

## ARTICLE

### The Art of Self-Fashioning, or Foucault on Plato and Derrida

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper examines Foucault's reading of Plato and ancient philosophy as part of his continuing dialogue and debate with Derrida. It contends that this debate not only in part motivates Foucault's turn to antiquity, but also is directly revelatory of the most basic differences between Foucault's and Derrida's conceptions of philosophy.

Michel Foucault began his 1982 course at the Collège de France, *L'herméneutique du sujet*, with a meticulous reading of the *Alcibiades*.<sup>1</sup> This dialogue, which is considered by some today to be pseudo-Platonic,<sup>2</sup> was widely appreciated in antiquity and universally accepted as genuine. One reason for its wide popularity was its theme: the necessity of caring for the self (*epimeleisthai heautou*), defined as caring for the soul, as a propaedeutic to entering into the affairs of state. For this reason, in late antiquity when the study of philosophy had predominantly become an exercise in textual commentary, and when the reading of the Platonic corpus proceeded through

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1 Michel Foucault, *L'herméneutique du sujet: Cours au Collège de France. 1981-82*, ed. Frédéric Gros (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2001). See also his résumé of the dialogue in his unpublished lecture of February 16 1983, in the course *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres* (1983), tapes of which are available at the Institut Mémoires de l'Édition Contemporaine. I thank the Institut for making these recordings available to me.

2 For a survey of the problem and a persuasive argument for the dialogue's authenticity, see Nicholas Denyer, *Plato: Alcibiades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 14-26. For a brief survey of the latest stylometric research, see Leonard Brandwood, "Stylometry and Chronology," *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 112. And for Foucault's position and an updated bibliography on the status of the controversy in France, see Foucault, *L'herméneutique du sujet*, 71, and Gros's accompanying note. Croiset's Budé edition, which would have been Foucault's reference volume, emphatically rejects all doubts about the dialogue's authenticity. Maurice Croiset, ed. and trans., *Platon: Introduction, Hippias Mineur, Alcibiade, Apologie de Socrate, Euthyphron, Criton*, 9th ed. (Paris: Société d'Édition «Les Belles Lettres», 1960), 49-53. Original = 1920.

a structured curriculum, the *Alcibiades* was generally the first text read, just as the *Philebus* was often the last. The *Alcibiades*, in particular, was thought to provide both a protreptic admonition to turn to philosophy, as a means of caring for the self, and a general overview of Platonic philosophy.<sup>3</sup>

Foucault saw in the *Alcibiades* the first and fullest theorization of an ethic of self-relation that was to constitute his primary object of interest in the last years of his life. For him, it provided not only an explicit theorization of one of the guiding threads of the Platonic corpus, it also represented a model of self-relation that made possible the Stoic ethic of the care of the self in the first two centuries of the Roman imperial period.<sup>4</sup> It was this latter form of self-constitution and cultivation that Foucault would directly contrast with the Christian model of confession and self-renunciation that he saw at the heart of modern technologies of disciplining and normalizing the self.<sup>5</sup> The Stoics, starting from Plato's initial model, offered an alternative form of self-relation both to the Christian archetype and to that described later and implicitly denounced in Foucault's middle works such as *Surveiller et punir* and *La volonté de savoir*. It was this alternative model on which Foucault concentrated during the final years of his life.<sup>6</sup>

In this paper, I shall examine Foucault's reading of Plato and ancient philosophy as part of his continuing dialogue and debate with Derrida on the importance and interpretation of Plato in contemporary philosophy. This debate, I shall contend, not only in part motivates Foucault's turn to antiquity, but also is directly revelatory of the most basic differences between Foucault's and Derrida's conceptions of the philosophical enterprise. Very schematically, where Derrida remains concerned with the origin and nature of metaphysics, Foucault in his late interviews and lectures on ancient philosophy, as well as in the *History of Sexuality*, offers a direct rebuttal while outlining a philosophy of practice. I will close the paper, however, by questioning whether the Foucauldian and Derridean analyses of Plato are truly mutually exclusive.

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3 Foucault, *L'herméneutique*, 164; Denyer, *Plato: Alcibiades*, 14; Pierre Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 238-40.

4 Foucault, *L'herméneutique*, 65. In his final course in 1984, Foucault lectured on the care of the self in the *Laches*, *Apology*, *Crito* and *Phaedo*. See Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 163.

5 Foucault, *L'herméneutique*, 242, 247; Frédéric Gros, "Situation du Cours," in Michel Foucault, *L'herméneutique du sujet: Cours au Collège de France. 1981-82*, ed. Frédéric Gros (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2001), 490-93, 507; Michel Sennellart, "La pratique de la direction de conscience," *Foucault et la philosophie antique*, eds. Frédéric Gros and Carlos Lévy (Paris: Kimé, 2003), 157.

6 Foucault, "L'herméneutique du sujet," *Dits et écrits: 1954-1988*, vol. 4, eds. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 364; James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 322, 340.

My claim, of course, is not that Foucault's debate with Derrida was the exclusive or even necessarily the primary motive for his turn to antiquity. Any such mutation in a complex philosophical project is obviously overdetermined. Moreover, it would be vain and anti-Foucauldian to speculate on his precise internal motivations. There are in addition explicit ethical and political concerns motivating this shift that are well documented. In the last two volumes of the *History of Sexuality* and in his lectures at the Collège de France from the same period, Foucault sought to elaborate an ethics founded not on the juridical, authoritarian, or disciplinary structures of modernity, but on what he refers to as an "art" or "stylization" of existence.<sup>7</sup> The purpose of this stylization was not self-absorption, but to offer new means of resistance to the normalizing structures of the market, scientific and social institutions, and the state.<sup>8</sup> An ethics and aesthetics of existence, founded on the history of subjectivation, was in part to be a means of resistance to the commodified, sexualized, and normalized subject of capitalist modernity.<sup>9</sup> My goal in this paper is to reconstruct one portion of the complex dialogic situation out of which this turn to ethics and antiquity evolved. It is a project conceived in much the same spirit as Arnold Davidson's *Foucault and His Interlocutors*<sup>10</sup>.

We can provisionally date the origins of Foucault's ethical turn to 1970 and his praise of Deleuze's 1969 *Logique du sens*. Deleuze, in this idiosyncratic work, launches an attack on the insidious Platonism that he sees infecting

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7 J. Miller, *Passion*, 323-22, 340, 346-47; David H. J. Larmour, Paul Allen Miller, and Charles Platter, "Introduction: Situating the *History of Sexuality*." *Rethinking Sexuality: Foucault and Classical Antiquity*, eds. David H. J. Larmour, Paul Allen Miller, and Charles Platter (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 22-33; Alain Vezier, "Incipit Philosophia," *Rethinking Sexuality*, 67-68, 71. On the relation between Foucault's late ethical thought and Anglo-American "virtue ethics, see Neil Levy, "Foucault as Virtue Ethicist," *Foucault Studies* 1 (2004): 20-31, who to my mind fails to emphasize sufficiently the importance of aesthetics in the final Foucault, but nonetheless notes some important points of meeting between these two bodies of thought.

8 Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 180-81; Gros, "Situation du cours," 524-25.

9 Jorge Davila, "Ethique de la parole et jeu de la vérité," *Foucault et la philosophie antique*, eds. Frédéric Gros et Carlos Lévy (Paris: Kimé, 2003), 207. On the relation between disciplinary practices and capital, see Foucault, "Les techniques de soi," *Dits et écrits: 1954-1988*, vol. 4, eds. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 785; Foucault, "La société punitive," *Dits et écrits*, vol. 2, 466-70; Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 135; and Ron Sakolsky, "'Disciplinary Power,' the Labor Process, and the Constitution of the Laboring Subject," *Rethinking MARXISM* 5.4 (1992): 114-26.

10 Davidson, *Foucault and His Interlocutors* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997).

Western thought. Using Stoic logic's distinction between bodies and events, as well as Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, he sets out to undermine Platonism's doctrines of the representation, recollection, and imitation of an ideal original, in the hope of uncovering an alternative philosophical tradition that privileges surface over depth and event over essence.<sup>11</sup> For Deleuze, Stoic doctrine represents the logical inverse of Platonic metaphysics. In Stoic logic, the ideal, precisely because it is an "incorporeal," is always only an effect of a body's surface rather than the ultimate guarantor of its essential identity. No longer representing the realm of strict determination, as in Plato's *Philebus*, the ideal is now associated with the world of becoming and the unlimited: "The realm of becoming and the unlimited becomes the event itself, ideal, incorporeal, with all the reversals that are proper to it."<sup>12</sup> For Deleuze, Stoic logic is an open system of expanding and multiplanar surfaces, as opposed to the closed system of Platonic metaphysics. It represents the possibility of new lines of flight, rather than the consolidation of an ideal identity that is thought to subtend and determine the world of becoming.

In his laudatory review Foucault argues that Deleuze's method of reconstructing this system is "rigorously Freudian." It is based on a careful symptomatic reading of the omissions, displacements, and repressions that constitute the history of Western philosophy, offering a restoration not of a lost depth, but of a lost surface. The upshot of the review is not only a call for a return to ancient philosophy, but to precisely those texts and events from antiquity that are the least read and most frequently neglected:

We should not scorn Hellenistic confusion or Roman platitudes, but listen to those things said on the great surface of the empire; we should be attentive to those things that happened in a thousand instances, dispersed on every side: fulgurating battles, assassinated generals, burning triremes, queens poisoning themselves, victories that invariably led to further upheavals, the endlessly exemplary Actium, the eternal event.<sup>13</sup>

Although Foucault's eventual reading of the Stoics would be very different from Deleuze's—focusing on the elaboration of an art of existence rather than a counter-Platonic logic—and although Foucault and Deleuze would later take their distances from one another philosophically and politically,

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11 Thomas Benatouil, "Deux usages du stoïcisme: Deleuze, Foucault," *Foucault et la philosophie antique*, eds. Frédéric Gros et Carlos Lévy (Paris: Kimé, 2003), 20.

12 Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens* (Paris: Minuit, 1969), 17.

13 Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum," *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 172. Original = 1970, reprinted under the same title in *Dits et écrits: 1954-1988*, vol. 2, eds. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 75-99.

nonetheless, even at this early date we can see Foucault's interest in the Stoics, as well as the Cynics, and such ostensibly marginal figures as Diogenes Laertius.

More importantly, we can also see in this same review his emerging conviction that the opposition to the classic metaphysics of "Platonism," which he, Derrida, and Deleuze all saw as subtending Western thought, can be found in Plato himself: for he contends that a counterdiscourse to metaphysical Platonism can be found not only in the later Stoics, but also in the pre-Socratics, the figure of Socrates himself, and in Plato's *Sophist*.<sup>14</sup> In Foucault's later work, this perception of the inherent heterogeneity of the Platonic oeuvre will lead to his reading the dialogues as an interconnected web of individual texts rather than attempting to subordinate them to a single-overarching vision.<sup>15</sup> In the manner of Pierre Hadot, he reads Plato less as an abstract theorist than as an advocate for a specific mode of reflective life.<sup>16</sup>

This pragmatic reading is in many ways separate from the mainstream of philosophical Platonism in early twentieth-century France, as represented by the works of people like Festugière,<sup>17</sup> Robin,<sup>18</sup> Diès,<sup>19</sup> and Boussoulas.<sup>20</sup> This

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14 Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum," 166-69; Benatouïl. "Deux usages du stoïcisme," 24, 30-31, 36; Thomas Flynn, "Foucault as Parrhesiast: His Last Course at the Collège de France (1984)," *The Final Foucault*, eds. James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 112. At this same period, in his inaugural address to the Collège de France, Foucault already envisaged returning to Plato and the sophists to examine the division between true and false discourses, which philosophy establishes, and how this division differs fundamentally from a the concept of truth embodied in the pronouncements of traditional poets such as Hesiod. See *L'ordre du discours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 16-17, 64.

15 Anissa Castel-Bouchouchi, "Foucault et le paradoxe du platonisme," *Foucault et la philosophie antique*, eds. Frédéric Gros et Carlos Lévy (Paris: Kimé, 2003), 176, 186-87. For a defense of this approach to the dialogues, see Matthew Kenney, *Seducing the Soul: Erôs and Protreptic in the Platonic Dialogues*. Dissertation. University of South Carolina (2003), 8-27.

16 Hadot, "Forms of Life and Forms of Discourse in Ancient Philosophy," trans. Arnold I. Davidson and Paula Wissing, *Foucault and His Interlocutors*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 211-12; Hadot, *Que'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, 102-03.

17 Nonetheless, it would be wrong to underestimate the influence of these earlier more traditional French Platonists on the later postmodernists' thought. Thus Festugière defines *philosophie* as "*le soin de l'âme*" ["care of the soul"] and opens his chapter on "*La vie intérieure*" with a citation from the *Alcibiades*, *ti estin to heautou epimeleisthai?* ["what is the care of the self?"]. A. J Festugière, *Contemplation et vie contemplative selon Platon*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Vrin, 1950), 61, 130. Original =1935.

18 Léon Robin, "Notice," *Platon: Le Banquet* (Paris: Société d'Édition «Les Belles Lettres», 1929), vii-cxxi; *La théorie platonicienne de l'amour*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires

latter tradition was that to which Derrida's reading of the *Phaedrus* and *Philebus* in "La pharmacie de Platon" and *La carte postale* was an heir and a response. This observation is important because Foucault in his return to Plato at the end of his life is not simply carrying forward his ongoing dialogue and later debate with Deleuze, nor is he merely grafting a reading of Hadot onto his own concerns with the body and sexuality; he is also continuing a polemic with Derrida that has its origins in the latter's 1963 lecture on the former's *Histoire de la folie*. Indeed, the Platonic subtext remains one of the most lasting threads in the set of discussions, debates, and dialogues that constitute French poststructuralist thought.

That Derrida's criticism of Foucault had struck a nerve can be seen in the fact that he waited over nine years to respond and that, when he did, he ignored those parts of Derrida's argument that dealt directly with the constitution of Western reason through the Socratic dialectic. Instead, he silently dropped from the 1972 edition of the book the original preface in which he had made the claim that the Greek *logos* knew no opposite.<sup>21</sup> There was no longer a place for such sweeping generalities about ancient philosophy. As Foucault admitted at the beginning of Volume Two of the *History of Sexuality*, it had become clear to him that his genealogies of modernity could only be valid if their difference from and grounding in antiquity were solidly established.<sup>22</sup>

Nonetheless, neither the *History of Sexuality* nor Foucault's courses at the Collège de France during the eighties should be seen as a concession to Derrida; rather they constitute a continuing rejoinder to his criticisms.<sup>23</sup> In his initial response to Derrida's essay, Foucault had argued that Derrida's perspective was too exclusively philosophical, that it sought to reduce history to a system enclosed within the Socratic *logos*, and that it treated socially and historically embedded discursive practices as mere textual traces.<sup>24</sup> Twelve

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de France, 1964), original =1933; "Notice," *Platon: Phèdre* (Paris: Société d'Édition «Les Belles Lettres», 1985), vii-ccv. Original = 1933.

19 Auguste Diès, "Notice," *Platon: Philèbe* (Paris: Société d'Édition «Les Belles Lettres», 1941), vii-cxii.

20 Nicolas-Isidore Boussoulas, *L'être et la composition des mixtes dans le «Philèbe» de Platon* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1952).

21 Roy Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 74-76, 118.

22 Foucault, *L'usage des plaisirs, Histoire de la sexualité*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 11-14.

23 By all evidence, the debate continued to fascinate Derrida as well. See his analysis of the ambivalent place of Freud in *Histoire de la Folie* and Foucault's later work, "'To Do Justice to Freud': The History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis," trans. Pascale-Ann Brault and Michael Naas, *Foucault and His Interlocutors*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

24 Foucault, "Mon corps, ce papier, ce feu," *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique suivi de Mon corps, ce papier, ce feu et La folie, l'absence de l'oeuvre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 584, 602.

years later, when Volumes Two and Three of the *History of Sexuality* were published, the more strictly philosophical discourses of Plato, Aristotle, and Seneca were consistently read in the light of ancient medicine, manuals of domestic conduct such as Xenophon's *Oikonomikos*, and the correspondence of the younger Pliny. Thus while Foucault granted Derrida's contention that it was impossible to do a genealogy of Western reason without a thorough consideration of its earliest exemplars, he refused to grant philosophical texts any special status. They were always examined as part of a larger ensemble of related discursive practices, as opposed to the disembodied texts of traditional philosophy, of which he saw Derrida as the latest and "most decisive representative."<sup>25</sup>

In fact, Foucault's later readings of Plato remain deeply implicated in his polemic with Derrida on the origins and constitution of Western reason. The range of his response is multileveled and often quite subtle. But the significance of this ongoing debate is not to be underestimated if we are not to miss both the philosophical stakes of Foucault's evolving understanding of the Socratic *logos* and the centrality of Plato to the debates that shaped the French intellectual scene in the last half of the twentieth century.

Thus, at the start of his 1982 course on the *Hermeneutic of the Subject*, before his actual reading of the *Alcibiades*, Foucault sketches the historical importance of the concept of the "care of the self" —in both its Socratic and its later Hellenistic and imperial versions. The practice of the care of the self is contextualized in the history of western philosophy in relation to that of "knowing the self." For Foucault, the practice of being a subject can never be disarticulated from its relation to specific conceptions and practices of knowledge and truth, even though the relative priority or secondariness of those technologies of self-constitution in relation to the domain of knowledge may be radically historically variable. At this point in his exposition, Foucault pointedly refers to Descartes' exclusion of madness from his first meditation as an example of the way in which the conditions for the subject's access to truth come to be increasingly defined within the domain of knowledge in the modern period, as opposed to knowledge being predicated on the subject's access to truth, in those periods when the ethic of the care of the self is predominant. The editor of the volume immediately picks up on a reference to the earlier polemic with Derrida in an accompanying note.<sup>26</sup> The topic is

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Foucault published a more concise response to Derrida in a Japanese journal the same year. It does not differ in substance from the above. See Foucault, "Réponse à Derrida," *Dits et écrits* vol.2, eds. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 281-95.

25 Foucault, "Mon corps, ce papier, ce feu," 602. See Angèle Kremer-Marietti, *Michel Foucault: Archéologie et généalogie*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1985), 131; and Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida*, 75.

26 Foucault, *L'herméneutique*, 19.

returned to later in the course. There it is a question of whether Descartes' *Meditations* constituted actual spiritual exercises in the antique mode, or were purely textual investigations. Again the reference escaped neither the editor nor, one imagines, Foucault's auditors<sup>27</sup>: for, it will be recalled that the understanding of Descartes' practice as an actual meditation was crucial to Foucault's response to Derrida (since one who dreams can still think and hence meditate, but one who is *demens* cannot engage in this methodical practice of thought).<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, evidence of a subtle retort to Derrida's reading of Plato's *Phaedrus* and the latter's suspicion of writing can be seen in Foucault's privileging of the Stoics throughout his later work.<sup>29</sup> Foucault observes that in the Stoics, and indeed all the philosophers of the imperial period, the exclusion of writing is completely discarded.<sup>30</sup> Philosophical pedagogy had changed, he notes, following Hadot.<sup>31</sup> "The Platonic culture of the dialogue cede[d] its place to a culture of silence and the art of listening."<sup>32</sup> In making this case, Foucault implicitly argues that there is an alternative philosophical tradition to the (neo-)Platonic one from which Derrida derives, a tradition whose primary focus is ultimately on practice rather than the *logos*, and whose chief concern is the ethics of self-fashioning rather than the metaphysics of presence.

Indeed, while Derrida is never mentioned, the careful reader of Foucault's *Dits et écrits* can discover a careful rebuttal of all the major points made in "La pharmacie de Platon," beginning with the *pharmakon* itself.<sup>33</sup> The

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27 Ibid., 340-41.

28 Foucault, "Mon corps, ce papier, ce feu," 591.

29 Evidence of Foucault's counterdiscourse to Derrida can be seen already in *Les mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966). Where Derrida had argued in his early work *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), and *La voix et la phénomène* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967) that Western metaphysics was constituted by the systematic exclusion of writing in favor of the voice and consciousness's immediate self-presence to itself. Foucault, however, in *Les mots et les choses* argues for an alternative tradition of renaissance philosophy that privileges writing (p, 53). This theme would be further developed in the 1982 course at the Collège de France where Montaigne is specifically seen as the heir to the late antique tradition of the care of the self (*L'herméneutique*, 240; "A propos de la généalogie de l'éthique," 410), a theme that is later repeated by Hadot (*Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique*, 395, 413) and Nehamas (*The Art of Living*). Foucault's *Les mots et les choses* was published the year before Derrida published his three books, but the latter's ideas had been in circulation for some time in the form of lectures and conference papers.

30 Foucault, "L'herméneutique du sujet," 361.

31 Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique*, 271-72.

32 Foucault, "Les techniques de soi," 796.

33 In at least one case, Foucault's interviewers clearly invite him to situate his work relative to the problematic investigated by Derrida in "La Pharmacie." Foucault's response is to switch immediately to a discussion of the history and technical status



*pharmakon*, it will be recalled, symbolizes writing's suspect status as something outside, yet also integral to, the *logos* itself. Thus Plato in the *Phaedrus* has Ammon argue that writing is a *pharmakon* that allows people to appear to know more than they do by repeating the discourses of others, as Phaedrus does in the case of Lysias, rather than coming to real knowledge through an active engagement in dialectic. In contrast, Foucault points out, even a Platonist such as Plutarch recommends learning the discourses of others as a *pharmakon*, or drug, that guards the soul against illness.<sup>34</sup> *Arêtê* on this model comes from study and prescribed spiritual exercises. Socratic *epimelia heautou* ("care of the self"), as outlined in the *Alcibiades*, has, in imperial philosophy, become indissociable from the practice of writing.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, what Plato, according to Derrida's reading, sees as harmful, imperial philosophy, according to Foucault, views as beneficial. Where Plato rejects writing, according to Derrida, as mere *hupomnêsis* instead of *mnêmê*, the philosophers of the empire, Foucault observes, directly advocated the keeping of *hupomnêmata*,<sup>36</sup> or notebooks, not as a substitute for memory—conceived of by Plato as vital and interior to the soul—but as a form of practice, a technology of the self.<sup>37</sup> Writing, rather than undermining the presence of the *logos* to itself or representing a form of discourse whose author is never present to defend the integrity of his intentions, actually renders the absent party present, according to Seneca.<sup>38</sup> The grapheme is not the foreign element that threatens the interiority of the soul, but rather the technology that makes interiority possible. Foucault states:

The *hupomnêmata* ought to be resituated in the context of a very palpable tension during this period: inside this culture that was so affected by tradition, by the recognized value of the quotation, by the recurrence of discourse, by the practice of "citation" under the seal of age and authority, an ethics was in the process of developing that was very openly oriented by the care of the self toward some very precise objects: the retreat into oneself; the

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of *hupomnêmata*, a move that appears to refuse the engagement with Derrida while simultaneously accepting it on his own terms ("A propos de la généalogie de l'éthique," 624-25).

34 Foucault, "L'herméneutique du sujet," 360; Foucault *L'herméneutique du sujet*, 310.

35 Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs*, vol. 1 (Paris: Maspero, 1965), 112.

36 The importance of the *hupomnêmata* as a genre of philosophic writing that was designed to serve as a spiritual exercise, and hence a technology of the self, was first discussed by Hadot in reference to Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* (*La citadelle intérieure: Introduction aux Pensées de Marc Aurèle* (Paris: Fayard, 1992) 40-49; Arnold Davidson, "Introduction: Pierre Hadot and the Spiritual Phenomenon of Ancient Philosophy," *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Hadot to Foucault*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 10-11.

37 Foucault, "L'écriture de soi," *Dits et écrits: 1954-1988*, vol. 4, eds. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris: Gallimard), 417-19; Foucault, "L'herméneutique du sujet," 360-61; Foucault, *L'herméneutique du sujet*, 343.

38 Foucault, "L'écriture de soi," 425.

interior life; independence; the taste for oneself. Such is the objective of the *hupomnêmata*: to make the memory of a fragmentary *logos* transmitted by teaching, listening or reading, a means of establishing a relation with oneself as adequate and as perfect as possible.<sup>39</sup>

Thus Foucault carefully and unobtrusively takes up each of Derrida's major themes with regard to the role of writing in the constitution of western philosophical reason—the *pharmakon*, *mnêmê* versus *hypomnêsis*, presence versus absence, interiority versus exteriority—and demonstrates the existence of a counter-tradition that Derrida ignores. That counter-tradition, like Foucault himself in his response to Derrida's attack on *Histoire de la folie*, privileges practice over the abstractions of pure reason, and self-fashioning over textuality. Thus it is no surprise that, immediately following his discussion of Descartes in *L'herméneutique du sujet*, Foucault returns to a discussion of the practice of philosophy in the first and second centuries CE, where he demonstrates that reading, through the practice of meditation, is directly linked in Stoic practice to writing, and thus that writing was central to the care of the self.<sup>40</sup>

The final and most explicit proof of the validity of this reading of Foucault's interpretation of Plato in light of his continuing engagement with Derrida can be heard in the recordings of his 1983 course on *Le Gouvernement de soi et des autres*. This course is devoted to an in depth examination of *parrhêsia*, the Greek term for truth-telling or frank speech.<sup>41</sup> It chronicles the changing sense of the word as it evolves from a primarily political term in fifth-century BCE Athenian politics and culture to one that refers to the courage of the philosopher to tell the truth, in the first instance to his prince, and ultimately to his disciple, who in the very different world of first- and second-century CE imperial Rome, would often be his social superior and patron. In the latter instance, it was a tool of the philosophical director of conscience to produce a self-relation of ideal transparency in the consciousness of his charge.<sup>42</sup> In line with this investigation, the course

39 Foucault, "A propos de la généalogie de l'éthique," 625-26.

40 Foucault, *L'herméneutique du sujet*, 341

41 For a discussion of the concept, see Flynn "Foucault as Parrhesiast." For Foucault's knowledge of Philodemus's surviving treatise *Peri Parrhêsias* at a time when it had yet to be translated into any modern language, see Foucault, *L'herméneutique*, 372, and David Konstan, "PARRHÊSIA: Ancient Philosophy in Opposition," *MYTHOS and LOGOS: How to Regain the Love of Wisdom*, eds. Albert A. Anderson, Steven V. Hicks, and Lech Witkowski (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 27. Philodemus's text is now available in English under the title *On Frank Criticism: Introduction, Translation and Notes* by David Konstan, Diskin Clay, Clarence E. Glad, Johan C. Thom, and James Ware (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998).

42 See *L'herméneutique du sujet* as well, 232, 357-63, and 382-89. For the changing meanings of *parrhêsia* from classical Athens to the Hellenistic period, see Konstan, "Friendship, Frankness, and Flattery," *Friendship, Flattery, and Frankness of Speech:*

features an extensive, detailed, and at times brilliant reading of Euripides' *Ion* (January 12, 19, 26, and February 2), as well as shorter interpretations of the *Phoenician Women*, *The Bacchae*, and the *Orestes* (February 2). There are, in addition, examinations of specific passages from Polybius (January 12), Thucydides (February 2), and Isocrates (February 2). The rest of the course is focused on Plato and features explications of specific passages from the *Republic* (February 9), the *Laws* (February 9), and the letters (February 9).

The key discussion for our purposes comes in the course of a lengthy reading of Plato's seventh letter on February 16, 1983. After an examination of the authenticity of the letters in the preceding meeting,<sup>43</sup> Foucault turns his attention to the twin problems of the nature of philosophical knowledge and the refusal of writing, as those problems are formulated in the seventh letter. The letter itself is addressed to the followers of Dion of Syracuse after the latter's death. They are seeking advice on how to prosecute their continuing opposition to the tyranny of Dionysus II. In the course of his response, Plato outlines the circumstance under which he undertook his second visit to Dionysus II at the urging of Dion and his friends in an attempt to convert the young tyrant to philosophy and convince him to rescind Dion's banishment. Plato had tried to instruct Dionysus once before and had met with little

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*Studies of Friendship in the New Testament World*, ed. John T. Fitzgerald (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 7-19.

- 43 He contends that 6, 7, and 8 are authentic, while the others are more likely to be forgeries. Cooper indicates that the seventh letter is "the least unlikely to have come from Plato's pen" and certainly dates from the period and shows a thorough acquaintance with Plato's personal history and philosophy. John M. Cooper, ed., *Plato: Complete Works*, assoc. ed. D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 1635. Irwin rejects it as spurious, but agrees that it must date from the period and be by the hand of "someone who knew Plato well." His note contains a good English bibliography on the question. Terrence Irwin, "Plato: The Intellectual Background." *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 51. Julia Annas notes that such forgeries were a common rhetorical genre exercise throughout antiquity, Annas, "Plato," *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed., eds. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Brandwood, however, indicates that the seventh letter is stylometrically consonant with the late dialogues ("Stylometry and Chronology," 111-13), and Penner notes its thematic and tonal continuities with these same works. Terry Penner, "Socrates and the Early Dialogues," *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 130. Souilhé, the editor of the Budé edition of the letters, which was Foucault's reference text, has both an excellent history of the controversies surrounding the letters in general (v-xxxi) and what is to my mind a convincing defense of the authenticity of the seventh letter (xxxiii-lviii). Joseph Souilhé, ed. and trans., *Platon: Lettres* (Paris: Société d'Édition «Les Belles Lettres», 1960). See also Morrow's defense of the authenticity of the seventh and eighth letters (Glenn R. Morrow, *Studies in the Platonic Epistles: With a Translation and Notes* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1935], 11-22) and Festugière on the Seventh (*Contemplation*, 61n. 1).

success. Nonetheless, Dionysus had claimed a continuing interest in philosophy during Plato's absence and held dialogues with the members of his court. Plato, thus, decided to test him on his return. He discussed with him a number of issues at, apparently, a high level of abstraction and probably included such difficult notions as the forms of justice and the good as first principles of nature (344d). The goal was to expose to him the difficulty of the philosophical pursuit and to see if Dionysus would be inspired to undertake the strenuous labor necessary to live the life of a philosopher. "Those who are really not philosophers but have only a coating of opinions, like men whose bodies are tanned by the sun, when they see how much learning is required, and how great the labor, and how orderly their lives must be to suit the subject they are pursuing, conclude that the task is too difficult for their powers" (340d).<sup>44</sup> Unsurprisingly, the young tyrant failed the test (345a). But Dionysus, Plato notes, was rumored to have later written a book based on their discussions. It is in this context that Plato launches into a brief digression on the nature of philosophical knowledge and its relation to writing.

Dionysus or any other writer, he argues, could not have been serious if he attempted to set down Plato's essential doctrine, or that of any other philosopher, in writing. Such an exclusion of writing, of course, would seem to provide direct evidence for the Derridean thesis of the phonocentric nature of the *logos* at the dawn of occidental philosophy. The seeming contradiction, moreover, of Plato's contention with the manifest fact that he himself did write would appear to be an example of precisely the kind of aporia and undecideability that Derrida traces in his minute examination of the term *pharmakon* and its peregrinations throughout the Platonic corpus.

Foucault, however, constructs a different reading of the letter. He notes that Plato argues there are five aspects to the knowledge of any real object: name, definition, image, the acquaintance our minds have with the object (scientific knowledge, reasoning, and right opinion), and the object itself in its abstract ideality (342). Inasmuch as the first two elements are language-dependent and hence mutable, and inasmuch as the third is dependent upon individual material instantiations, which is made clear in Plato's discussion of the example of a circle, then, while these three elements are necessary to the formation of the fourth element they can never be adequate to a true *epistêmê* of the object in itself. Hence, "no sensible man will venture to express his deepest thoughts in words, especially in a form which is unchangeable, as is true of written outlines" (343a).

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44 Morrow "Letters," *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, assoc. ed. D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 1658. All other translations of the letters are from this edition. Plato only once tried to lecture on the Good. Aristotle tells us it was completely incomprehensible (*Metaphysics* A.6).

The problem is not, according to Foucault one of writing per se, but of philosophy as a practice rather than as a set of “formulas.”<sup>45</sup> According to the seventh letter, we arrive at the knowledge of “real” objects not through direct sense perception, nor through the memorization of discrete formulas, but through the process of approximation, refutation, and reformulation that characterizes the Socratic-Platonic *elenchus*.<sup>46</sup> The *elenchus*, moreover, is pursued in the intense transference relationship between master and disciple evoked by Socrates at the beginning of the *Alcibiades*<sup>47</sup> when he confesses his love for the young man, and described by Lacan in his reading of the *Symposium*.<sup>48</sup> The seventh letter is clear.

There is no writing of mine about these matters, nor will there ever be one. For this knowledge is not something that can be put into words (*rhêton*) like other sciences; but after long continued intercourse (*sunousias*) between teacher and pupil in joint pursuit of the subject, suddenly (*exaiphnês*),<sup>49</sup> like the light flashing forth when a fire is kindled, it is born in the soul and straightaway nourishes itself. (341c-d).

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- 45 Foucault seems to be paraphrasing Souilhé (*Platon: Lettres*, I), but see also Festugière (*Contemplation*, 191), as well as Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique*, 106.
- 46 Irwin, “Plato: The Intellectual Background,” 65-66, 68-69; Penner, “Socrates and the Early Dialogues,” 139-47; Gail Fine, “Inquiry in the *Meno*,” *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 203-11; Nehamas, *The Art of Living*, 82-87. Foucault makes this clear at the conclusion of the course on April 9, 1983 in a discussion of *elenchus* and the *Gorgias*.
- 47 Souilhé, *Platon: Lettres*, liv-lv; Kenney, *Seducing the Soul*, 28-90. Foucault notes that the term for this relationship is *sunousia* (“being with”), which often has an erotic sense; he then asserts that it has does not have that sense in the context of the seventh letter while admonishing us not to “overinterpret.” It is difficult to know how seriously to take this admonition. On the one hand, it could be a deliberate attempt to inoculate his audience against a premature or facile psychoanalytic reading. On the other hand, Foucault is well aware of the erotic frame of the *Alcibiades* and its relation to Alcibiades’ drunken entrance in the *Symposium*, which is the crux of Lacan’s reading of this latter dialogue. By calling attention to the possibility of the erotic reading of *sunousia* before an audience of non-Hellenists, while simultaneously warning against it, Foucault both calls our attention to the intense affective relationship between master and disciple and cautions us against an overhasty assimilation of it to a purely genital one. Of course, the ancient satiric texts reveal that this assimilation was as common in a pre-Freudian era as it is today. See Juvenal 2 and *Satyricon* 85-87 as well as Daniel McGlathery, “Reversals of Platonic Love in Petronius’s *Satyricon*,” *Rethinking Sexuality: Foucault and Classical Antiquity*, eds. David H. J. Larmour, Paul Allen Miller, and Charles Platter (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). On erotics as an essential protreptic strategy in Plato, see Kenney’s excellent *Seducing the Soul*.
- 48 Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire livre VIII: Le transfert*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1991). See *Symposium*, 211 a-b. For a comparison of this passage with the seventh letter, see Robin (*Le Banquet*, xci).
- 49 On the centrality of this concept in Platonic metaphysics, see Boussoulas (*L’être et la composition des mixtes*, pp.77-82).

Lest Foucault's audience miss the larger importance of his highlighting this passage to his understanding of the role of writing and speech at the origins of Western formal reason (and consequently of his entire rereading of Plato in terms of the practice of the care of the self), Foucault pauses to invoke directly Derrida's reading of this same problematic as a foil to his own. To paraphrase, Foucault says, "You see the Platonic exclusion of writing, therefore, has nothing to do with the birth of logocentrism in Western philosophy." "Logocentrism" is of course Derrida's term for the constitution of Western reason under the sign of the self-presence of the transcendental signified to itself, which in turn is manifest in a phonocentrism that privileges speech over writing as the immediate transparency of meaning to consciousness itself.<sup>50</sup>

Foucault continues by noting that Plato does not in fact contrast writing with the *logos* in this passage, but rather asserts the inadequacy of the *logos* to the thing itself in its abstract ideality. The problem of writing, then, is not one of its difference from or deferral of full meaning, but of its rigidity, its removal from the question and answer of the elenctic process that leads to the flash of insight in the intense relation between master and student. "The refusal of writing is not made in the name of the *logos*, but of something positive. It is made in the name of *tribê*, exercise, work, and a laborious relation of the self to itself. It is the Western subject itself that is engaged in this simultaneous rejection of writing and the *logos*." Just as in 1972 when Foucault published his response to Derrida's 1963 lecture, in 1983 he continues to see the latter as the "decisive" representative of a certain tradition of teaching philosophy in France, a tradition that emphasizes systems, categories and metaphysics as opposed to the relations, technologies, and practices that were Foucault's central focus.<sup>51</sup>

There are, of course, a number of potential weaknesses in Foucault's response to "La Pharmacie de Platon," some more apparent than real. The first is the seeming contradiction between Plato's rejection of writing in favor of the direct, interpersonal practice of dialectic and the fact that Plato nonetheless not only wrote, but wrote voluminously and with great care. For Derrida, as noted above, this contradiction is embodied in the ambivalence of the word *pharmakon* and of writing itself both in the *Phaedrus* and throughout the Platonic corpus. Though Foucault's and Derrida's responses to this problem are not logically mutually exclusive, Foucault's is convincing, shifting the ground firmly back from theory to practice. He begins by drawing our attention to passage 344c in the seventh letter, "What I have said comes, in short, to this, whenever we see a book, whether the laws of a legislator

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50 Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, part 1.

51 Gros "Situation du cours," 506; Flynn, "Foucault's Mapping of History," *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 29.

(*nomothetes*) or a composition on any other subject, we can be sure that if the author is really *serious*, this book does not contain his best thoughts; they are stored away with the fairest of his possessions" (emphasis mine). Foucault is quick to note the seeming contradiction with the *Laws* and the *Republic* where Plato appears to play precisely the role of the *nomothetes* or lawgiver. He then notes that Plato also invents and relates a variety of myths, such as Aristophanes' tale of the Androgyne in the *Symposium*, the chariot procession in heaven of Socrates' great speech in the *Phaedrus*, or the story of Er that concludes the *Republic*. These myths he argues are also not "serious" in the sense that they are not to be taken literally. Rather they are a provocation to thought and thus to a reexamination of our relation to ourselves, and hence of our capacity to govern both ourselves and others. Foucault then asks if this is not the real philosophical work of the *Laws* and the *Republic* as well: not to provide prefabricated recipes and formulas for the perfect state, but to prompt readers to question the nature of how they govern themselves and others and to seek what may be the best laws for each. In this regard, he cites the admittedly fictive fifth letter, which he believes nonetheless reflects Platonic if not Plato's thought.<sup>52</sup> It contends that the philosopher's job as counselor to the state is not to impose a constitution, but to listen to each particular constitution's voice, and to help it come to speak "its own language to gods and men" (321d-e). If we accept this, as well as the seventh letter's judgment that philosophy cannot be reduced to "formulas" and that what we must seek instead is a system where men can live under freedom and the best laws, then the notion that the *Republic* and the *Laws* constitute actual blueprints for a real state becomes absurd. Thus, Foucault concludes, these dialogues are not to be taken "seriously," but are to be read in a fashion analogous to the myths themselves.<sup>53</sup>

The *Republic* in fact explicitly supports this claim when Socrates states that he does not wish to discuss the possibility of putting his plan into practice but rather to indulge his "fancy like an idle daydreamer out for a solitary walk" (458a-b).<sup>54</sup> Later, when he and Glaucon are discussing whether the ideal philosopher would actually take part in politics, we find the following exchange:

Glaucon: You mean that he will do so in the society which we have been describing and which we have theoretically founded; but I doubt if it will ever exist on earth.

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52 Souilhé, *Lettres de Platon*, lxxxix-xci

53 See Elizabeth Asmis, "Plato on Poetic Creativity," *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 338.

54 Desmond Lee, ed. and trans., *Plato: The Republic*, 2nd rev. ed. (London: Penguin, 1987), 178-79. All translations of the *Republic* are from this edition.

Socrates: Perhaps . . . it is laid up as a pattern in heaven, where he who wishes can see it and found it in his own heart. But it does not matter whether it exists or will ever exist . . . (592a-b).<sup>55</sup>

The philosopher is to be the new artist who faithfully reproduces the harmonic forms of beauty and justice in themselves (500c-501b), rather than copies of copies like the mimetic artist who is expelled in Book 10. His is a higher fiction that points beyond the limits of the means of representation and actualization as in the myth of Er. As the Athenian says in the *Laws*, responding to an imaginary petition on behalf of the tragedians, "Our entire state has been constructed to be a 'representation' of the finest and noblest life . . . So we are poets like yourselves."<sup>56</sup>

A more weighty objection to Foucault's critique of Derrida is to be found in his focus on the seventh letter: for, while it is possible to argue that the letter's text does not discount writing in favor of the *logos* as the transcendental guarantor of meaning, but rather focuses on philosophy as an interpersonal practice of subject formation, one cannot say the same of the *Phaedrus*, which is the primary focus of Derrida's exposition. The myth of Theuth makes clear that writing itself is seen as opposed to *epistêmê* and *mnêmê*, for Ammon does not condemn writing as part of a broader denunciation of the reduction of philosophy to verbal formulas as Plato does in the seventh letter, but he condemns the invention of writing per se as leading to a neglect of memory (*mnêmês ameletêsiai*).<sup>57</sup> *Mnêmê* and *epistêmê*, as in the *Meno*<sup>58</sup> are equated with one another in the myth recounted in Socrates' great speech. The forms, as is made clear there, provide the transcendental guarantee of meaning, and it is our immediate recollection of the forms that constitutes real knowledge and sparks our love of wisdom (*philosophia*):

For the soul that has never seen the truth, will not assume human form. For it is necessary that a person understand what is spoken (*legomenon*) according to the form (*eidōs*), a language which goes from the multitude of sense

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55 On the translation, see the note in Lee, *Plato: The Republic* and Adam's important discussion *ad loc.* James Adam, *The Republic of Plato*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963).

56 Trevor J. Saunders, *Laws*, *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, assoc. ed. D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 1483-84; Asmis, "Plato on Poetic Creativity," 338; Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 88.

57 *Ameletêsia* is an alpha-privative form of the word *meletaō* ("to care for"), which gives us the *epimelia* of Foucault's *epimelia heautou* or "care of the self."

58 Walter Hamilton, ed and trans., *Plato: Phaedrus and Letters VII and VIII* (London: Penguin, 1973), 55 n.2.



impressions to bringing them together by reasoning (*logismôî*) into a unity (*hen*). (249b-c)<sup>59</sup>

Writing here, therefore, suffers from the same degree of ontological inferiority that poetry does in book 10 of the *Republic* and that the lover who physically consummates his desire for the beautiful boy in Socrates' great speech does, and each must be expelled from the realm of pure presence constituted by the forms, if only to return through the backdoor in the guise of Eros as mediator in the *Symposium*, the writing on the soul of the *Phaedrus*, or the myth of Er at the end of the *Republic*.

Of course, Foucault, after such a provocative gesture as singling out Derrida for criticism, is neither so foolish nor so poor a scholar as to neglect the *Phaedrus*. He turns to it two weeks later on March 2 as part of a larger discussion of the relation between philosophy and rhetoric. This lecture contains no direct acknowledgement of Derrida. His first two texts for this lesson are taken from the *Apology*. In one, Socrates announces that he will not use a speech produced by a *logographos*, but will address the court in his usual manner (18a). He thus contrasts his *etumos logos* ("true speech") with the false or fictive rhetorical speech that is usually heard in the courts.<sup>60</sup> In the second passage, he explains why, if he claims to speak the truth, he nonetheless does not speak in the assembly (31c-32). His answer is that he would not be heeded and would have certainly been put to death before now. In both passages, as Foucault reads them, the emphasis is on Socrates as *parrhêsias*t and on philosophy as the effective use of truth telling. Foucault then turns his attention to Socrates' great speech as another example of an *etumos logos*. His argument is that in the *Phaedrus* Socrates' true speech is directly contrasted with Lysias's attempt at a rhetorical *tour de force* in the speech Phaedrus reads. Lysias is later in the dialogue explicitly referred to as a *logographos* and

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59 The translation is my own. The passage is much controverted. For three very different translations see Claudio Moreschini and Paul Vicaire, eds., *Platon: Phèdre* (Paris: Société d'Édition «Les Belles Lettres», 1985); Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, eds. and trans., *Plato: Phaedrus* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995); and Hamilton, *Plato: Phaedrus*. Nehamas and Woodruff adopt Badham's emendation of *iont'* for *ion*, which changes the subject of the last clause. This is in line with their overall interpretation of the dialogue as moving from the transcendental vision of the forms found in the *Republic* to a more immanent, almost Aristotelian vision, found in the *Philebus* (xlii-xliii).

60 In point of fact, the adjective *etumos* appears nowhere in the *Apology*, although the phrases *ton t'alêthê legonta* ["speaking the truth"] (17b4-5), *pasan tèn alêtheian* ["the whole truth"] (17b8), and *t'alêthê legein* ["to speak the truth"] (18a6) do. The phrase *etumos logos* does, however, occur in the *Phaedrus*, where it is attributed to Steisichorus and serves to introduce Socrates's great speech (243a9). It is impossible to tell whether the conflation is deliberate and Foucault is anticipating his argument on the *Phaedrus* or a simple slip, given that we are dealing with oral teaching and do yet not have access to an official transcript.

Phaedrus, now converted to what he thinks to be Socrates' point of view condemns him for that reason. Nonetheless, as Foucault notes, Socrates reproves Phaedrus on this point and indicates that the question is less if one's *logos* is *graphos* ("written") than if it is *aischros* ("shameful") (258d). Lest we miss the Derridean resonances to these passages, Foucault underlines the fact that *logos* is used by Plato for both written and oral speech.

He concludes then by arguing that Phaedrus says that for a speech to be good, the person who delivers it must be someone who knows the truth. But Socrates is not satisfied with this. Rhetoric on this model is conceived of as an add-on and ornament, a mere externality. Knowledge of the truth, however, is not given in advance, but is a function of discourse as it is practiced through the *elenchus* as discussed in the seventh letter.<sup>61</sup> From here he concludes that the true art of rhetoric is nothing other than *psychagogia*, that is, the ability to "lead souls." Dialectic, not rhetorical set speeches in the manner of Lysias, is the true example of this art. The tricks of rhetoric found in the manuals are only valuable to the extent that they are subordinated to the dialectic (and its *etumos logos*). Dialectic in fact makes a double demand, the knowledge of being and *psychagogia*. These are two faces of the same coin. It is by the movement of the soul that one comes to know being, and it is through knowing the nature of being that one knows the nature of the soul. Thus, according to Foucault, Socrates' great speech has only the function of giving an example of the *etumos logos*, that is of anticipating the discussion of rhetoric in the dialogue's final part and hence of showing the link that exists between access to the truth and the soul.

Foucault's reading is a *tour de force*. It offers an interpretation of the dialogue that at once unifies the two sections and recasts the *Phaedrus* not as a meditation on writing's relation to the *logos*, and hence to the soul, but as rhetoric's relation to philosophy's vocation to speak the truth and to lead others to the truth. Nonetheless, while valid in its own terms and offering important insights into how the *Phaedrus* can be read in terms of philosophy, viewed as a set of practices that are aimed in the first place at the relation of self to self and then of self to truth, it not clear that Derrida's reading is therefore invalid. First, Foucault never offers a counterreading of the myth of Theuth, which is Derrida's strongest piece of evidence. Second, he never addresses the way in which the vocabulary of writing as a *pharmakon* relates to the myth of Pharmakeia that opens the dialogue or to the nature of Eros as depicted in the competing speeches, nor, in spite of Foucault's assertions to the contrary, can the discourse on love be reduced to a mere illustration of the

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61 This is a reasonable deduction, but Foucault does not cite a specific passage and I know of nowhere in the *Phaedrus* where Socrates actually says this.

problem of true speech as opposed to rhetoric.<sup>62</sup> Third, Foucault oversimplifies what Derrida means by writing. As Derrida's critique of Husserl in *La voix et le phénomène* makes clear, there can be no meaning without some form of inscription. All language represents a materialization of thought, an encoding of the conceptual in the signifier whether its medium be that of vibrations in the air, synaptic firings in the brain, or paper and ink. But thought has no reality outside that materialization, thus writing always precedes speech. Language is not merely the medium of thought, but that which makes thought possible. Writing in Derrida stands for the formalization of thought that is at once inescapable and yet always alienates thought as pure meaning from itself.<sup>63</sup> The attempt to expel writing from Western metaphysics is the attempt to recover a lost origin, a realm of pure meaning that like the forms is always posited, but never present. Thus Foucault's observation that Plato uses *logos* of both speech and writing ultimately falls wide of the mark. As Ferrari observes, "There is no such thing anymore—certainly not in philosophy—as pure speech. Speech is always speech-in-the-light-of-writing—a tool self-consciously adopted."<sup>64</sup>

In the end, in spite of Foucault's polemical jibes, and the strong evidence that it was at least in part the challenge of Derrida that led Foucault to return to Plato, it is not clear that the two levels of analysis are mutually exclusive. As Alexander Nehamas observes, in response to Hadot's claim that ancient philosophy was only concerned with theory as an incitement to and support for a mode of life, "Needless to say, theory was never very far away and very often closer than Hadot believed."<sup>65</sup> By the same token, while Foucault is undoubtedly right to refocus us on the problematic of the care of the self in ancient philosophy and the relation of the subject to truth as a set of practices, nonetheless we cannot neglect the fact that it *is* with Plato's dialogues that the very possibility of formulating in a rigorous manner questions about the nature of the good, the just, and the relative merits of pleasure and knowledge comes into formal existence in occidental thought.<sup>66</sup> Plato is the founder of Western metaphysics, and the conceptual and epistemological foundation of this ontology was from the beginning, as any

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62 Which is not to say that it does not also serve as such an illustration. See G. R. F. Ferrari, "Platonic Love," *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

63 Catherine H Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, Strauss, Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 201-16; Allan Stoekl, *Agonies of the Intellectual: Commitment, Subjectivity and the Performative in the Twentieth-Century French Tradition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 201.

64 Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas: A Study of Plato's Phaedrus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 219-20.

65 Nehamas, *The Art of Living*, 164.

66 Alexander Grant, *The Ethics of Aristotle Illustrated with Essays and Notes*, vol. 1 (London: Longman's, 1866), 45.

reader of the *Ion*<sup>67</sup> must know, linked to a break from the predominantly oral and poetic structures of thought that dominated Greek education and culture until at least the middle of the fifth century BCE.<sup>68</sup>

Plato's relationship to writing is problematic and the fact that this problematization is linked to a conception of what must ultimately be called philosophy as a spiritual practice pursued through the Socratic *elenchus* does not exclude it from also being a theoretical conundrum. Writing's relationship to thought and the fundamental realities that make rigorous conceptual investigation possible is fraught with ambivalence and contradiction. The problem of externality and inscription, whether in the case of poetry, as in the

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67 For a discussion of recent readings of the *Ion* in relation to the *Republic*'s "banishment" of the poets and the elaboration of Plato's mature metaphysical theories, see Ledbetter, who accepts a rigorous distinction between the early Socratic dialogues and the later Platonic dialogues. Grace M. Ledbetter, *Poetics Before Plato: Interpretation and Authority in Early Greek Theories of Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 78-99.

68 It was Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963) who most decisively, if somewhat monochromatically, demonstrated this. His text remains fundamental. See Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue*, 17; Rosalind Thomas, *Oral Tradition and Written Record in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 34; John Miles Foley, *The Theory of Oral Composition: History and Methodology* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1988), 62; Jesper Svenbro, *Phrasikleia: An Anthropology of Reading in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 1; Bruno Gentili, *Poesia e pubblico nella Grecia antica: Da Omero al V secolo* (Rome: Editori Latera, 1984), 53; Asmis "Plato on Poetic Creativity," 361 n.1; Peter W. Rose, *Sons of the Gods, Children of Earth: Ideology and Literary Form in Ancient Greece* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 337; although its more extreme claims, particularly about alphabetic literacy and the direct causal effects of literacy are today questioned See Thomas, *Oral Tradition*, 3, 17n.2, 26; Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 17; William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1989), 50n.23; Rose, *Sons of the Gods*, pp.116-17). See also Paul Zumthor, *Introduction à la poésie orale* (Paris: Seuil, 1983) 34, 46; Jack Goody and Ian Watt, "The Consequences of Literacy," *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Jack Goody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) 53; Harry Berger, Jr., "Phaedrus and the Politics of Inscriptions," ed. Steven Shankman, *Plato and Postmodernism* (Glenside, PA: Aldine Press, 1994: 82); Thomas, *Literacy and Orality*, p.18; and Harvey J. Graff, *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1987), 5.

On poetry as the dominant form of *paideia*, and the lack of any significant form of book trade until the end of the fifth century BCE, see Grant, *The Ethics of Aristotle*, 50; Anthony Snodgrass, *Archaic Greece: The Age of Experiment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 174; Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 57-59, 84-93; Graff, *Legacies of Literacy*, 26; Thomas, *Literacy and Orality*, 8, 13, 51; *Oral Tradition*, 21; Leslie Kurke, *The Traffic in Praise: Pindar and the Poetics of Social Economy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 88; Gregory Nagy, *Greek Myth and Poetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) 38; Nagy, *Pindar's Homer: The Lyric Possession of an Epic Past* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 404.

*Republic's* doctrine of mimesis; of sexual attraction, as formulated in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*; or of writing's relation to thought and the real, as defined in the *Phaedrus* and the seventh letter, is central to Plato's concerns. The doctrines of recollection and spiritual purification that Plato describes in the great middle dialogues and integrates directly into his general theory of knowledge certainly have their roots, as Vernant<sup>69</sup> and Morgan<sup>70</sup> have shown, in traditional Greek religious and Pythagorean practices. But spiritual practice is ultimately inseparable from its theoretical values, however informal, unconscious, or provisional. By the same token, the structures of thought that make possible the Socratic *elenchus* are inconceivable outside a culture of formalized abstraction and hence writing.

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69 Vernant, *Mythe et pensée*, vol. 1, 92-117

70 Michael L. Morgan, "Plato and Greek Religion," *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).