

# DERRIDA, TEXTUALITY, AND SACRIFICE

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## Introduction

In this paper, I focus on Derrida's criticism of Plato as the arch-metaphysical thinker.<sup>1</sup> Derrida continues a long tradition that caricatures Plato as a political philosopher<sup>2</sup> or an enlightenment thinker<sup>3</sup> who seeks to rationally examine his reality and arrive at secure propositional knowledge.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to this approach, I argue that it is important to appreciate Plato's affinity to Greek religion,<sup>5</sup> and especially his concern with mortality. This soteriological dimension<sup>6</sup> renders Plato immune to twentieth-century anti-metaphysical criticisms and exaggerated political readings.<sup>7</sup> I will show that Derrida's "playful" interpretation of Plato brushes aside the concerns of mortals: death, salvation, and philosophy. In doing so, Derrida appears as a sophist on Detienne's definition:

Towards the end of the sixth century, certain circles in Greece witnessed a birth of a type of a philosophical and religious thought absolutely opposed to that of the Sophists. The thought of the Sophists was secularized, directed towards the external world, and founded on *praxis*, while the other was religious, introverted, and concerned with individual salvation. (Detienne 119)

Derrida is closer to the sophist than the philosopher,<sup>8</sup> in that he focuses on writing rather than on the pedagogy of Phaedrus, whereas, for Socrates, it is the fate of the mortal singular that is decisive.

In arguing against Derrida, I also challenge the *polis*-paradigm, i.e., the view that Greek religion was purely a phenomenon of the *polis*,<sup>9</sup> on two levels: 1) Religion and 2) Philosophy.

Lacking a word for religion,<sup>10</sup> ancient Greek made no distinction between philosophers and religious figures as recent studies by Burkert, Kingsley, Riedweg, and Detienne have shown.<sup>11</sup> Platonic philosophy is, in fact, closer to what we consider theology than to what we consider rational positivism,<sup>12</sup> as I have argued previously ("Initiation").<sup>13</sup> Access to Greek philosophical religion remains closed to us because we do not take the claims of philosophical salvation in Greek philosophy seriously, nor do we understand the rational soteriology of Greek religion.

Secondly, Platonic philosophy is not as easily reducible to political rationality as some scholars (e.g., Strauss)<sup>14</sup> think. Both the *Republic* and *Letter VII* show Plato to be deeply suspicious of politics. Thus, one can see Platonic dialogues as articulating the limits of political thought and thereby turning away from politics to issues of mortality and salvation through philosophy.

In this paper, I focus on the *Phaedrus*, which shows Socrates leaving the city walls to engage in an erotic conversation with the youth, Phaedrus.<sup>15</sup>

## Religious Themes in the *Phaedrus*

The myth of Orithuia (*Phaedrus* 229b-d) falling to her death as a consequence of Boreas' desire introduces us to the erotic, religious, mortal, and soteriological ambitions of

Platonic philosophy. This story bears striking parallels to the myth of Persephone and the Eleusinian mysteries.<sup>16</sup> Both maidens, while playing with friends and gathering flowers, encounter an immortal and suffer tragic fates.<sup>17</sup>

Socrates rescues the myth from the “clever” demythologizers who seek to allegorize it away. By invoking poly-morphic, poly-phonic creatures, his commentary may also be making an interesting concession that pluralism is sometimes a more real truth than what results from an attempt to distill certain insights into individual forms.<sup>18</sup> Socrates, moreover, invokes the Delphic oracle (whose utterances exceed mere literal interpretations) and links his search for self-knowledge to a mythic figure bound forever to the underworld: Typhon (*Phaedrus* 230a). His criticism of Lysias’ rationally calculative sobriety as well as his defense of prophecy and madness show that the search for self-knowledge, for Socrates, ultimately exceeds the boundaries of rational knowledge and enters into the dangerous space opened up by erotic and mortal being.<sup>19</sup>

Both the dramatic setting of the *Phaedrus* and this opening myth point to the meaning of the dialogue: the *polis* and the alternatives it offers ultimately do not reach far enough to touch the singular being of the individual or to offer him a way to realize himself. Critically, the *polis* cannot save the individual from his death, a failure which requires of the individual a turn inward as the event of finding oneself (i.e., fulfilling the *gnothi seauton*). Thus, in the *Phaedrus*, Plato shows Socrates and Phaedrus leaving the city for an explicitly apolitical space in which to talk. This is the space in which an intimate conversation about the nature of love, of one’s mortality, of the possibility of salvation from such mortality through the experience of *eros*, and of one’s ultimate and highest calling can take place. The setting of the dialogue, a shady site next to a stream in the Athenian countryside, can even be seen as a symbol for the fates of the participants, one of whom will be exiled from the city and the other who will be put to death.<sup>20</sup>

### Derrida’s Interpretation of the *Phaedrus*

Let us see how Derrida interprets the *Phaedrus*. In “Plato’s Pharmacy,” one of his most influential and playful early works, Derrida undertakes a clever deconstructive reading of Plato’s *Phaedrus*. Derrida, to state it bluntly, ties Plato up in a knot. In Derrida’s reading, Plato helplessly falls victim to the very thing he sets out to avoid, namely, according to legitimacy to the written word. Derrida finds in this Platonic dialogue a hopelessly frustrated Plato whose fundamental distinction between mythology and philosophy are completely undermined by his own logic and rhetoric.

Derrida begins his interpretation of Plato by clarifying why the *Phaedrus* is not an incoherent, amateurish dialogue by Plato but a “rigorous, sure and subtle” oeuvre (67).<sup>21</sup> One of the clues to this unity is Plato’s detailed exploration of the word *pharmakon*,<sup>22</sup> which may have any one of several meanings: cure, medicine, and poison.

Derrida’s concern in this essay is to show Plato as a metaphysical thinker who privileges *logos* or speech over writing or scripture.<sup>23</sup> But the trial of writing provides a verdict that is not straightforward: writing embodies the ambiguous properties of the *pharmakon*, simultaneously a poison and a cure. As a cure, he argues, writing is indispensable to

Plato, while, as poison, writing embodies some very deleterious qualities, as Socrates explicitly articulates. “What is magisterial about the demonstration [i.e., Plato’s demonstration] affirms and effaces itself at once, with suppleness, irony and discretion” (67). Thus, Plato writes with a pen in one hand, as it were, and an eraser in the other. The erasure is the overt criticism of writing which Plato pens into the dialogue.

In the second half of his essay Derrida moves on to other dialogues that use the word *pharmakon*. He depends on Saussure for his next move: meaning is created through a play of differences amongst various signs. Derrida renews his attack on Plato with Oedipal fury.<sup>24</sup> He shows that Plato fails to uphold his own distinction between “inside” and “outside,” before turning, in section 7, to the problem of imitation and the distinction between originals and copies. In the penultimate section of the essay, Derrida reaches his goal: to overturn living *logos* with scripture, arguing that Plato’s distinction between speech and writing gives way to the distinction between two different kinds of writing. The living *logos* has been subverted to *l’écriture*, scripture.<sup>25</sup>

Derrida continues his essay by establishing the primacy of scripture at the price of parricide (Plato)... but we are playing. Like Orithuia, Derrida’s playfulness makes him oblivious to the seriousness of this play, i.e., to Socrates’ death in particular and to the mortal condition in general. He concludes his analysis by painting a surprising portrait of Plato: a thinker who struggles to “isolate the good from the bad, the true from the false” but also to block out the “stammering buzz of voices,” (167) including his own. It is this stammering buzz of mortal voices that, I argue, Plato hears and takes seriously,<sup>26</sup> whereas Derrida does not.

Every voice, if it is not some fictional generalization such as “speech,” “writing,” and so on, belongs to a mortal<sup>27</sup> who is confronted by (the prospect of) his own death and is, therefore, in need of salvation. Derrida cruelly ignores Plato’s concern with the deadly aspect of human existence, rather, reveling in his own Gordian play.

Critically, Derrida’s interpretation overlooks Socrates’ function as the *pharmakos*. In ignoring the mortal fate of Socrates, Derrida falls prey to the same charge he makes against Plato: he reduces philosophy to a play, albeit a deadly one. I thus first examine Socrates’ role as a *pharmakos* and then conclude by showing how political reality, like Derrida’s fictional reality, also excludes philosophy and mortal existence to protect its authority and reinforce an illusion of permanence.

### **Socrates’ Death: A *Pharmakon* for the City**

The Greek word *pharmakon* appears several times in the dialogue *Phaedrus* (cf. 230d, 274e, 275a). The word *pharmakon* is usually translated as “medicine” or “drug.” Derrida examines the significance of this word both in the role that it plays in unraveling the *Phaedrus* and showing that it is a unified, well thought-out and precisely-executed work. In recounting the myth of the abduction of Orithuia by Boreas, Socrates mentions that she was playing with a playmate named Pharmakeia (229c). *Pharmakeia* is a noun suggesting the application of a *pharmakon*. However, as Derrida demonstrates, this interpretation is

inadequate since *pharmakon* has several meanings, including the antithetical connotations of “cure” and “poison.”

Plato exploits the polysemy of the word *pharmakon* and its cognates by using them as keys to unlock each of his complex themes. I agree with Derrida that Plato exploits the many senses of this word. Here is a list of meanings:

1. Transcending the political: Socrates admits that Phaedrus has discovered a *pharmakon* for leading him out of the city (*dokeis moi tes exodou to pharmakon heurekenai*, 230d5-6).

2. Erotic writing: In a playful sexual allusion, Socrates asks Phaedrus to show him what he has concealed under his cloak (228d). This turns out to be Lysias’ erotic speech. It is this speech which is the *pharmakon* that leads Socrates out on a walk with Phaedrus (as just mentioned). Socrates reinforces the phallic metaphor and clarifies its association with writing. The *pharmakos* is a dangling carrot which Socrates follows like a hungry animal as well as a written speech.

3. Erotic transgression: Orithuia succumbs to Boreas’ deadly erotic seduction while playing with *Pharmakeia* (*sun Pharmakeia paixousan*, 229c).

4. Mortality: *Pharmakeia* does not cure our mortality, and neither does *eros*. The erotic seizure of Orithuia by an immortal does not result in her escape from mortality, as in the case of Ganymede, whom Zeus carries off. Socrates mentions this love, in another context, about how desire gives us wings (255d). Neither her lover’s immortality nor his “flood of passion” (255d) gives Orithuia wings; her erotic encounter leads to her fatal descent into mortality.

5. Writing vs. speaking: Socrates presents writing as a *pharmakon* in an Egyptian myth. Theuth, presenting the gift of writing (*grammata*), to king Thamus, says of it: “This discipline (*to mathema*), my king, will make the Egyptians wiser and will improve their memories (*sophoterous kai mnemonikoterous*): my invention is a *pharmakon*” (274e).

6. Enchantment, bewitchment, magic: *Pharmakeus*, a word which does not appear in the *Phaedrus*, is nevertheless relevant here, as Derrida correctly demonstrates. Diotima calls Eros himself a sorcerer, which Derrida interprets as one of Socrates’ masks. He writes, “Socrates in the dialogues of Plato often has the face of a *pharmakeus*. That is the name given by Diotima to Eros. But behind the portrait of Eros, one cannot fail to recognize the features of Socrates as though Diotima, in looking at him, were proposing to Socrates the portrait of himself. (*Symposium*, 203c,d,e)” (117). Eros, rather than the written Platonic dialogue seems Plato’s preferred method of presentation of his dead teacher. Everywhere in the dialogue, either as the visionary of Forms or the mad lover, either as the most just citizen or the most pious, Plato’s philosophy leads to the life and death of one concrete individual, i.e., Socrates, and to the problem of his mortality.

We can see how the words *pharmakon*, *pharmakeia*, *pharmakeus* comprehensively link the most important themes of the *Phaedrus*. I agree with Derrida in his analysis of this word and its relevance to the dialogue, but I disagree with him in his conclusions. Derrida ignores the erotic speeches completely,<sup>28</sup> focusing exclusively on the theme of writing within which he ignores the horizontal erotic relationship between two individuals as lovers, and, rather, stresses the hierarchical power relationship of the commanding father-king. In short, Derrida sees Socrates not as a lover, but the father, king, or judge, the Egyptian king Thamus whose pronouncements convict writing as a lesser form of

knowledge based on its ambiguous qualities, thus maintaining his “meta-physical” emphasis on scripture and its authority, not living beings and lovers.

Derrida also displaces the dichotomy of life and death from mortals to modes of expression by stressing the second half of the dialogue at the expense of the first. He rejects the death of Orithuia as the fate of every mortal, thus simplifying its complex expression to a special effect of *pharmakeia* (writing). “Through her games” he writes, ignoring the erotic overture of Boreas, “Pharmacia has dragged down to death a virginal purity and an unpenetrated interior” (70). This interpretation, however, does not convey the profundity of her death. Because Pharmakeia is unable to prevent her friend’s abduction, her efforts become a pointless play against the erotic rush and mortal fall to which Orithuia succumbs. Like *eros*, death chooses each individual as an individual, and not only is Pharmakeia unable to provide an antidote to the erotic and fatal features of mortal fate, she cannot be a substitute.

Derrida’s interpretation ignores mortality, *erotics*,<sup>29</sup> individuality, the quest for self-knowledge, and Socrates’ condemnation of writing from the mortal point of view. These concerns are crucial for any explication of the dialogue and ignoring them violently reconstructs its shape into something almost unrecognizable. As a remedy, I propose we shift our obsession away from “writing,” which itself is not as simple as markings on paper.<sup>30</sup> Here, however, I want to shift the focus from *biblia*<sup>31</sup> back to beings, both mortal and erotic, of which Socrates is an unparalleled example. Thus, the remedy that cures us of textual fetishes is an understanding of Socrates as the *pharmakos*, the scapegoat and mortal victim condemned to die.

The missing link is Socrates himself, uncannily present as a *pharmakos*, the ritual scapegoat of Athenian politics. Jane Harrison writes:

That the leading out of the *pharmakos* was a part of the festival of the Thargelia we know from Harpocration. He says in commenting on the word: “At Athens they led out two men to be purifications for the city; it was at Thargelia, one for the men and the other for the women.” These men, these *pharmakoi*, whose function it was to purify the city, were, it will later be seen, in all probability put to death....<sup>32</sup> The ceremony of expulsion took place, it is again practically certain, on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of Thargelion, a day not lightly to be forgotten, for it was the birthday of Socrates. (95-96)

Derrida is not unaware of this text; he footnotes this exact passage. He does, however, succumb to the oldest of metaphysical seductions: the exclusion of mortal being from philosophy.<sup>33</sup> Thus, Derrida reads death allegorically even while Socrates warns him, along with the demythologizers, that one ought not to rush into allegorical interpretation (*Phaedrus* 229d). Instead of this boorish kind of expertise (*sophiai khromenos*, 229d), he recommends a worthier model for philosophy: the non-metaphysical endeavor of seeking “self-knowledge.” As his metaphor for what kind of person he is, Socrates mentions Typhon, who shook up Zeus’ hierarchical order. For this anti-foundational move, Zeus punished Typhon even as Athens punished Socrates for positing self-knowledge over and against the “written” laws of the city and its concerns. Socrates, in Schürmann’s words, rejects the task of being a “functionary” of the city and its laws.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the Socratic quest

for self-knowledge is anarchic because the unsubsumable individual,<sup>35</sup> as mortal, cannot provide stable foundations for the city in the ways that written laws can: writing is therapeutic to the city, while mortality threatens it by turning citizens into individuals. Therefore, metaphysics is a useful tool in the city, which suppresses the disruptive thirst for self-knowledge by holding up Forms, Laws, History, Logic, Argumentation, Writing, and Science—in short, all generalizations and atemporalizations—over the mortal individual and his fate. From the *polis* point of view, Socrates is nothing short of a traitor while his philosophy, by following the implications of mortality, exposing the city's metaphysical program, and banishing it into an unreal "*topos noetos*," betrays the city. By condemning Socrates, the city purifies itself of his mortal and erotic subversions designed to create individuals rather than citizens. He needs to be destroyed and silenced through subsequent institutionalizations of his teaching, a remedy that has worked more than once in our history.

Harrison writes, "This necessity for utter destruction [of the *pharmakos*] comes out very clearly in an account of the way the Egyptians treated their scapegoats. Plutarch in his discourse on Isis and Osiris says, on authority of Manetho, that in the dog days they used to burn men alive whom they called Typhonians..." (104).<sup>36</sup> The word Typhon (*Tuphonos*, 230a) used in the context of Socrates' exodus from the city alludes phonically (*phone*) to the Typhonians and thus again to scapegoating (*phonos*, murder) and city-sponsored execution. Unwittingly, Derrida takes his stance against Socrates and, in describing Socrates both as a *pharmakeus* and an authority figure who condemns writing, binds to Socrates' head "moral business, not his own" (quoted in Harrison 105). Derrida neutralizes Socrates' erotic playfulness and mortal instability by firmly reestablishing a hierarchical model (father/king). From this atemporal metaphysical *topos*, a place where the foundations of the city rest, he sentences Socrates.

One final point on the *pharmakon*: is it relevant and appropriate to use this metaphor for 5<sup>th</sup>-century Athens? In a separate speech from Lysias, composed against Andokides, he writes: "We needs must hold that in avenging ourselves and ridding ourselves of Andokides we purify the city and perform apotropiac ceremonies, and solemnly expel a *pharmakos* and rid ourselves of a criminal; for of this sort the fellow is" (quoted in Harrison 97).<sup>37</sup>

The overall religious character of this dialogue persists to the very end. In the final section of the dialogue, Socrates prays to Pan, the scapegoat god. Theocritus' poem describing the fate of that divine *pharmakos* is preserved for us as follows:

Dear Pan, if this my prayer may granted be  
Then never shall the boys of Arcady  
Flog thee on back and flank with leeks that sting  
When scanty meat is left for offering;  
If not, thy skin with nails be flayed and torn  
And amid nettles mayst thou couch till morn. (Theocritus quoted in Harrison 101)<sup>38</sup>

Harrison writes, "Pan is beaten because...he has failed to do his business. It is sometimes said that Pan is beaten, and the *pharmakoi* are beaten, in order to 'stimulate their powers of fertility'" (101).<sup>39</sup> Socrates, by remaining sterile, is no longer in the service of the city; he fails to do his business in providing "evidential moorage" for founding the city. The

city expects this business of the philosopher. Thus, in the *Apology*, Socrates asks for meals at the city's expense, because by failing the city as a philosopher, he will instead perform his civic duty as a *pharmakon*. He is, therefore, entitled to meals at the city's expense.<sup>40</sup>

This detailed description of the *pharmakos* is necessary to balance Derrida's displacement of the trial of Socrates by the trial of writing. I retain his insight that *pharmakon* and its cognates are central to understanding the dialogue, however, adding that the *pharmakos* (the scapegoat) is the seventh important dimension to the six I previously listed.

The Socrates who emerges in this macabre and tragic landscape is different from the usual impression we have of Socrates as a rational philosopher for whom philosophizing meant asking questions, examining life, and "fidelity to reason." The Plato who, likewise, emerges is not interested in Socratic doctrine, but conveys that, for him, writing philosophy meant giving testimony to the life of Socrates.

Thus, the dialogue itself undergoes a transformation. It is no longer a conversation Plato maintains with the reader, a technical apparatus comprised of talking points, but a dangerous space<sup>41</sup> where Socrates and Plato retain their individuality while conversing with each other through a complex technique of immortalizing their mortality. Entering the dialogue thus constitutes acknowledging our own mortal nature, the irreversibility of time, and its immanent victory. It means accepting that Plato and Socrates are, beyond their words, dead, and will never have a conversation with us, but that when we truly enter the Platonic dialogue, we encounter not only the theory of Forms as *pharmakeia*, but its inability to aid us in our own death. Like Socrates, we wander, without *topos*, displaced between the Forms and the city and their illusory denial of our temporal natures.

### Conclusion

Focusing on Socrates' singular and tragic fate provides us a way to understand the philosophical salvation that is thematized in the Platonic dialogue. Moreover, it also lets us overcome the prejudice (voiced, in particular, by Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood) that Greek religion was mainly a *polis* religion.

From Homer through the Presocratics, Plato inherits the central theological function of philosophy. Thus, Inwood's view of *polis* religion should be seriously tempered with Plato's philosophy *beyond the polis*: a rational and useful theology, the lifeblood of philosophy, without which philosophy is, at best, a child's game.

To say that Plato is a philosopher and, therefore, an inappropriate example when describing the phenomenon of Greek religion is a naive anachronism. It is we who, lacking a rational soteriology, insist on this division. Our soteriology is "of the book" or scripture and its mysterious power to save, while our philosophy is rational and thus the two, for us, can never meet.

This rational salvation, however, is the content of another study. Here, I wish to draw attention to a Plato who transcends all politics and scripture and indicates a way by which the philosopher can participate in the immortal *nous*. In this sense, Platonic dialogues in general, and the *Phaedrus* in particular, do not propound the virtues of philosophy, but, rather, illustrate that philosophy is about the fate of the reader.

## NOTES

1. A criticism made especially in his essay "La pharmacie de Platon" published in *La Dissémination* (1972) and translated into English as "Plato's Pharmacy" in *Dissémination* (1983). For a good overview of Derrida's relation to Plato, see the chapter "Derrida on Plato: Writing as Poison and Cure" in Christopher Norris, *Derrida*.

2. A view especially associated with Leo Strauss and his followers. Strauss writes: "By answering the question of how the good city is possible, Socrates introduces philosophy as a theme of the *Republic*. This means that in the *Republic*, philosophy is not introduced as the end of man, the end for which man should live, but as a means for realizing the just city, the city as armed camp.... Since the rule of philosophers is not introduced as the ingredient of the just city but only as a means for its realization, Aristotle is justified in disregarding this institution in his critical analyses of the *Republic* (*Politics* II)" (History 56). See also Allan Bloom's interpretive essay in his *The Republic of Plato*.

3. In his review of A. Laks and G.W. Most's *Studies on the Derveni Papyrus*, Richard Janko writes: "Thus the [Derveni] papyrus reveals how, under threat of persecution, spiritually inclined freethinkers like Socrates exchanged the traditional polytheistic religion, with its shocking myths and peculiar rites, not for atheism or even agnosticism (for which Protagoras had been condemned), but for a new pantheism. Even this seemed so dangerous that the Athenians unleashed a veritable Inquisition against it" (26). This view, popular amongst many including Burnet and numerous other Anglo-American scholars, shows Socrates as chiefly participating in the "Enlightenment" of the period. Socrates is, in this view, a critic of the "old religion" and while not atheistic, nevertheless constitutes a break in traditional "theology."

4. See, for example, Annas.

5. For an alternative view, see Mark McPherran's well-written *The Religion of Socrates*. McPherran downplays the mortal and soteriological aspects of Plato's thought and valorizes a Socrates who is chiefly interested "in... 'What is x?' questions..." (293).

6. Pierre Hadot has drawn attention to this aspect of Platonic philosophy, in particular, and of ancient philosophy, in general. In his *What is Ancient Philosophy?* Hadot shows that the doctrinal content of the philosophical schools was less important than the application of philosophical techniques (among which he includes "physical," "discursive," and "intuitive" [6] practices) to oneself in an effort at self-transformation. See also his "Die Entteilung der Philosophie im Altertum"; Hadot concludes that of the three classificatory approaches, only the "third type," the classification of philosophy as "stages of a way that is to be traversed within oneself," "is in an authentic and etymological sense philosophy, i.e., the love of wisdom, since it corresponds to an effort, a search, a practice that leads to wisdom" (444). See also Levenson's *Socrates among the Corybantes: Being, Reality, and the Gods*.

7. As Plato repeatedly shows (in dialogues such as *The Republic*, *The Apology*, and *Hippias Major*), true justice and harmony and their constituent attributes of genuine self-knowledge and self-realization cannot be achieved within the political realm and its alternatives, but require, instead, a personal voyage, a quest for one's own nature. On the motif of journey in ancient thought, see my *Return from Transcendence* (forthcoming from Continuum), especially chapters 1 ("Radical Individuality: Time, Mortal Soul, and Journey") and 6 ("Reading Plato's *Phaedrus*: Socrates the Mortal").

8. This is not to deny that Derrida is a very serious philosopher and a deeply religious thinker. It is only in relation to his interpretation of Plato, especially with the life or death context of the scapegoat execution of Socrates, that I believe Derrida goes astray. In making a choice between writing and Socrates as the victim, Derrida overlooks that his concerns are the same as Plato's, who thus becomes the most radically *anti*-metaphysical thinker.

9. The argument that Greek religion was a purely political phenomenon ("polis religion") has been made most strongly by Sourvinou-Inwood; see her "What is Polis Religion?" and "Further Aspects of Polis Religion."

10. *Eusebeia*, *iatreia*, etc.. are terms that come closest to what we would signify with the English word "religion."

11. Riedweg shows that Plato's use of the language of initiation into the mysteries is not accidental, but programmatic and philosophically significant. Kingsley (1995 and 1999), following on Burkert's important



researches on the topic, shows the deep resonances between philosophical literature and the journey of the initiation undergoing *katabasis* (ritual descent).

12. For a history of the word *theologia*, see Vlastos.

13. Some of the material in this article draws upon this previous piece (since published in *Mouseion*).

14. See, for example, his *The City and Man*.

15. As Nails has argued in *The People of Plato*, the *dramatis personae* of every Platonic dialogue and their personal histories are crucial to the dialogue's message. Thus, Phaedrus' excursus from the city in this context is extremely important as it alludes to his exile from Athens. Plato's contemporary readers would have known that in this dialogue, Socrates is going beyond the walls of the city to converse with a "religious" exile. My emphasis on the dramatic setting of the dialogue is meant as a counter to Derrida's move, who makes very little of Socrates' journey outside the city walls, Phaedrus' background and education, or the erotic interplay between Lysias, Phaedrus, and Socrates. Derrida stresses only those characters within the "mythologemes," mostly the relationship between Thaumus and Theuth and also between Orithuia and Pharmakeia. The domination of text over life in Derrida's thought is seen here also.

16. The motifs of purification (through a palinode), a grand myth of the journey of the soul, the *katabasis* or descent of the soul (through loss of wings), and a divine revelation are the chief features that provide not only structure but also a philosophical content to the *Phaedrus* dialogue.

17. One of the maidens mentioned here is Pharmakeia.

18. I thank Matt Newman for this point (personal communication).

19. For an alternative reading, see Charles Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in the Phaedrus*.

20. As Matt Newman points out (personal communication), the setting, as Socrates notes, lends itself to wondrous things like nympholepsis, etc. Unless it is dangerous to retroject Alexandrian imagination of the same kind of setting, we should remember the nympholepsis of Hylas in Theocritus and Apollonius; in the former, it seems as though he may undergo an apotheosis of sorts. With that in mind, one is also struck by Socrates' 'veiling' and later apocalypsis. This is a very divine thing to do (in the *Hymn to Demeter*, for example, Demeter veils her face). Is Socrates, in delivering his palinode, becoming somehow divine? Is Socrates' speech a divine epiphany for Phaedrus?

21. Diogenes Laertius reports that Plato's *Phaedrus* was considered his first attempt and therefore to manifest a certain juvenile quality about it. Schleiermacher, however, makes the opposite case: the dialogue is late and its apparent incoherence a sign of Plato's growing age. On the composition of the *Phaedrus*, see L. Robin's *La théorie platonicienne de l'amour* (2nd ed); see also H. Raeder's *Platons philosophische Entwicklung* in support of Schleiermacher's hypothesis. The great classicist Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf believed, somewhat eccentrically, that the *Phaedrus* dated from 420 BCE, i.e., from Plato's youth before the death of Socrates. However, the general consensus regards the *Phaedrus* as a late dialogue, written probably *after* the death of Socrates; cf. Hackforth and de Vries; see also Panagiotou.

22. In "Plato's Pharmacy," Derrida claims his careful reading "... unites a whole *symploke* [of] patiently interlacing arguments.... That entire hearing of the *trial of writing* should some day cease to appear as an extraneous mythological fantasy, an appendix the organism could easily, with no loss, have done without. In truth, it is rigorously called for from one end of the *Phaedrus* to another" (67). The "more secret organization of themes, of names, of words," (67) which Derrida meticulously uncovers, reveals the "trial of writing" as the unifying program of the entire dialogue. However, as I argue here, the unifying program is not writing but Socrates himself.

23. The word "writing" ultimately does not fully bring forth the force of Derrida's argument. Scripture, which literally means "writing" but which alerts the reader to other greater philosophical and theological ramifications is, in my view, a richer translation.

24. This is not a mere Freudian gloss. In the dialogue *Sophist*, the Eleatic stranger hints at a parricide: to remove father Parmenides to make philosophical argument go forward. In that dialogue, this attempt is botched, and the dialogue ends without resolution. Derrida is keenly aware of the role of the father in philosophy: he downplays the first half of the *Phaedrus* with its speeches on erotic love to focus on the paternal relationship contained in Socrates' brief illustration of a point using an Egyptian myth.

25. But, contrary to Derrida's view, the Platonic dialogue does not succumb to the distinction between writing and speech, *logos* and *muthos*. Rather, writing's task is to direct the soul (cf. *Phaedrus* 270c, 271d-272b); otherwise, it is ultimately fatal since it is an image. An image, we recall, for Plato, is death (cf. *Phaedrus* 276b, 276e-277).

26. See, for example, Socrates' myth of cicadas (*Phaedrus* 259a-e), where Socrates recounts the story of an entire race of mortals who die out because of their exclusive over-indulgence in the gifts of the Muses; the race of cicadas comes from these mortals. As the myth indicates, devotion to the Muses, i.e., creativity, alone cannot

save. Soteriology and creativity, Socrates seems to be saying, are two different things. See also Diotima's speech in the *Symposium*, where the prophetic distinguishes immortality through reproduction from that through creativity (208e-209e) and both again from "the final and highest mystery" (210a) which relates to what purely *is* in every way and "neither comes to be nor passes away..." (211a).

27. In her excellent *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and other Socratics*, Debra Nails amply demonstrates Plato's commitment to real existent individuals throughout his literary career.

28. Ignoring the great myth of the soul entirely in his interpretation, Derrida only pauses to take note of the myths of Orithuia and of Thamus. But that these myths serve as evidence in the "trial of writing" further complicates his strategy: it is not clear whether these myths are "written" by Plato or "uttered" by Socrates. Like the dialogues themselves, myths are not univocal; they display properties of both writing and speaking.

29. In the *Phaedrus*, the writer Lysias takes up the case of the non-lover, disparaging *eros*. In a similar move, the commentator Derrida, defending *writing*, replaces *eros* with an obsessive meditation on another non-erotic relationship: that of the father and son, engaged in a murderous game for authority.

30. For a discussion of the polyvalent nature of writing and its complicated relationship to speaking, see my *Return from Transcendence*.

31. Books, in the sense of a historical record. For a detailed explanation of this issue, refer to the contrast between bibliography and biography in my *Return from Transcendence*.

32. A view, however, that Bremmer rejects based upon more recent sources; cf. Bremmer 315-318.

33. Derrida's commentary thus exemplifies the crucial charge Socrates raises against writing: forgetting of persons. Indeed, such an "erasure" of individuals is endemic to an entire tradition of Plato commentators, beginning with Diogenes Laertius. Diogenes points out the unreal nature of Plato's characters, all of whom are dead at the time of writing. He believes the five characters, in particular, are mouthpieces for Plato (Socrates, Parmenides, the Eleatic Stranger, Timaeus, and the Athenian Stranger). The case I am arguing for here is decidedly against a reading of Plato's characters as his "mouthpieces." In addition to this, I am arguing for something even more radical: that these "characters" are *human* and that they have a "life of their own" beyond the views they proclaim in the dialogues. Their "background" does not merely provide a framework for the views they espouse; their biographies are not contexts for their viewpoints. The stronger, reverse case is true: the characterizations preserve the individual through a portrayal of his ideas. This means that the dialogue not only aims to use Socrates as a proponent of a certain point of view, but attempts to preserve Socrates himself in his mortality. (Cf. also Nail's engagingly written "Mouthpiece Schmouthpiece.")

34. See Schürmann's *Broken Hegemonies, passim*.

35. As a mortal singular, Socrates is unsubsumable under any category: it is always a specific individual rather than "man" who dies. Death is a singularization which is experienced without reference to the logic of universals and particulars (metaphysically) or identities (politically). Thus, it is only individuals such as Plato or Derrida who die, rather than a "Christian" or a "Jew" or even a "citizen."

36. For the story, see W. Sieveking, *Plutarchi moralia* (1-80).

37. For a recent text/commentary see Todd's *A Commentary on Lysias*. This speech is ostensibly not a speech of Lysias' but of one of the "subsidiary prosecutors" (Todd *Lysias* 62, n.1); formally, however, it is from *Lysias* 6, *against Andocides*.

38. The citation is from *Idyll* 7.106-10; for the text, see Hunter.

39. Interestingly, Bremmer notes that, according to Hipponax of Kolophon (fr. 5-11 West), the *pharmakoi* were hit on their genitals with squills (300, 301, 309). While Bremmer attributes this particular detail to Hipponax' "malicious imagination," (301) we should not overlook that there is a wordplay in the *Phaedrus* on the scroll Phaedrus conceals under his cloak (228d), an obvious phallic reference. When Socrates later dismantles Lysias' speech, he, metaphorically speaking, "beats" this scroll. This allusion goes back and forth, because Phaedrus later threatens to constrain Socrates by force to become fruitful with regard to speeches (236e).

40. As Bremmer shows in his useful and comprehensive study of scapegoat rituals in ancient Greece, in many cases the city maintained an individual for a period of one year at its expense before casting him out and, in some cases, stoning or putting him to death. Bremmer notes further that the individuals chosen were always at the margins of society, usually very ugly or useless people or those who had somehow put themselves outside society (e.g., criminals). Bremmer also notes that the *pharmakos* was led out of the city in a ritual procession—a procedure that recalls Phaedrus' leading Socrates out of the city.

41. The term "dangerous" indicates the mortal, fatal, and painful character of becoming. This feature is central to understanding why Homer's description of war, Greek tragedy, sacrifice, and Plato's focus on the trial and execution of Socrates should be read philosophically. Philosophy is only possible when the apocalyptic aspect of time is properly understood. Otherwise, philosophy collapses into mere politics, i.e., short term manipulation of an institution without any understanding of the mortal and ultimate concerns of its citizens.

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