (*Bewegung*); to understand the Aristotelian mode of investigation, Heidegger will study “Book A”, of Metaphysics and, finally, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Heidegger deals mainly with

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<sup>3</sup> An interesting fact: this report was considered lost until the 1980s; Gadamer (1995) estimates that it was destroyed during the bombings of Leipzig during World War II. However, in 1989, Professor Hans-Ulrich Lessing from Bochum accidentally found a complete copy of the text in the Göttingen library; it was Georg Misch's copy. In the 1920s, this professor was concerned with comparing the philosophy of his father-in-law (Wilhelm Dilthey) with the phenomenological orientations of Edmund Husserl, which meant that he did not pay attention to Heidegger. As far as we know, Misch was also bothered by the emphasis on Stefan George in Heidegger's writing, considering it exalted, and so he gave the position to Moritz Geiger. Considering the fact that the copy of Misch found is the one that serves as the basis for the publication of *The Phenomenological Interpretation of Aristotle* in the Dilthey-Jahrbuch of 1989, I insist on the idea of referring to this document as the “Natorp-Misch Report”.

<sup>4</sup> In the edition we take as reference, the text of the *Natorp Report* has 36 pages (already free of the editors' apparatus and notes), with the part dedicated to Aristotle beginning on the twenty-first page. Cf. Heidegger (1992a).

the latter in his “Book VI”, in which the so-called *dianoetic virtues* will be addressed; Heidegger intends to indicate how being-there reveals itself or, to put it more appropriately, how that, which will soon be called being-there, reveals itself comprehensively as meaning in the context of life and self-understanding. The report aimed to indicate the so-called “hermeneutical situation” (*hermeneutischen Situation*). But what situation would this be? Precisely, that of Aristotle's philosophy, which was elucidated from the analysis of phenomenological interpretations. Operating phenomenologically and hermeneutically, Heidegger intends to raise the previous positions, the previous views and the previous conceptualities that condition the facticity of these ideas; yes, they are the same previous structures of understanding that we would see later in *Being and Time*, although, at that moment, they are named prototypically as: “viewpoint” (*Blickstand*), “view” (*Blickrichtung*) and “range of vision” (*Sichtweite*). Heidegger knows that it is necessary to take these parameters of understanding into account to determine how to go to Aristotle, taking contributions from him for his investigation; in the same way, it proceeds in this way, taking care not to naively remain in the traditional circuits of interpretation of these ideas, which always leave us one step away from the desired original ground, since we always inherit them from the interpretations edited in tradition. With this, the investigation gains clarity regarding the fact that its course is conditioned by elements extrinsic to it, but not determined by them (Peraita, 2002). Heidegger will thus strive to indicate the most relevant constitutive elements of factual life, aware that it is in understanding that the most immediate mode of apprehension occurs; that such life occurs in a project of concretization of its own being, even when in contexts of average everyday life. Since factual life is not something that would have a substantial or quiditative trait, it is ontologically constituted as a constant task of becoming itself in its “[...] difficult way of being and assuming, then the genuinely adjusted way of accessing and maintaining this openness can only consist in embracing the difficulty that life brings with it” (Heidegger, 1992a, p. 19, our translation). Thus, we agree with Olafson (1998) when he indicates precisely that it is this attempt to understand the phenomenon of life that brings Heidegger closer to the foundation of Aristotelian ethics. With the aim of elucidating the relationship between the phenomenology of factual life in Heidegger and the way in which it would be related to the contexts of Aristotle's practical philosophy, *Nicomachean Ethics* comes into focus in the following topic.

## 2. Phenomenological interpretation of Aristotelian practical philosophy

Heidegger reads the *Nicomachean Ethics* as a work of practical philosophy; he focuses on his “Book VI”, which deals with the dianoetic virtues mentioned above. There are five of these virtues:

*tékhnē*, *epistémē*, *sophía*, *noûs* and *phronesis*, and the philosopher understands them as modalities through which entities unveil themselves (*alétheuein*), a revelation that is also that of the factual life (*psykhé*) that we are. (Heidegger, 1992a) Heidegger (1992a) follows the dynamics of Aristotle's own exposition in the aforementioned ethics writing. As we have there, he considers that there are two ways of uncovering (*alétheuein*); first, "that which promotes knowledge" (*epistemonikón*); then, "that which makes reflection possible" (*logistikón*). With both in mind, Heidegger identifies that Aristotle distinguishes science (*epistémē*) from knowledge (*sophía*), from this distinction arises the delimitation of science, technique and circumspection (*phronesis*), within the scope of *logistikón*. By considering them as modes of uncovering, Heidegger will identify in all of them the way of being of praxis (and this, later, will be presented as relevant to our developments).

However, in his reading of Aristotle, Heidegger seems to introduce additional tasks related to such uncovering: it becomes necessary to understand the five virtues apparent there as those that, to give us a glimpse of the multiplicity of phenomena, freely access the fundamental determination to which entities may be purely appropriate (Heidegger, 1992a). Next, understanding the fundamental character of "noûs" as apprehension already depends on an intuition of the structural connection between phenomena (Heidegger, 1992a). This is why in Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle, for a certain time, an emphasis on the idea of "noûs" is identified, as this is a pure apprehension capable of intuiting the truth of the phenomenon; in this way, in the movement of its own manifestation in the phenomenon, without there being an ontognoseology that mediates knowledge by positioning the truth (of knowing) in judgment, reissuing the traditional formula according to which truth is always the product of agreement (*adaequatio*) between a veritative judgment (*intellectus*) and a certain state of things (*res*). Now, the attentive reader must have already identified here similarities with the Husserlian intention of, through phenomenology, intuitively reaching the eidetic content of phenomena, since, here too, Heidegger avoids the theoretical gesture of ontognoseologies by intending to take the essential of the phenomenon without resort to the expedients of traditional philosophy. Hence, as Sheehan (1975) rightly points out, what we witness is Heidegger translating Aristotle's philosophy into phenomenological terms, in which the dianoetic virtues are experienced in an intentional field, a space for the unveiling of phenomena, in which truth – before being an object of verification or certification – is taken from the entity that manifests itself, it is the very opening in which the entity can appear (Heidegger, 1992a). By having these contexts before his eyes, our philosopher has revived that old expectation that phenomenology would enable his purpose of replacing the question about being, this interview in his youthful readings of Brentano's book on Aristotle, because, since the truth of beings is what occurs in a field of meaning in which any phenomenon



there means what it is, then it is from this field of meaning (*noûs*) that the question about the being of beings can be put back in new terms. Finally, if, unlike Husserl, Heidegger is aware that his phenomenology-hermeneutics, however successful, does not guarantee apodictic knowledge (given that the phenomenon never presents itself with meridian evidence, there is always something constitutively veiled in it), at least both “phenomenologies” seem to find a common term in what can be said since Aristotle: “noûs” is at the basis of all possible knowledge.

Remarkably, it is the same thematization of the dianoetic virtues that will show us how they placed us before Aristotle's practical philosophy. As a phenomenologist, Heidegger is anti-theoretical and, as a phenomenological interpreter of Aristotle, he continues to avoid, in principle, the theoretical gesture, if not the one originally identified in Aristotelian ethics, the one present in its derivation in Aristotelianism (Sadler, 1996; Brogan, 2005). It follows that Heidegger's treatment of these virtues is not theoretical, in the sense of thinking of ethics and its contents as objects of hypostatized consideration; as treated by Heidegger, this approach is descriptive and analytical and, as such, they are formally indicated as ways of being of factual life, in the way it deals with itself and with the beings that present themselves to it; furthermore, Heidegger's motivation is not moral, but strictly ontological, as he suggests in the process of ontologization to which the so-called dianoetic virtues are subjected. In a timely reminder, Long (2002) tells us that Heidegger's interest, whether in the need to ontologize dianoetic virtues or in the task of phenomenologically deconstructing (*Abbauen*) the history of metaphysics (and the constant presentness linked to *ousia*, conjugated therein), demands the rescue of what is radical in facticity when the concept of being edited in history is at stake, an effort to understand how the ancients, in turn, witnessed the obscuring of its original meaning and how such forgetfulness came to determine the future course of philosophy. A task like this remains on the agenda even in later years, as can be seen in the following passage from the Fribourg lecture of the summer semester of 1923:

With the critical deconstruction (*kritischen Abbau*) of tradition, there is no longer any possibility of wallowing (*verzetteln*) in problems that are only apparently important. Deconstruction here means: returning to Greek philosophy, to Aristotle, to see exactly how the originary decays and is covered up, and to see to what extent we are in this decay (Heidegger, 1988, p. 76, our translation).

Deconstructing what tradition – even the earliest, among Greeks and Latins – made of Aristotle, what scholastic readings made of the same practical philosophy, and how these reach us, even preceding a way of describing and analyzing factual life is at stake in the quote. The approach of Aristotelian practical philosophy shows that facticity, as a determination of factual life, is not static as a substantial condition, facticity is a *doing*, it is a *doing to ourselves* and, as such, it indicates the way of being specific to the *ekstatic* temporal movement of life itself. In praxis,

phenomenologically appropriated from Aristotle as temporality, we have the human in process, a project that releases power-being in linked possibilities and from which everything that is ontological in this entity is engendered. Thus, for Heidegger, dealing with Aristotelian philosophy, focusing on the search for original thought, places us in the face of a praxis that reveals (*praxis kai alétheia*) the phenomenon of life, but the occupations and concerns of the world, as well as with the *phronesis*, is closely related to the “care” essence of this *ekstatic* project. (Heidegger, 1992b) What this means, however, becomes understandable from a closer consideration of the concept of *phronesis*.

### 3. “*phr-*”, epicenter

The theme of *phronesis* is also linked to “Book VI” of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. There, too, this is a virtue that encourages us to rationally decide what behavior we should adopt in favor of good and goodness (this is what tradition has consecrated as “*orthos lógos*”). For Aristotle, *phronesis* is a central element of his practical philosophy and is related to ethical behavior.

In the present context, the use of the term “central” is not an adjective of emphasis; the paradigmatic centrality of this structure seems to insinuate its origin from the etymology of the term, which allows us to rehearse the famous Greek dictionary by Liddell & Scott (1984), when it records that *phronesis* is a word whose root “*phr-*” is common to the word “*diáphragma*”. How can we think about the relationship between the two? Now, the diaphragm is a muscle located in the middle of the body, dividing the torso into two segments (thoracic and abdominal cavities) and, together with the spinal column, helps to balance the rib cage. In *phronesis*, the *phr-* can be interpreted by us as an epicenter or, rather, as an axis that outlines an area in which correct behaviors and decisions should be circumscribed. This interpretation helps us understand how *phronesis*, more than a prudential conduct or a type of ethical wisdom, points more precisely to a *praxis* that delimits a human *ethos*; it is a practice that opens us to a space of our own fulfillment.

Heidegger, in his report addressed to Natorp, is aware of this, since he seems to understand that *phronesis* opens a horizon related to a concrete way of dealing with the world through an occupation, an execution, a manipulation; it still holds in its most proper being its horizon in which the relationship that human life maintains with itself unfolds, as well as the way of putting such relationship into practice. (Heidegger, 1992a) As Heidegger understands it, *phronesis* is constituted as a detailed relationship with beings, a *práxis* in which, when we operate, we become who we are in our behavior, so that, when I behave, I become who I am through behaving. This means affirming that, for the phenomenological interpretation of Aristotle's practical philosophy, *phronesis* is what can practically guide us in our own actions; it provides a vision of the open and implies



continuous interaction with our own being. Now, in this case, the Heideggerian interpretation of *phronesis* seems to go beyond the traditional one that makes it the virtue that would guide the conditional application of practical knowledge to behaviors that would lead us to the ultimate end (*télos*) which is happiness (*eudaimonia*).

In the *Phenomenological Interpretations* of Aristotle (homonymous lectures contemporary with the *Natorp Report*), Heidegger suggests the connection between *phronesis* and the ease with which we move in the world of occupations and concerns. A considerable part of his effort there is to indicate that such ability is not, so to speak, theoretical. That is to say, although comprehensively open to a world, its behaviors are immediately pre-theoretical (*vorthoretische*), that is, prior to any type of theorizing (even *antepredicative* (*vorprädikativ*), using Husserl's expression, which points to the anteriority with respect to any enunciative judgment); immersed in the practical record of its facticity in the world, the being-there merely behaves, follows the meanings of the referential network of the world of these occupations, is in accordance with it and understands its meanings and significances, however, it does not position itself in a way to theorize about these occupations and what it is concerned with. This is why, from a certain point onwards, *phronesis* will be referred to by Heidegger as "circumspection" (*Umsicht*); with this, we have the formal indication that the being-there is this one constantly involved in the affairs of its existence. By behaving in its world, this circumspection offers us an understanding of how existence is going, of how we know ourselves, how we take care of being in existence. This both preserves the practical essence of such a structure and broadens it, pointing out how much it is articulated to the dynamics of the being of human facticity. Thus, *phronesis* (as circumspection) and the pre-theoretical character of behaviors in the world are what, in this work, allow us to see and make us see the practical nature of life itself, something only provided by the contexts of Aristotelian practical philosophy, which explains why *Nicomachean Ethics* is preferred over other works in the contexts of such philosophy.

#### 4. Plato's Sophist and Phronetic Deliberation

While the *Nicomachean Ethics* is the work mainly used by Heidegger, on the other hand, as we mentioned in the introduction, there are many titles in which Heidegger deals with Aristotle. And the phenomenological interpretations of Greek philosophy, which reached their first conclusions in 1921/22, soon ended in 1924 in an impressive state of elaboration.

*Plato's Sophist* is a didactic lecture given by Heidegger in the winter semester of 1924-25, the period in which he was working in Marburg. Although announced as an interpretation of the reading of the Platonic dialogue, *The Sophist*, Heidegger does something different from what was in

his teaching plan. Identifying Plato's philosophy as obscure, he assumes that it would be better understood if elucidated through that of his disciple Aristotle (who would have known him well enough to offer us the possibility of a clearer vision of this philosophy). In his words:

We want to follow the opposite path, from Aristotle back to Plato. This path is not unheard of. It follows the ancient hermeneutical precept that, in interpretation, one must go from the clear to the obscure. We make the presumption that Aristotle understood Plato. Even those who do not know Aristotle in depth will see, from the level of the work, that it is not bold to think that Aristotle would have understood Plato. What can be said about the question of understanding is that those who come afterwards always understand those who preceded them better than they do themselves. The fundamental element of creative investigation lies precisely in the fact that it does not understand itself in that which is decisive. If we want to penetrate Platonic philosophy, we will do so using Aristotelian philosophy as a guiding thread (Heidegger, 1992b, p. 11, our translation).

Thus, Heidegger deals with the *obscure* (Plato) in the preliminary consideration of the work, the first twenty pages, and spends the next seven hundred dealing with the *clear* (the Aristotle he has been researching in previous years). It is important to note that there is no arbitrariness here; a master in the art of preparation, Heidegger prepares the ground for a successful incursion of phenomenological seeing into the traditional terrains in which, in our time, we have come to find Plato. Between phenomenology and hermeneutics, our author here combines that precept according to which we must always start from what is most accessible to us and only then attempt to reach the distant; he tries to make the hermeneutic circle turn with the aim of, counting on Aristotle, coming to understand Plato better than he himself<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, the strategy of following retroactively from Aristotle's contexts to the same ones in Plato, guarantees an interpretation that is aware of the influences acting on the interpretations of these philosophies, while avoiding the risk of being dragged down by the historical-factual positions of the time. And it would not be an exaggeration to say that, with Aristotle, Heidegger intends to take what comes from Plato, but that with the Stagirite ends up becoming more acute, more radical (Heidegger, 1992b).

Even in *Plato's Sophist, Nicomachean Ethics* continues to be a work that lends itself to thinking about the uncovering of beings in general and of *being-there* itself; in the case of the *latter*, due to the fact that such *being* disposes itself, in various ways, to the movement of uncovering. Therefore, it is to be assumed (in view of Heidegger's conduct at this time) that he understands that any ontological investigation should compromise with the entity that would provide access to the meaning of the being of entities, which is capable of evidencing the unveiling of truth (*aletheia*).

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<sup>5</sup> Here is Schleiermacher's hermeneutical claim, which is, in truth, appropriated from Christian Wolff, when he says: "It is natural that the interpreter who interprets the author's statement by replacing an obscure notion with a clear notion understands the author better than he himself could do" (Wolff, 2019, §929).

Thus, here we witness Heidegger – more than anywhere else – articulating his phenomenology with the foundations of Aristotle's philosophy in such a way that it properly operationalizes a philosophy of *being-there*.

In what we call the disposition to the movement of uncovering, we see *phronesis* once again returning to the agenda. However, now it is a fundamental concept in the nascent philosophy of *being-there* (*Dasein*); with it, protagonism is given to *being-there*, as an *ecstatic* dynamic projected onto a world that is unveiled, and in the face of which such an entity can conquer its being to the extent that it exists for being, that cares for being who it is. This is because, from now on, *phronesis* is no longer just a practical virtue, but rather a structure of existence. It is *phronesis*, already belonging to the existentiality of being-there, that gives it a view of the world and of itself, which makes it essential to this existence and to the existential analytic that results from it. In this way, to indicate how *phronesis* is linked to a mode of uncovering being-there in its world is to highlight the way in which the entity that we paradigmatically are (no longer as the human *factum*, *factical* life or *facticity*), now in the form of being-there, gives itself to Heidegger's existential phenomenology.

As in previous investigations, Aristotelian practical philosophy remains in focus, with *phronesis* continuing to be the central concept, which makes this lecture a decisive writing for the establishment of both an existential analytic and a fundamental ontology, years later, in *Being and Time* (1927) (Kahlmeyer-Mertens, 2013). However, before we can point out any developments of *phronesis* in the work, there is a whole movement of exposition and analysis that Heidegger needs to make of the matter in order to establish what for us is an important concept. Heidegger will deal with the distinction of *alétheuein* in the form of knowledge (*epistemonikón*) and reflection (*logistikón*), and will indicate that, for Aristotle, both allude to the original (*arkhé*). Heidegger shows that, as understood by Aristotle, *phronesis* is a kind of in-virtue-of, indicating that in all reflection there is always a purpose involved. Heidegger points out that *phronesis* is always for itself, while technology is in virtue of what becomes in production. The philosopher reads Aristotle by discerning the ways in which the being uncovers itself, which would be science (*epistémé*) and knowledge (*sophía*). From his interpretation, Heidegger already appropriates these two modalities, understanding them as active in phenomenological seeing, since the latter can be treated as seeing intentionally directed towards idealities (*Hinsicht*), while the former still generally aims at beings as substantial (which, in the language of *Being and Time*, we would call “given in advance”, *Vonhandenheit*). In continuation of this, it will focus on *techné*, understanding it as behavior towards the entity that is to be made, taking it as the actual bringing of the entity to being through such practice, technical production as uncovering.

*Phronesis* then begins to be treated within the scope of praxis only after these expositions and, more precisely, as deliberation on a certain behavior. The philosopher then endeavors to demonstrate how the meaning of *phronesis* (henceforth understood as circumspection (*Umsicht*)) is related to that of *praxis*, since any deliberation implies a disposition to behavior. In Aristotle, this good deliberation is called *eubouleusis*; however, for Heidegger, interpreter of Aristotle, the operator of this good deliberation (the *phronebus*) is the one who does not behave *with tables of commandments, codes of principles, normative statutes or a priori moral criteria*. Morality, in these terms, is virtue converted into doctrine; therefore, it does not fit here. After all, *phronesis* is not ethics, nor is it science or a stance mediated by language; it is what it can be, if it is a vision of an action and of concrete deliberations. (Heidegger, 1992a). Therefore, good deliberation always implies a constant deliberation on the diverse, it is always a decision before the variable that was revealed in the situation, is in the face of the totality of beings as it circumvisively accompanies the whys and the in-virtues in the situations, thus, to put it clearly, deliberation (*boulê*), as understood by Heidegger, before being ethical, is *phronetic*.

## 5. *Arkhé* and *telos* from the circumspection of being-there

In the delimitation adopted by our work, a look at the field of *logistikón* allows us to see the role that *phronesis* plays in the face of practice and how this allows Heidegger to formulate the concept of circumspection mentioned above. With the contexts of *Nicomachean Ethics* in mind, Heidegger wants to show here the existence of being-there; in this regard, in turn, this topic aims to demonstrate this concept, still in line with the conceptuality of Plato's Sophist.

As we have seen, circumspection is linked to a certain type of reflexive praxis, since there must be a practical context that supports its emergence as a mode of uncovering. That said, it is no coincidence that concepts from Aristotelian practical philosophy (such as *techné* alongside *phronesis*) populate Heidegger's investigations at this stage. As Heidegger indicates, circumspection (*phronesis*) is always related to a behavior that is directed toward oneself, that is by-the-meaning-of-itself; therefore, the direction of *phronesis* is that which reflects from itself and toward beings in their totality, unlike its counterpart, *techné*, which is oriented by virtue of what is external to it. In saying this, we do more than fundamentally distinguish the way of being of *phronesis* from that of *techné*, since the former has within itself both its origin (*arche*) and its purpose (*telos*). This is the opportunity that Heidegger needed to interpret circumspection as that which can open the being-there to a vision of itself, i.e. to a gain in transparency regarding its way of being. This means that – as to its *arche* – circumspection allows the being-there to dispose itself to its original principles, in order to

place itself in a mode of dealing and knowing that is circumspective in each case, in each way, with itself. Thus, our philosopher found, in Aristotle's practical philosophy, the concept that would highlight the most original mode of behavior of the being-there in the world, since for him, *phronesis*, as a mode of production, is even the foundation of other modalities of uncovering the truth, which allows us to affirm that it has primacy even over *techné*, *epistémē* and *sophia*. On the other hand, – as to its telos – circumspection points to itself or, in other words: the telos in circumspection is the opening of the being-there to its own mode of being, it is the uncovering of the truth of the being-there to itself (Heidegger, 2012). At this stage of his investigation, *phronesis*, as circumspection, is what allows the visualization of the whole of being-there, precisely for this reason, it is *phronesis* characterized as the “[...] claim to be man's highest mode of knowledge [...]” (Heidegger, 1992b, p. 135). It is possible to note that what Heidegger operates together with the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* is an appropriation. Within the scope of this phenomenological-hermeneutic philosophy, such appropriation corresponds to the transformation of a *circum-seeing* (*Umsicht*), *phronetic*, one that accompanies behaviors in the contexts of mutual reference between the entities of the totality, to a kind of contemplative seeing (*Hinsicht*), of the order of *epistémē*, which is directly placed before the being that the being-there is with a view to what is essential to it, thus promoting the aforementioned self-transparency.

Here we have evidence of how much this investigation, as it is now called, is as much phenomenological as it is hermeneutical, since one can identify traces of the lecture from the previous year, in which, as here, factual life itself is once again understood. The legacy of Ontology - *The Hermeneutics of Facticity* (1923), then, is felt in the lecture *Plato's Sophist*, since it is a phenomenological interpretation of what in Aristotle's practical philosophy bears witness to how the traces of that facticity can be rescued from the layers of traditional interpretations of that philosophy, a historical-traditional sedimentation that makes these ideas of Aristotle already appear in certain circuits, causing the original latent there to become doctrinal content capable of being repeated and disseminated already in the shortened contexts. And what would be rescued from the centuries of deposition of interpretations that conceal facticity? Taking being-there from the circumspection that it allows itself and the interpretation of the way in which the psyche is revealed, through *phronesis*, certainly does not lead us back to the notions of reason, intellect or judgment combined in tradition. Rather, we have the original appropriation of this life (*psyche*)<sup>6</sup>, not as a vital, anthropological or psychic principle, but as a self-reflection of the being-there (*psyche*) focused on

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<sup>6</sup> There is a frankly interpretative character in this sentence; we accept the premise of the philologist Erwin Rohde (1973) according to which the most appropriate translation of the word *psyche* would be “life”. This, without a doubt, brings Heidegger's phenomenology of factual life (and its developments in the fundamental analysis of being-there) very close to what he, interpreting Aristotle, calls *psyche*.

what has already been revealed. To put it plainly: circumspection confronts the being-there with its ethos and this has nothing to do with doctrinal ethical principles such as those of good or happiness, the greatest good that the being-there achieves from this structure is the vision of the how of its being, of the essence of its existence itself there. In the works that follow *Plato's Sophist*, we will see Heidegger's not-so-gradual distancing from circumspection, certainly not from the experience described here as the gaining of self-transparency regarding one's being, but from the terminology that is perhaps not yet the most precise in designating the being-there's own way of revealing itself and the movement of realizing its possibilities with a view to the phenomenon of itself. The term care (*Sorge*) then enters the scene, referring to this treatment of the being-there with itself and the possibility of visualizing its whole. Here, too, the *phronetic* character of the vision of an action and of concrete deliberations in each case, in each mode, with itself remains active (this time as attention to the occurrence of the possibilities of the being-there in its existence, in response to what it always makes of itself in this movement of essentialization of itself); Here, too, Aristotle's practical philosophy has a contribution to make, adding to other repertoires from the 1920s<sup>7</sup>, for future elaborations of Heidegger's philosophy in the fields of a fundamental ontology and the existential analytics that are subordinate to it.

However, in this article, the importance that the concept of care will come to have in works such as *Being and Time* will be felt, given the impossibility of minimally satisfactory developments that would characterize it and given the urgency of concluding, its consideration will be restricted to the brief mention made above.<sup>8</sup>

## Final considerations

What the article ultimately delivers is anything but an expert's opinion. Instead, it is more a set of notes than a detailed analysis; it presents more general outlines of Heidegger's phenomenological interpretation of Aristotle's practical philosophy, especially in relation to *phronesis*. A scholar's text would certainly focus on presenting each of Aristotle's *dianoetic* virtues and also on pointing out the links that they share with each other; would reconstruct the concepts of *Nicomachean Ethics* and Heidegger's works that deal with this treatise. When addressing the

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<sup>7</sup> We have in mind here the concept of *curare*, in the lecture *Augustine and the Neoplatonism* (1920-21). This, the result of Heidegger's interpretation of the late ancient philosopher, designates a practice of oneself that provides the containment through which we come together and become unity in the face of the totality of "creatures". We identify in this notion, which precedes Heidegger's thematizations of *phronesis*, also embryonic traces of the concept of *care* (*Sorge*), as we will see in 1927, since *curare* has a changing relational meaning in the factual-historical nexus of life (Heidegger, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> See more on this subject in Kahlmeyer-Mertens (2008).



concept of *phronesis*, it would have focused on a substantial part of the text, presenting details such as the relations between *phronesis* and *noûs*, *sophia*, *episteme* and *techné*; it would have detailed even more how, in Heidegger, the concept of care would derive from the interpretation of *phronesis*, a topic that was suggested rather than explored in our article. By listing all these development tasks to specialists in Aristotle or, even, in Heidegger interpreting Aristotle (which, at the same time, points to the gaps in this text), we indicate everything that would be appropriate for a theme like this; on the other hand, we soon realize how impossible this would be in the narrow space of a scientific article. Therefore, when we defined our theme, as announced in the title, we already knew that the treatment here would be that of the roughest contours, rather the scheme of how the concept of *phronesis* appears in the two chosen works (*Natorp's Report* and *Plato's Sophist*) with the conceptuality most immediately found adhered to these axes, than a subtle exegesis of this in the works of Heidegger. In thus declaring the results of our exercise of reading Heidegger as a phenomenological interpreter of Aristotle regarding *phronesis*, we have that the objective was the itinerary of a reading that awaits the moment to be filled with the technicalities and conceptual filigrees of a specialized interpretation. In this path, we have achieved evidence that Heidegger's approach to Aristotelian practical philosophy is not theoretical, in the sense of thinking about ethics and its objective contents, it is descriptive and analytical, indicating the ways of being of factual life; it is also not promoted by ethical-moral interest, it is ontological. Thus, when Heidegger turns to dianoetic virtues, he is searching for the originary in this thought and finds himself faced with a praxis that uncovers life: *phronesis*. This, as a circumstantial approach to beings, is also a care in which we make ourselves who we are in our behavior. The circumspection, formulated from here, is linked to a certain type of reflexive praxis, since there needs to be a practical context that supports its emergence as a mode of uncovering. From the exposition of this it resulted that in the phenomenological interpretation of Aristotle's practical philosophy, *phronesis* is what can practically guide us in our own actions, providing a vision of the open and implying continuous interaction with our own being. In this way, indicating how *phronesis* is linked to a mode of uncovering the being-there in its world is to highlight the way in which the being that we paradigmatically are is given to Heidegger's existential phenomenology. The article concludes by understanding that it has also indicated the ingenious and original nature of Heidegger's reading, highlighted since the introduction. Let us remember that the young Leo Strauss considered our philosopher to be the greatest expert on Aristotle in Germany, surpassing masters in the office of the professor. However, a look at what is recorded in these pages makes it clear to us how much Heidegger, by carrying out a thoughtful confrontation (*Anseinandersetzung*) with the Aristotelian text and the tradition that follows it, recovers not only an idea of facticity lost in the history of receptions, but

also the possibility of Aristotle being treated as an author who has a word to say to contemporary times, a favor that places us, once again, before that which is worthy of question.

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