

University of Warwick institutional repository: <http://go.warwick.ac.uk/wrap>

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD at the University of Warwick

<http://go.warwick.ac.uk/wrap/4203>

This thesis is made available online and is protected by original copyright.

Please scroll down to view the document itself.

Please refer to the repository record for this item for information to help you to cite it. Our policy information is available from the repository home page.

**Reviving An Ancient-Modern Quarrel: A Critique of
Derrida's Reading of Plato and Platonism**

A Thesis Presented For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Jones A. Irwin

December 1997

University of Warwick

**Supervisors: Mr. Martin Warner
Dr. Cyril Barrett**

ABSTRACT

This thesis begins from an analysis of Derrida's specific readings of Plato and Platonism, identifying there a modernist bias, which interprets these metaphysical systems as if they were coextensive with Cartesian rationalism. Against Derrida, I argue for a repositioning of Plato and Platonism in the context of an *ancient-modern quarrel*. In replacing Descartes's "clarity and distinctness" with a pre-modern emphasis on "faith" (*pistis*), I am seeking to challenge Derrida's diagnosis of a perplexity or impasse (*aporia*) which cannot be overcome by philosophy. With specific reference to the *Meno* and the *Phaedrus*, one can locate a three-tiered Platonic dialectic beginning with an assertion of knowledge, followed by a necessary deconstruction of this knowledge with, thirdly, a tentative reconstruction of philosophy based on faith rather than knowing. In later chapters, I examine this dialectic as it is developed in the Neo- and Christian-Platonist traditions, particularly through the work of Plotinus, Boethius and Augustine.

On my interpretation, deconstruction remains at the second level of the Platonic dialectic, that of impasse and perplexity (one of Derrida's most recent texts is in fact entitled *Aporias*). Again with reference to an ancient-modern quarrel, it is my contention that Derrida's unstinting stress on the "aporetic" is due to an overemphasis of the Cartesian paradigm. Derrida identifies the exhaustion of what Deeley calls "the classical modern paradigm" with the exhaustion of philosophy *per se*. But this identification of philosophy with Cartesianism can be seriously challenged through a renewed foregrounding of the premodern philosophical resources which Descartes (and now Derrida) have sought to obscure.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to my supervisors, Martin Warner and Cyril Barrett, for their help and encouragement over the last three years. As my main mentor, Martin has been an untiring Stoic in reviewing my explorations. This thesis would never have seen the light of day without the personal friendship of many, most especially Floris, Paul, Ben, Darren, the two Adrians. Additional thanks to the Philosophy secretaries Josie and Julia (and now Lynda) for their tolerance and humour, to Angie Hobbes for being such a stalwart of the Ancients and to Keith A.P. for infectious enthusiasm. Institutional thanks to the British Academy and Warwick University for making it all financially possible.

The final honours are reserved for my parents for being so supportive and loving and to Melissa, for being the greatest force in my life, ever.

Eros, friends,

Jones Irwin

Coventry / Ireland [December 1997].

To Melissa, in eternal love

**REVIVING AN ANCIENT-MODERN QUARREL: A CRITIQUE OF
DERRIDA'S READING OF PLATO AND PLATONISM**

CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	8
INTRODUCTION	10
CHAPTER 1 - Derrida on the "Moderns" and the "Ancients"	
1.1 - Prefatory Remarks	21
1.2 - Derrida and Descartes	22
1.3 - A Poison (<i>Pharmakon</i>) Deserved	33
CHAPTER 2 - From the Presocratics to Plato : A Meditation on a Complex Metaphysical Unity	
2.1 - Prefatory Remarks	55
2.2 - Heraclitus and Parmenides	57
2.3 - Heraclitus and Plato	69
2.4 - Parmenides and Plato	76
CHAPTER 3 - Plato <i>contra</i> Derrida I : The Case of the <i>Meno</i>	
3.1 - Prefatory Remarks	84
3.2 - The <i>Meno</i>	88
3.3 - Philosophy's Doing Battle (<i>diamkhoimen</i>)	101

CHAPTER 4	-	Plato <i>contra</i> Derrida II : The Case of the <i>Phaedrus</i>	
		4.1 - Forms in the <i>Phaedrus</i>	111
		4.2 - “Wisdom” in the <i>Phaedrus</i>	124
CHAPTER 5	-	Derrida on “Platonism” : Deconstruction, Apophasis and Dialectic	
		5.1 - Prefatory Remarks	144
		5.2 - Questioning Derrida’s “Crisis” - On the Problem of the “Problem”	149
		5.3 - On “Denials” and <i>The Gift of Death</i>	160
CHAPTER 6	-	Platonism <i>contra</i> Derrida I : The Cases of Plotinus and Boethius	
		6.1 - Prefatory Remarks	180
		6.2 - On “The One” or “First Existent” in Plotinus	181
		6.3 - On <i>The Consolation of Philosophy</i>	191
CHAPTER 7	-	Platonism <i>contra</i> Derrida II : The Cases of Augustine and De Cusa	
		7.1 - Prefatory Remarks	199
		7.2 - Augustine’s <i>Love of Wisdom</i>	203
		7.3 - De Cusa on “Wisdom”	215
CONCLUSION		I - A General Overview	227
		II - Murdoch, Weil and a Postmodern Platonism	240

NOTES

248

BIBLIOGRAPHY

254

ABBREVIATIONS

[Note: Quotations from translations given except where otherwise indicated]

I - Works by Derrida

“Cogito” - “Cogito and the History of Madness” translated by Alan Bass in *WD* [see below]. “Cogito et Histoire de la Folie”

“Denials” - “How to avoid speaking: Denials” translated by Ken Frieden in *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*. Edited by Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser [New York, Columbia University Press, 1989]. “Comment ne pas parler: Dénégations” in *Psyché: Invention de l'autre* [Paris, Galilée, 1987]

DS - *Dissemination* translated by Barbara Johnson [Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1981]. *La Dissémination* [Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1972]

GD - *The Gift of Death* translated by David Wills [Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1995]. “Donner la mort” in *L'éthique du don, Jacques Derrida et la pensée du don* [Paris, 1992]

OG - *Edmund Husserl's "Origin of Geometry": An Introduction* translated by John P. Leavey Jr. [Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1989]. *Introduction à "L'Origine de la géométrie" par Edmund Husserl* [Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1962]

OTN - *On the Name* translated by John P. Leavey Jr., David Wood and Ian McLeod [Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1995]. This is a unified translation of three separate French texts: *Sauf le Nom* [Paris, Editions Galilée, 1993], *Passions* [Paris, Editions Galilée, 1993] and *Khora* [Paris, Editions Galilée, 1993]

PP - “Plato's Pharmacy” translated by Barbara Johnson in *DS*. “La Pharmacie de Platon” in *La Dissémination*

SP - *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* edited and translated by David B. Allison [Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1973]. *La Voix et le phénomène. Introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* [Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1967]

WD - *Writing and Difference* translated by Alan Bass [Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1978]. *L'écriture et la différence* [Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1967]

II - Works by Platonists

Plotinus

Enn. - *The Enneads* translated by Stephen MacKenna [London, Penguin, 1986]. *Plotini Opera, editio maior* in 3 volumes [Paris/Brussels, 1951-73]

Boethius

Consol. - *The Consolation of Philosophy* translated by V.E. Watts [London, Penguin, 1969]. *Boethii Philosophiae Consolatio* edited by Ludovicus Bieler *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina XCIV* [Turnholti, 1957]

Augustine

EA - *The Essential Augustine* edited by V. Bourke [Indiana, Hackett, 1964]. For Latin references for Augustine cf. Bibliography.

De Cusa

“CW” - “Concerning Wisdom” in *UR*. “De Sapientia”

“OLI” - “Of Learned Ignorance” in *UR*. “De Docta Ignorantia”

UR - *Unity and Reform: Selected Writings of Nicholas De Cusa* edited by John Patrick Dolan [University Of Notre Dame Press, 1962]. *Opera Omnia* [Leipzig, Felix Meiner, 1932-]

Iris Murdoch

EM - *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* [London, Random House, 1997]

Simone Weil

GG - *Gravity and Grace* [London, Ark, 1952]

III - Other Abbreviated Titles

GP - W.K.C. Guthrie *The Greek Philosophers: From Thales to Aristotle* [New York, Methuen, 1967]

ID - Rodolphe Gasché *Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida* [Harvard University Press, 1994]

PL - G.R.F. Ferrari “Platonic Love” in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* edited by Richard Kraut [Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992]

REVIVING AN ANCIENT-MODERN QUARREL: A CRITIQUE OF DERRIDA'S READING OF PLATO AND PLATONISM

Introduction

Those who would like to consider “deconstruction” a symptom of modern or postmodern nihilism could indeed, if they wished, recognise in it the last testimony - not to say the martyrdom of faith in the present *fin de siècle*. This reading will always be possible. Who could prohibit it? In the name of what? But what has happened, so that what is thus permitted is never necessary as such?

Derrida, “Denials” (p.77)

Unhappy Aristotle! Who invented for these men dialectics, the art of building up and pulling down, an art so far-fetched in its conjectures, so harsh in its arguments, so productive of contentions - embarrassing even to itself, retracting everything, and really treating of nothing!

Tertullian, “On Prescription Against Heretics”

My aim in this thesis is in a sense quite simple: to repose the question “What is Philosophy?”. John Deeley in his *New Beginnings: Early Modern Philosophy and Postmodern Thought* [1] makes the claim that the “premoderns” interrogated the presuppositions of modernity more powerfully than any of the “postmoderns” have so far achieved [p. xii, Santella-Brago *Preface* to Deeley]. My own claim in this thesis is more moderate to the extent that it focuses on specific strands of the premodern and postmodern epochs in thought - that of Platonism on the one side and deconstruction on the other. But given this more restricted scope, my claim is perhaps more radical; that in the case of Derrida's thinking, deconstruction is not only less questioning of

modernity than Platonism, but is in fact a reinforcing of the modern paradigm. Derrida, on my interpretation, is a *neo-modern* rather than a post-modern; deconstruction is in effect a more developed form of Cartesianism.

This is not a claim which is standardly made against Derrida - ironically, deconstruction is usually subjected to the accusation that it is anti-Cartesian, anti-truth, irrational etc. (most notably by analytic philosophers e.g. Searle "Reply to Derrida" [2]). Defenders of deconstruction, however, have been known to refer to an Enlightenment element in Derrida's thinking. Christopher Norris [3] for example speaks of Derrida as continuing the work of Kant. More significantly, Simon Critchley, in an essay on Derrida's enigmatic text *Glas* [4] has referred to specific Kantian / Husserlian aspects of Derrida's thought -

it is worth noting that when Derrida locates the thought of *différance* in Husserl's use of the "Idea in the Kantian sense", he adds, "La critique de Kant par Hegel vaudrait sans doute aussi contre Husserl". My claim is that this remark read against the grain and in the knowledge of *Glas*, is a good deal more Kantian or Husserlian than might at first appear [*Speech and Phenomena*, French edition p. 114] (Critchley, p. 20).

This interpretation lends some support to the suggestion that Derrida is more a *neo-modern* than a post-modern. And this is precisely where one can locate the importance of "reviving an ancient-modern quarrel". Derrida's texts on "Plato" and "Platonism" (with which this thesis is primarily concerned) are readings of unequivocally "premodern" metaphysics. The epoch (or epochs) of "premodernity" have taken on a renewed importance in the philosophical world since the recognition of what Deeley calls "the exhaustion of the classical modern paradigm":

we are at a turning point in the history of philosophy, a turning point forced upon us by the exhaustion of the classical modern paradigm [p. 6, Deeley].

However, a difficulty arises if Derrida's work can properly be said to be *neo-modern* rather than post-modern. For if deconstruction constitutes a development rather than a critique of modernity, to what extent is Derrida's thought also determined by the "exhaustion of the classical modern paradigm"? If modernity is exhausted, what validity can possibly attach to neo-modernity? This question can be said to apply most especially to Derrida's readings of "Plato" and "Platonism". As paradigmatic examples of "premodern" metaphysics, the philosophy of Plato and its development through neo-Platonism (Plotinus) and Christian Platonism (Boethius, Augustine, De Cusa) become crucial alternative visions or models to that of Descartes / modernity. Faced with the exhaustion of the classical modern paradigm and thus with the possible exhaustion of philosophy as such, "Plato" and "Platonism" can be reintroduced as ancient but nonetheless valid wellsprings for the reinvigoration of thinking.

It is here that the crux of Derrida's readings of "Plato" and "Platonism" takes on significance. Rather than interpreting the latter metaphysical systems as being possible new well-springs of philosophy, Derrida (in essays such as "Plato's Pharmacy" and "Khora") seems rather to see such "premodern" thought as *anticipating* the modern exhaustion of philosophy. In other words, rather than positing "Plato" and "Platonism" as antidotes to the modern crisis in philosophy, Derrida seems rather to interpret them as reinforcing the inevitable exhaustion of thought. "Platonism" (on Derrida's reading), like deconstruction, would involve a "doubling" of philosophy, where the old binary oppositions of either / or become replaced by neither / nor or both / and. Certainly, this interpretation is not without textual support. To take the most evocative example, one could cite the Christian Platonism of Nicholas De Cusa. De Cusa had a strong distrust of Aristotelian

dialectic and explicitly rejected the principle of noncontradiction, embracing instead the equivocation of the *coincidentia oppositorum*. But rather than (as with Derrida) seeing the exhaustion of the principle of noncontradiction as the exhaustion of philosophy as such, De Cusa's work has rather been described as an attempt to "transcend the usual conceptual confines" [Luscombe p. 177] (5).

He adhered to the crucial distinction characterised by Gerson as that between speculative theology and mystical theology, the former being the work of the intellectual power of the rational soul and the latter being the task of its affective power [Luscombe, p. 177]. In other words, "rationalism" was not the only alternative. From a theological perspective at least, one also had the alternative of a certain "mysticism". Since Descartes, of course, this "mysticism" has been seen as the terrain of theology and thus as excluded from philosophy proper. It was the very tendency towards the mystic or nonrational which Descartes saw as a primary weakness of ancient and medieval thought and which motivated his own rationalism as a counter-philosophy -

in my college days, I discovered that nothing can be imagined which is too strange or incredible to have been said by some philosopher.....it is also true that I have completely lost the intent to refute this philosophy; for I see that it is so absolutely and so clearly destroyed by means of the establishment of my philosophy alone, that no other refutation is needed....[Ariew: "Descartes and Scholasticism" *Cambridge Companion to Descartes*; quoted pp. 58/76] (6).

It is conventional to locate the transition from ancient / medieval to modern philosophy with René Descartes ["modernity began with the Cartesian rationalism and Lockean empiricism, finding together their most accomplished synthesis in Kant"; Braga, Preface to Deeley; p. xii]. There are many aspects to this transition but my particular focus will be on the way in which for Descartes philosophy became coextensive with epistemology, the "search for clear and distinct ideas" of the

Meditations [7]. This epistemologism excluded as philosophically invalid such genres as De Cusa's "mystical theology", which was now seen as being based on a complete irrationalism. In effect, not simply De Cusa but a whole tradition of ancient and medieval thought became excluded as *nonphilosophical*.

At the beginning of this Introduction, I elaborated the issue of re - posing a fundamental philosophical question: "What is Philosophy?". With reference to the origin of modernity and the problem of the so-called "ancient-modern quarrel" [cf. for example, Stanley Rosen's *The Question of Being*](8), one can delineate two quite clearly opposed philosophical camps. The moderns, most notably Descartes (a legacy to be developed by Locke, Kant and Hegel amongst others), considered philosophy to be an exclusively epistemological enterprise, grounded in the question "what can I know?"[9]. And the ancient / medieval philosophers, most notably for us Plato and the tradition of Platonism, were concerned with defining philosophy more broadly as "*philo-sophia*", "love of wisdom", where the values of *love* and *wisdom* were distinguished from, and often opposed to, the value of knowledge, going back at least as far as Socrates' repeated pronouncement of "ignorance", most especially in the *Meno* where he undergoes the states of perplexity [*aporia*] and benumbment [*narkosa*] (cf. Chapter 3).

It is this quarrel which sets the philosophical context of my exploration of the Derridean readings of "Plato" and "Platonism". The problems which are integral to this exploration will be outlined and interrogated through the successive analyses of this thesis. Before concluding this Introduction however, it is necessary to clarify the concept of *neo-modernism* which I have applied to Derrida's work. In considering the nature of the "ancient-modern quarrel" I have foregrounded the conflict between

epistemological and nonepistemological models (e.g. those based on “wisdom” and “love”) of thought, the former being generally identifiable as “modern” models and the latter as “premodern”. But where does this leave Derrida’s “neo-modernism” and how might this be related to the much vaunted epoch of post-modernity? Here one can return to Simon Critchley’s claim that Derrida may be more “Kantian” or “Husserlian” than originally thought. Critchley locates the evidence for this important suggestion in a statement Derrida makes in his early text on Husserl, *Speech and Phenomena* [10] -

La critique de Kant par Hegel vaudrait sans doute aussi contre Husserl [French edition, p. 114].

The critique of Kant by Hegel would also undoubtedly apply against Husserl [my translation].

Given Descartes’s original modernist intention of transforming philosophy into a rigorous epistemology, it is clear that the Kantian philosophy represents a development (albeit a *critical* development) of Cartesianism, rather than a complete refutation of the latter. What links Descartes and Kant is an emphasis on *rational epistemology* (rather than for example *revelation*) as the paradigmatic criterion of philosophical analysis[11]. This is also the case, despite their pronounced differences, with the respective cases of Hegel and Husserl. Indeed, one can trace a direct lineage from Descartes to Husserl in a specific text, the later Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations*[12]. While certainly not positing a homogeneous development therefore, one can trace a continuity between Descartes and Husserl which could be called a modern continuity, a consistent modernist rationalism.

In interpreting Derrida as a “neo-modern”, my intention is to place him solidly within this tradition of thought. The “neo” refers more to the fact that Derrida is still a

modernist within a supposedly post-modernist age than to any specific difference between deconstruction and the philosophy underlying modernity. It is true of course that Derrida has been critical of many modern thinkers, most notably Hegel. In *Glas*[13] for example, his stated intention (with especial reference to the Hegelian discourse) is to -

enervate, then, dilapidate enormous discourses [*Glas*, p. 3/4]

As Critchley observes -

If Derrida can be said to read Hegel systematically, then this is not done in order to maintain the system, but rather to find a moment of “rupture” within the system’s development [Critchley, p. 8].

But this finding of a “rupture” within Hegelian rationalism still seems completely accepting of the standard of philosophy as rational epistemology - it remains an intra-epistemological critique of epistemology. As Derrida observes in the essay “Cogito and the History of Madness”[14]; “Hegel again, always”[*Cogito*, p.43]. And this essay is itself an attempt to defend Cartesian epistemology against Foucault’s anti-epistemological stance, precisely under the conviction that “Reason” is inescapable. But if Derrida is a rationalist critic of Reason, how are we to situate his discourse within the problematic of the ancient-modern quarrel, and what implications might this have for issues concerning the nature of philosophy *per se*?

Here perhaps the most revealing text is *Glas*, concerned as it is with, amongst other issues, Hegelianism and Kantianism. From the perspective of “premodern” thought, *Glas* is also significant as it involves an extended discussion of Christianity. Moreover, these three perspectives intersect in the discussion concerning the Hegelian philosophy of religion and how the latter relates to both the Kantian philosophy of religion and to religion *per se* -

Hegelian philosophy, through and through a philosophy *of* religion, could be read as an effect of Christianity as well as an implacable atheism. Religion accomplishes itself and dies in the philosophy that is its truth, as the truth of past religion, of the essence of thought past of the Christian religion [*Glas*, p. 32].

In describing Hegelian philosophy as “through and through a philosophy *of* religion”, Derrida locates one key moment of the ancient-modern split. For Plato, as for Platonism, the distinction between philosophy and religion, if it exists at all, is very blurred. This blurring of the distinction is what allows Platonism to develop into Christian Platonism. Although the dogmatics of the Christian faith (Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection) are absent from Platonism, what remains continuous is the emphasis on nonrational criteria of interpretation - for example the “eroticism” of the *Phaedrus* [15] or Plotinus’ concepts of “rapture” and “enthusiasm” (cf. Chapters 4 and 6 below respectively). Platonism therefore is not so much a philosophy of religion as a *philosophical religion / religious philosophy* [the ordering of terms matters little]. In Chapter 2, I trace this Platonic sense of a religion / philosophy from its roots in Presocratism, with particular reference to the work of Eric Voegelin [16].

In contrast to this Platonic intersection of philosophy and religion, what makes Hegelianism primarily a “philosophy *of* religion” (Derrida’s emphasis) is precisely its attempt to subordinate religion to reason. Although for Hegel Christianity represents the highest form of religion (“the Absolute religion” - in contrast to Judaism), it still expresses the truth of existence only inadequately, as a representation or “*Vorstellung*” of Absolute Knowledge or *Savoir Absolu*, which Derrida shortens to the siglum *Sa* -

But just as Christianity represents and anticipates itself only in its *Vorstellung*, in Judaism, so the absolute religion Christianity is, remains the *Vorstellung* of *Sa* as philosophy. *Vorstellung*’s structure opens the scene of the holy family onto *Sa* [*Glas*, p.32].

Hegel posits his philosophy *of* religion in opposition to that of Kant who had claimed that “we can know nothing of God” (quoted Critchley 1988, p. 19). What links the two thinkers is their modern sense of a philosophy *of* religion. Although Hegel believes we can know God while Kant believes we cannot, both agree that from a philosophical point of view, religion must be interpreted according to the criteria of epistemology - “is it possible to know God?”. Critchley makes the point that in opposing Hegel in *Glas*, Derrida may be himself moving towards a variation of Kantianism -

If Hegelianism is, as Derrida claims, a philosophy of presence, where philosophy is the truth of religion and where self-consciousness is presented with the Absolute as an object of cognition, then one might ask, does Kantianism bear a more complex relation to the philosophy of presence?.....Is *Glas* implicitly postulating a post-Hegelian Kantianism? [p. 20, Critchley 1988].

For the purposes of this thesis, the important point here would not be the conflict between Hegelian and Kantian philosophies of religion, but rather the fundamental affinity between the latter and their mutual opposition to a premodern symbiosis between philosophy and religion. For Hegel -

God is God only in so far as he knows himself; his self-knowledge is, further, a self-consciousness in man and man’s knowledge *of* God, which proceeds to man’s self-knowledge *in* God [*Encyclopedia*, quoted Critchley 1988 p.19].

For Kant in contrast, “one can know nothing of God”. But both share an emphasis on epistemology (whether *gnosis* or *agnosia*). From this point of view, Derrida’s thought seems to follow Kant’s (epistemological) emphasis on *agnosis* (this also of course has interesting parallels with Derrida’s own Judaic background). As Derrida stated in his 1980 Doctoral Thesis defence *Punctuations*: “I have never known where I was going”[17]. For Derrida (as for Kant), this *agnosticism* is not simply applicable to theological matters but rather to every phenomenon coming under the rubric of

philosophical enquiry. As such, Derrida is not so much a theological agnostic as a philosophical agnostic.

Socrates too, it might be noted, was a kind of philosophical agnostic: “all I know is that I know nothing”. But as we shall see in the various analyses of this thesis, philosophical agnosticism represents only a stage of the Platonic “system” (as the term is applied to both Plato and the wider movement of “Platonism”). In Chapter 3, for example, I will analyse Plato’s agnosticism from the point of view of Meno’s paradox; the crucial point being that *agnosia* or ignorance remains conditional in Plato. In the *Meno* [18], it is overcome through a recourse to *pistis* or “belief” and a reference to the “divinely inspired poets”, most notably Pindar. Significantly, Socrates states that to remain at the level of mere *agnosia* is to risk becoming *argos* (lazy) and *malakos* (indolent, evil). Plato’s distance from Derrida’s kind of agnosticism is clear. Similarly, Augustine is clear in stating that one can never properly know God. In the *Confessions* [19], he even goes so far (in Book 7) as to criticise “the Platonists” for a residual gnosticism. However, unlike Kant / Derrida, Augustine’s *agnosia* is not definitive. It is rather superseded by a stress on *love* and *intellect*, which takes us beyond the circular argumentation of *ratio*.

The tradition of Platonism therefore (as an exemplar of the “premodern” paradigm of philosophy) can be interpreted as leading beyond what Derrida sees as the debate between *gnosis* and *agnosia*. To return to the initial problematic of “What is philosophy?”, my concern is through an analysis of Derrida’s reading of “Plato” and “Platonism” to redefine philosophy *contra* Derrida. In place of epistemologism, I will argue that philosophy needs to return to its original self-conception as “*philosophia*”, love of wisdom. Ironically, this may not require too much of a leap back to

the historical past. This thesis is not set up as a refutation of contemporary “post-modern” thought; rather it is interested in the ways in which “postmodernism” might be extricated from “neo-modernism” and become a genuine move beyond what Deeley has called “the exhaustion of the classical modern paradigm”. On my interpretation, Derrida has failed to take up the most important and transformative potentialities of this exhaustion, preferring one might say to dwell on the “end” rather than to make a new beginning. Jean-Francois Lyotard’s conception of post-modernity however, as not so much a historical periodization as an “alien temporality”, is very suggestive -

the postmodern is thus an alien temporality that in a sense precedes and constitutes *modernism*, always inscribing the possibility of a radical revision of modernism against itself, specifically in the thinking of the event (Bill Readings - *Lyotard: Art and Politics*) [20]

As understood by Lyotard, the “post-modern” leads one out of the problem of simply positing a return to some pristine “origin” of thought. Premodern metaphysics understood on Lyotard’s model would also be post-modern. Contrary to popular opinion Plato, and not Derrida, would be the exemplary post-modernist, the radical reviser of modernism. To this extent, there would open up powerful possibilities for philosophy beyond the limits of neo-Cartesianism. And there would also open up the possibility of marking important affinities (as well as disaffinities) between such unlikely counterparts as Plato and Lyotard, Plotinus and Heidegger, Augustine and Bataille.....[21].

CHAPTER 1 - DERRIDA ON THE “MODERNS” AND THE “ANCIENTS”

Section 1.1 - Prefatory Remarks

There is no chance that within the thematic of metaphysics anything might have budged, as concerns the concept of time, from Aristotle to Hegel. The founding concepts of substance and cause, along with their entire system of connected concepts, suffice by themselves - whatever their differences and internal problematics - ensure (us of) the transmission and uninterrupted continuity - however highly differentiated - of all the moments of Metaphysics, Physics and Logic, passing through Ethics [Derrida, “Ousia and Gramme” p. 39] (1)

The above quotation locates a fundamental continuity in what Derrida refers to as the “thematic of metaphysics”, here extending from Aristotle to Hegel. This Derridean interpretation cuts across what I referred to in the Introduction as the *ancient-modern quarrel*. “Ousia and Gramme” makes the claim that (at least in one fundamental respect) there “is no chance” of a real quarrel between the ancients and the moderns - there is rather an “uninterrupted continuity”, nothing “budges”. I have outlined above how a philosophical link might be made between the “premoderns” and the “postmoderns”, - as both epochs are questioning of epistemological rationalism as a value. Given what Deeley calls “the exhaustion of the classical modern paradigm” [Deeley, p.6] (2), premodern thought becomes a crucial ally and resource of thought for postmodern philosophy. This resource, however, can only be accessed if one accepts the reality of an *ancient-modern quarrel*. For if, with Derrida, one sees an “uninterrupted continuity” between the ancients and the moderns, then premodern thinking also becomes subject to the “exhaustion” of the “classical modern paradigm”.

I will argue that Derrida's account of such continuity between the ancients and the moderns is grounded in a generalisation of Cartesianism to the history of philosophy "as such" [cf. *PP.*, tr. pp. 86 / 194, tr. p.76 / 167] (3). From a reading of Descartes, Derrida applies the Cartesian logic back to the very origin of philosophy with Plato. The "exhaustion" of Cartesianism (of what Derrida refers to in "Cogito and the History of Madness" as the "pathetic" essence of philosophy) becomes the "exhaustion" of philosophy *per se*. In this chapter, I will trace the development of this Derridean interpretation through an analysis of two crucial essays, "Cogito and the History of Madness" [1963] (4) and "Plato's Pharmacy" [1972], beginning with the former.

Section 1.2 - Derrida and Descartes

there is no Trojan horse unconquerable by Reason (in general).....
Derrida, "Cogito..."

The essay "Cogito and the History of Madness" is one of Derrida's earliest texts (1963) and, significantly, it is written at a time when Derrida is also working on Husserl. The very title of Husserl's late text "Cartesian Meditations" [5] makes explicit the links with the Cartesian legacy which Derrida takes up; Derrida's texts on Husserl, *Introduction to Husserl's "Origin of Geometry"*[6], *Speech and Phenomena*[7] and the 1959 essay "Genesis and Structure"[8] can be seen to bear on his 1963 interpretation of Descartes. Derrida's first published book (from 1962) is his *Edmund Husserl's "Origin of Geometry": An Introduction*. There Derrida focuses on what he terms "the Idea in the Kantian sense". He is critical of Husserl's attempt to dialecticize this "idea" into a phenomenological "intuition" and stresses how Husserl

fails adequately to recognise the distinction between these two terms which Kant saw as crucial.

In other words, for Derrida Husserlian phenomenology is at its most convincing when it maintains a Kantian scepticism towards metaphysical dialectics, emphasising instead of the essential “thing in itself”, the “idea” divorced from dialectical objectivism. In the Introduction I noted Simon Critchley’s contention that Derrida’s later text *Glas* [1974] (9) adopts a similarly “Kantian” approach to dialectics. Significantly, Derrida’s text “Cogito and the History of Madness” (which I will focus on in this section) also foregrounds the paradigm of an “idea” abstracted from metaphysical dialectics. This is a crucial emphasis with regard to the ancient-modern quarrel. In privileging an “idea” divorced from metaphysical objectivism, Derrida is placing himself firmly in a modernist tradition of thinking. Descartes is the pivotal founder of this modernist tendency in philosophical thought and “Cogito and the History of Madness” can be interpreted as Derrida’s *neo-modernist* development of the Cartesian legacy. Greek and medieval “realism” (e.g. Platonism), with its contrasting stress on the “object” independent of the idea can be seen as an exact opponent of the Cartesian / Derridean school of thought. It is these two paradigms of thinking which I will bring into direct confrontation in this thesis but before doing so it will be necessary to examine Derrida’s “neo-Cartesianism” in more detail.

Derrida’s “Cogito” essay is primarily a critique of Foucault’s reading of Descartes in *Madness and Civilisation* [10]. In this text, Foucault puts forward a critique of Descartes which interprets the latter as excluding the possibility of the individual subject being mad. He instances the following passage from Descartes’ *Meditations* as conclusive evidence -

And how could I deny these hands and this body are mine, were it not perhaps that I compare myself to certain persons, devoid of sense, whose cerebrella are so troubled and clouded by the violent vapours of black bile, that they constantly assure us that they are kings when they are really quite poor, or that they are clothed in purple when they are really without covering, or who imagine that they have an earthenware head or are nothing but pumpkins or are made of glass.....But they are mad (*sed amentes sunt isti*), and I should not be any the less insane (*demens*) were I to follow examples so extravagant [quoted in "Cogito" essay; p. 45 / 46].

What interests Foucault is how this exclusion is meant to be consistent with Descartes' project of radical doubt. Has not this doubt remained complacent and thus unsuccessful in the measure to which it has assumed that it could not possibly be mad? Foucault concludes the following -

In the economy of doubt, there is a fundamental imbalance between madness, on the one hand, and error, on the other.....Descartes does not avoid the peril of madness in the same way he circumvents the eventuality of dream and error ["Cogito", p. 46].

In other words, Foucault is claiming that the "absolute foundation" of the Cartesian Cogito, grounded indubitably after the supposed furthest extremes of questioning, remains precarious in the measure to which these furthest extremes have not been reached: the "peril of madness" has *not* been avoided. One can say that, according to Foucault, Descartes has only maintained a stable metaphysical structure (the Cogito) through a repression or exclusion of excess. It is this precise interpretation which Derrida wishes to counter in "Cogito and the History of Madness", and he does so from two points of view. According to Derrida -

a) the Cogito, not only does not exclude madness, but is related to the very experience of madness itself. Indeed, madness (as an instance of *excess*) is shown to depend upon the Cogito as its basic presupposition.

and

b) this internal relationship between thought and madness is characteristic of what Derrida sees as the highest possibilities of philosophy. It is only the “hyperbole” [“Cogito”, p.57] (or *excess*) of metaphysics which can escape the “determined historical totality” [“Cogito”, p. 57].

In the first case, Derrida stresses a very specific misreading of the *Meditations* by Foucault. The Cartesian passage previously quoted, far from determining an exclusion of madness, is shown by Derrida to be simply a pedagogical device of Descartes to avoid alienating his readers. Foremost in Descartes’ mind is the effort to exemplify the fact that *crisis* is not confined to the realm of the idiosyncratic. If madness were to be the paradigm of this crisis, it would give the impression that the crisis was not generalized, was thus not altogether serious. Consequently, Descartes looks to dreams as a “more common, and more universal experience than that of madness” [“Cogito”, p.81]. Significantly, however, this in no way reduces the extremity of doubt. Rather, dreams are simply a different medium for the same message. Because, as Derrida demonstrates, Descartes, under this new hypothesis of dreams, *reintroduces* the very same kind of doubt he had previously judged inadmissible under the hypothesis of insanity. The important point being that it is not the content or extremity of the doubting which has been exchanged, but rather the pedagogical case which is used to exemplify this doubt. And as madness seemed to imply a body made of glass so now dreams seem to suggest that even this residual material has been withdrawn -

I shall consider that the heavens, the earth, colours, figures, sound, and all other external things are nought but the illusions and dreams of which an evil genius has availed himself in order to lay traps for my credulity; I shall consider myself as having no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, nor any senses, yet falsely believing myself to have all these things [“Cogito”, p. 53].

This point of extreme doubt is of course only a transitional phase for Descartes. It will eventually lead to the more solid principle of *Cogito, ergo sum* [Descartes *Discourse on Method*] or “I think, therefore I am”. But what is important for Derrida is that this movement from the radicality of dreams to the indubitability of the Cogito in no way represents an exclusion of hyperbolic questioning. Rather for Descartes, the point is precisely that the solidity of the Cogito remains consistent even with the extremity of doubt; even with madness as Derrida observes -

it can no longer literally be said that the Cogito would escape madness because it keeps itself beyond the grasp of madness, or because as Foucault says, “I who think, I cannot be mad”; the Cogito escapes madness only because at its own moment, under its own authority, it is valid *even if I am mad*, even if my thoughts are completely mad [“Cogito”, p.55].

This then would be Derrida’s disagreement with Foucault. While the latter sees the Cogito as a metaphysical reduction of excess, Derrida sees rather Foucault’s analysis of the Cogito as reductionistic. The principle of “I think, therefore I am” does not depend upon the repression of the possibility of madness. Rather, as Derrida notes -

madness is only one case of thought (*within* thought) [Derrida’s emphasis] [“Cogito”, p. 56].

This brings me to the second point mentioned above. That the radicality of a Cogito which no longer seeks to exclude madness is for Derrida characteristic of the highest possibilities of philosophy. It is best approached through his analysis of the concept of *crisis* [“Cogito”, p. 62], given near the end of the “Cogito” essay. There, Derrida speaks of there being two kinds of philosophical crisis. In the first place, he refers to Husserl’s sense of “crisis”, in the guise of objectivism and the forgetting of origins. In the essay *The Origin of Geometry*, for example, Husserl puts forward a critique of the objectivism inherent in Galilean geometry. The latter is a “handed-down” [*Origin*

of Geometry, p. 157] (hereafter *OG*) science, which takes its fundamental axioms as an “inheritance” [*OG*, p. 170]. But for Husserl, such a science remains alienated from its origin and because this origin has received no philosophical validation, the theorems of Galileo remain without support. They are reduced to contingent and arbitrary principles. This kind of geometry, therefore, (and Galilean geometry would seem to be being employed as a paradigm case of geometry in general) is in *crisis*. What is required in response to this crisis is a *Rückfrage* [*OG*, p. 113], a return enquiry, which will seek to reactivate the repressed history of geometry, leading back to the originary source of this history in what Husserl calls the *lebenswelt* (the life-world) [*OG*, p. 172].

Briefly, one can say that Derrida agrees with this Husserlian analysis in the measure to which it is a critique of objectivism, but disagrees with the proposed solution of a *Rückfrage*. Derrida makes this clear in his *Introduction*. One is therefore left with a discredited objectivism, which is shown to depend upon a historical, finite beginning, but from this finitude Derrida denies that one can reach what Husserl called a *historical a priori* [*OG.*, p.180]. And this would be the second sense of *crisis* which Derrida wishes to introduce. A crisis which is no longer simply a forgetting of origins, but rather a crisis of “origin” [*OG.*, p. 153] itself, a confusion as to whether there ever was an origin or a unified first principle which could act as a regulator and normative ideal for all succeeding history.

This would seem to return Derrida to the kind of Diltheyan historicism (or historical relativism) to which phenomenology was a direct reaction. However, Derrida wishes to say more than this and “Cogito and the History of Madness” is once again instructive in this regard. In the following passage, for example, he distances

himself from the idea that the principle of finite world-views, characteristic of historicism, is sufficient in itself -

In question is a way of accounting for the very historicity of philosophy. I believe that history in general would be impossible if we possessed only hyperbole, on the one hand, or, on the other, only determined historical structures, finite world-views ["Cogito", p. 60].

In this passage, Derrida would seem to be making a crucial distinction between "historicity" and "history". History, on the one hand, would simply be the relativity of world-views, what Derrida also refers to in this essay as the "human" ["Cogito", p. 56], the realm of "the natural man" [p. 56], "all that is real, factual, and existent" [p. 56], "anthropological factuality" [p. 56]. In contrast, historicity would involve the conflict between history and all that is "metaphysical and demonic", all that which involves a "reduction of the natural man" [p. 56], "the margin of the possible, the principled and the meaningful, which exceeds all that is real, factual and existent" [p. 56]. In the above passage, Derrida refers to the latter category as "hyperbole". It is the battle between metaphysical hyperbole and finite history which Derrida sees as constitutive of philosophy's historicity, and it is precisely this value of historicity which takes deconstruction beyond both Husserl's historical *a priori* and the relativity of historicism. Firstly, in the case of historicism, it can be said that the historicity of philosophy is more than a series of relative world-views as philosophy, for Derrida, involves "a thinking beyond the finite shelter" -

if philosophy has taken place.....it is only in the extent to which it has formulated the aim of thinking beyond the finite shelter ["Cogito", p. 56].

Following this passage, Derrida formulates a possible historicist rejoinder. Is it not precisely this attempt to think beyond finitude which is symptomatic of philosophy's

effort to shelter itself from the necessity of finitude? (i.e. the necessity of the absence of infinity or God). Derrida answers in the negative -

One cannot allege that the philosophical project of the “infinitivist” rationalisms served as an instrument or as an alibi for a finite historico-political-social violence (which is doubtless the case) without *first* having to acknowledge and respect the intentional meaning of this project itself. Now, within its own intentional meaning, this project presents itself as the conceptualisation of the infinite, that is, of that which cannot be exhausted by any finite totality, by any function, or by any instrumental, technical, or political determination. It will be said this presentation of the philosophical project by itself as such is its greatest lie, its violence and its mystification - or, further, its bad faith. And certainly, the structure which links this intention to exceed the world to the totality of history must be described rigorously, and its economy must be determined. But like all ruses, these economic ones are possible only for finite words and finite intentions, substituting one finitude for another [“Cogito”, p. 310].

Historicism, therefore, for Derrida, would merely substitute one finitude for another.

The important point being that the “intentional meaning” of the infinitivist project is here interpreted as significantly *exceeding* relativism. It is thus an intention, an idea, of infinity which is constitutive of philosophy’s “historicity” and of its irreducibility to finite world-views -

One cannot accuse those individuals or societies who use God as a recourse against madness of seeking to *shelter themselves*, to be sure of having protections against madness - the safe boundaries of asylums - except by construing this shelter as a finite one, within the world, by making God a third party or finite power, that is, except by deceiving oneself; by deceiving oneself not concerning the content and effective finality of this gesture in history, but concerning the philosophical specificity of the idea and name of God [“Cogito”, p. 110] (Derrida’s emphasis).

It is thus the *idea* of God which is philosophically specific, which is specific to philosophy. Beyond the consequent critique of historicism, this diagnosis has important ramifications for Husserl’s regulative ideal of an *historical a priori*. The problem, in brief, stems from the chasm between an idea or intention on the one hand, and the so-called thing-in-itself on the other. Husserl’s phenomenology

grounds its critique of historicism in the conviction that the finite world-view can be superseded by infinity, as an idea and also, most importantly, as a thing-in-itself. Husserl is no idealist. But in the above passage, Derrida tells the reader that it is precisely and exclusively an idea of infinity which constitutes philosophy's exceeding of historicism and therefore its very specificity and power. The dream of Husserl has consequently been left behind, reduced in scope. But, more importantly, one has here Derrida's clear positing of what he sees as the highest possibility of philosophy. It is a *thinking* beyond the finite shelter, an *idea* of nonfinitude.

Certainly, this would seem to mark Derrida's originality as a philosopher in the measure to which it is a hypothesis which *a priori* excludes the possibility of the idea of infinity being anything more than ideal. To employ a distinction used by Derrida earlier in the "Cogito" essay, infinity belongs within the margin of the possible, principled and meaningful rather than in the finite shelter of the "real, factual and existent". So, for example, so long as Descartes' idea of infinity remains just that, an idea, Derrida is happy to defend him against Foucault's objections. However, when later in the *Meditations*, Descartes begins to neglect the precariousness (or madness, as Derrida sees it) of this idea, and acts as if this idea were a truth in some objective sense, Derrida sides with Foucault -

the act of the Cogito, at the hyperbolic moment when it pits itself against madness, or rather lets itself be pitted against madness, must be repeated and distinguished from the language or the deductive system in which Descartes must inscribe it as soon as he reflects the Cogito for the other, which means for oneself. It is through this relationship to the other as an other self that meaning reassures itself against madness and nonmeaning. And philosophy is perhaps the reassurance given against the anguish of being mad at the point of greatest proximity to madness. This silent and specific moment could be called *pathetic* ["Cogito", p. 59].

Derrida has thus given us two kinds of philosophy, espoused by Descartes at different moments. On the one hand, the *madness* or excess of what one might call his philosophy of *ideas*, his hyperbolic notions of infinity. And, on the other hand, the misguided reassurance of his deductive system which inscribes his mad ideas of infinity *as if* they were objective truths. While philosophers of the first kind would, on Derrida's terms, escape Foucault's accusations of a repression of madness, philosophers of the second kind would not. To be clear, therefore, one can say that Derrida defends Descartes's *Meditations* only at their most hyperbolic moment. Additionally, he employs this aspect of Cartesian thought to set up a whole philosophy of philosophy, a meta-philosophy -

philosophy is perhaps the reassurance given against the anguish of being mad at the point of greatest proximity to madness. This silent and specific moment could be called *pathetic* ["Cogito", p. 59].

But Derrida now goes on to make a crucial qualification. The "reassurance" which he has described as being "pathetic" is integral to metaphysical dialectics which has as its effect a "finite historico-political-social violence". *However*, one cannot make philosophy as such synonymous with only this (reactive) dialectical movement. Crucially, one would "first" have to acknowledge the predialectical or "intentional meaning of this project itself" -

One cannot accuse those individuals or societies who use God as a recourse against madness of seeking to shelter themselves.....except by deceiving oneself; by deceiving oneself not concerning the content and effective finality of this gesture in history, but concerning the philosophical specificity of the idea and name of God ["Cogito", p. 110].

It is this aspect of Cartesianism, its "intentional" or *ideal* aspect which Derrida wishes to maintain. This *neo-modernist* grounding of deconstruction becomes crucial in considering Derrida's readings of Platonism. As we will see in the next section,

for example, “Plato’s Pharmacy” seeks to instigate an “unravelling” [*denouement*] of Platonic dialectics. In the “Cogito” essay, Derrida pinpoints an exhaustion of Cartesian dialectics and abstracts from this a neo-modernist stress on Cartesian ideality divorced from its “deductive system”. In “Plato’s Pharmacy” similarly, the metaphysical pretensions of Plato / Socrates are shown to be illusory. Socrates institutes no proper dialectic but is rather a “sorcerer” who (with particular reference to the *Meno*) is an instigator only of *aporia* and confusion.

My contention (which I offer as merely a suggestion here - to be developed in further chapters) is that this “unravelling” of dialectics and the consequent embracing of a neo-modernist *ideality* excludes the possibility of a realist dialectics grounded outside Cartesianism. One fundamental aspect of the “Cogito” essay is Derrida’s claim (*contra* Foucault) that the “history of Metaphysics” is a “continuous history”. As Derrida notes in the essay “Plato’s Pharmacy” -

Platonism sets up the whole of Western metaphysics in its conceptuality[12].

The difficulty with this Derridean interpretation is that it misses the fundamental rupture which takes place between the ancients / medievals and Descartes. With the Cartesian system, a clear transition takes place from the paradigm of the realist *object* to the paradigm of the subjective *idea*. A residual realism remains in Cartesianism as the subjective *idea* seeks to correspond to an extra-subjective *object*, but the locus of emphasis has changed. The object is now dependent upon the subject, and not *vice versa*. Derrida’s neo-modernism takes the break with realism one stage further. Because the Cartesian “deductive system” is a failure, because the idea fails to correspond to the object, one must abstract the *idea* from any obligation to

correspondence whatsoever. Deconstruction therefore, in valuing the *ideal* as ideal, seems to take Cartesianism to its logical conclusion.

However, there is a danger here of identifying the logical development of Cartesianism with the development of philosophy as such. The failure of the Cartesian deductive system may inevitably lead (from a Cartesian perspective) to the valuation of an abstracted ideality. But this conclusion is not applicable to philosophies which do not begin from the Cartesian emphasis on the Cogito. Derrida's conclusions concerning the "unravelling" of philosophical dialectics in the "Cogito" essay (and below, in "Plato's Pharmacy") remain open to question from an other than Cartesian standpoint. It is this widening of the philosophical perspectives (with particular reference to the thought of Plato and Platonism) which I will develop in the succeeding chapters. Before doing so, however, it will be useful to analyse Derrida's deconstruction of Platonic dialectics in "Plato's Pharmacy".

Section 1.3 - A Poison (*Pharmakon*) Deserved

this strategy is a strategy without any finality; for this is what I hold and what in turn holds me in its grip, the aleatory strategy of someone who admits that he does not know where he is going (*Punctuations*, p.50) [quoted in Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction* p.104) [13]

In the "Cogito" essay Derrida declares "I philosophise only in terror", this "terror" being consequent upon the "aleatory strategy" described in the above epigram. This mode of anxious modernism (the anxiety of someone "who does not know") is continued in the essay "Plato's Pharmacy". The import of this later text is that Platonism, like Cartesianism, is unable to maintain its "deductive system", a system which Platonism is credited with having instituted in the first place. At several points "Platonism" (e.g. *PP.*, p. 86, tr. p. 76), here understood as the work of Plato alone, is

cited as setting up the whole of philosophy in its conceptuality (e.g. pp. 86 / 194, tr. pp. 76 / 167). As with Descartes, Plato's attempt to maintain a correspondence between the Idea (or Form) of truth and the objective reality of truth runs aground, in this case because of the inability of Plato to extricate his philosophy from its sworn enemy, sophism. In other words, truth becomes falsity and falsity becomes truth, leaving the binary oppositions of Platonic "conceptuality" in crisis; a process Derrida refers to as "doubling" and which will give the title to the follow-on text in *Dissemination* on Mallarmé, "The Double Session". It is helpful to note at this point a problem with the Derridean interpretation which I will develop in more detail below. The Platonic Idea is not identifiable with the Cartesian "idea" - to make this identification, as Derrida does, is to miss the whole import of this *ancient-modern quarrel*. The Cartesian idea is a *subjective* criterion - it is grounded in Descartes's revolutionary return to the self (*Cogito, ergo sum*). The Platonic Idea (*Ideon*) in contrast is perhaps less confusingly translated "Form" and refers to the unrepresentable (to the subject) "object" of philosophical striving. It is precisely this inaccessibility of the Platonic Idea / Form to subjectivity which will motivate Aristotle's vehement criticisms of Platonism in Book 1 (chapters 9 and 13) of his *Metaphysics* [14]. "Plato's Pharmacy" interprets the Platonic arguments for philosophical truth as if they had as their criterion the certainty of Cartesian "reason". But as we shall see in succeeding chapters, Platonic idealism often sets itself up in direct opposition to rationalism, *the nonrational basis of its claims being exactly (as for example with De Cusa) the justification for an acceptance of those claims*. These are issues to which I will return below. First, however, I will look at "Plato's Pharmacy" in more detail.

Derrida's analysis in this essay has as one of its primary loci the relationship between Plato and sophistics (*PP*, p. 120 -136, p.105-119). Initially, Derrida makes the following blunt statement -

men of writing appear before the eye of God not as wise men (*sophoi*) but in truth as fake or self-proclaimed wise men (*doxosophoi*). This is Plato's definition of the sophist. For it is above all against sophistic that this diatribe against writing is directed: it can be inscribed within the interminable trial instituted by Plato, under the name of philosophy, against the sophists [*on peut l'inscrire dans l'interminable procès entamé par Platon, sur le nom de philosophie contre les sophistes*] (*PP*. p. 120 /121, tr. p.105 /106)

Just two pages on, however, Derrida adopts a rather different tone -

Contrary to what we have indicated earlier, there are also good reasons for thinking that the diatribe against writing is not aimed first and foremost at the sophists. On the contrary: sometimes it seems to proceed *from* them (*il semble parfois en procéder*) [Derrida's emphasis] (*PP*. p. 123, tr. p.108).

The negative, rejoinding aspect of this second statement is clear - Derrida twice uses the term "contrary" alongside a single use of "not". But the more affirming, extending sense of this passage is easier to miss. It is encapsulated in the "also" - "there are *also* good reasons for thinking". Once again, Derrida is not so much arguing against himself as *adding* a second (apparently contradictory) proposition to a prior premise. Plato would be *both* against sophistic *and* for sophistic. This logic of both / and is developed by Derrida in the succeeding discussion.

Socrates' and Plato's original criticism of the sophists is presented by Derrida (see above) as being linked to writing. The diatribe against writing is primarily a diatribe against sophistic (p. 120 /121, tr. p.105 / 106). In the *Sophist*[15], Socrates gives a definition of the character of the title - the sophist is "the imitator of him who knows" (*mimētēs tou sophou*). This status of "imitation" is grounded in the privileging of speech over writing - writing can only imitate speech. But now Derrida points to a

discussion of writing in the *Laws*[16] where Plato seems to adopt a more affirmative attitude -

In this instance, the immutable, petrified identity of writing is not simply added to the signified law or prescribed rule like a mute, stupid simulacrum: it assures the law's permanence and identity with the vigilance of a guardian [*elle en assure la permanence et l'identité avec la vigilance d'un gardien*] (quoted *PP.* p. 128 ,tr. p.113)

Derrida quotes from two passages in the *Laws*, the first (891a) where the putting into writing (*en grammasi tethenta*) is interpreted as being both a challenge to posterity and a safeguard against people's tendency to miss the point at first hearing - "since even the dull student may return to them for reiterated scrutiny" (891a). The second passage concerns the need to procure books (*grammata*) as a condition for being a righteously equal judge. Such a judge "must keep these matters before his eyes", a possibility underivable from speech but intrinsic to the permanence of writing. The final sentence of the passage leaves one in no doubt that here at least Plato is *privileging writing over speech* -

There is, in truth, no study whatsoever so potent as this of law, if the law be what it should be, to make a better man of its student. (957c).

Already, Derrida states, there has been a "reversal" [*renversement*; also "overthrow"] (*PP.* p. 128, tr. p.112) of Plato's original position of a distancing from writing and sophistic, understood as interdependent, to an endorsement of writing, as *the most potent* method of studying law and moreover, the best means to make *a better man of its student*. Writing is thus now tied, positively, to morality and civil ethics. But this is only the first of the apparent inversions which Derrida will describe. These inversions are not limited to the Platonic side of the "border" [*frontière*] (*PP.* p. 123, tr. p.108), but are equally engaged in by sophistic. Isocrates, sophist *par excellence*, is the next thinker foregrounded in "Plato's Pharmacy" -

Inversely, symmetrically, the rhetors had not waited around for Plato in order to *translate writing into judgement*. For Isocrates, for Alcidamas, *logos* was also a living thing (*zoon*) whose vigor, richness, agility and flexibility were limited and constrained by the cadaverous rigidity of the written sign. (*PP.* p. 129, tr. p.114).

“*Inversely, symmetrically*” [*Inversement, symétriquement*] - before discussing the details of the Isocrates case, it is useful to once again move towards what might be called the meta-level, towards Derrida’s motif of *closure*. *On the one hand*, there is inversion here (‘inversely’). Plato inverts a privileging of speech over writing into a privileging of writing over speech. Isocrates inverts a (conventionally) sophistic privileging of writing over speech into a privileging of speech over writing. *On the other hand*, there is simultaneously an undeniable symmetry (‘symmetrically’) at work. If the opposition between Plato and sophistic is premised on their maintaining their stereotypical positions, the above inversions problematize such a fundamental opposition, such a fundamental asymmetry. They thus, by definition, point towards the possibility of symmetry. But, of course, one is not here (*chez Derrida*) dealing with a dialectic of thesis, antithesis, synthesis. Symmetry would not constitute the final term of a series. Rather it would now be added as a supplemental term to the previous binary opposition between Plato and sophistic. Thus -

- 1) Plato and sophistic would be symmetrical.
- 2) Plato and sophistic would be asymmetrical.

This enigmatic series of simultaneous inversion, symmetry and asymmetry is eloquently described by Derrida in “Plato’s Pharmacy” in the following, revealing passage -

The front line that is violently inscribed between Platonism and its closest other, in the form of sophistic, is far from being unified, continuous [*est loin d’être unie, continue*] as if stretched between two homogeneous areas. Its design is such that, through a systematic indecision, the parties and the party lines frequently exchange [*echangent*] their respective places, imitating the

forms and borrowing the paths of the opponent. These permutations are therefore possible, and if they are obliged to inscribe themselves within some common territory [*sur un terrain commun*], the dissension no doubt remains internal and casts into absolute shadow some entirely-other [*tout-autre*] of *both* sophistic and Platonism, some resistance having no common denominator [*sans commune mesure*] with this whole commutation (*PP.* p. 123, tr. p.108).

The references to a “common territory” and a “whole commutation” (*toute cette commutation*) in this passage manifest the tendency in Derrida’s work towards a certain absolutism. This is unsurprising when one considers that Derrida’s concept of *closure* is premised on a description of the relations between the “inside” and the “outside”. Whereas Plato, at the most repressive moments of his text, would seek to exclude the “outside”, deconstruction would attempt to open up towards the “other”. Inversely, (symmetrically), whereas thinkers of the “outside” such as Bataille, Artaud etc. would seek to exclude the “inside”, deconstruction would attempt to reground a respect for the complexity of traditional metaphysics (and Derrida’s reading of these thinkers particularly in *Writing and Difference* is a clear distancing of the work of deconstruction from the French avant-garde). Deconstruction would thus represent both the “inside” and the “outside” and as such would appear to have a greater claim to the status of absolutism than either metaphysics (privileging the “inside”) or the avant-garde (privileging the “outside”). This issue of deconstruction and a certain absolutism is one I will return to below. Suffice to say here that the deconstructive concept of the supplement (graft, grapheme etc.) is perhaps more appropriately described as an *addition* to the Absolute rather than the institution of a new dominant paradigm (the very possibility of addition to an absolute calling the latter concept into question).

Returning to the case of Isocrates, in “Plato’s Pharmacy” Derrida is keen once again to exemplify the multiplication of inversions, apparent contradictions, bizarre complicities -

If one holds, as does Robin, that the *Phaedrus* is, despite certain appearances, ‘an indictment against the rhetoric of Isocrates’ and that the latter is more concerned, whatever he may say, with *doxa* than with *episteme*, one will not be surprised by the title of his discourse, “Against the Sophists”. Neither will one be amazed to find, for example, this passage, whose formal resemblance with Socrates’ argumentation is blinding (*aveuglante*).....(PP. p. 129, tr. p.114).

Derrida goes on to quote from Isocrates’ *kata ton sophiston* (“Against the Sophists”[17]), the relevant passage being itself an interesting admixture of sophistic and anti-sophistic elements (but by this point one is beginning to wonder with Derrida what exactly is constitutive of sophistic as such, or indeed anything *as such* e.g. philosophy as such, Platonism as such, deconstruction as such. The details of Isocrates’ statement will be elaborated below. But at this point it is more helpful to unpack the complexities of the Derridean passage leading into the citation from Isocrates. At least nine points can be disentangled from Derrida’s dense writing -

1) the initial conditional. “If one holds...” (*Si l’on tient*) to a certain interpretation of the *Phaedrus* (here the interpretation of Robin [18]). Insofar as the *Phaedrus* is Derrida’s primary concern in “Plato’s Pharmacy”, such a conditional foregrounds an important issue - how is one to interpret the *Phaedrus* and by implication, the work of Plato as a whole.

2) Robin’s interpretation claims that the *Phaedrus*, despite certain appearances (*malgré certaines apparences*) [p.129 / tr. p.114), is of a certain sort. But what of these “appearances” - is Derrida referring to certain inversions and contradictions within the *Phaedrus* itself? If so, what?

- 3) Despite certain appearances, the *Phaedrus* is, according to Robin, *an indictment (requisitoire) against the rhetoric of Isocrates*. A univocal interpretation of the *Phaedrus* (and perhaps of Plato) is being foregrounded by Derrida.
- 4) Isocrates is concerned, *whatever he may say [quoi qu'il dise]* (p.129 / tr. p.114), with a specific thinking. Again, a certain movement of inversion, of complication, an intra-Isocratean *différance* is being highlighted. Isocrates, according to Robin, would not be what he claims to be.
- 5) Despite his inverse claims, Isocrates is more concerned (according to Robin) with *doxa* than with *episteme*.
- 6) If one agrees with Robin, *one will not be surprised [on ne se laissera plus étonner]* by the title of Isocrates' discourse ie Robin's logic anticipates the logic of the title and thus apparently explicates all the prior inversion and complication.
- 7) The title of this discourse is "Against the Sophists". Isocrates, a sophist, would be *contra-sophistry*. The *Phaedrus*, as *contra-Isocrates*, would thus be *pro-sophistry*.
- 8) *Neither will one be amazed* (Derrida here reiterates the confidence of Robin's anticipation) by the Isocratean passage to be quoted, a passage which manifests *a formal resemblance [la ressemblance formelle] with Socrates' argumentation*. Socrates resembles a sophist thinker writing against sophistry. But is this not something to cause amazement?
- 9) This resemblance is *blinding [aveuglante]*. The Platonic Sun is blinding but so also is sense knowledge (Derrida plays on the ambiguity between the the positive blindness of the *Republic* [19] and the negative blindness of the *Phaedo*[20]) - can one philosophically differentiate the Sun (the Good etc) from the supplement (writing, sense knowledge etc.)? This is a question which will recur in Derrida's discussion of

Platonic “paternity”, both in the sense of the Father of Logos (the *Phaedrus* - positive paternity) and in the sense of an economic Parent sum (the *Republic* - negative paternity). See next section.

I will take each of these points, but not in the above order.

3) The *Phaedrus* is an indictment against the rhetoric of Isocrates. This is the essence of Robin’s interpretation (Introduction to the *Phaedrus*, Budé edition). In chapter 3, I will deal with the *Phaedrus* in more detail, with particular reference to Ferrari’s text *Listening to the Cicadas*. But here Derrida wants to focus on Robin’s concept of a Platonic critique of Isocrates, a privileging of speech. Robin’s interpretation is radical as traditionally the *Phaedrus* has been seen as a critique of writing, manifested most strongly in the myth of Theuth. Theuth was the god of invention - “Among his inventions were number and calculation and geometry and astronomy, not to speak of various kinds of draughts and dice, and above all, writing” (*Phaedrus*, 274c-d) [hereafter *P.*]. Theuth exhibited his inventions before the King, Thamus, who “inquired into the use of each of them, and as Theuth went through them expressed approval or disapproval, according as he judged Theuth’s claims to be well or ill-founded”(P, 274e). When it came to writing, Theuth claimed that he had invented something which would improve the memory and wisdom of his countrymen. Thamus however was not convinced and his reply is worth quotation *in extenso* as it has come down as the essence of the *Phaedrus*, as a Platonic / Socratic critique of writing -

Theuth, my paragon of inventors, the discoverer of an art is not the best judge of the good or harm which will accrue to those who practise it. So it is in this case; you, who are the father of writing, have out of fondness for your offspring attributed to it quite the opposite of its real function. Those who acquire it will cease to exercise their memory and become forgetful; they will rely on writing to bring things to their remembrance by external signs instead of on their own internal resources. What you have discovered is a receipt for

recollection, not for memory. And as for wisdom, your pupils will have the reputation for it without the reality: they will receive a quantity of information without proper instruction, and in consequence be thought very knowledgeable when they are for the most part quite ignorant. And because they are filled with the conceit of wisdom instead of real wisdom they will be a burden to society. (*P.*, 275a-c)

The myth of Theuth has traditionally been seen as a critique of writing by Plato to the extent that the written word gives merely the “reputation” (or *appearance*) of truth / wisdom without the “reality”. Socrates will go on to contrast this writing with “words *spoken* by way of instruction” (my emphasis, *P.* 277c-d) i.e. speech. This is where “lucidity and finality and serious importance are to be found” (*P.*, 278a). But if Derrida is correct and for Isocrates speech must be privileged over writing (*PP.* p. 128 /29, tr. p.113 / 114), then what is one to make of Robin’s interpretation that the *Phaedrus* is an indictment against the rhetoric of Isocrates. On the one hand, the *Phaedrus* would be a critique of writing (via the myth of Theuth). But on the other hand, it would be a critique of speech (*contra* the sophistry of Isocrates). Again Derrida is foregrounding a *both / and* logic. His point appears not to be that either one or the other must be correct but that both interpretations of the *Phaedrus* are simultaneously valid. This issue refers back to issue 2 mentioned above -

2) “Despite [*malgré*] certain appearances” the *Phaedrus*, according to Robin, is an indictment against the rhetoric of Isocrates. In many senses deconstruction is always about the “despite” [*malgré*] It seeks to generate the resources of the “despite” so that which is cursorily dismissed becomes precisely the unravelling [*dénouer*] (*PP.* p. 96, tr. p.84) component. The ‘appearances’ of the *Phaedrus* undo the interpretation of Robin. Significantly, Robin’s interpretation is already very subtle. It seeks to go beyond the equation of sophistry with writing and to see Isocrates’ ideal of speech as merely writing by another means i.e. bad, sophistic, nonSocratic speech. The

Phaedrus on Robin's terms is thus a critique of sophistry in general, written and spoken.

While Robin's hypothesis itself involves a certain "crossing of the border" [*le passage de la frontière*] (*PP.* p. 123, tr. p.108) between the poles of writing and speech, it nonetheless tries to posit a specific essence of the *Phaedrus* i.e. the *Phaedrus* = X. Derrida's thematic of inversions is more irresolvable. It invokes the kind of logic espoused by Henry Moore's painting *Tortured Roots* (employed as a cover by Critchley in his *The Ethics of Deconstruction*). On Derrida's terms, the critique of sophistic requires a pure vantage point of non-sophistic, Platonic speech which is complicated not primarily by Isocrates' privileging of speech but rather by Plato / Socrates' continual recourse to sophistry - "the threads of these complicities are almost impossible to disentangle" [*les fils de ces complicités sont presque inextricables*] (*PP.* p. 134 / tr. p.117). This inability to disentangle thus emblemizes the irresolvability of a plurality of tortured roots, to invoke Henry Moore.

This point leads to a foregrounding of another two of the issues raised by Derrida, points 1 and 6 -

1) the initial conditional: "if one holds.....to Robin's interpretation of the *Phaedrus*".

and

6) If one agrees with Robin, *one will not be surprised* by the title of Isocrates' discourse.

From the foregoing analysis it is clear that Robin's interpretation has been at least problematized by Derrida. If it can be said to be correct in a certain way, it can also be said to be incorrect - *both correct and incorrect*. The initial conditional is therefore invoked as itself *unconditional* - conditionality, for Derrida, here as regards Robin's

interpretation of the *Phaedrus*, becomes unconditional. This leads on to point 6 - it is at least possible that one *will* be surprised by the title of Isocrates' discourse. Derrida has often argued against what he calls "preformationism" (most notably in *Force and Signification*), the tendency of philosophy to have its end "performed" in its beginning, outruling the possibility of chance or surprise. In the case of Robin, the implication from Derrida is that his discourse is just such a type of preformationism. The problem being that the end may not always be in the beginning (at least according to deconstruction).

The points concerning Isocrates are best taken together -

4) Isocrates is concerned, *whatever he may say*, with a thinking of a type X.

5) Despite his inverse claims, Isocrates is more concerned (according to Robin) with *doxa* than with *episteme*.

6) The title of this discourse is "Against the Sophists" (*Kata ton Sophiston*).

Point 4 is primarily concerned with what could be termed the logic of the "despite" (*malgré*). *Despite* what Isocrates says, despite the *appearances* (*apparances*) of his discourse, he is doing something completely opposite. Derrida is interested in the way this gesture continually repeats itself among commentators. Robin bases his interpretation on a reading contrary to Isocrates' stated intention. An *inversion* of sorts thus takes place and is employed to critique Isocrates for a supposed philosophical inversion in his very discourse, the subordination of *episteme* to *doxa* (point 5). The final inversion of the series is invoked by Derrida when he points to the title of Isocrates' discourse - "Against the Sophists" (Point 7). Robin thus inverts the stated intention of Isocrates' discourse in order to critique a supposed real inversion only, finally, to have Isocrates invert this interpretation again in the very title of his

discourse. What Derrida finds *surprising* here is that amidst all these “tortured roots”, following Robin *one would not be in the least surprised* (Point 6). Again there is a rather ironic Derridean point being made - preformationism necessarily unravels.

This brings one to points 8 and 9, the former beginning with a reiteration of the complacency of preformationism, a reiteration which is therefore *doubly ironic* (the motif of the *double* being continually emphasised by Derrida; cf., for example, “Two Words for Joyce”).

8) *Neither will one be amazed* by the Isocratean passage to be quoted, a passage which *manifests a formal resemblance with Socrates’ argumentation*.

9) This formal resemblance is *blinding (aveuglante)*.

I have already commented on Derrida’s *doubling*, his re-iteration of the non-surprise, the non-amazement, the anticipation, the preformationism accruing to a certain reading of the relation between Plato and sophistics. Again, in points 8 and 9, a doubling takes place but this time of a different sort, not a re-iteration of a point, but an apparent contradiction -

8) One will not be amazed at a formal resemblance

9) This resemblance is blinding.

Both Not-A (8) and A (9). I have already discussed this Derridean “logic”. Suffice to *re-mark* it here again. Other issues are raised in this context with regard to the question of “formal resemblance”. One more inversion is added to the increasingly tortured series. In claiming that Plato and sophistics are closely aligned, then that the *Phaedrus* is a critique of Isocrates, and then that Isocrates’ work is against the sophists, *one will not be surprised*. But now Isocrates’ work is said to exemplify a formal resemblance with Socrates’ argument; therefore the anti-sophist (Isocrates)

resembles the sophist (Socrates). And this apparent contradiction is *both* unsurprising *and* blinding. When one considers that Derrida's reference to a "blinding" resemblance is itself *double*, that it refers to the (positive) blinding of the Sun (*Republic*) and the (negative) blinding of sense experience (*Phaedo*) [PP. p. 73 / 74, tr. p.83/84], it becomes clear that one is not merely talking of ambiguity here, a double-meaning, but a doubling upon doubling *ad infinitum*. This is the 'theme' of "The Double Session" ("La Double Séance" (which follows "Plato's Pharmacy") and of *Dissemination (La Dissémination)* as a 'whole' -

dissemination *affirms* the always already divided generation of meaning [*la dissémination affirme la génération toujours déjà divisée du sens*] (DS. p. 300 / tr. p.268)....."a book neither begins nor ends: at most it pretends [*semblant*] to" (DS, p.303 / tr. p. 271).....an effect that is therefore each time "new" (*neuf*), a game (*jeu*) of chance forever new, a play of fire (*feu*) forever young (*jeune*) - fire and games being always, as Heraclitus and Nietzsche have said, a play of luck with necessity [*le jeu du hasard avec la nécessité*], of contingency with law (DS, p.309 / tr. p.277).

But Derrida is not finished yet in his attempt to exemplify all these doubling effects. While points 8 and 9 outline this logic with regard to the contradiction between Isocrates' title being non-surprising *and* blinding simultaneously, they also suggest yet another doubling effect. This concerns the "formal resemblance" (p. 129 / tr. p.114) between Isocrates' discourse and that of Socrates. As outlined above, there are four propositions which lead to this confusing effect -

- A) Derrida 'demonstrates' that Socrates / Plato cannot be distinguished from sophistics.
- B) Derrida outlines Robin's view that the *Phaedrus* is a critique of Isocrates.
- C) Insofar as the title of Isocrates' discourse is "Against the Sophists", it is suggested that Isocrates is an anti-sophist.

D) Isocrates' text is said to formally resemble that of Socrates i.e. a supposed anti-sophist (Isocrates) resembles a thinker indissociable from sophistry (Socrates).

Derrida's suggestion appears to be that any clear demarcating line between philosophy on the one hand and sophistry on the other is an impossibility. Instead there is just the ever increasing process of blurring and complicity, of *doubling*. And this argument is intensified in the final pages of Part I of "Plato's Pharmacy" (*PP*, pp. 129 - 136 / tr. pp. 114-119). In the first case, Derrida outlines the content of Isocrates' critique of writing and his eulogy to speech. The rigidity of writing is a result of the fact that no matter how many republishings take place, the texts must obey the "preestablished pattern" (p.130 / tr. p. 114) of what was written down originally -

writing, in that it repeats itself and remains identical in the type, cannot flex itself [*ne se ploie*] in all senses, cannot bend [*plie*] with all the differences among presents, with all the variable, fluid, furtive necessities of psychagogy. He who speaks [*Celui qui parle*], in contrast, is not controlled by any preestablished pattern [*ne se soumet a aucun scheme préetabli*]; he is better able to conduct his signs; he is there to accentuate them, to inflect them, retain them, or set them loose [*les lâcher*] according to the demands of the moment the nature of the desired effect, the hold [*la prise*] he has on the listener (*PP*. p. 129, tr. p.114).

This is a crucial passage in terms of Derrida interpretation. Critics and defenders of deconstruction alike have focused on a much vaunted Derridean critique of phonocentrism (cf., for example, Norris' *Derrida*[21]), the privileging by metaphysics of the voice over the written word, to which deconstruction would then be an inversion, i.e. a privileging of writing over speech. But what I have tried to show through this analysis of "Plato's Pharmacy" is the constant interplay between opposing inversions in Derrida's work - an opposition is inverted only to be later re-inverted or de-inverted.

At the outset of “Plato’s Pharmacy”, Derrida had been keen to stress the Platonic privileging of speech over writing, and the Platonic critique of sophistry as a privileging of writing over speech (cf., for example, p.120 / tr. p.106; “it is above all against sophistic that this diatribe [*requisitoire*] against writing is directed”). However, he then pointed to a Platonic privileging of writing (in the *Laws*, 891a and 957c) as beneficial to posterity and *the* most potent study of law (cf. *PP*. p. 128, tr. p.113). No sooner had the Platonic position been inverted than Isocrates was introduced as a “rhetor” (ie a sophist) privileging speech, while at the very same time the *Phaedrus* was introduced as a text critiquing Isocrates, therefore critiquing a certain privileging of speech.

The objection might be raised that Derrida is confusing matters here. The *Phaedrus* Robin, for example, might reply is a critique of rhetorical speech, not speech in general. There would thus be no doubling in this context but a hierarchical distinction between good and bad speech. Derrida’s answer is two-fold. Firstly, the doubling effect does not simply relate to the Socrates-Isocrates resemblance but also for example to the dualistic Socratic privileging of speech (in the *Phaedrus*) and privileging of writing (in the *Laws*). In the Socrates- Isocrates instance, it is important that Derrida does in fact refer to a specific difference -

Despite these similarities, the condemnation of writing is not engaged in the same way by the rhetors as it is in the *Phaedrus*. If the written word is scorned [*est méprise*], it is not as a *pharmakon* coming to corrupt [*corrompre*] memory and truth. It is because *logos* is a more effective *pharmakon* [*plus efficace*] (*PP*, p.115).

It is thus not the truth of *logos* which the rhetors (Isocrates, Gorgias, Alcidamas - the Attic school) privilege, but its “spellbinding powers of enchantment, mesmerizing fascination, and alchemical transformation, which make it kin to witchcraft and

magic” [*de son pouvoir d’envoûtement, de fascination médusante, de transformation alchimique qui l’apparente à la sorcellerie et à la magie*] (PP. p. 131, tr. p.115). Or at least the rhetors are initially ambiguous on this point (“as a *pharmakon*, *logos* is at once good and bad [*est à la fois bon et mauvais*]; it is not at the outset governed exclusively by goodness [*le bien*] or truth” (PP. p. 131 / tr. p.115). However, the rhetors (particularly Gorgias) soon repeat “the Platonic gesture” (PP. p. 131, tr. p.115). In his *Encomium of Helen*, Gorgias describes the persuasive powers of speech, its seductions and ravishments. *But -*

in showing that Helen gave in to the violence of speech (would she have yielded to a letter?), in disculpating [*innocentant*] this victim, Gorgias indicts *logos* in its capacity to lie [*en son pouvoir de mensonge*] (PP, p.116).

The counter-argument put forward against Derrida’s motif of “reversal”, to the effect that the rhetors privilege *bad speech* while the *Phaedrus* privileges *good speech* is now undermined. The Attic school simultaneously critique writing as being excessively rigid *and* speech (*logos*) as being, in its bad aspects, a tendency to lie or seduce. Once again a reversal of positions has taken place. Derrida, however, has one more surprise in store. Up to this point, Socrates and sophistic have indeed been made coextensive but aside from the privilege accorded to writing in the *Laws*, this has not proved too detrimental to the claims of Platonism. For has not Derrida just shown that *even the rhetors* maintain a certain normative hierarchy and that coextensivity with sophistic does not necessarily imply a valuation of evil. On this reading, the processes of *doubling* described by “Plato’s Pharmacy” while calling for a reevaluation of sophistic do not necessarily call for a simultaneous reevaluation of Socrates / Plato. Does “Platonism” not remain intact in its eternal integrity?

The final section of Part I of “Plato’s Pharmacy” (Section 5 - *The Pharmakeus*)

answers in the negative -

isn’t Socrates, “he who does not write” [*celui qui n’écrit pas*], also a master of the *pharmakon*? And in that way isn’t he the spitting image [*ne ressemble-t-il pas à s’y méprendre*] of a sophist? a *pharmakeus*? a magician? a sorcerer? even a poisoner? and even one of those impostors denounced by Gorgias? (*PP.* p. 134, tr. p.117).

Having elevated the rhetorical Attic school to the position of Socrates, to the position of critic of *logos* (speech) as a seduction and ravishment, Derrida now de-elevates Socrates to the status of a “sorcerer” [*sorcier*; p. 134] and “poisoner” [*empoisonneur*], a purveyor of the very sorcery and poison which the Attic school have been represented as criticising. The final inversion is thus in place. Derrida cites two characteristic Platonic passages, from the *Symposium*[22] where Socrates is described as a bewitcher of mankind (215c) with nothing but a few simple words (*psilois logois*) and from the *Meno*[23] where Socrates is compared to a stingray (*narke* - from which we derive the term ‘narcotic’) which exercises “magic” and “witchcraft” on its interlocutors, *numbing* them in the process (80, a-b). It is however perhaps the final sentences quoted from the *Meno* passage which are the most telling, where Meno offers a prophetic warning to Socrates -

In my opinion you are well advised not to leave Athens and live abroad. If you behaved like this as a foreigner in another country, you would most likely be arrested as a wizard (*goes*) [80, a-b].

Derrida derives the necessarily apocalyptic conclusion - “Socrates arrested as a wizard [*sorcier*] (*goes* or *pharmakeus*): that will have to wait [*patientons*]” (*PP.* p. 135, tr. p.119). It seems less than far-fetched to see the *Meno* passage as an inscription within the text, by Plato, of Socrates’ death-to-come. But what are we to make of this impending martyrdom? The fact that the *Meno* is written after Socrates’ death

clarifies the fact that this martyrdom *has already taken place*. In hindsight, then, what is Plato seeking to tell the reader; about Socrates' death, about Socrates' life, about his relation to sophistry, about sophistry's relation to witchcraft and the *pharmakon*, about the *pharmakon's* relation to morality and the Good? Within this context, Derrida makes his own provocative point (these are the last words of Section I) -

the structure of the *pharmakon*, the one and only name for that potion that must be awaited. And even, in Socrates' case, *deserved* (my emphasis)[*la structure du pharmakon: nom unique de cette potion qu'il faut attendre. Et qu'il faut même, comme Socrate mériter*] [PP, p. 136 / tr. p.119).

A poison which, in Socrates' case, would be *deserved*. The accusation against Socrates from Meletus, Anytus and Lycon had two aspects - a charge of heresy and a charge of corrupting the minds of the young (cf. *The Last Days of Socrates*, p.43). This of course is the very accusation brought by Socrates against sophistry on numerous occasions (for example, the *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*). In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates turns against his very own original speech, declaring that he has committed a sin and must not go away until he has expiated it (*P*, p.23). Socrates' original speech had been a reiteration of Lysias' sophistic speech. This is then deemed to be a *heresy*. In other words, one has an equation of heresy with sophistic. Derrida's concluding claim in "Plato's Pharmacy" is that the charge of heresy can equally be brought against Socrates. In other words, the work of Socrates / Plato is indissociable from that of the sophists. And as such, the penalty brought against Socrates by the Athenian authorities, that of a death sentence, is according to Derrida fully deserved. The final confirmation of this being the homonymy between the term for Socrates' kind of philosophical magic (*pharmakou*) and the hemlock (*pharmakon*) administered to bring his life to an end. This then would be Derrida's final conclusion from a

subtle analysis in “Plato’s Pharmacy” concerning the apparent interdependencies between Socrates / Plato and sophistic.

It is significant that having described this interdependency in “Plato’s Pharmacy”, the follow on essay in *Dissemination* (“The Double Session”) is concerned primarily with the work of Stéphane Mallarmé. Mallarmé is often seen as a kind of Platonist, but a Platonist simultaneously determined by the *modernist* revolution in thinking. For Mallarmé the Idea is everything, but less in the sense of the objective Form / God of the medievals and more in the sense of the “Idea in the Kantian sense”. In the poem *Les Fenêtres*[24], Mallarmé puts forward a vehement diatribe against what he calls “*Ici - bas*” (“the here-below”) in much the same way that in the “Cogito” text, Derrida disavows the objective or “finite shelter”. There Derrida contrasts this misguided objectivism with the “idea of infinity”, the *intentional* force of philosophy. Similarly, in *Les Fenêtres*, Mallarmé values the subjective (“*O moi*”) over the objective -

Is there a way, O Self familiar with bitterness, of breaking through the crystal insulted by the monstrous and escaping with my two featherless wings - at the risk of falling for all eternity? [25]

There is a certain interpretation of Plato and Platonism (put forward most notably by Heidegger) which in seeing a Platonic chasm between the sensible and the supersensible would favour the conception that Mallarmé is a faithful Platonist. Certainly in placing “the Double Session” directly after “Plato’s Pharmacy” in *Dissemination* there is the suggestion by Derrida that the only route Platonism can take after the deconstruction of its dialectics is towards a kind of Mallarméan subjective idealism. “Plato’s Pharmacy” seems to lead Plato away from metaphysical dialectics and towards Mallarméan subjectivism in much the same way that the

“Cogito” essay led Descartes away from his previous “deductive system” and towards a valuation of *the idea as idea*. In succeeding chapters, I will put forward a critique of this attempt by Derrida to unravel Platonic dialectics by pointing to the fundamental differences between Platonic and Cartesian dialectics, with particular reference to an *ancient-modern quarrel*. I will attempt to show that Platonic dialectic is still workable once one extricates it from a neo-Cartesian framework and returns it to its more objectivist origins.

Here the conception of the “Forms” will be crucial. The term which Plato often uses for the Forms (“*Ideon*”) has itself been regularly translated as “Idea” and this translation has contributed to the blurring of the problematic of an *ancient-modern quarrel*. If translated as Idea, *Ideon* risks giving the sense that it is to be identified with what Derrida calls “the Idea in the Kantian sense” or Descartes’s “idea of infinity”. What distinguishes the former from the latter is its complete independence from the Cogito. For Plato, the *Idea* is that which limits subjectivity while, for Descartes and Kant, it is subjectivity which limits the ideal. This distinction is so strong that it will lead Platonists such as Simone Weil to call for an annihilation of subjectivity as an act of faithfulness to the Idea (“the sin in me says I”; *Gravity and Grace* p. 27) [26]. To avoid confusing these two completely distinct symbols therefore, it is perhaps more appropriate to translate “*Ideon*” as “Form”. I will return to this notion of Form in Chapter 4 on the *Phaedrus*, in chapter 7 on De Cusa and also in the Conclusion through a discussion of Iris Murdoch’s development of this conception. At this point it is only necessary to note how the conception of Form works in direct contrast to the criterion of the Cartesian idea.

In the next chapter, I will begin my analysis of the resistance of Platonic dialectic to Derridean deconstruction with an examination of the roots of Platonic thinking in Presocratism, most notably the thinking of Heraclitus and Parmenides.

CHAPTER 2 - FROM THE PRESOCRATICS TO PLATO: A MEDITATION ON A COMPLEX METAPHYSICAL UNITY

Section 2.1 - Prefatory Remarks

The relation between Plato and Derrida bears a significant similarity to the conflict which took place in James Joyce's work between the writing of *Ulysses* [1] and *Finnegan's Wake* [2]. *Ulysses* was Joyce's great attempt at metaphysics; it can be seen as very much a poetic articulation of Platonism / Aristotelianism. But for Joyce, the metaphysics of *Ulysses* ultimately had to give way to the more deconstructive poetics of *Finnegan's Wake*. Applying this hypothesis to the relation of Plato to *Ulysses* and Derrida to the *Wake*, one's conclusion would be that Platonism must make way for deconstruction, that the metaphysics of Plato is subject to an inevitable and fatal deconstruction.

Such a conclusion is not without its apparent justifications. From a Derridean perspective, while difference depends upon identity, identity depends upon difference. Thus the positing of a unity independent of difference becomes highly problematic, indeed impossible. Derrida's reading of Plato in 'Plato's Pharmacy' points to this impossibility, through the irreducibility of *doubling*. Derrida locates points of stress within the Platonic text and there is the sense that this is not so much a deconstructive critique of Plato as a recognition that Plato is already engaged in self-deconstruction. This is no doubt the case and Derrida's reading is very subtle here.

But "Plato's Pharmacy" also recognises a prevalent *metaphysical* movement in Plato's work. At one point, for example, Derrida refers to "Platonism" (*PP.*, p.76) as

“setting up the whole of Western metaphysics in its conceptuality” (*PP.*, p.76). A over-simple reading of Derrida might identify this statement as a *critique* of Platonism, and by implication of metaphysics as such. However, “Plato’s Pharmacy” makes clear at several points that from a Derridean perspective there is no one Plato, no one interpretation of Platonism -

we do not believe that there exists, in all rigor, a Platonic text, closed upon itself, complete with its inside and its outside (p.130, *PP.*).

The metaphysical moment of Plato’s text is thus interpreted as provisional, contextual and therefore subject to always possible re-contextualisation. Far from repressing Plato, a deconstructive reading thus opens up the Platonic text to an endless *dissemination* of possibilities. Plato would not merely be a metaphysician, but potentially a thinker of the anti-metaphysical, the transmetaphysical, the nonmetaphysical, the premetaphysical, the postmetaphysical etc. etc. Indeed, strictly speaking, there would be no closed metaphysics to transgress. “Metaphysics” would “itself” be far more complex than has often been supposed. These developments of Derrida’s logic are in no way meant as ironic. Rather they point to a relentless drive towards nonfinalisation at the heart of deconstruction, a wellspring of futural possibility. It therefore may appear rather bizarre that it is this futural Plato, this postmodern regeneration of Platonism which I wish to call into question. This may seem bizarre to the extent that one can one well ask: has Derrida not precisely shown the contemporary relevance of Platonism in all its flexibility and *différance*?

My answer to this question is twofold. First, I do not wish to oppose Derrida but rather his interpretation of Plato. From the perspective of a reading of deconstruction, this thesis is intent on articulating the importance of Derrida’s work. The import of Derrida’s philosophy requires careful consideration; this is not at issue. What is at

issue is the philosophical status of Plato and Platonism. The dialogues of Plato manifest extraordinary procedures of reversal, doubling, apparent contradiction, impasse etc. Nonetheless, I am in agreement with Eduard Zeller when he states that it is only in the form of a “system” that one can truly be faithful to Plato -

Although Plato’s philosophy is nowhere transmitted as a systematic whole and in the dialogues we can only observe from afar its gradual growth and development, it is only in the form of a system that any account of it can be given. The justification for this is the incontestable fact that in the dialogues we see circles spreading wider and wider until they finally embrace the whole universe (Zeller, p.126) [3]

This is an eloquent rendition by Zeller of the Platonic procedure. While Zeller speaks of “system” he does not mean, for example, the systematicity of logical positivism. Rather the description is almost absurd - “circles spreading wider and wider”. Plato’s would be an almost absurd systematicity, a quite fantastical unity. In the next two chapters I will attempt to make sense of this metaphysical epiphany, beginning in the next section with an analysis of Plato’s precursors, Heraclitus and Parmenides, to whose own enigmatic philosophies of unity he owed such a great debt.

Section 2.2 - Heraclitus and Parmenides

In traditional histories of Greek philosophy, Heraclitus and Parmenides are represented as diametrically opposed thinkers. W.K.C. Guthrie, for example, in *The Greek Philosophers: From Thales to Aristotle*[4], groups their supposed mutual antagonism under the heading of the “problem of motion” (cf. pp. 43-50) -

He (Parmenides) was the exact reverse of Heraclitus. For Heraclitus, movement and change were the only realities; for Parmenides movement was impossible, and the whole of reality consisted of a single, motionless and unchanging substance (*GP.*, p.47).

Guthrie sees both Heraclitus and Parmenides as “pioneers” (*GP.*, p.47) of philosophy, thinkers of both “power” and “limitation” (*GP.*, p.47). He quotes a question from the Classical Tripos at Cambridge to the effect that many problems in Greek philosophy resulted from a confused sense of the difference between grammar, logic and metaphysics (*GP.*, p.47). The implication is that one must wait until Plato and Aristotle for a proper approach to these issues. Heraclitus and Parmenides are of historical interest and indeed insightful within their limited context but, according to Guthrie, their work lacks a genuine systematicity.

This section will attempt to rehabilitate (*contra* Guthrie) the philosophical status of Heraclitus and Parmenides. A fuller discussion of their respective relations to Plato will have to await the succeeding sections but here it is already necessary to emphasise their direct influence on the latter. The apparent self-deconstruction of dialogues such as the *Lysis*[5] and the *Meno*[6] (i.e. their failure to reach set conclusions) seems on first inspection to play into the hands of Derrida’s theory of “doubling” *ad infinitum*. That is, they seem unable to support a metaphysics of unity, instead foregrounding an interminable process of deferral. However, the interpretation I will put forward of Heraclitus as primarily a thinker of *unity*, is useful as an analogy to the Platonic procedure in these dialogues. As Charles H. Kahn argues -

We can best imagine the structure of Heraclitus’ work on the analogy of the great choral odes, with their fluid but carefully articulated movement from image to aphorism, from myth to riddle to contemporary allusion. Yet, the intellectual unity of Heraclitus’ composition was in a sense greater than that of any archaic poem, since its final intent was more explicitly didactic, and its central theme a direct affirmation of unity: *hen pant einai*; “all things are one” [Kahn p.7] (7)

In line with the previously quoted interpretation of Zeller, my interpretation claims that Plato's work can only be understood as a "holistic" system, but nonetheless a system of a subtly enigmatic kind. In line with Kahn, I claim that a similar system precedes Plato in the work of Heraclitus, and that this Heraclitean "didacticism" can be linked to the Platonic method.

Similarly, one can make a strong argument for the Parmenidean influence on Plato although in this case one has almost an inversion of the Heraclitean example. In linking Heraclitus to Plato, the possible critical rejoinder is always that Plato is a far more unified thinker than Heraclitus. Following Guthrie's reading of Heraclitus as a thinker of *flux*, an oppositional interpretation might see this flux as devoid of structure and thus wholly incompatible with the Platonic unity posited for example in the *Republic*. My reading of Heraclitus (following Kahn) as a didactic thinker avoids such difficulties. With Parmenides, it is rather the positing of didacticism which as it were causes the problem in the link with Plato. For if Parmenides is to be represented (following Guthrie) as a philosopher of unchanging substance, then the very temporality which gives Plato's dialogues much of their force and power would seem to have been lost. In other words, in linking Parmenides with Plato, does one not lose a recognition of and respect for difference (albeit within unity)?

Again, I wish to portray a different figure from that represented by Guthrie. The Parmenides of "impossible movement" simply does not hold up to a reading of the Parmenidean fragments undertaken more recently by for example A.H.Coxon (*The Fragments of Parmenides*) [8] Coxon foregrounds several possible references by Parmenides to Heraclitus (Coxon, p. 221), none of which appear to be negative. I will discuss these points below. Here, it is useful to interpret the import of this

general reinterpretation of Parmenides and Heraclitus. According to Guthrie, Heraclitus is a thinker of flux (without unity) and Parmenides a thinker of unity (without flux). This binary opposition, I have claimed, is untenable. Instead, following Kahn and Coxon, it seems clear that both Heraclitus and Parmenides are thinkers of a differentiated unity, a complex One. In following sections I will link this metaphysical structure to that of Plato. At present, however, I will address the respective intricacies of the Heraclitean and Parmenidean systems in more depth.

Heraclitus is said to have antedated Parmenides by several decades (cf. Guthrie p.43/46) and it is his work that I will first address. Eric Voegelin in *The World of the Polis (Order and History Volume 2)* [9] places the system of Heraclitus at a crucial historical juncture between a prior “theomorphism” and a new enriched view of “human” character (p.224). Voegelin cites Fragment **B119** -

Character - to man - demon.

This emphasis on a particularly or specifically human character (*ethos*) in Heraclitus is paradoxical. It in no way signifies a rejection of divinity (*daimon*) but rather a recognition that divinity and humanity are not mutually exclusive. The previous theomorphism of such thinkers as Homer and Hesiod tended to interpret divinity as the exclusive attribute of the immortal i.e. the gods (cf. Voegelin, p.224). With Heraclitus, however, one has, as it were, an *incarnation* of divinity in the mortal. Voegelin is right to foreground the extraordinariness of this tenet. For it can be seen as a profound anticipation of (and influence on) the Platonic doctrine of exemplarism / participation and of course the Christian Incarnation itself (see below).

Significantly, however, the redirection of divinity towards the human is not meant by Heraclitus to constitute what Augustine would call a “puffing up” (see *Confessions*, Book 7) of humanity. Rather in line with the tenet that “the wise is set apart from all things” (B108), Heraclitus clearly sees divinity as divesting the human of its previously complacent knowledge and self-assurance. Paradoxically, the *divinisation* of the human is a simultaneous deconstruction of the latter’s wisdom (*sophia*) and knowledge (*polymathie* - “much knowing”) towards the more vulnerable status of “lover of wisdom” (*philosophos*). This is a movement that will be repeated in Parmenides and in effect it marks the beginning of philosophy proper. As Voegelin observes -

Human wisdom is not a completed possession but a process. The participation in the divine wisdom that is apart from all things, cannot be achieved by a leap beyond all things; it is the result of the occupation with these very things, ascending from the manifold to the One that is to be found in them all.....The new term for the man of such higher knowledge should not be *sophos* - for that is a great name seemly “to God alone” - but the more humble and befitting *philosophos* (Voegelin, p.226).

Voegelin here goes on to make reference to an identical movement in the *Phaedrus*. Predating Plato, Heraclitus can therefore be seen to have begun to define a philosophical perspective which will become highly influential throughout the history of philosophy. Guthrie’s interpretation of Heraclitus as simply a thinker of *flux* becomes in this context all the more surprising. But what of Kahn’s conception of a didactic Heraclitus - is this given credence by the enigmatic relation between the divine and the human here described? Certainly there can be no sense in which one would simply invert Guthrie’s hypothesis of flux and supplant it with a homogeneous Heraclitean unity. Nonetheless, the vulnerability of the *philosophos* is vulnerable

precisely only in relation to an all-embracing Unity. This is made clear from Heraclitus' very first fragment -

Although this account (*logos*) holds forever, men ever fail to comprehend, both before hearing it and once they have heard. Although all things come to pass in accordance with this account (*logos*) men are like the untried when they try such words and works as I set forth, distinguishing each according to its nature and telling how it is. But other men are oblivious of what they do awake, just as they are forgetful of what they do asleep (Kahn, p.29).

The *logos* holds forever (*aiei*). Vulnerability thus resides at the level of the human and *not* the divine. Through obliviousness and forgetfulness men are like sleep-walkers. Taken in abstraction, this second level of reality almost directly corresponds to the Derridean position outlined in Chapter 1 - "I have never known where I was going". Significantly, Derrida has at several points noted an affinity between deconstruction and Heraclitus. In "Plato's Pharmacy", for example, he makes reference to a cryptic *phusis* in Heraclitus, which he links to the fragment "Nature loves to hide". My analysis of the fragments however has been intended as a problematisation of this view which is very akin to Guthrie's theory of irreducible *flux*. On my interpretation, following Kahn and Voegelin, 'flux' for Heraclitus is always *conditioned*, qualified by an overarching unity.

If such is the case however, one can well wonder at the reasons for Heraclitus' mode of utterance. Known for example as "the Riddler" and "the Obscure", his enigmatic style seems to suggest a sense of interminable difference and confusion. If he is so convinced of unity, one might ask, why does he write in such a differentiated mode? One response to this question is to point to the enigma already present in the very *experience of transcendence* itself, an experience which Voegelin posits as being the

basis of Heraclitus' project (p.234). The challenge which divinity brings to the human is not imposed from without or extrinsic; rather it comes from within. Voegelin here quotes a passage from Plato's *Timaeus* which he sees as being directly influenced by Heraclitus -

With regard to the kind of soul which is dominant in us, we should consider that God has given it to each of us as a *daimon*, dwelling as we said at the top of the body; and because of its affinity with Heaven it draws us away from Earth, for most truly we are a heavenly growth, not an earthly one (Voegelin p.206 / Plato *Timaeus* 90 a-b).

This "drawing away" from the Earth is not without its difficulties. As Heraclitus and Plato are all too well aware, the coming to terms with wisdom is a process fraught with tension and the possibility of failure. This particularly applies to those whom Heraclitus terms *asynetoi* or fools -

Fools, even when they hear it, are like the deaf; of them it is said: "Present, they are absent" (B34).

Two more fragments also bear on this precariousness of the *daimon* -

Eyes and ears are bad witnesses for men whose souls are barbarous (B 107).

There awaits men at death what they neither hope nor surmise (B 27).

In the case of fragments B34 and B107 the Heraclitean interpretation is unequivocally negative. He is criticising, ridiculing the foolish and the barbarous. This is important to bear in mind when one considers Heraclitus' emphasis on the *xynon* or "common". While there is an underlying commonality there also seems (in the case of the foolish and the barbarous) to be an irretrievable *loss*. These are figures who remain incapable of directing their soul towards the divine *sophia* or wisdom. This is one side of the

vulnerability intrinsic to Heraclitus so often referred to as his thinking of *flux*. In this context, one is speaking of a negative vulnerability, a *failure* to fulfill the divine task which is the responsibility of the human *ethos* or character.

However, there is also a positive aspect to this vulnerability. Here one can speak of Heraclitean unity maintaining a symbiotic relation with difference. The force of this positive Heraclitean difference is captured by fragment B27 -

There awaits men at death what they neither hope nor surmise.

This refers back to the original issue of Heraclitus' notion of the *philosophos*, the lover of wisdom. The philosopher is not in possession of *sophia* or wisdom, but is rather constituted in his / her very straining or yearning for this *sophia*. This "reaching out" (*orexis*) is to become a central theme in Empedocles' discourse (cf. Voegelin p.223). In Heraclitus, the presence of such *orexis* raises the issue of the philosophical import of the experience of transcendence. In what is its apparently irreducible vulnerability to be differentiated from the vulnerability or blindness of the foolish and the barbarous? Is this theological experience not also a *blindness*, grounded only in an abyssal groundlessness?

This is where one sees Heraclitus' crucial significance for the development of philosophy (and also for the theme of this thesis). Faced with a scenario analogous to that of a Derridean *doubling* or *différance*, Heraclitus in no way reduces or represses this difference, but at the same time neither does he see such difference as interminable, infinitely deferred etc. (like a proto-Derrida). This is where Heraclitus becomes central to the Platonism vs. Deconstruction debate. Three fragments are relevant in this regard -

The most beautiful *kosmos* is like a garbage-heap strewn at random (B 124)

If you do not hope, you will not find the un hoped-for, since it is hard to be found and the way is all but impassable (B 18)

Through lack of faith (*apistis*) the divine escapes being known (B 86).

I will consider the first fragment independently, and the last two in tandem. The concept of the *kosmos* “being like” a garbage-heap has two aspects. In the first case, it can be linked to Parmenides’ notion of the *eoikota panta* (B8, 60), where the light-goddess promises to tell Parmenides the arrangement of the world “as all is likely” (*eoikota panta*). Here, as Voegelin observes, one has a specifically contingent truth, a “likely” account (p.216). Applying this to Heraclitus, one can say that according to fragment B 124, it is possible that the *kosmos* is a garbage heap strewn at random. This in effect is for Heraclitus the possibility of failure, the world as seen by the fools and the barbarous. But this remains an irreducible *possibility*.

The second sense of the fragment interprets “like” in the sense of a negative appearance. The most beautiful *kosmos* is like, might be seen by some as, a random garbage-heap, but ultimately it remains a beautiful *kosmos*. Understood in this sense the first part of the fragment is assertive - S is P (the cosmos is beautiful) while the second part refers to a mistake, a misreading by those whose souls are not directed towards the *sophia*, unhealthy souls, those suffering from a “disease of the soul” (*nosos*) [B 46]. However, one must be careful in describing the first part as “assertive”. This would seem to be an example of the didacticism which Kahn speaks of (and which I believe to be the driving force of Heraclitus’ writings). Nonetheless, it is stated by Heraclitus who has already described the access to *sophia* as only a divine capacity.

As a *philosophos* on Heraclitus' terms (that is, a *lover* of wisdom rather than a wise man), to state that the *kosmos* is beautiful can only be a statement grounded in *orexis* (reaching out). Can one still maintain that it is therefore didactic? I believe the answer to be *yes* when one considers the crucial fragments B 18 and B 86 (see above). Heraclitus' didacticism is a didacticism based on "hope" and "faith", but it is no less a didacticism for all that. Faced with the inaccessibility of *sophon*, there is always the danger that one will sink into oblivion. If truth (*a - lethia* - literally, the negation of oblivion), is only accessible to a divinity, does this not leave humanity in the abyss, in the realm of *lethia*? Fragments B18 and B86 reject this pessimism through hope and faith.

Some commentators might respond that this remains a *nonphilosophical* rejection. Hope and faith, if not illogical, are at least extra-logical, extrinsic to philosophy. At this point, one would have to foreground the perennial question, "What is philosophy?". I have attempted to show how in Heraclitus the emphasis is placed on the *philo* - aspect, the aspect of the lover rather than that of the wise. To this extent, hope and faith are not only for Heraclitus *not* extrinsic to philosophy; they are the very movement of the philosophical spirit. With Parmenides, the situation is similar.

Commentators such as Guthrie interpret the Parmenidean poem in a univocal sense, as a treatise on the unchangeability of Being and, by implication, the impossibility of motion. As Guthrie himself observes, such conclusions are "extraordinary" (*GP.*, p.47) having been reached by equally "extraordinary" means, but one can only put this down to the limitations of language and logic within which the Presocratics worked (*GP.*, p.47). Voegelin however interprets Parmenides rather as a thinker of

complexity whose conception of Being is inscribed within a process greater than itself. This is for Voegelin an “experiential” (p.203) process which -

by its inner logic, will articulate the soul to the point where its supernatural destiny achieves consciousness (Voegelin, p.202).

Parmenides describes this journey of the soul in a Prologue and two parts, one concerning Truth (*alethia*) and the other Opinion / Delusion (*doxa*). The part concerning *alethia* elaborates a philosophy of Being, Being as an eternal Now (*nyn*) [B8, 5], as Justice (*dike*) [B8, 13-15], as Necessity (*ananke*) and as bounded (*teleuteton*) [B8, 29-33]. These motifs are the basis for the supposed antagonism between Parmenides’ Being and Heraclitus’ Becoming. This polar opposition becomes problematised when one considers that it rests on a total neglect of the relation between the the first part and the second part of Parmenides’ poem. For the realm of *doxa* is concerned with the realm of the mortal and as such it must be the very starting point for Parmenides’ own reflections.

Both parts of the poem are said to derive from the knowledge received from the nameless goddess of light, introduced in the Prologue. This goddess guides Parmenides in his search for reality - Parmenides is therefore in the traditional Pythagorean position of one who disclaims *sophia* (wisdom) which is allowed only to God, in favour of that of *philosophos* (lover of wisdom) [cf. Coxon, p.12]. The very vulnerability of this status of philosopher gives the lie to those such as Guthrie who identify the thought of Parmenides with the first part of the poem i.e. the Way of Truth. If anything, it seems more consistent to identify Parmenides with the second part of the poem, the Way of Delusion, thus throwing the whole project and status of the poem into question. For if Parmenides is fundamentally deluded, how is one to

take anything of what he says seriously, whether titled the Way of Truth or the Way of Delusion? All Parmenidean Ways become equally subject to vulnerability.

This approach to Parmenides, while legitimate in some respects, risks a process of infinite regress. Almost in Derridean fashion, one finds oneself asserting that Parmenides would be *neither* true *nor* deluded, *both* true *and* deluded. It seems to me that a more fruitful line of inquiry is that taken up by Voegelin who compares Parmenides' thought to that of Plato, in a similar fashion to the affinities he draws between Heraclitus and Plato (and thus between Parmenides and Heraclitus). All three are interpreted as thinkers of a certain paradox, that is the participation (*metaschesis*) of the divine in the human, the infinite in the finite. This of course foreshadows the Christian revelation, a foreshadowing and relationship I will discuss below. It is certainly possible to read back into Parmenides' poem many of the elements which will later be developed by, for example, Augustine and Boethius. The love (*philia*) of the philosopher is linked as in Heraclitus to a *orexis* (reaching out) of the spirit. This is Parmenides' evidence of the heavenly growth (*phyton ouranion*) which Plato will describe so eloquently in the *Timaeus* (90a-b): "for most truly we are a heavenly growth". The relation between Parmenides and Plato will be developed more clearly in section 2.4 but here it suffices to conclude with a certain Platonic interpretation of the poem itself. In a sense, the poem can be seen as a *dialogue* between its various parts - the Prologue announcing the Goddess, the first section announcing Truth, the final section announcing *Doxa*. As Voegelin observes:

What are the relations between the gods that appear in the revelation concerning Delusion and the goddess who reveals the gods as delusionary? Could it be that we, after all, do not emerge from the *Doxa* into the Truth of Being, but that the Truth of Being is embraced by the *Doxa*? Or are there nondelusionary gods beyond Being? Or is the revelation of the Truth, coming

from the goddess, perhaps itself a Delusion? The poem offers no answers to such questions; we have reached the limits and limitations of Parmenidean thinking. Nevertheless, these questions, while not answered by the poem, are raised by its very structure (p.218, Voegelin).

For Voegelin, one has to wait until Plato to obtain a genuine answer to these questions. However, this is perhaps to still underestimate Parmenides. Voegelin's interpretation also applies to Heraclitus - the problems raised by Heraclitus are only resolved by Plato. In the next two sections I will address this problematic directly. Section 2.3 will be concerned with Heraclitus and Plato, Section 2.4 with Parmenides and Plato. In both cases I will point to a resolution which already takes place in the Presocratics - what Voegelin would term an assertion of "order" (the theme which guides his magnum opus *Order and History*).

Section 2.3 - Heraclitus and Plato

Of all those whose accounts I have heard, none has gone as far as this: to recognise what is wise, set apart from all (XXVII, Kahn, p.41).

In his analysis of this fragment, Charles Kahn speaks of a certain "duality" (p.115), which he posits as being fundamental to Heraclitus' thought. In "Plato's Pharmacy", Derrida refers to a Heraclitean cryptic *phusis* which he aligns with the doubling effect of deconstruction. Here, however, I will seek to draw a strict distinction between Heraclitean duality and Derridean doubling. In "Plato's Pharmacy", Derrida also refers to Plato's early dialogue the *Lysis* as being another example of deconstructive doubling. While outlining an undeniable duality in the *Lysis*, this section will attempt to link this Platonic ambiguity with Heraclitus rather than Derrida. In so doing it is

hoped to foreground both the Heraclitean influence on Plato and the Heraclitean / Platonic philosophical resources which can be employed to resist the ateleology of deconstruction.

To begin, it is possible to locate two different examples of duality or ambiguity in the Heraclitean fragment quoted. The term *logoi*, translated by Kahn as “accounts”, has both a subjective and a cosmological meaning. It can refer to the treatises of philosophers, for example Heraclitean treatise or here the treatises of his philosophical opponents, *or* it can refer to something universal, to which all things agree. Fragment 1 makes this second meaning clear -

Although this account (*logos*) holds forever (*aiei*) [Kahn, p.29].

In fragment XXVII, however, *logoi* has primarily a negative connotation, as the subjective work of thinkers distanced from true wisdom. But it also stands as a kind of barometer of true wisdom - these *logoi* would not be true *logoi*. Heraclitus repeats this ambiguity at the very end of the fragment in the pronoun *panton* (“all”). What is wise (*sophon*) is set apart from “all”. But Heraclitus does not specify here if he means “all men” or “all things”. As Kahn observes -

The difference is considerable: is the wise separate “from all men” or “from all things”? The first reading suggests wisdom as ordinarily conceived, a property men wish to possess, though in fact they fail to attain it. The second seems to posit the “wise” as a cosmic divine principle, separate or transcendent like the Intelligence (*nous*) of Anaxagoras which is “not mixed with anything else” (Kahn, p.115).

Just as the term *logos* has a respective subjective and cosmological meaning, a dual structure, so too the term *panton*. Kahn goes on to clarify this simultaneous ambiguity -

his (Heraclitus') characterisation is strictly ambivalent between a human property that is rare and difficult and a cosmic power which is unique and remote from all others. For it is precisely this ambiguity or duality between the life of man and the life of the cosmos that structures Heraclitus' entire discourse, as in the duality already noted between *logos* as the utterance of a man and *logos* as the pattern of cosmic process (p.115, Kahn).

As this passage implies, it is not simply ambiguity which the terms *logos* and *panton* share. They also share an emphasis on an enigmatic unity. *Panton*, if taken to mean "all men", refers to *a human property that is rare and difficult*. In other words, the ambiguity of *panton* is tempered by an unambiguous hierarchy pertaining to the human. Similarly, if taken to mean "all things", *panton* can be understood as "a cosmic power which is unique and remote from all others". There can be no ambiguity as regards the uniqueness or remoteness of this cosmic principle. Rather, the ambiguity can only refer to the nature of the remoteness itself. I emphasise this subtle point because it differentiates Heraclitus' "duality" from Derridean doubling which would come to subvert the remoteness itself, thus disallowing the concept of hierarchy or even genuine wisdom (*sophia*).

This difference from Derrida is also made clear by Heraclitus' employment of the verb "to recognise" (*ginoskein*) in this same fragment XXVII - "to recognise what is wise".

This concept of recognition is continuously used by Heraclitus. Kahn refers to it as follows -

Heraclitus has taken over this verb, with its cognate nouns *gnome* and *gnosis*, as his own term for "cognition" in a privileged sense, for the insight which men lack and which his own discourse attempts to communicate (Kahn, p.104).

The duality which thus governs Heraclitus' reference to *logos* and *panton* is far from being a duality of infinite regress. Rather it is very much a purposeful duality: it is

part of a hierarchical Heraclitean system which seeks to redress the *lack* of wisdom which often parades as the essence of wisdom. In this sense, Heraclitus is particularly scathing towards his predecessors in Greek literature and philosophy. Note, for example, the following fragments -

XVIII - Much learning (*polymathie*) does not teach understanding (*noos*). For it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, and also Xenophanes and Hecataeus.

XIX - The teacher of most is Hesiod. It is him they know (*epistantai*) as knowing (*eidenai*) most, who did not recognise (*ginoskein*) day and night: they are one.

XXII - Men are deceived (*hexepatantai*) in the recognition (*gnosin*) of what is obvious, like Homer who was wisest of all the Greeks. For he was deceived by boys killing lice who said: what we see and catch we leave behind: what we neither see nor catch we carry away.

I want to stress two particular points deriving from these fragments: 1) that Heraclitus is making a clear distinction, a hierarchical distinction, between genuine recognition or understanding (XVIII - *noos*, XIX - *ginoskein*, XXII - *gnosin*) and mere learning or inferior knowledge (XVIII - *polymathie*, XIX - *epistantai / eidenai*, XXII - *hexepatantai*) and 2) that this understanding (*noos*) remains of an enigmatic sort. This is borne out by what Homer is supposed to have misunderstood according to fragment XXII i.e. the “obvious” (*phaneron*). However, the riddle of the boys killing the lice seems far from obvious. This is a crucial fragment for understanding the wider implications of Heraclitus’ thought and I will use it as a helpful preface to the discussion of the Heraclitean influence on Plato (with particular reference to the *Lysis*).

Kahn emphasises what he calls the “double paradox” (Kahn, p.112) in fragment XXII. Usually one assumes that what one sees and catches one carries away and what one neither sees nor catches one leaves behind. Fragment XXII however denies the

expected consequence of seeing and catching (“what we see and catch we leave behind”) while affirming this consequence of *not* seeing and catching (“what we neither see nor catch we carry away”). This is the riddle of the lice which is said to have caused Homer’s death through the grief attendant on not being able to guess the answer (cf. Kahn, p.112). Heraclitus’ fragment can be seen as a projected answer to this riddle.

His most fundamental point would appear to refer back to our previous definition of the *philosophos* as undertaking a journey towards truth rather than having arrived. Etymologically, this is what distinguishes the term “philosopher” (lover of wisdom) from the term “sophist” (possessor of wisdom). Applied to the lice riddle, one can see Heraclitus as pointing to the irreducibility of a certain *ignorance*. The philosopher remains blind to the lice which are yet to be caught. These lice constitute the task which lies ahead for the philosopher - the problems yet to be solved. The fact that Homer fails to understand this open project is not so much due to his ignorance as to his polymathie, his false wisdom which blinds him to the enigmatic truth which is stated as being accessible to the “boys” i.e. to children. This point links fragment XXII to fragments XVIII and XIX. It also links Heraclitus to a prominent aspect of Platonic thinking.

One clear example of such Heracliteanism at work in Plato is the *Lysis*. Heraclitus’ thinking concerning the need for opposition (“conflict is justice”) is introduced by Socrates as a hypothesis in relation to the essence of true friendship. Perhaps, Socrates says, friendship is not so much a matter of like being attracted to like, as like to unlike. For surely the like are merely receiving what they already have when they

become friends with their like. With the “unlike”, however, they have something of genuine originality to receive. Socrates nonetheless dismisses this hypothesis as being too close to that of the *antilogoi* who privilege opposition to merely confuse the argument. Initially, this would seem to outrule the concept of a Heraclitean influence on Plato. Has Socrates not here explicitly rejected a central Heraclitean tenet i.e. that conflict is justice?

Two points can be made here. Firstly, as already discussed in this section, Heraclitus should not be simply seen as a thinker of opposition. To requote Kahn -

the intellectual unity of Heraclitus’ composition was in a sense greater than that of any archaic poem, since its final intent was more explicitly didactic, and its central theme a direct affirmation of unity: *hen pantai einai*, “all things are one”[Kahn, p.7]

The “Heracliteanism” which Socrates rejects in the *Lysis* is thus somewhat of a caricature and probably more directly attributable to the work of the Heraclitean contemporary of Socrates, Cratylus. Secondly, there is the question of the enigmatic structure of the *Lysis* itself. While the conflict of opposites is rejected as a hypothesis concerning friendship so too is the doctrine of like and like. A.E. Taylor makes the point that the dialogue seems to end in a circle as in its final phase it appears to unquestionably reintroduce a variant of the like and like doctrine as the key to friendship (the doctrine having been refuted earlier in the dialogue).

However Taylor makes an important qualification. The final phase of the dialogue privileges a friendship based on what is most near and intimate to us (*to oikeion*), this being the good (*to agathon*) -

The way in which the thought that what is most near and intimate to us (*to oikeion*) is the good is kept back to the very end of the conversation suggests that this - that man as such has such a “natural good” and that it is the one

thing worth caring for in life - is the thought he means the discussion to leave in our minds. [p. 73 - Taylor *Plato the Man and his Work*] (10)

Taylor derives the following significant conclusion -

If we go back to the various proposed explanations of the secret of friendship with this thought in our minds, it may occur to us that they do not after all formally contradict one another. [Taylor, p. 73]

This reevaluation of the different refutations outlined in the *Lysis* has the effect in one case of reintroducing the importance of a certain Heracliteanism - the doctrine of opposites in its relation to friendship. I have already described this doctrine as a caricature of Heraclitus' thought. This criticism is true from the point of view of Heraclitus' fundamental emphasis on unity - a unity which must underlie all opposition. However, opposition is nonetheless a significant component of Heraclitus' thinking taken in a less general sense. For example, many of the fragments foreground a conception of unity precisely through a thinking of the unity of opposites (e.g. "the mortal is the immortal" etc). This emphasis on *the unity of opposition* is however very different from the privileging of opposition over unity which is practised by the *antilogoi*. And in this sense Socrates can be said to have been unfair to Heraclitus in the *Lysis*.

However, I have already pointed to the fact that this refutation remains provisional. This provisionality is tied to Plato's strategy in the *Lysis*. Edith Hamilton for example has described the *Lysis* as illustrating in an exemplary way the "method" of Plato [Hamilton, p. 145] (11). Schematically, one can say that in the *Lysis* this method stages an inconclusive dialogue between apparently conflicting philosophies (thus emphasising plurality) while concluding by introducing the *Good* as an unproven assumption, this *Good* being seen as a reconciling principle between all the

competing philosophies. This method is repeated throughout the Platonic corpus, most notably in the *Meno*, in the famous “Meno’s paradox” where Socrates is asked how he can possibly find the *Good* (or Truth) if he does not know what he is searching for. This ignorance or perplexity concerning the *Good* is exemplified in the *Meno* by the fact that this principle must remain an unproven assumption - it is introduced at the end, after an inconclusive discussion. I will discuss this Platonic method in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4. Here it is useful to see it in its striking affinity to Heraclitus’ concept of the One which far from repressing difference seems rather to depend upon this difference as its very condition of possibility. In the next section, I will outline an analogous affinity between the Platonic method and the structure of Parmenides’ poem.

Section 2.4 - Parmenides and Plato

As discussed in Section 2.2, Parmenides’ concept of being (as One, changeless, timeless etc - fragment 8: “that Being is ungenerated and imperishable, entire, unique, unmoved and perfect: *hos ageneton eon kai anolethron estin, houlon kai atremes mounogenes te hed ateleston*) is often seen as outruling the possibility of difference. This leads Guthrie for example to speak of the historically specific “limitations” of Parmenides’ project. In other words, the concept of Being as unmoved, timeless etc is interpreted by Guthrie as ultimately inadmissible and a merely interesting stop-off point in the history of philosophy (albeit a rather farcical stop - off point, in hindsight).

In this section, however, in linking Parmenides with Plato I will argue for a different interpretation of Parmenidean Being (*to eon*). As Coxon has noted -

Parmenides' poem is dominated by his conviction that human beings can attain knowledge of reality or understanding (*noos*) [Coxon, p.19].

However, if one is to adhere to the traditionalist interpretation of Parmenides (as exemplified by Guthrie) such a reading is inadmissible. If Being is "unmoved and perfect" (fragment 8) then one is disallowed from speaking of elements such as "conviction", "human beings" etc as these would all be *differentiations* of the One. Indeed strictly speaking, the One would exclude any possibility of a philosopher called Parmenides. On my reading this extremism represents a distortion of Parmenides' work to the extent that -

a) it judges Part 1 of the poem, "the Way of Truth", as if it were the poem as such, taking its tenets (Being is One etc) as the essence of Parmenides' poem. This neglects the fact that the Prologue and Part 2 maintain an enigmatic and unclear relation to Part 1.

b) Part 1 of the poem is addressed to Parmenides by a "goddess". Its truth-status is therefore at least ambiguous, if not precarious. For example, one would have to take account of the mythic component of the goddess' speech.

Both of these points are linked to Parmenides' relation to Plato. In the following two chapters, I will concentrate on Plato's dialogues, the *Meno* and the *Phaedrus*. Here, however, it seems most appropriate to concentrate on the *Parmenides* which has been described, for example by Miller [12], as having "surely proven itself the most enigmatic of all of Plato's dialogues" (Miller, p.3). One of the reasons for this

enigma is Plato's placing of Parmenides in the position of questioner and Socrates in the position of interlocutor undergoing the trial of the *elenchus*. Moreover, it is not just any Socratic / Platonic position which is in question here, but precisely the Theory of Forms, perhaps *the* Platonic doctrine. Even more surprisingly, Socrates seems unable to offer a defence of the Theory of Forms, and Parmenides' criticisms appear to be destructive of their very basis.

This apparent undermining by Plato of a central Platonic doctrine has led Platonic commentators to seek security by passing the Parmenides off as a "highly enjoyable philosophical jest" (Taylor, p. 370). On Taylor's interpretation, the *Parmenides* is Plato's employment of the Eleatic method to exemplify the inherent confusions of the latter -

It is enough for his [Plato's] purpose to perplex the "eristics" by availing himself of fallacies of the kind which they habitually commit in their own argumentation. His parody of their *elenchus* is also an exposure of it. The one important point to keep in mind is that the conclusions to which he is led by his application of the Eleatic methods to the Eleatic "hypothesis" are not meant to be asserted as his own. They are simply what happens to the "hypothesis" if you make the Eleatic criticize himself by his own methods [Taylor, p. 366].

This interpretation at best only holds for the second part of the *Parmenides* (most commentators split the *Parmenides* into "Parmenides I" and "Parmenides II"). In the first part of the dialogue, the confusion regarding the Theory of Forms is not the result of Eleatic fallacy but of Socrates' very own inability to answer incisive questions from Parmenides. To this extent, Taylor's attempt to pass the *Parmenides* off as merely a "philosophical jest" seems to err more than a little on the side of

wishful thinking. Nonetheless, Taylor's interpretation does have the merit of foregrounding the Parmenides / Plato relation.

As is clear from the above quotation, Taylor views the relation as one of a Platonic critique of Parmenides. It seems however that if Taylor were to see this (as appears to be the case) as a general interpretation of the Parmenides / Plato relation that this view would only hold on a very unsympathetic reading of Parmenides. That is, if Taylor is claiming that not simply the *Parmenides* but Plato's work in general is a critique of Parmenides, this interpretation seems only admissible if one returns to a view of Parmenides à la Guthrie i.e. Parmenides posits a univocal, timeless, changeless One. It is clear that this version of Parmenideanism is rejected by Plato *tout court*.

However, there is a more sympathetic reading of Parmenides which in turn forces one to reconsider the Parmenides / Plato relation. As Voegelin notes -

the effectiveness of Parmenides.....would be unintelligible without the initial meaning of his work. This meaning was recovered, and magnificently enriched, in the work of Plato. The *Republic* is animated by the Parmenidean light-vision, giving the philosopher his grasp on the Truth of Being, and of the incarnation of the paradigmatic order in the work of the philosopher, that is, in the order of his *Politeia*. Philosophy in the strict sense, as the tree of speculation that grows from the heavenly root, is the creation of Parmenides and Plato [Voegelin, p. 214].

Voegelin therefore grounds this reinvigoration of the Parmenides / Plato relation in what he refers to as the *initial meaning* of Parmenides' thought. The central question relates to the debate between those who would stress such a Parmenidean original meaning and those who would rather stress the rigidity of the Parmenidean One. From the point of view of the latter, the Parmenides / Plato relation can only be very tenuous. While it is true that there is a linkage between the Parmenidean One (even

understood rigidly) and Plato's Theory of Forms, the former remains incompatible with for example the Platonic philosophy of dialogue which emphasises difference, albeit a difference which can possibly be overcome.

Understood outside a rigid notion of the One, however, Parmenides' philosophy can be linked in several important ways to the development in Plato's own thinking. The structure of Parmenides' poem is important in this respect. It is divided into a Prologue and two parts which report the knowledge received from the goddess concerning Truth (*aletheia*) and Delusion (*doxa*). In the Prologue, the goddess addresses Parmenides as follows -

Welcome, O youth, arriving at our dwelling as consort of immortal charioteers and mares which carry you; no ill fate sent you forth to travel on this way, which is far removed indeed from the step of men, but right and justice (Fragment 1, 23-26).

Crucially the Prologue thus foregrounds Parmenides having been "carried" by mares to the goddess, his having travelled "on this way" (*hodon*). At once this problematizes the rigid conception of a Parmenidean One. If the One requires a "way" or "path", it must in consequence allow for change, time etc, all the attributes denied of the rigid Parmenidean One. This admission of an irreducible time or plurality is reinforced by the advice which the goddess adds -

You must be informed of everything (*panta*), both (*hemen*) of the unmoved heart of persuasive reality (*aleitheies eupeitheos atremes*) and of the beliefs of mortals (*hede broton doxas*), which comprise no genuine conviction; nevertheless you shall learn these also, how it was necessary that the things that are believed to be should have their being in general acceptance, ranging through all things from end to end (*pantos panta peronta*) [fragment 1, 29-32] [Coxon, p.50].

The continued reference here to the “all” (*panta*) or “everything” and that which extends through “all things from end to end” is more reminiscent of Heraclitus than of the traditional interpretation of Parmenides. This is perhaps because the Prologue is always neglected in favour of a reading of Part 1 of the poem which elaborates the timelessness of Being. My contention is that when read in the context of the Prologue, Part 1 of the poem becomes a utopian construct or speculation rather than a metaphysical refutation of change. As later with Plato, Parmenides is attempting to put forward a critique of the beliefs of mortals (*hede broton doxas*). However, in his very recognition that these beliefs are to be found in “everything” (*panta*), Parmenides has rejected (prior to its inauguration) posterity’s interpretation of the Eleatic as a thinker of timeless Being.

Coxon describes the situation well when he calls for a clear distinction between the journey necessary to reach the goddess (*hodon poluphemon daimonos*) and the philosophical contemplation of Being which she advocates (*peithous keleuthos*) [Coxon, p.12]. Coxon accuses a “Stoic writer” of having initially confused these two distinct paths -

The correctness of this identification of the journey along the *hodon poluphemon daimonos* with the *peithous keleuthos* described by the goddess has commonly been taken for granted; nevertheless it flagrantly violates the form of the poem [p. 12]

By “the form of the poem” Coxon is alluding to the relation between the Prologue and Part 1, and also to how this relation is already clarified *within* the Prologue itself;

By his careful use of tenses in the prologue, Parmenides distinguishes clearly between 1) being set on the road to the goddess by the mares; 2) being drawn along this road and through the gates, to which it leads, by the mares under the guidance of the Heliades; 3) hearing from the goddess about the possible *hodoi dixesios* and about the landmarks on the “real way” or “journey of

persuasion” which lies before him. Since dicesis is philosophical enquiry, the journey to the gateway must necessarily be in some sense preliminary to the enquiry she describes...[Coxon, p. 12].

In other words, the journey, the path (*hodon*), in effect the opening to temporality and flux, must *precede* the arrival at timeless Being. This more open view of Parmenides, as a thinker of a projected Unity within difference, links the Eleatic to Plato’s work. Coxon makes the point that the *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist* and *Statesman* constitute an “Eleatic tetralogy” [p. 26] from Plato’s perspective. For Coxon, the Platonic theory of Forms is “a pluralist development of Parmenides’ monism” [p.26] -

It is consequently not surprising that, although there is no allusion to Parmenides either in the formulation of the theory in the *Phaedo* or in its elaboration in the middle books of the *Republic*, the latter is sometimes expressed in language which derives unmistakably from him [Coxon, p. 27].

So too with the later dialogues which on first inspection would seem to represent a refutation of Eleaticism. The *Sophist* for example (succeeding the *Parmenides*) puts forward a critique of Parmenides’ monism. However, it also outlines a critique of Plato’s own theory of Forms (cf. 248a). Additionally, this critique in both cases is vocalised by a dissident Eleatic, the Stranger. Coxon derives the following conclusion -

The visitor from Elea is represented as the embodiment of the genuine philosopher and so as one who is “dedicated always through arguments to the Form of Being” (*te tou ontos aei dia logismon proskeimenos idea* - 254a). In making this the ultimate concern of dialectic, Plato shows himself still, as earlier in the *Phaedo* and *Republic*, a direct if unorthodox successor to Parmenides [p. 29].

This Parmenidean influence on Plato distances him from Derrida in the measure to which the Form of Being remains an almost undeconstructible assumption in Platonism. This becomes particularly clear in the *Meno* where Socrates is challenged

by Meno precisely because he is employing such an ideal paradigm without any substantive content. “How”, asks Meno, “can one find the truth if one doesn’t even know what one is looking for?”. Plato’s work can be interpreted as an attempt to answer this most fundamental of philosophical questions. The next two chapters examine the details of this metaphysical project, what in the *Seventh Letter* Plato calls “the almost miraculous effort” [cf. Voegelin, p.4].

CHAPTER 3 - PLATO *CONTRA* DERRIDA I: THE CASE OF THE *MENO*

Section 3.1 - Prefatory Remarks

W.K.C. Guthrie, in the Introduction to his translations of the *Protagoras* and *Meno* outlines some of the difficulties which any interpreter of Plato must face -

When a philosopher expounds his thoughts in the more usual form of a systematic treatise, it may be profound and difficult, but at least the reader's task is limited to finding out what it means on the assumption that the writer was doing his best to communicate his own views in as clear and orderly a manner as possible. But in dealing with something that so far from being a treatise, is a unique amalgam of philosophical discussion with dramatic art, humorous irony, and poetic myth, a number of prior questions must arise [p. 8] (1)

Guthrie goes on to outline some such questions, particularly in relation to the *Protagoras* which he cites as being especially prone to misunderstanding. For example, Socrates' exposition of the poem of Simonides (342A -347A) appears to outdo even the sophists in terms of its distortions of the poem and its "long, continuous exhibition of virtuosity" [Guthrie, p. 19]. Similarly, there is Socrates' defence of the Spartans as the most philosophical of the Greeks, his claim that their apparent disdain for metaphysics is simply an elaborate ruse, their expulsions of foreigners the means to indulge in a clandestine bout of philosophical discussion [Guthrie, p.19]. This is undoubtedly Socrates at his most mischievous, but the ramifications of this behaviour have serious import. For it is precisely this kind of Socratic sophistry which Derrida cites in "Plato's Pharmacy" as disallowing a simple dichotomy between Platonism and sophism. There is, says Derrida, rather a *doubling* effect, a confusing of positions.

Dialogues such as the *Protagoras* can easily lend themselves to such an interpretation. Besides the above mischievousness there is additionally the rather startling fact that Socrates seems to admit to a kind of Protagorean hedonism at the conclusion of the discussion. As Guthrie observes -

An endless controversy has been aroused by the fact that in this dialogue, he [Plato] apparently makes Socrates enunciate and defend a doctrine regarded by many as the direct antithesis of what Socrates is likely to have taught in real life [p.9; Guthrie].

Guthrie however goes on to make two important qualifications to this point -

1) Protagorean hedonism, to which Socrates appears to adhere in the *Protagoras*, is far from, for example, the vulgar hedonism espoused by Calicles in the *Gorgias* (a dialogue in which Socrates takes a much stronger tone with sophistry). Protagoras is rather the “best of the sophists” (p. 23, Guthrie), a man of whom Plato had a high opinion, both as a thinker and as a moral influence.

2) Although “stopping short” [p. 23] of the “full teaching” [p.23] of Socrates in the *Protagoras*, Plato’s other dialogues (for example, the *Meno*) can be employed to put this as it were strategic representation of Socrates in context.

It is this second point which most interests me in the context of this thesis as it foregrounds the hypothesis of an at least relatively unified philosophy of Plato. In other words, no dialogue should be taken in isolation but must be read in the context of all the other dialogues, although Guthrie is sensible enough to admit that *all* dialogues are “open to a number of different interpretations” [p. 25]. Given this admission, I think that Guthrie’s approach is a fair and fruitful one which gives the reader a framework within which to identify the consistency present in Plato’s work.

In the next two chapters I will address the *Meno* (an early / middle period dialogue) and the *Phaedrus* (a middle / late period work). While the Socratic philosophizing in each dialogue can be said to differ qualitatively, fundamentally it is always the drive for truth, for the Good (i.e. the life of the *philosophos*) which remains paramount.

As in the *Lysis* which was discussed earlier, this ideal or Form of the Good often remains little more than an assumption (or a daemonic dream) without substantive content. But what differentiates Plato from Derrida is that whereas the latter sees such insubstantiveness as a justification for making the Good conditional, deconstructible, for Plato (even in its very insubstantive state) it must remain *unconditional*, unconditioned, as an ideal which must guide the search for truth, and thus life itself. My first analysis of this problem will concentrate on the *Meno*. Guthrie describes the *Meno* as “one of the most interesting of Plato’s dialogues, and the best of all to serve as an introduction to the study of his thought” [p. 24]. The dialogue is significant in one sense because it has been cited as the crucial transition point between the dialogues as a representation of Socrates’ philosophy and as a representation of Plato’s philosophy. The assertion of the transcendent Forms, the theory of learning as recollection and the doctrine of the immortality of the soul distinguish the *Meno* from, for example, the more Socratic influenced *Gorgias* and *Protagoras* -

in the *Meno* one can see the transition taking place. It shows the mind of Plato assimilating what Socrates had to give and then, under other, particularly Pythagorean influences, as well as the individual bent of his own temperament, reaching out beyond it to regions of which Socrates scarcely dreamed [p. 24, Guthrie].

The more complex metaphysics of the *Meno* however should not blind one to the continuing Socratic influence. Plato’s work from the *Meno* onwards is in no way a

refutation of Socrates' thought but a "natural extension" (Guthrie, p.25) of the latter's moral and political thinking into the more explicitly cosmological sphere. And this cosmological thinking requires more than ever a Socratic foundation. In the early dialogues, the discussion often concerns concepts which appear readily accessible to the average reader - moral virtue, political justice etc. Socrates' subsequent point is of course that these concepts are employed without understanding by people and are therefore more inaccessible than one might at first admit. Nonetheless, most of his interlocutors in the early dialogues either reject Socrates' argument (thus returning to the "complacent" [*tharraleon*] state of, for example, a Calicles) or else accept it but see the solution as within reach, given consideration (e.g. Hippothales in the *Lysis*. Although the *Lysis* seems to have a circular argument, it nonetheless finishes with the supposition that "friendship" is our "very own" [*phusei oikeion*], that is, within reach).

To the extent, however, that the *Meno* is addressing more cosmological issues, Socrates leaves himself open to the charge that he has no control over his subject-matter. This leads Meno to propound a dilemma or what he sees as a paradox of the Socratic position. If one is as ignorant as Socrates claims then one cannot know what one is searching for. But if one does not know what one is searching for, one cannot hope to find it. Meno has thus introduced a problem which could be fatal to the Socratic / Platonic project as a whole. Initially Socrates seeks to avoid this paradox by outlining the thesis of knowledge as "remembrance" or *anamnesis*. This seems to be a specifically Platonic rather than Socratic solution. However Socrates later disclaims any certainty as regards this thesis. Rather his only philosophical means for avoiding the paradox is his declaration that it is always better to seek knowledge than to weakly

give up the quest (Guthrie, p. 104). Even in the *Meno* therefore, where one can trace the Platonic introduction of cosmological themes, these themes still remain very much dependent upon a Socratic method of enquiry. I will discuss how these issues are developed in the *Meno* in more detail in the following section.

Here it is more appropriate to make a more general point. The Socratic response to Meno's paradox is something I believe to be central to the Platonic project as a whole, early to late. I am thus following Guthrie's thesis that no dialogue can be interpreted in isolation. Running throughout the dialogues is the assumption of the Form of the Good, to which all vision must be directed. But as Socrates makes clear, even in the rather intellectualist *Republic*, the Good is "beyond knowledge". Meno interprets this "beyond" negatively in constituting his paradox and I would argue that Derrida repeats this negativity. In contrast, Plato affirms this "exteriority" as the very object of philosophical striving.

Section 3.2 - The *Meno*

In Chapter 2, I discussed the Presocratic affinity, particularly that of Heraclitus and Parmenides, with Plato. There, the subtle difference between the Presocratic / Platonic emphasis on "Unity" and Derrida's stress on "doubling" was outlined. The *Meno* is again a clear case in point. It combines a fundamental faith in the One with a continuous reiteration of the difficulties involved in proving (*endeixasthai*, 82a) such an ideal. The tone is set abruptly at the very beginning of the dialogue with Meno immediately asking "Can you tell me, Socrates, whether virtue can be taught, or is

acquired by practice, not teaching?” (70a; *ekheis moi eipein, ho Socrates, ara didakton he arete; he ou didakton all asketon*);). Plato avoids the articulation of dramatic context he so ably elaborated in the prior *Protagoras*. This enables him (via Socrates) to focus on the philosophical issues more clearly and the introduction of the topic of virtue (*arete*) provokes Socrates into a question concerning the nature of virtue itself. Far from being able to offer an answer to whether virtue is acquired by teaching (*didakton*) or practice (*asketon*) Socrates cannot even elaborate what virtue is in the first place -

a drought of wisdom has come on (*aukhmos tis tes sophias gegonen*).....so far am I from knowing (*eidenai*) whether it can be taught or not (*eite didakton eite me didakton*) that I actually do not even know (*host oude auto eidos*) what the thing itself, virtue (*arete*) is at all [71a].

This lack of knowing reminds one of Heraclitus' critique of *polymathie* and Parmenides' *Way of Delusion (Doxa)*. In both the latter cases, this lack was not understood negatively but rather as the impetus to the striving (*orexis*) which was constitutive of the philosophical spirit. Here in the *Meno* one sees Plato repeating this Presocratic gesture. At the beginning of the dialogue, there is an initial deconstruction of the *polymathie* which Socrates cites as being representative of the Thessalians and linked to the influence of the sophist Gorgias on that city (70a / b). Socrates contrasts this with the drought of wisdom (*aukhmos tis tes sophias*) which has “come on” [71a] Athens. Meno wishes Socrates to answer the question concerning virtue in a Thessalian manner and appears indignant when Socrates admits his ignorance -

Meno: But is it true, Socrates, that you do not even know what virtue is (*alethos oud ho ti arete estin oistha*)? Are we to return home with this report of you?

Socrates: Not only this, my friend, but also that I never yet came across anybody who did know, in my opinion (*alla kai hoti oud allo po enetukhon eidoti, hos emoi doko*). [71c]

Socrates changes the emphasis from his own ignorance to a more general philosophical problem. His words are an implicit challenge to the *polymathie* of the Thesalians, and to Meno's own expectations. As the dialogue develops and Meno responds to Socrates' questioning, the fundamental philosophical issue is foregrounded. Having made the transition from the question "is virtue teachable?" to "what is virtue?" (*ti phes areten einai*), Meno cites a number of examples of virtues (in the plural; 72a-b). Socrates refers pejoratively to these examples as being a "swarm" (72b - *smenos*) of virtues rather than the one virtue he was seeking (*ei mian zeton areten*) [72a]. This is once again a referring back to Presocratic terminology, in this case the debate concerning the One and the Many. Socrates is searching for the One (*mia*) amongst the swarm (*smenos*).

We thus have here a rather enigmatic combination of Socratic ignorance and an assumption or striving for unity. From a Derridean perspective, one might say that this is an instance of *doubling*, where Plato juxtaposes truth and confusion so as to create an impasse. My hypothesis however is that the dual nature of the Socratic / Platonic enterprise is fundamentally opposed to Derridean *doubling*. Unity and philosophical ignorance (e.g. concerning virtue) are not interchangeable. Rather for Plato, ignorance or perplexity is part of a dialectical process. In a crucial passage in the *Meno* [75d] Socrates makes this clear -

Socrates: If my questioner were a professor of the eristic (*eristikon*) and contentious sort, I should say to him: I have made my statement; if it is wrong, your business is to examine and refute it. But if, like you and me on this occasion, we were friends and chose to have a discussion (*dialegosthai*) together, I should have to reply in some milder tone more suited to dialectic

(*dialektikoteron*). The more dialectical way (*isos to dialektikoteron*), I suppose, is not merely to answer what is true, but also to make use of those points which the questioned person (*erotomenos*) acknowledges he knows (*eidenai*). And this is the way in which I shall now try to argue with you.

Socrates' distinction in this passage between "eristic" (*eristikon*) and the "dialectical way" (*isos to dialektikoteron*) can be referred back to the opening section of the *Meno* discussed above. There, Socrates sought to deconstruct the *polymathie* of the Thessalians which had influenced the questioning style of Meno. In effect, Meno's questioning style, which expects immediate answers to fundamental questions ("is virtue acquired through teaching or practice?") is representative of the eristic mode of discourse. At section 84a of the *Meno* (in the slave boy discussion) Socrates outlines perhaps the foremost attribute of this kind of discourse - *to tharraleon*, understood in a negative sense as that of the "overconfident" or "presumptuous" participant. In contrast, dialectic (*dialektikoteron*) opens up a realization of what Socrates initially refers to as a drought of wisdom (*aukhmos tis tes sophias*). Under the experience of Socrates' dialectical questioning, Meno's state is transformed from that of the eristic *tharraleon* (or *tharros*) to what he himself will refer to as *aporia* (utter perplexity). This transformation and Meno's ensuing indignation reaches a climax at the famous passage where Meno accuses Socrates of being akin to a torpedo-fish -

I consider that both in your appearance and in other respects you are extremely like the flat torpedo sea-fish; for it benumbs (*narkon*) anyone who approaches and touches it, and something of the sort is what I find you have done to me now. For in truth I feel my soul (*ten psukhen*) and my tongue quite benumbed (*narko*), and I am at a loss what answer to give you. And yet on countless occasions I have made abundant speeches on virtue (*aretas pampollous logous*) to various people - and very good speeches they were, so I thought - but now I cannot say one word as to what it is (*nun de oud ho ti esti to parapan ekho eipein*) [80b].

This is then the result of the way of dialectic. While eristic leads to the making of abundant speeches on virtue (*aretas pampollous logous*) dialectic leads rather to a drought of wisdom, a state of being benumbed (*narko*). This situation is repeated in the example of the slave-boy (84a) where Socrates tries to prove a mathematical truth to the slave of Meno. Initially, the boy is confident but he is shown by Socrates to be over-confident (*tharraleos*) and he is reduced to a state of perplexity (*aporia*). However, this perplexity is interpreted by Socrates positively as it leads the slave-boy to “push on in the search gladly, lacking knowledge” (*nun men gar kai zeteseien an hedoes ouk eidos*) [84b]. Perplexity (*aporia*), lack of knowledge (*ouk eidos*) is the spur to a desire (*hedoes* - literally “pleasure”) for truth. This reminds one of Heraclitus’ concept of *orexis* or striving; reaching out for truth.

Orexis is etymologically linked to *oreios* which means “living on the mountains”. This is perhaps unsurprising when one considers that Heraclitus rejected societal life in favour of the wandering life of the hermit. It also foregrounds a possible relation to Derrida’s “I have never known where I was going” [*Punctuations*]. However, one can say that there is a fundamental difference between the Derridean wandering and the Heraclitean / Platonic enquiry. The perplexity (*aporia*) and lack of knowledge (*ouk eidos*) which is characteristic of both deconstruction and Plato’s texts is nonetheless set within a dialectical context in the case of Plato. This becomes clear from Socrates’ response to Meno’s paradox. Faced with the confusion attendant upon Socrates’ questioning, Meno raises his infamous question -

Why, on what lines (*tropon*) will you look (*zeteseis*), Socrates, for a thing of whose nature you know nothing at all (*me oistha*)? Pray, what sort of thing, amongst those that you know not will you treat us to as the object (*prothemenos*) of your search (*zeteseis*)? Or even supposing, at the best, that

you hit upon it, how will you know (*eise*) it is the thing you did not know (*ho ou ouk hdestha*)? [80d]

Meno seems to have turned the tables fatally on Socrates. Socrates had first reduced Meno from a state of confidence (*to tharraleon*) to a state of utter perplexity (*aporia*). At the heart of this transformation was the Socratic / Platonic conviction that *polymathie* is a false knowledge. In other words, genuine philosophizing only begins, according to Plato, with lack of knowledge (*ouk eidos*). However, Meno here challenges the practicality of such an ideal. In professing complete ignorance and loss, how is one to progress philosophically? His critique asks two fundamental questions - 1) Without an object (*prothemenos*) of enquiry, one has no direction (*tropon*) for one's search (*zeteseis*).

2) Without knowledge of one's "object" one may paradoxically find it without knowing (*ouk hdestha*). In other words, despite having the truth in one's possession, one would remain unaware of this fact.

Socrates' answer to these questions is nothing short of extraordinary. Instead, as one might expect, of carefully arguing his case, he proceeds to call on the words of the mystical poets concerning the immortality of the soul (*ten psukhen tou anthropou einai athanaton*) [81b] and the doctrine of knowledge as remembrance (*anamnesis*) [81d]. If taken in isolation, this can seem either a Platonic *tour-de-force* (from a mystic's perspective) or a deplorable lack of rigour (from a more conventionally philosophical perspective). However, Plato's recourse to a kind of poetizing (Pindar is explicitly mentioned at 81a) is best understood in the context of a later passage [86b].

There Socrates outlines a rationale which casts clearer light on the mysticism of the previous section. Firstly, he disclaims any “confident assertion” (*diiskhurisaimen*) of his anamnesis argument or the argument concerning the immortality of the soul (*athanton*). Instead it is suggested that it is a solution to Meno’s paradox which is crucial. In other words, the high-flown poetizing is only a means to launch one out of Meno’s paradox where one cannot search for or find what one does not know. At 80e, Socrates describes the paradox as a “captious argument” (*eristikon logon*) again reiterating the fundamental Socratic distinction between eristic and dialectic. At 86b, one gets a firm espousal of the dialectical mode of philosophizing as an antidote to the “captious” eristic representative of Meno -

Most of the points I have made in support of my argument are not such as I can confidently assert (*diiskhurisaimen*); but that the belief (*oiomenoi*) in the duty (*dein*) of inquiring after (*zetein*) what we do not know (*ha me tis oide*) will make us better (*beltious*) and braver (*andrikoteroi*) and less helpless (*hetton argoi*) than the notion that there is not even a possibility (*mede dunaton*) of discovering (*eurein*) what we do not know (*a me epistametha*), nor any duty of inquiring after it (*mede dein zetein*) - this is a point for which I am determined to do battle (*diamakhoimen*).....both in word and deed (*kai logo kai ergo*) [86b-c].

There are four points I would like to address in relation to this important passage which bear on our problematic as a whole.

- 1) the undermining of confident assertion (*diiskhurisaimen*)
- 2) the belief (*oiomenoi*) in the duty (*dein*) of inquiring after (*zetein*) what we do not know (*ha me tis oide*)
- 3) the conviction that this inquiry will make us better (*beltious*) and braver (*andrikoteroi*) and less helpless (*hetton argoi*)

4) the claim (stemming from Meno's paradox) that there is not even a possibility (*mede dunaton*) of discovering (*eurein*) what we do not know (*a me epistametha*), nor any duty of enquiring after it (*mede dein zetein*)

1) **The undermining of confident assertion (*diiskhurisaimen*)** - This has already been referred to in relation to the opening passages of the *Meno* where Socrates puts forward an implicit critique of the Thessalian *tharraleoi* with their over-confidence in assertion. It is also a crucial point in relation to the thesis as a whole. My primary reason for foregrounding a confrontation between Platonism and deconstruction is that I believe Derrida to be asking several important questions of philosophy, to which I think Platonism offers several significant answers. This problem centres on the issue of whether philosophical judgement is possible. In "Plato's Pharmacy", Derrida suggests that any Platonic assertion is doubled i.e. it is reversible. In other words, all philosophical judgement is conditional and relative.

On one level, section 86b-c of the *Meno* vindicates this Derridean deconstruction. Having just outlined his theory of *anamnesis* and the immortality of the soul and applied this philosophy to the slave-boy, Socrates then seems to retract his confidence in these assertions - "most of the points I have made in support of my argument are not such as I can confidently assert". When one considers that it is precisely these arguments which have been traditionally seen as constitutive of the *Meno's* importance, it is clear that Derrida has a point. There is undoubtedly self-deconstruction at work in Plato.

However, what differentiates Plato from Derrida is the ideal of dialectic. The eristic arguments of the Thessalians and Meno are deconstructed so as to pave the way for

the dialectical process. Whereas in Derrida philosophical judgement is conditional, in Plato it is perplexity and confusion (*aporia*) which are conditional. The benumbment (*narkan*) which Meno describes as being consequent upon the Socratic questioning method represents only an initial stage. Indeed, it is a positive stage to the extent that it is what induces the desire for truth. Socrates describes this link between perplexity (*aporia*) and a craving (*epothese*) for knowledge in the context of the slave-boy, who has been led to an analogous state of benumbment as that of Meno, and now desires to learn -

Now do you imagine he [the slave-boy] would have attempted to inquire or learn (*epikheiresai zetein*) what he thought he knew (*ho oeto eidenai*) when he did not know it (*ouk eidos*), until he had been reduced to the perplexity (*aporian*) of realising that he did not know (*me eidenai*), and had felt a craving (*epothese*) to know (*to eidenai*)?

The undermining of confident assertion (*diiskhurisaimen*) is therefore a condition of the craving (*epothese*) for wisdom which is the origin of philosophy. One question which remains however is how the confident assertion of eristic differs from the assertion which will now be consequent upon philosophical enquiry. Eristic assertion clearly differs from the perplexity (*aporia*) of the initial stage of dialectic. But if this perplexity is to be overcome, how is one to avoid returning to a state of eristic assertion? This is one of Derrida's fundamental points in "Plato's Pharmacy" when he states that there is a "crossing of the border" between Platonic dialectic and the eristic of the sophists.

Plato faces two difficulties in this context. On the one side lies the over-confident (*tharraleon*) assertion of the Thesalians / Meno / sophistry in general, which his questioning method is meant to undermine. However, once perplexity has

undermined one's over-confidence, any progress from this perplexity to a state of knowledge runs the risk of repeating the very form of the opposed eristic. The second difficulty lies with a possible affinity between Platonic dialectic and deconstruction. This is the kernel of Meno's accusation. Although obviously not referring to Derrida, Meno's paradox states that the Platonic method seems unavoidably destined to a philosophical impasse. In the effort to avoid over-confident assertion, Platonic dialectic is brought very close to deconstruction *ad infinitum*. In the next section, I will look at how the Platonic dialectic can be distinguished from this second threat of endless deconstruction.

2) The belief (*oiomenoi*) in the duty (*dein*) of inquiring after (*zetein*) what we do not know (*ha me tis oide*)

In its efforts to avoid the over-confident (*tharraleon*) [84a] assertion exemplified in the *Meno* by for example the Thessalians, Meno and the slave-boy (initially), how is the Platonic dialectic to avoid an infinite regress? Derrida's emphasis on the "unravelling" of dialectic in "Plato's Pharmacy" centred around the inevitability of *doubling*, the primary case being the simultaneous sense of *pharmakon* as "poison" and "cure". In this coincidence of opposite meanings, Derrida's point was that Plato's attempt to distinguish between the positive and negative senses of this term failed radically. In the case of writing, Plato's distinction between good and bad writing (in the *Phaedrus*) was inadmissible. Good writing *doubled* as bad writing and *vice versa*.

The *Meno* throws up a significantly analogous situation centring on the term *to tharraleon / tharros*. I have already described how this term is used negatively by

Plato to signify the “presumption” endemic to the eristic method [86a]. However, this term is also used positively by Plato in the *Meno*. At 86b, Socrates employs the term “*tharrounta*” [“confidently”] in a positive sense -

You must confidently [*tharrounta*] try to search for and to recollect what you don't happen to know now.

In this context, he is speaking of the courage or confidence [*tharros*] which must drive the philosophical method or endeavour (*zetein*). Here is an instance of what one might call the Platonic *double* - *tharros* is used twice in the *Meno* in diametrically opposed senses. How are we to interpret this ambiguity?

I would suggest that one read the double sense of *tharros* / *to tharraleon* as a pivotal Platonic response to the question already posed - how is Platonic dialectic to avoid the twin perils of over-confident eristic and deconstructive under-confidence? In the previous section, I addressed Plato's relation to the former. By foregrounding the “drought of wisdom” (*aukhmos tis tes sophias*) underlying the self-assertion of Meno's argument, Plato distances his own dialectic from the presumptive sense of *tharros*. He thus uses *tharros* negatively in order to deconstruct false knowledge. This leaves him, as it were, in the same position as Derrida. But Plato's “dialectical way” (*isos to dialektikoteron*) [75d] progresses from the deconstructive stage to a reconstructive phase via a positive employment of *tharros* by Socrates. This renewed sense of confidence or courage can faithfully be linked to the Heraclitean tenet of *orexis*. While the negative sense of *tharros* remains too complacent to translate *orexis*, the positive sense of *tharros* returns to the Heraclitean sense of striving or yearning for truth.

As with *orexis*, the positive sense of *tharros* fails to translate into Derrida's *différance*. This failure is perhaps best explained by an invoking of Heraclitus' fragment B86 -

Through lack of faith (*apistis*) the divine escapes being known.

Pistis (faith) is what instils the positive sense of confidence in the philosophical quest for Heraclitus and Plato. Such faith is not negated in Derrida but rather *doubled*. In other words, Derrida refuses to maintain faith as an unquestioned condition of his philosophizing. For deconstruction, lack of faith (*apistis*) must be simultaneously maintained. I will return to this issue of Derrida and faith in the second part of the thesis concerning Derrida's interpretation of Platonism, and particularly Christian Platonism. Here I will develop Plato's sense of *pistis* and its philosophical ramifications in more detail.

I had extracted a quotation from Meno 86b to begin this section - "the belief (*oiomenos*) in the duty (*dein*) of inquiring after (*zetein*) what we do not know (*ha me tis oide*)". Plato's concept of belief (*oiomenos*) is of course directly linked to the concept of faith (*pistis*) which he uses at 81e in the context of refuting Meno's paradox which he refers to as that "captious argument" (*to eristiko logo*). In contrast to this "eristic" (*eristiko*) argument, Socrates puts his trust or faith (*pisteuon*) in the truth (*alethei*) of virtue (*arete*), a trust which then makes him ready to inquire (*zetein*) into the nature of virtue. There are then three steps to the Platonic dialectical method;

A) A rejection of the two kinds of eristic argument (*to eristiko logo*) where

1) Through over-confident (*tharraleon*) assertion one thinks one knows what one does not know, but one's complacency prevents any further questioning e.g. Thesalians, Gorgias at 70b.

2) Through lack of faith (*apistis*), one thinks there is no hope of finding any truth e.g. *Meno* at 96d.

B) A placing of one's trust or faith (*pistis*) in truth

C) Through such pistie or belief (*oiomenos*), one undertakes to enquire (*zetein*) into the nature of truth. Plato terms this method the way of dialectic ("*isos to dialektikoteron*) [75d]

This leads on to the third issue deriving from section 86b-c.

3) The conviction that this inquiry will make us better (*beltious*) and braver (*andrikoteroi*) and less helpless (*hetton argoi*);

This returns one to the problem of *tharros*. Plato's critique of eristic over-confidence led to the apparent impasse of Meno's paradox. Here at 86c, Plato describes the benefits of a different kind of *tharros* - the dialectical method is not going to leave us stranded and helpless (*argoi*). Instead we will become better (*beltious*) and braver (*andrikoteroi*). The passage 86b-c finds an analogue at 81d. There, Socrates asks that we have courage (*andreios*) and that we faint not (*me apokamne*) in the search (*zeton*). Again the danger is that one might be seduced by the "captious argument" (*eristiko logo*). To do so would be to become idle (*argos*) and indolent (*malakos*). In contrast, the dialectical way makes us energetic (*ergastikos*) and inquiring (*zetetikos*).

Of course it is faith (*pistis*) which again grounds this declaration and one can well ask, from a Derridean perspective, whether this faith is justified. Throughout the *Meno*, this faith leads Socrates to search for the one amongst the many, the unity underlying plurality. At 72c for example, he seeks the one common character (*eidos tauton apasai ekhousi*) by which all virtues are virtues. At 72e he seeks the one form (*auto eidei*) which makes a man a man, and a woman a woman. Again at 73e he looks for the homogeneous good (*auto agathoi*) by which all mankind (*pantes ar anthropoi*) are virtuous in the same way. It is this common good (*agathon*) which is worth searching for and which according to 86c will make us better (*beltious*) and braver (*andrikoteroi*) and less helpless (*argoi*).

Without *pistis* however all the negative qualities excluded by Plato begin to loom large - helplessness, idleness, indolence. The fundamental question therefore is whether Plato can give a philosophical grounding to the concept of “faith” and whether this may allow Platonism to transcend the *crisis* of metaphysics which Derrida has spoken of for example in “The Double Session”. In the last section of this chapter, I will address this issue from the perspective of the final point to be extracted from 86b-c.

Section 3.3 - Philosophy’s Doing Battle (*diamkhoimen*)

The final point to be developed from *Meno* 86b-c is the claim (stemming from Meno’s paradox) that -

A) there is not even a possibility (*mede dunaton*) of discovering (*eurein*) what we do not know (*a me epistametha*), nor any duty of inquiring after it (*mede dein zetein*).

To what extent is Derrida's philosophy convergent with the claims of Meno's paradox? If understood as a sophistic pronouncement of truth, point A differs from Derrida's claims fundamentally. For example, if Meno was to state that "truth is impossible" or "truth does not exist", he would himself be making a philosophical claim of sorts. In contrast, Derrida's *doubling* strategy does not disavow truth but rather claims that truth is indistinguishable from the absence of truth. This is of course a paradoxical claim rather than a univocal predicative thesis such as "truth does not exist". However claim A is derived from Meno's own original paradox. When Socrates at 86b-c attacks the claim that "there is not even a possibility of discovering that we do not know nor any duty of inquiring after it", the content of what he is opposing can only be understood as rooted in paradox.

The difficulties originally stem from the opening passage of the *Meno* [70a] where Meno immediately addresses Socrates in an eristic style, expecting "fearless, magnificent answers" (*aphobos te kai megaloprepos*) [70b] to his question "whether virtue can be taught?" (*ara didakton he arete;*). This is just another form of the overconfidence which Socrates later disdains in the slave-boy. However, in attempting to lead Meno out of this negative *tharros*, Socrates' questioning is of a sufficiently radical sort to incur the accusatory reactions of Meno at 80a where, as already discussed, he claims to have been benumbed [*narko*] by Socrates. This accusation hinges on Meno's suspicion that Socrates divests his interlocutors of *tharros* while retaining his own sense of philosophical confidence. But Socrates tries to scotch this

claim by allowing Meno's analogy with the torpedo-fish [Meno compares Socrates to a torpedo-fish with the power of numbing others with his sting] to hold only if the torpedo-fish is itself numb -

As for me, if the torpedo - fish is torpid itself (*ei men he narke aute narkosa*) while causing others to be torpid, I am like it (*eoika aute*), but not otherwise. For it is not from any sureness in myself (*ou gar euporon autos*) that I cause others to doubt (*aporein*): it is from being in more doubt (*mallon autos aporon*) than anyone else that I cause doubt in others [80c].

Socrates therefore is in more doubt (*mallon autos aporon*) than even Meno. Nonetheless, he immediately expresses a willingness (*ethelo*) to join Meno in searching (*suzetesai*) for the nature of virtue [80d]. It is precisely this willingness (*ethelo*) which also signifies capacity or power, in the face of the aforementioned radical doubt and apparent incapacity that stuns Meno. It provokes him into articulating his paradox -

Why, on what lines will you look (*tina tropon zeteseis*), Socrates, for a thing of whose nature you know nothing at all (*ho me oistha*)? Pray, what sort of thing, amongst those that you know not (*hon ouk oistha*), will you treat us to as the object (*prothemenos*) of your search? Or even supposing, at the best, that you hit upon it, how will you know it is the thing you did not know? (*ho su ouk hdestha*) [80d].

This is the paradox upon which claim A was based - "that there is not even a possibility of discovering what we do not know nor any duty of inquiring after it". At 86b-c, Socrates has translated the paradox into a predicative utterance which he wishes to oppose. Here at 80d, it remains in the more open form of a question. I have returned to this passage because I believe it to be a direct precursor of Derrida's thinking. In effect, Meno's paradox represents the *doubling* strategy of deconstruction in its implication that Socratic knowledge can only be nonknowledge,

Socratic objectivity only the lack of an object. Derrida makes an exactly similar point in a rather more enigmatic fashion, in his essay “The Double Session” [2] -

one cannot get out of Mallarmé’s *antre* as one can get out of Plato’s cave. A mine full of nothing [*mine de rien*]. (translation modified) [DS, p. 216]

Derrida has carefully woven many different issues into this condensed declaration. Firstly, *antre* is the French word for “cave”. Throughout “The Double Session”, Derrida plays on the fact that “antre” and “entre” are homonyms. The latter means “between” or “through”. Mallarmé’s “cave” [*antre*] is a cave which one cannot get through, it is in effect a “between” [*entre*], a kind of limbo state. Derrida is here turning “entre” into a noun, while “antre” becomes a preposition. Significantly, there is an English phrase which can capture this ambiguity. The word “passage” could possibly translate “antre” or “entre”. “Passage” is also advantageous because it allows one to refer back to Plato’s “passage” or “cave”. For Derrida, Plato’s cave is a *passage without passage* - it is the preposition which becomes a noun. There is no exit from Plato’s cave to an outside of light and truthfulness. Plato’s philosophy is always *à travers* - in passage. This, on my interpretation, is also the implication of Meno’s paradox. Meno exemplifies the *in-betweenness* of Socrates’ questioning, the fact that it is in-between knowledge and nonknowledge, objectivity and nonobjectivity.

The final phrase of “The Double Session” quotation puts this hypothesis more provocatively -

a mine full of nothing [*mine de rien*] (DS, p.216).

This is not (as might appear) a negative statement from Derrida. It is both positive and negative - a positive full mine, of negative nothing. Again, there is the sense of being in-between positivity and negativity. The claim is being made that Plato's *antre* (cave) is a precursor of Mallarmé's *entre* (between / passage).

If one follows the hypothesis of an analogy between this Derridean claim and Meno's paradox, it is possible to find Socrates / Plato's own answer to this challenge from deconstruction. Having expressed his willingness, his capacity (*ethelo*) to search (*suzetesai*) for truth, despite his stated perplexity (*aporein*), Socrates finds his own perplexity radicalized by Meno in the paradox. Socrates' response is immediate. Describing the paradox as a "captious argument (*eristikon logon*) [80e], he introduces a truth, "something true, as I thought, and beautiful" (*alethe, emoige dokein, kai kalon*) [81a]. This truth and beauty has been imparted to Socrates from enigmatic sources -

I have heard from wise men and women (*andron te tai gunaikon sophon*) who told of things divine (*theia pragmata*) that -

The sentence in the text ends in mid-sentence and this is the only point in the *Meno* where there is a deliberate impasse or breakage. One is reminded of the previous discussion concerning *antre* and *entre*. Plato seems to be here employing a method analogous to that of Mallarmé. The ellipsis (" - ") introduces a confusion as regards the philosophical status of what is now going to be said. This vulnerability is increased by the phrase "*emoige dokein*" ("as I thought") in the sentence which claims to set the argument on a surer footing; "something true, as I thought, and beautiful". The universality of Truth and Beauty becomes conditioned by a subjective

intentionality. To this point, it is clear again that there is a strong affinity between deconstruction and Platonic dialectic.

However, as before, what differentiates the latter from the former is the reintroduction by Plato of philosophical *tharros* (confidence) after an initial period of perplexity. At 81a-b, the reasoned account (*logon oiois*) of priest and priestesses (*ton iereon te kai iereion*) is invoked alongside Pindar and “many another poet of heavenly gifts” (*polloi ton poieton, osoi theioi eisin*). The *alethe* which these visionaries have imparted concerns the immortality of the soul (*ton psukhen tou anthropou einai athanaton*) [81b], living one’s life in the utmost holiness (*osiotata*) and the doctrine of knowledge as recollection (*anamnesis*) [81c]. These concepts or ideals, in particular the last paradigm concerning *anamnesis*, are what have been traditionally abstracted by commentators as the essence of the *Meno* (cf. for example Taylor). The *Meno* would be Plato’s exemplification of the doctrine of knowledge as remembrance.

The difficulty with such interpretation is that it loses the contextual nature of such ideas in Plato and here specifically in the *Meno*. At 81e for example, Socrates states that the arguments of immortality and *anamnesis* are worth only one’s trust (*pisteuon*) or faith. The *tharros* or confidence behind these arguments is therefore fundamentally heterogeneous to the kind of *tharros* / *to tharraleon* which Socrates originally criticised in the Thessalians and *Meno*. There, being *tharraleos* had the effect of thwarting the desire for knowledge. Similarly, it is excessive *tharros* which must be exorcised from the slave-boy [84c] if he is to undertake philosophical enquiry (*zeteseien*). To this point, Plato and Derrida appear to be in agreement.

What Plato wishes to avoid however is a philosophy which would remain at the negative stage of a deconstruction of false *tharros / to tharraleon*. This is the kernel of Meno's paradox. For Plato, it remains a "captious argument", an "*eristikon logon*" [80e]. One imagines that Plato would respond similarly to Derrida's deconstructive strategy. The difficulty for Plato is how to avoid the impasse of Meno's paradox and Derrida's *doubling* while at the same time avoiding the stifling *tharros* of the Thesalians and Meno.

Crucial to this debate is Socrates' discussion of the difference between understanding (*phronesis*) and right opinion (*orthē doxa*) which is first introduced at 97b. Socrates had previously been making the assumption that it is only through the guidance of knowledge (*episteme*) that human conduct is right and good [96e]. But this assumption leads Meno to such an impasse that he is unsure whether there are any good men at all -

And that makes me wonder, I must say, Socrates, whether perhaps there are no good men at all (*oud eisin agathoi andres*), or by what possible sort of process (*tropos*) good people can come to exist (*tes geneseos ton agathon gignomenon*) [96d]

Realising the absurdity (*katagelastos*) [96e] of this position, Socrates changes the assumption from knowledge being the only guide to good human conduct to there also being true opinion (*orthē doxa*) [97b] as such a guide. At 97d, Socrates differentiates between knowledge and right opinion on the grounds of the latter being like Daedalus' statues. Daedalus was reputed to be the first sculptor who contrived an ingenious mechanism in his statues by which they could move. Right opinion is analogous to these statues because unlike knowledge, it is not fastened (*dedemena* - 97d) whereas knowledge is fastened by its trammels (*desmo* - 98a).

This hypothesis of right opinion is crucial for Socrates if he is to avoid Meno's paradox. If he were to hold out for the ideal of understanding (*phronesis*), he admits himself that he would be destined to absurdity (*katagelastos*) [96e]. In contrast, the paradigm of right opinion allows Socrates to admit a continual level of perplexity (*aporia*) while nonetheless accounting for the good men (*agathoi andres*) whom Meno felt may be unintelligible at 96d. It would however be wrong to suggest that Socrates has replaced the regulative value of knowledge with the regulative value of right opinion. At 98b, Socrates is unequivocal on this point -

Socrates: And indeed I too speak as one who does not know (*ouk eidos*) but only conjectures (*all eikazon*): yet that there is a difference between right opinion and knowledge (*orthē doxa kai epistēmē*) is not at all a conjecture with me but something I would particularly assert that I knew (*phaiēn an eidenai*): there are not many things of which I would say that, but this one, at any rate, I will include among those that I know (*an on oida*). [98b]

On first inspection, this can appear to contradict Socrates' transition from the paradigm of understanding / knowledge (*phronesis / epistēmē*) to that of right opinion (*orthē doxa*). Was it not precisely the assumption of the ideal of knowledge which led to absurdity (*katagelastos*)? As with so many Platonic dialogues, there appears to be a danger here of absolute confusion. How is one to reconcile, for example, the simultaneous privileging of right opinion and knowledge when each ideal appears to exclude the other? I have already referred to the fact that a privileging of knowledge runs the risk of returning to Socrates' admitted absurdity (*katagelastos*) at 96e. By the same token, a reading of the *Meno* as a dialogue emphasising right opinion at the expense of knowledge causes a chasm between the *Meno* and later crucial dialogues such as the *Republic*. Amidst these problems, is there a possibility of reconciling the various strands in Plato?

On this issue I am in fundamental agreement with the thesis of Eduard Zeller (cf. Chapter 2) whose interpretation is worth reiterating -

Although Plato's philosophy is nowhere transmitted as a systematic whole and in the dialogues we can only observe from afar its gradual growth and development, it is only in the form of a system that any account of it can be given. The justification for this is the incontestable fact that in the dialogues we see circles spreading wider and wider until they finally embrace the whole universe [Zeller, p.126] (3)

"It is only in the form of a system that any account of it can be given" - but what kind of system is one to attribute to Plato? At *Meno* 75d, in contradistinction to the "eristic and contentious" method, Socrates introduces the "milder tone more suited to dialectic" (*praoteron pos kai dialektikeron apokrinesthai*). This "dialectical way" (*isos to dialektikoteron*), Socrates continues, does not merely involve the speaking of truth but also the "making use of those points which the questioned person (*erotemenos*) acknowledges he knows (*eidenai*)". At 84c, Socrates reiterates this fundamental point when he states that he merely asks Meno questions and does not teach him (*erotontos emou kai ou didaskontos*). This is thus Plato's dialectical way or method (*isos to dialektikoteron*). But does it enable us to make sense of the aforementioned contradictions and paradoxes?

In the measure to which Socrates shuns the didacticism or teaching (*didaskontos*) and embraces questioning (*erotontos*), the Socratic dialectical method is bound to encounter difficulty. As Socrates says at 82a, "it is no easy matter" (*all esti men ou radion*). It is this *erotontos* which leads to a deconstruction of the negative *tharros* of the Thesalians and Meno. But the crucial transition point between the ensuing contradiction, confusion and perplexity so ably encapsulated in Meno's paradox and the dialectical method takes place at the reintroduction of a positive *tharros*.

Lexically, this marks the transition from 84a to 86b (from the slave-boy's stifling *tharros / to tharraleon* to Socrates' positive use of *tharrounta* ["confidently"]). But in fact it is a transition which occurs again and again in the *Meno*, for example when at **84b** the slave-boy rediscovers a craving (*epothese*) for knowledge, at **86b-c** where Socrates tells us we will be better (*beltious*) and braver (*andriketeroi*) and less helpless (*hetton argoi*) if we follow philosophical enquiry (*zetein*) and most notably at **98b** where Socrates asserts that the difference between right opinion and knowledge is something "I would particularly assert I know" (*phaien an eidenai*).

The analysis of the *Meno* in this chapter has intended to exemplify the simultaneous proximity and distance between Plato's dialectical method and Derrida's doubling, deconstructive strategy. In the next chapter, I will analyse this relationship from the perspective of the *Phaedrus*.

CHAPTER 4 - PLATO *CONTRA* DERRIDA II: THE CASE OF THE *PHAEDRUS*

Section 4.1 - Forms in the *Phaedrus*

In Chapter 1, I outlined how Derrida diagnoses the failure of the Cartesian project as its inability to set up a “deductive system” between the idea and the “thing-in-itself”. For Descartes, the ultimate responsibility for this failure lies with the subject in so far as it is the mind of the individual which represents the locus of philosophy. This problematic of a correspondence between the subjective and the objective is also present in Plato’s work. Here, however, the terms are differently defined. Whereas for Descartes the subject is the locus, for Plato it is rather the objective Forms which guide philosophy. In many ways, the Platonic Forms can be seen as a development of Heraclitus’ notion of the *Logos*. This is particularly true of the fragment “listen not to me, but to the *logos*”.

Nonetheless, both Heraclitus and Plato also stress the need for a relationship between subjectivity and the objective Form. When, for example, Heraclitus states “I enquired into myself” or Socrates endorses “Know thyself”, they are not speaking of Cartesian introspection but rather of the ability to locate the divine element within oneself; as it were, to locate the objective in the subjective. In Plato’s work, this project has a rather tortured history. The early and middle dialogues clearly outline a metaphysics of *separation* - in the *Republic*, for example, the Good is “beyond Being”. But by the time Plato came to write the *Timaeus* [1] he had realised the difficulty of surmounting this philosophical chasm - how was the individual subject to access the Forms?

Kenneth M. Sayre in *Plato's Late Ontology*[2] makes the point that the brevity of the *Critias* might be seen as the last gasp of Plato's "two-world" ontology -

Plato's abrupt termination of Socrates' conversation with Timaeus and his companions only a few pages into the *Critias*, in fact, might possibly signal his ultimate disaffection with the "two world" ontology upon which these dialogues are explicitly based (Sayre, p.14).

Depending upon how one dates the *Phaedrus*, it is either a late middle (or "intermediate") dialogue or a very late work. Rowe, for example, sees only the *Laws* and the *Philebus* as later. Whatever view one takes, the *Phaedrus* is placed right at the nexus of the difficulties concerning Plato's interpretation of the Forms. On Sayre's view, the later Plato begins to develop a more dialectical view of the relation between subjectivity and the Forms. The *Parmenides* is the crucial deconstructive text in this regard. *Parmenides II* in particular (cf. Sayre, p.16) represents a "massive and formally conclusive refutation" of the two-world ontology. It is the *Philebus* which then builds on this deconstruction a new sense of the ontology of the Forms -

The ontology of the *Philebus* is entirely different.....in the *Philebus* the Forms are ontologically derivative.....whereas sensible objects are composed of Forms and the Unlimited, Forms themselves are composed from the same Unlimited in combination with the principle of Limit (Sayre, p.14).

Previously (for example, in the *Republic*), the Forms were said to be ontologically separated from the sensible world. This separateness of course is the basis of Aristotle's famous accusation against the Platonic Forms in the *Metaphysics* - how can philosophy continue if it has no connection to Truth? The later Plato appears to take this accusation on board and the *Phaedrus* and *Philebus* [3] in particular can be seen as attempts to bridge the chasm between the sensible and the intelligible. However before this constructive project is undertaken, Plato unequivocally undoes the logic of his prior two-world ontology. This deconstruction is already implicit in

the *Timaeus* but it is undertaken to a most extreme degree in the *Parmenides*. Understood in isolation, the *Parmenides* can only be seen as a descent into nihilism and several commentators note this specificity of the dialogue as an unclear work. For example, Mitchell H. Miller describes it as “the most enigmatic of all of Plato’s dialogues. In spite of a sustained and extensive history of discussion, there is no positive consensus about the basic issues central to its interpretation” (p.3, Miller). Similarly, Constance C. Meinwald comments: “Plato’s *Parmenides* today finds itself in a strange position: it is clearly an important work, but its import remains remarkably unclear” (p.3, Meinwald)[4].

An in-depth analysis of the *Parmenides* would take me too far beyond the stated intention of the thesis. It is significant with regard to the *Phaedrus* in so far as it is emblematic of a crisis in Plato’s concept of the Forms. In effect the *Parmenides* is a complete deconstruction of the “two world ontology” of the early Plato. Following Rowe’s [5] interpretation, I will regard the *Phaedrus* as having been written after *Parmenides II* and as thus an attempt to reground philosophy outside the prior dualism between the Forms and the world. G.R.F. Ferrari [6] for example contrasts the *Phaedrus* on precisely this level with the *Symposium* [7] -

the place of Beauty in the two dialogues is different. Diotima’s initiate comes to see Beauty just in itself; he comes to see, I suggested, that there *is* such a thing as Beauty, independent of what we find beautiful. The experience of the inspired lover in the *Phaedrus*, by contrast, is to shuttle in memory between the bodily beauty of the boy and the Beautiful itself. It is to be awoken by an exemplar of Beauty to the conviction that there is such a thing as Beauty (The boy, too, comes to have this experience, seeing the lover’s face transformed by love, made beautiful by the sight of beauty; 255b7 - d3) [‘Platonic Love’, p. 268] (8).

It would however be misguided to portray the later Plato as resolving all the questions concerning the Forms in a clear and distinct manner. The *Phaedrus* manifests such

ambiguity and reversal of argument (e.g. Socrates gives one speech which he then completely recants in a succeeding speech) that it has been interpreted throughout history as either a work of an immature (Diogenes Laertius) or senile (e.g. H. Raeder) Plato. As Derrida himself observes in “Plato’s Pharmacy” there has been a prominent reading of the *Phaedrus* as a “badly composed” dialogue. While not denying the enigmatic organisation of the *Phaedrus*, I will rather interpret this asymmetry as purposeful on Plato’s part.

From a Cartesian perspective such asymmetry by definition exemplifies a lack of clarity and distinctness i.e. a failure of philosophy. But given that Plato’s model of philosophy is more accurately comparable to Heraclitus’ concept of *orexis* or striving, one can see how asymmetry becomes precisely a condition of possibility for genuine philosophising. Before analysing the details of the *Phaedrus*, I will first outline some of the ontological tenets of the roughly contemporary (or slightly later) *Philebus* as this dialogue seems to make explicit much of the metaphysics which remains implicit in the structure of the *Phaedrus*.

The *Philebus* is Plato’s most explicit attempt to offer an alternative view of the Forms to the two-world ontology. The difficulty of trying to link subjectivity or the sensible world with the Forms, given the latter’s ontological “separation”, is overcome through the interpretation of the Forms and the sensible world as “ontologically homogeneous” (p.15, Sayre). The Forms are no longer described as ultimate but rather as “ontologically derivative” (p.14) to the extent that they (like the sensible world) partake of the principle of the Unlimited. While the *Philebus* offers no clear account of how the sensible world or its individual subjects relate to the Forms, it nonetheless has now provided the philosophical framework within which such

communication is at least possible. The irony (from a Cartesian / Derridean perspective) is that this increased possibility has not been effected by making the subject more knowledgeable but rather by conceiving of the Forms as more participant in the sensible world. In other words, the resolution lies in an increased emphasis on the object rather than on the subject. Hackforth [8] refers to this objective emphasis as being particularly a feature of the *Phaedrus*: “ a susceptibility to the influence of external Nature felt as a power lifting him (Socrates) out of his normal rational self into a state of “possession” (*enthousiasmos*)” (Hackforth, p.14). As with Ferrari’s contrast with the *Symposium*, the *Phaedrus* is again here interpreted as a paradigmatic text with regard to the intertwining of the sensible / Forms and subjective / objective. This paradigmatic aspect of the *Phaedrus* makes it a good text to foreground here in our analysis of Platonic dialectic. The importance of the *Phaedrus* to our purposes is also underlined by Derrida’s own foregrounding of the latter in “Plato’s Pharmacy”. It is therefore to the details of this complex dialogue to which I now turn.

Two crucial philosophical problems are foregrounded at the opening of the dialogue. In the first case there is the very issue of *external Nature* which Hackforth speaks of (p. 14). The significance of place or of situation is introduced by Plato in the very first words of the text -

Socrates: Where do you come from, Phaedrus my friend, and where are you going?

Phaedrus: I’ve been with Lysias, Socrates, the son of Cephalus, and I’m off for a walk outside the wall, after the long morning’s sitting there. On the instructions of our common friend Acumenus I take my walks on the open roads; he tells me that is more invigorating than walking in the colonnades.

Socrates: Yes, he’s right in saying so. [Phaedrus, 227a-b].

The importance of this reference to place lies in its relation to the problem of the Forms which was discussed above. Ferrari refers to the difference in kind between the

Symposium and the *Phaedrus* in so far as the former posits the Forms as separated while the latter sees the Forms as more embodied in the sensible world. It is therefore significant that Plato should begin the dialogue with an explicit question concerning situation and place - "where do you come from and where are you going?". The *Phaedrus* is the only dialogue where Socrates actually leaves the city and a little later in the text he will begin his second speech with an invocation to the local divinities to give him some inspiration. The suggestion is that the philosophical content of the *Phaedrus* is intrinsically linked to its contextualization "outside the city" -

Phaedrus: you, my excellent friend, strike me as the oddest of men. Anyone would take you, as you say, for a stranger being shown the country by a guide instead of a native: never leaving the the town to cross the frontier nor even, I believe, so much as setting foot outside the walls (*Phaedrus*, 230 c-d).

This declaration by Phaedrus follows an extended paen to the surroundings from Socrates. Phaedrus is mocking Socrates for his expression of awe concerning an area which should be all too familiar to a local. The wider point however concerns Socrates' overstated enthusiasm for the empirical context; for a philosopher who never leaves the city because the countryside can teach him nothing (230d) Socrates shows a remarkable love for the banks of the Ilissus -

Socrates: Upon my word, a delightful resting-place, with this tall, spreading plane, and a lovely shade from the high branches of the agnus: now that it's in full flower, it will make the place ever so fragrant. And what a lovely stream under the plane-tree, and how cool to the feet! Judging by the statuettes and images I should say its consecrated to Achelous and some of the Nymphs. And then too, isn't the freshness of the air most welcome and pleasant: and the shrill summery music of the cicada choir! And as crowning delight the grass, thick enough on a gentle slope to rest your head on most comfortably. In fact, my dear Phaedrus, you have been the stranger's perfect guide (230b-c).

This eulogy is too pronounced to be insignificant. At 230d Socrates has stated that he never leaves the city because the countryside can teach him nothing. However, this time Socrates *has* left the city and the implication would seem to be that he is

beginning to learn from his surroundings. This thesis is reinforced by Sayre's claim that there is a move away from the two world ontology in the later Plato. Dating the *Phaedrus* as a significantly late work, Socrates' eulogy to his surroundings can be interpreted as a revaluation of the sensible world *contra* his prior supposition that the sensible world can teach him nothing. Socrates' invocation of the Ilissus would thus look forward to the conception of the Forms as "ontologically homogeneous" with the empirical world in the *Philebus*.

This is precisely Ferrari's point in the essay "Platonic Love". There Ferrari describes Plato as building a "bridge" (*PL.*, p.248) in the *Phaedrus* "between love and philosophy" (*PL.*, p. 248). If Love is still a Form for Plato it is now at least an incarnate Form, a Form which manifests itself in the sensible world. This sense of incarnate Form looks forward not simply to Aristotle's conception of immanent form but more closely to the development of Christology in Christian Platonism (cf. Chapters 6 and 7). Christ would be the incarnate Form *par excellence*. In the *Phaedrus* this incarnation is exemplified by the beauty of the Ilissus (which is an exemplar of Beauty as such). There is also a sense in which Phaedrus himself represents an empirical incarnation of Beauty, leading Socrates outside the city with his seductive power. Socrates claims that it is Phaedrus' possession of the arguments of Lysias which leads him out of the city -

a hungry animal can be driven out of the city by dangling a carrot or a bit of green stuff in front of it: similarly if you proffer me volumes of speeches I don't doubt you can cart me all round Attica, and anywhere else you please [230d-e].

However, the overall context of the dialogue would seem to suggest otherwise. In the first case, Socrates will reject the basis of Lysias' very arguments concerning the

preferability of a non-lover over a lover (230e-234c), or strictly speaking the superiority of rationalism over love. Socrates' initial speech agrees with Lysias' fundamental point while disagreeing with his method, but the second Socratic speech is a complete refutation of the principle that "the rational must always be praiseworthy and the irrational always deserve censure" (235e and Hackforth p.36). In the next section, I will analyse this Socratic eulogy to love in more detail and discuss its implications for the Platonic concept of "wisdom" as opposed to "knowledge". Here my primary concern is to foreground the *objective* aspect of Eros in the *Phaedrus*, how Socrates' concern for love is also a concern for the Form of Love. Ferrari's distinction between the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* (see above) is crucial here. In the latter dialogue the conception of the Forms as "separated" becomes developed into a sense of the Forms (particularly the Form of Love) as "shuttling" between the sensible and intelligible worlds. This is manifested for example in Socrates' eulogy to the banks of the Ilissus, in the erotic play between Socrates and Phaedrus which is a continuing feature of the dialogue and in the final section on writing / speech which exemplifies the importance of what might be termed the *objective pedagogical context* in which philosophy can flourish. The last case is particularly important with regard to Derrida's interpretation to the extent that Derrida reads Socrates' privileging of speech as an example of "phonocentrism", the attempt to exclude the alienating effects of writing. The argument of "Plato's Pharmacy" (cf. Chapter 1) is that this project of repression fails and that the Platonic system is thus destined to an endless "unravelling".

Derrida himself makes no reference to possible changes in Platonic methodology in "Plato's Pharmacy" or to how the *Phaedrus* might be seen as a refutation of Plato's

earlier two-world ontology. However, a thematisation of this issue may be helpful in clarifying a Platonic response to Derrida. On my reading Derrida's interpretation of Platonic phonocentrism is an epistemological one. In other words, it is analogous to his argument against Descartes' deductive system in "Cogito and the History of Madness". Plato and Descartes try but fail to exclude a "madness" at the heart of reality. In the *Phaedrus*, this project of repression becomes most prominent according to Derrida in the last section concerning "writing" and "speech". Plato wishes to maintain the face-to-face presence of the teacher to pupil relation while excluding the "orphan" status of writing i.e. writing, unlike speech, does not require its generator to be present for its transmission. Writing (*écriture*) therefore is constituted in and by *absence* or difference / deferral (*différance*) and it is this radicality which Socrates wishes to exclude in favour of presence. Nonetheless despite this repressive moment, Derrida locates in Plato's text (as with that of Descartes) a simultaneous moment of *différance*. For example, Plato on the one hand (through the mouth of Socrates) seems to exclude writing but there is of course the fact that this refutation takes place in the overarching context of *a written dialogue*. Derrida's conclusion is that Platonism is perhaps its own self-deconstruction; Plato would seem to have already recognised the interminable movement of *différance*.

The *Phaedrus* may nonetheless be read differently. The difficulty with Derrida's interpretation is that it sees Platonism as being *double* in nature, as being first a positing of a theory (for example that of phonocentrism) and in turn a deconstruction of this theory. These two aspects of Platonism, as it were its *schizophrenia*, are irreconcilable according to Derrida. This irreconcilability is not specific to Plato's work but is generalised by Derrida to be the very nature of philosophy itself.

Certainly this sense of a “doubling” in Plato is not without foundation. I have already referred to the two-world ontology in the early Plato. Our analysis of the *Meno* in the last chapter was based around Socrates’ *anamnesis* of the Forms, this remembrance being the very basis of the philosophical project. This *anamnesis* however was only partial (it remained very fragile), this being precisely the difference between sophistic *tharros* and Socratic *tharros*. In other words, the access to the Forms is extremely tenuous. To this extent it is fair to speak of a duality in the work of Plato between the Forms and the sensible world and although this dualism is revised in later works such as the *Phaedrus* and the *Philebus*, there is a sense in which “doubling” always remains a feature of Platonism. The Forms may become “ontologically homogeneous” in the *Philebus* but they still remain the Forms and Plato also introduces the “principle of Limit” as an element heterogeneous to the sensible world. To this extent, a dualism remains.

It is however the fundamental difference between Plato’s dualism and Derrida’s “doubling” which is at issue here. Whereas Derrida’s doubling leads to an “unravelling” of philosophy, Plato’s dualism is precisely the very condition for philosophy to take place. The model of “phonocentrism” is paradigmatic here in so far as it is interpreted in fundamentally opposed ways by Derrida and Plato. For Derrida, Socrates/Plato’s privileging of speech over writing is an example of a metaphysical gesture *par excellence*, and signifies an attempt to close off the “other” of philosophy.

In contrast, in the *Phaedrus* the phonocentric model is linked to the very nature of “dialogue” as a structure of philosophising. This is particularly true of the final passages where the teacher-pupil relationship is described. For Plato, the paradigm of

speech far from representing a repression of the “other” is precisely an opening up to the other, whether that be the teacher’s opening up to the pupil or vice versa or even the philosopher’s opening up to the anti-philosophical sophist (as for example, in the case of Socrates’ discussion of Lysias’ speech). Hackforth makes the point that Socrates’ first speech is a radical example of this kind of submission to the other. Phaedrus misinterprets Socrates’ undertaking as involving a commitment to defend Lysias’ thesis (albeit with greater care and precision than Lysias himself was capable of). To this extent, Hackforth states that Socrates’ first speech is “forced” (p.37) on him by Phaedrus’ misinterpretation. Beyond the mere particulars of the issue lies the general nature of *dialogue* as in this case Socrates’ submission of his subjective philosophy to the opposed sophistic system of Phaedrus. Phonocentrism here far from involving a repression of otherness constitutes an exacerbation of otherness. Additionally, there is the fact that the Socrates’ own philosophy is transformed and altered within this very dialogue. His second speech involves a complete refutation of the thesis underlying the first speech.

Of course in one sense this is Derrida’s exact point. Although the model of phonocentrism is presented as being a repression of otherness, in reality it is built on nothing but *différance*, the difference and deferral of what Derrida calls “writing”, the other of speech. Socrates’ opening up to Phaedrus and his consequent “submission” and “recantation” are therefore for Derrida evidence of a deconstruction *ad infinitum*. That is, for Derrida, these effects of phonocentrism are destructive of the very basis of the paradigm of speech and more generally of the very basis of philosophy itself. The irony is that for Plato these movements seem to be the very vindication of philosophy as an enterprise. This conflict in interpretation stems from a

fundamentally opposed conception of the nature of philosophy. As outlined in previous chapters Derrida seems to be working with a neo-Cartesian model of philosophy where one either achieves knowledge or is destined to interminable difference. In the last chapter, employing in particular the example of the *Meno*, I put forward a skeletal outline of a three-tiered dialectic where one could locate Derrida's thinking at the second stage of a *negative deconstruction of knowledge*. Platonic dialectic was rather to be found at the third stage of a reconstructive philosophy based on faith (*pistis*) and striving (*orexaito*). In the next section, I will apply this Platonic dialectic to the question of "wisdom" (or "love" *contra* knowledge) in the *Phaedrus*.

In concluding this section, however, I will focus on the question of the Forms in the *Phaedrus*. In effect the issue of phonocentrism is a subsection of the Forms question. The model of Socrates *in dialogue with the other* (here Phaedrus, but also Lysias and by implication Sophism in general) is an analogue of the otherness of the Forms and in the *Phaedrus* one is given the further analogy of the otherness of the Ilissus (or as Hackforth describes it, the otherness of External Nature). In the *Meno*, while the paralysis of Meno's paradox was circumvented, this philosophical progress was extremely fragile, being based on a vulnerable "faith". Already at this early stage of his development Plato had moved away from the epistemologism of the sophists (in this case Gorgias/Meno), replacing the value of knowledge with that of love of wisdom. But Plato's adherence to a two-world ontology in the early dialogues creates the difficulty of accessing the Forms. It is this residual difficulty which the *Phaedrus* attempts to address - the latter dialogue is in this sense a development of the skeletal

Platonic philosophy outlined in dialogues such as the *Meno*. In contrast with the Cartesian paradigm of a clear and distinct subjective idea, the *Phaedrus* very much exemplifies the paradigm of the Object or Form in Platonism. For example at 277d-e, Socrates describes the philosophical object as being a study of the “just, the fine and the good” and crucially outlines how any subjective interpretation of this Object cannot be final. Even those who succeed in speaking accurately of such Forms cannot be ascribed the title of “being wise” -

Socrates: To call him wise seems to me to be too much, and to be fitting only in the case of a god; to call him either a lover of wisdom - a philosopher - or something like that would both fit him more and be in better taste [p.131, 278d].

This Platonic philosophy looks back to Parmenides’ sense of metaphysics as a “heavenly growth” (cf. Chapter 2: Voegelin); one grows towards the Forms. In the *Phaedrus* the Forms also begin to manifest themselves within the sensible world. The crucial point here in terms of philosophical methodology is that “spiritual development” (*psukhes paideusin*, 241c) consists in ones’ becoming more like the philosophical object rather than in the case of Husserlianism where the subject “creates” in addition to discovering truth. While Derrida sees lack of knowledge as constituting the “unravelling” of philosophy, for Plato metaphysics begins in the diminution of subjective knowledge and the opening towards the object. The *Phaedrus* perhaps better than any other Platonic dialogue exemplifies this importance of the extra-subjective. One can say that the dialogical context *per se* is already a paradigm case of extra-subjectivity in so far as it involves the philosopher in discussions outside his / her individual *cogito*. The *Phaedrus* adds extra emphasis to this perspective in its continual reference to context e.g. the descriptions of the Ilissus and this being Socrates’ first visit outside the city. In Derrida’s emphasis on a

deconstruction of epistemology, he fails to take notice of Plato's reconstructive efforts outside epistemology. In this section I have concentrated on these efforts in relation to the Forms, particularly in the *Phaedrus*. In the following section, I will focus rather on the question of "wisdom" in the *Phaedrus*.

Section 4.2 - "Wisdom" in the *Phaedrus*

The last two chapters have been concerned to develop an alternative philosophical model to that of Derrida, primarily through interpreting deconstruction as a neo-Cartesianism and contrasting this latter with a model of philosophy as "love of wisdom" (*philosophia*). In Chapter 2, I outlined how the sense of philosophy as grounded in love began with the Presocratics, most notably with Parmenides and Heraclitus. In Chapter 3, I focused on Plato's early dialogue the *Meno* as an example of the Platonic dialectic at work. This dialogue was particularly revealing insofar as it opposed a philosophical dialectic based on "faith" to a sophistic dialectic based on an over-confident (*tharraleon*) "knowledge". The sophistic dialectic was in many senses a forerunner of the Cartesian revolution in philosophy and I employed the three stages of the *Meno*'s argument as an analogue of Derrida's relation to both Cartesianism and Platonism. I concluded that whereas deconstruction remained paralysed at the second stage of an infinite regress Platonism rather offered the opportunity to move beyond this second stage to a third stage of constructive philosophy. The *Phaedrus* develops this inherent logic of the *Meno* into a more sophisticated form. Along with perhaps the *Protagoras*, the *Phaedrus* is Plato's most successful realisation of the dramatic potentiality of the dialogue form. While it shares with the *Meno* an unequivocal

critique of epistemology, it gives more substantive content to the alternative model of philosophy which will be set up in the place of the latter.

In the previous section, I focused on the question of the Forms in the *Phaedrus*. It is the new emphasis on the incarnation of the Forms which allows Plato to move beyond the tentativeness of the *Meno's* formulations. This philosophical development takes place at two levels. In the first place, Socrates continues the thematic of *tharraleos* which was begun in the *Meno*. Although this term never explicitly appears in the *Phaedrus*, the whole discussion concerning "love" is directed at the very same philosophical problem - namely, is rationalism or nonrationalism the best philosophical methodology? As with the *Meno*, Socrates eventually rejects rationalism in favour of a nonrational methodology. Here the specific discussion concerning the nature of this nonrational methodology is already more advanced than the analogous discussion in the *Meno*, but what really constitutes the difference between the two dialogues is the link which is now made between nonrationalism as a subjective capacity for "love" and the reaching out of this love towards its *object*, whether this be the sensible environment of the Ilissus, Socrates' attraction towards Phaedrus, or Socrates' concern with the Forms of the "just, the true and the good". In the "Cogito" essay Derrida declared the essence of philosophical crisis to be the chasm between the idea of infinity and the failure of rationalism to "prove" this idea. However, in the *Phaedrus* this chasm is no longer seen as being philosophically important. The failure of rationalism is basically the primary theme of the dialogue but whereas for Derrida this failure leads to an infinite regress for Plato the deconstruction of rationalism opens up the space within which a new relationship between the subject and object of philosophy can be developed.

This new conception of a subject-object reciprocity is perhaps nowhere more expressively outlined than in the opening passage on the banks of the Ilissus. This passage captures both the sense of a nonrational philosophical model and the sense that this nonrationalism must not remain a simply subjective capacity; it must rather open up to the extrasubjective context within which philosophy finds itself located. Both these insights in this opening passage revolve around the discussion of the myth of Oreithuia and Boreas. Phaedrus asks Socrates whether he believes the myth to be true -

Phaedrus: But please tell me, Socrates, for goodness' sake, do you believe this fairy-tale to be true?

Socrates: If I disbelieved (*apistoiēn*) it, like the experts (*sophoi*), I would not be extraordinary; I might then cleverly say that a blast of Boreas pushed her down from the nearby rocks while she was playing with Pharmaceia, and that when she met her death in this way she was said to have been seized by Boreas - or else from the Areopagus; for this account (*logos*) is given too, that it was from there and not from here that she was seized. But, Phaedrus, while I think such explanations attractive in other respects, they belong in my view to an over-clever (*lian de deinou*) and laborious (*epiponou*) person who is not altogether fortunate (*ou panu eutukhous*); just because after that he must set the shape of the Centaurs to rights, and again that of the Chimaera, and a mob of such things.....if someone is sceptical (*apiston*) about these, and tries to reduce each to what is likely, with his boorish kind of expertise (*agroiko tini sophia*), he'll need a good deal of leisure [229e-230a].

This important passage looks ahead to Socrates' second speech which is a more developed critique of rationalism. Indeed Hackforth makes the point that Plato is here outlining the philosophical methodology which must be applied to Socrates' later speech. If that speech is judged on rationalist terms, on the terms of a "boorish kind of expertise" (*agroiko tini sophia*), then it will be interpreted as philosophically inadmissible particularly in the context of Socrates' invocation to the "local divinities" for inspiration. Hackforth's claim however is that this earlier passage at 229-230 outlines a nonrational methodology which for Plato is the philosophical

methodology *par excellence*. This passage is not only important from an intra - *Phaedrus* perspective. It is significant that many of the concepts from the crucial passages in the *Meno* are here reiterated by Plato. For example, the maligned rationalists are again (as with Gorgias / Meno in the *Meno*) the “*sophoi*”. These sophists are criticised because they “disbelieve” (*apistoi*) and the term which Plato uses for the further reference to the scepticism of sophism is “*apiston*”. This is important with regard to the *Meno* because there the philosophers’ way out of Meno’s paradox is guided by *pistis* or belief. Once again therefore one has a fundamental contrast between the rationalism of sophism and the “belief” or “faith” of genuine philosophy. At 228b Socrates has already described himself as being “sick with passion” (*nosounti*) for hearing people speak (*logoi*). As with Heraclitus, the Socratic / Platonic *logos* is nonrational. Indeed the term *nosounti* derives from the noun *nosos* which designates sickness and in this context a “disease of the mind, especially madness”. *Nosos* can also mean distress, affliction, evil or a plague. This emphasis on the nonrational bears an affinity with Derrida’s foregrounding of “terror” and “horror” in the “Cogito” essay. But whereas Derrida sees these elements as destructive of philosophical dialectic, for Plato they constitute the precise driving force of philosophy. This will become clearer in our discussion concerning Socrates’ speech on “love” (philosophy *as* love; as Hackforth puts it “philosophy *is* love”).

Before analysing this speech and its relation to Socrates’ earlier refutation of rationalism, I will first look briefly at how Plato links this nonrationalism in the Boreas / Oreithuia passage to a crucial sense of *place* or *objective context*. In the last section I spoke of this Platonic emphasis on the extra-subjective (e.g. what Hackforth terms “External Nature”) as being fundamental to his move away from a two-world

ontology. It is therefore significant that the Boreas / Oreithuia passage is first introduced in terms of a reference or question concerning place -

Socrates: So lead on, and keep a lookout for a place for us to sit down.

Phaedrus: Well then, you see that very tall plane-tree?

Socrates: I do indeed.

Phaedrus: There's shade and a moderate breeze there, and grass to sit on, or lie on, if we like.

Socrates: Please lead on.

Phaedrus: Tell me, Socrates, wasn't it from somewhere just here that Boreas is said to have seized Oreithuia from the Ilissus?

Socrates: Yes, so it's said.

Phaedrus: Well, was it from here? The water of the stream certainly looks attractively pure and clear, and just right for young girls to play beside it.

Socrates: No, it was from a place two or three stades lower down, where one crosses over to the district of Agra; and somewhere there is an altar of Boreas (229c).

This detailed discussion of "place" appears rather bizarre in the context of the figure of Socrates who has "never left the city". However, given Sayre's thesis (see above) of the Forms becoming "ontologically homogeneous" with the sensible world in Plato's later work (e.g. the *Phaedrus*) the detailed reference becomes more understandable. In other words, "place" or one's empirical context now becomes philosophically significant in so far as the Forms are now manifest within the world. Although the altar of Boreas is said to be "two or three stades lower down" from the Ilissus, the discussion reemphasises the sense that some places may be sacred and this becomes particularly important in relation to Socrates' later invocation of the "local divinities".

It is also important that the Boreas / Oreithuia discussion directly precedes the flowery eulogy to the Ilissus at 230b-c. There, detailed and loving description is given of the plane-tree, the stream, the grass, the cicadas' song and indeed of the "sacred" spot of figurines and statuettes which appear to be dedicated to "some Nymphs and to Achelous". Socrates apologises to Phaedrus for having to "interrupt our conversation

(*logoi*)” (230a) with a question concerning *place* but the following context of eulogy to place suggests that the nonrational *logos* and the beauty of the empirical context are mutually dependent. In many respects this emphasis on *objective place* looks forward to the development of a philosophy of the Object in Neo- and Christian- Platonism. Perhaps the most striking example of this Platonic principle in operation is to be found in Meister Eckhart’s *On Detachment* [9], where Eckhart calls for a complete “annihilation of self” so as to be more “receptive” to the divine Object. It will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 with regard to De Cusa’s motif of the “incomprehensibility” of the infinite “object” -

it comes to pass that the very inaccessibility or incomprehensibility of its infinite life becomes that which is most desired and longed for. It is as if a man discovers that the treasure of his life is innumerable, unweighable and immeasurable. And this very awareness of the incomprehensibility is most desirable *not because it refers to the one comprehending but to the.....incomprehensible loveliness of the thing loved* (*Sap.*, p.107) [my emphasis] (10)

The negative reference to subjectivity is crucial here - “*not* because it refers to the one comprehending”. The focus is shifted from the locus of comprehension, the subject, to the object being comprehended, the objective or extra-subjective. This movement outside subjectivity is analogous to the emphasis on *objective place* which is found in the *Phaedrus*. A little later in “De Sapientia”, De Cusa explicitly states that the eternal wisdom will not be obtained if the criterion of subjectivity is held to -

the eternal wisdom will not be obtained unless the possessor keeps nothing of his own. That which we have of our own are our vices and that which we have of the eternal wisdom are nothing but good things (*Sap.*, p.112)

In “De Docta Ignorantia” [11], De Cusa further distinguishes between the “vegetative” (*DI*, p.84) and “intellectual” (*DI*, p.94) aspects of subjectivity as they relate to their respective objects. In this context, “vegetative” seems to have a

broader than usual sense, including all kinds of rationalism which claim to exhaustively understand their objects. The nature of vegetative power, De Cusa states, is that it “transmutes nourishment into its own system” (*DI.*, p.84), the food becomes “the nature of the feeder” (*DI.*, p. 95) - in other words, the “object” is reduced to “subjective” terms. In contrast, in genuine philosophy where the subject is directed towards its object -

the food of life is eaten ever, but never to become the nature of the partaker....the intellect becomes the thing it understands (*DI.*, p.96)

The focus is therefore shifted - from rationalism where the object becomes subjective, to the life of the “intellectual spirit” where the subject as it were becomes its object. De Cusa’s analysis of this problem of “objectivity” is a direct development of the logic of the *Phaedrus* - both in the sense of the latter’s emphasis on *objective place* (the Ilissus etc) and in the sense of Socrates’ subjective wisdom being influenced by extra-subjective “local divinities”. In the first case of *objective place* there is a further quotation from “De Sapientia” which perfectly captures this Platonic logic of the “object” - “Wisdom cries out in the streets and her cry is that she dwells in the highest”. If one was to translate this into the terms of the *Phaedrus* one might say that wisdom cries out along the banks of the river Ilissus. The second sense of the “objective” in the *Phaedrus* as a wisdom which comes from outside oneself (as in the case of Socrates’ being “possessed” by divinity; 238d) finds a closer analogue in Augustine’s concept of “intellectual vision” than in De Cusa’s more alienated *learned ignorance* but the De Cusa’s *Idiota* [12] dialogues are nonetheless an explicit carrying on of the Socratic ideal of wisdom. I will discuss these issues in more detail in Chapter 7. In concluding this chapter, I will be concerned rather with the specifics of

the Socratic ideal of wisdom as outlined in the *Phaedrus* and how once again this concept might be employed against Derrida's reading of philosophy in "Plato's Pharmacy".

The Socratic ideal of wisdom as a "divine madness" or "love" is most explicitly stated in Socrates' second speech, the third and final speech of the *Phaedrus* (after Lysias' and Socrates' first speech). However, the essence of this wisdom is already articulated by Socrates directly after Lysias' speech. He expresses his philosophical discontent with Lysias' thinking as follows -

Phaedrus: Where have you heard anything better than this?

Socrates: I can't tell you off-hand; but I'm sure I have heard something better, from the fair Sappho maybe, or the wise Anacreon, or perhaps some prose writer. What ground, you may ask, have I for saying so? Good sir, there is something welling up within my breast, which makes me feel that I could find something different, and something better, to say. I am of course well aware it can't be anything originating in my own mind, for I know my own ignorance; so I suppose it can only be that it has been poured into me, through my ears, as into a vessel, from some external source; though in my stupid fashion I have actually forgotten how, and from whom, I heard it (235c-d).

The reference at this early stage of the *Phaedrus* to an "external source" for Socrates' arguments is an initial thematization of the pronounced sense of "divine possession" which will be integral to Socrates' second speech. At 242b-c Socrates declares that he has been visited by a "divine sign" which now necessitates him to recant his original speech -

At the moment when I was about to cross the river, dear friend, there came to me my familiar divine sign - which always checks me when on the point of doing something or other - and all at once I seemed to hear a voice, forbidding me to leave the spot until I had made atonement for some offence to heaven. Now, you must know, I am a seer; not a very good one, it's true, but, like a poor scholar, good enough for my own purposes; hence I understand already well enough what my offence was. The fact is, you know, Phaedrus, the mind itself has a kind of divining power; for I felt disturbed some while ago as I was delivering that speech, and had a misgiving lest I might, in the words of Ibycus

By sinning in the sight of God win high renown from man.

But now I realise my sin (242c-d).

At this point of the dialogue Socrates is just about to introduce his second speech which will be a complete recantation of both the initial speech of Lysias (recounted by Phaedrus) and Socrates' own first speech. "I am a seer" - it is crucial that at this juncture in the dialogue Socrates once again reiterates his nonrational paradigm. Already through the myth of Boreas / Oreithyia Socrates has outlined his distrust of rationalism and its "over-clever... boorish kind of expertise", emphasising in contrast the "belief" (*pistis*) upon which nonrational mythology is dependent. And as we saw above, even introducing his first speech Socrates is clear in distancing his thinking from rationalism, in this case in so far as his thoughts "cannot be anything originating in his own mind" (the direct contrast with the Cartesian ideal of subjective clear and distinct ideas is obvious). But it is Socrates' second speech which constitutes the centre-point of the dialogue, at least in terms of its underlying philosophy if not its "formal structure" (Hackforth, p.136).

On this point, Hackforth claims that there is an apparent "formal defect" (Hackforth, p.137) in the *Phaedrus* to the extent that the formal structure of the dialogue, which appears to be guided by the importance of "dialectic" as a new philosophical methodology (of "collection and division"; 264e-266b) is undermined by the nonrational excess of the second speech. Hackforth nonetheless sees this "formal defect" as purposeful on Plato's part - the *Phaedrus* is really about philosophy as love and this underlying basis of the dialogue is perfectly exemplified by the extremism of the second speech. Formalism, despite initial appearances, plays only a small part in the *Phaedrus*. There is also a point to be made here concerning the nature of Plato's

formalism. The distinction which Hackforth maintains between the second Socratic speech and the formal emphasis on dialectic assumes that the latter is exclusively rational. But Hackforth himself clearly shows that even the formal aspects of the *Phaedrus* are far from being rationalist in a simple sense of the term. While Socrates sets very high standards for dialectical procedure in general his own employment of this technique in the *Phaedrus* is undermined by inconsistency and a lack of precisely the clear definition which the new methodology is intended to inaugurate. Commenting for example on the passage 265e-266b, Hackforth states the following -

There are serious difficulties in this paragraph. Socrates speaks as though the generic concept of madness (*to aphron, paranoia, mania*) had been common to his two speeches, and there had been a formal divisional procedure followed in both of them. Neither of these things is true. In the first speech Socrates starts by bringing *eros* under the genus *epithumia* but this is superseded by *hubris*, which is declared to be *polumeles kai polueides* (238a); it is then shown that *eros* is a species of *hubris*, but this is done not by successive dichotomies, but by an informal discrimination from an indefinite number of other species, of which only two are named. It is only in the second speech that Socrates starts with a clear concept of "madness"; but here again there is no scheme of successive divisions, whether dichotomous or other: there is merely the single step of a fourfold division.

It must therefore be admitted that Socrates' account of the dialectical procedure followed in his speeches is far from exact (Hackforth, p.133).

On this interpretation the extremism of the second speech (i.e. its complete rejection of rationalism) is no longer diametrically opposed to the formalism concerning dialectic. The emphasis on dialectic now becomes at least compatible with the stress on Eros so pronounced in the second speech in so far as the new Socratic dialectic is itself far from being completely rational (or as Hackforth observes, "far from exact"). This affinity between Eros and dialectic seems hardly surprising. The Platonic dialectic is after all a dialectic grounded in "love" - at 266b for example Socrates describes himself as a "lover (*erastes*) of these divisions and collections". It seems

possible therefore to read Hackforth's so-called "formal defect" in the Platonic dialectic as being purposeful on Plato's part. If dialectic is driven by a love of wisdom rather than wisdom itself (which at 266b Socrates describes as being accessible to God alone; "God alone knows") then one can refer its nonfinalisation back to, for example, the Heraclitean model of striving (or *orexis*) for an unattainable truth. In Epistle VII, surveying a life lived as a seeker after truth, Plato himself states that he has never outlined a manual of his doctrine (341c; Hackforth p.163) thus supporting the sense of philosophy as an open-ended project. In other words the failure of the Platonic dialectic in the *Phaedrus* to live up to its stated intentions is not a specific failure due to error which might be superseded by a better methodology. Rather this is the failure which is intrinsic to the philosophical project as such - as Socrates himself so frequently observes, one can know only that one doesn't know. Understood from this perspective the emphasis on dialectic no longer seems incongruous with the radical invocation to "mania" in Socrates' second speech. The second speech itself is Plato's most eloquent invocation of philosophy as an activity of the erotic. Socrates outlines the thrust of the speech in the interlude prior to the speech when he locates the defect of the previous two speeches in their conviction that love could involve any kind of evil. Is not love a god, Socrates asks Phaedrus rhetorically, and the two early speeches in their attribution of evil to it have been guilty of gross blasphemy -

Socrates: Well, do you not hold Love to be a god, the child of Aphrodite?

Phaedrus: He is certainly said to be.

Socrates: But not according to Lysias, and not according to that discourse of yours which you caused my lips to utter by putting a spell on them. If Love is, as he is indeed, a god or a divine being, he cannot be an evil thing: yet this pair of speeches treated him as evil. That then was their offence towards Love.....in awe of Love himself, I should like to wash the bitter taste out of my mouth with a draught of wholesome discourse; and my advice to Lysias is

that he should lose no time in telling us that, other things being equal, favour should be accorded to the lover rather than to the non-lover (242d-e, 243d).

Socrates' second speech is basically a spirited development of the logic of this interlude. In the first case, Socrates makes clear that the primary reason for the preferability of a lover over a nonlover derives not from the former's rationality but rather from an affirmation of his / her very *mania* ("in reality, the greatest blessings come by way of madness, indeed of madness that is heaven-sent" 244a-b). Socrates then delineates three types of "divine madness" of which the manic "love" of the philosopher is posited as a fourth possibility. The three initial types of divine madness described are prophecy (244d), the mania of rites of purification (244e) and the poetic madness for which the Muses are the source (244e). This analysis is intended as a revaluation of madness against those who would wish to subordinate it to sanity or rationalism -

let us not be disturbed by an argument that seeks to scare us into preferring the friendship of the sane to that of the passionate. For there is something more that it must prove if it is to carry the day, namely that love is not a thing sent from heaven for the advantage both of lover and beloved. What we have to prove is the opposite, namely that this sort of madness is a gift of the gods, fraught with the highest bliss. And our proof assuredly will prevail with the wise, though not with the learned (245b-c).

The final point deserves reiteration - "our proof assuredly will prevail with the wise, though not with the learned". Socrates is reemphasising his distance from the rationalists. If madness is indeed a gift from the gods, a divine blessing, this is not something which can be understood by what he has earlier referred to as the "over-clever" and "laborious" explanations of science. Just as the Boreas / Oreithuia myth must be accepted on "faith" (*pistis*), so too the sense of a blessed divine madness is inaccessible to "the learned". It is, we are told, accessible to the "wise" and this

accessibility will come through an analysis of the “nature of soul, divine and human, its experiences and its activities” (245c).

Socrates initially describes his projected analysis of soul as a “proof” (245c), but again this turns out to be no rationalist proof but rather an enigmatic myth. Frutiger classifies this particular myth as *parascientific* and his explanation of this type of myth in general is instructive with regard to the difference between rationalism and the nature of Platonic dialectic -

To complete the results of *logos*, to extend them beyond the limits of pure reason, to take the place, by way of *deuteros plous*, of dialectic when it comes up against some impenetrable mystery - that is the function of those myths which, for want of a better epithet, we have called parascientific (Frutiger, p.223).

It is this extra-rational function which Frutiger (and Hackforth; “I would agree that our myth belongs to this class”, p.76) believes the Myth of the Soul (246a-247c) performs in the *Phaedrus*. When one considers that Socrates has introduced the analysis of the soul as being the philosophical basis of the invocation of divinity (or “divine madness”) it is clear that this invocation of “divine madness” does not rest on a rational foundation. Following Frutiger and Hackforth one might say that the *Phaedrus* rests on a *parascientific* basis - extending philosophy “beyond the limits of pure reason” into the realm of “impenetrable mystery”. This sense is reinforced at the very beginning of the telling of the myth when Socrates disallows a finalised human understanding of the soul, distinguishing between the inaccessible attributes which the soul has in itself (*oion esti*) and the accessible knowledge of what it resembles (*hoi oiike*) [246a]. Socrates then proceeds to compare the soul to a winged charioteer driving a team of winged horses. Again Socrates is quick to make a distinction between the divine chariots and the merely human -

Let it (the soul) be likened to the union of powers in a team of winged steeds and their winged charioteer. Now all the gods' steeds and all their charioteers are good, and of good stock; but with other beings it is not wholly so. With us men, in the first place, it is a pair of steeds that the charioteer controls; moreover one of them is noble and good, and of good stock, while the other has the opposite character, and his stock is opposite. Hence the task of our charioteer is difficult and troublesome (246a).

This duality between the divine and the human at the level of soul causes the human charioteer to be continuously “confounded by her steeds” (248a); in the effort to reach that place where true Being dwells (247c) even the best human charioteers are capable of only seeing in part (“her unruly steeds sees in part, but in part sees not”; 248a). The “rest” are condemned to be “sucked down as they travel, they trample and tread upon one another, this one striving to outstrip that” (248a). Socrates makes clear that if souls succeed in maintaining their direct vision of Being (thus “following in the train of a god” 248c) they will remain exempt from a “fall” (Hermeias, quoted by Hackforth p.79) into a body. But once they come across any “mischance”(suntukhia; 248c) their fall into embodiment becomes inevitable and it is simply a question of what level of embodiment they enter. Socrates distinguishes between nine levels of embodied life (248d) positioning the worst kinds of soul at the ninth stage of being a “tyrant” and the eight stage of being a “sophist or demagogue” (248e). The first stage unsurprisingly is the level at which the soul of the philosopher enters embodied life -

the soul that hath seen the most of being shall enter into the human babe that shall grow into a seeker after wisdom or beauty (*philokalos*), a follower of the muses (*mousikos*) and a lover (*erotikos*) [248d].

As Hackforth notes (Hackforth, p. 83), the *philokalos*, *mousikos* and *erotikos* are not persons other than the *philosophos* (the philosopher), but denote aspects of him. Through the enigmatic Myth of the Soul which takes the *Phaedrus* “beyond the

bounds of pure reason” (Frutiger) [13] one therefore has a Platonic delineation of the philosopher as a being in harmony with wisdom, beauty and love respectively. It is this mythology which leads into Socrates’ introduction of the fourth and highest kind of “divine madness”, the *mania* of this very philosophical soul. At 249d Socrates outlines the process by which initiation into this *mania* takes place. Every human soul, Socrates tells us, by reason of its nature has had at least some contemplation of true Being (249d). To remember this vision of Being is however not easy for every soul to the extent that, for example, the reasoning powers of man are merely “dull organs” (*di amudron organon* - 250b-c; cf. also Hackforth p.95). But the sensible manifestation of beauty is singled out by Socrates as an exception to this dullness -

but with beauty it is otherwise. Beauty it was ours to see in all its brightness in those days when, amidst that happy company, we beheld with our eyes that blessed vision, ourselves in the train of Zeus.....Now beauty, as we said, shone brightest amidst these visions, and in this world below we apprehend it through the clearest of our senses, clear and resplendent. For sight is the keenest mode of perception vouchsafed us through the body; wisdom, indeed, we cannot see thereby - how passionate had been our desire for her, if she had granted us so clear an image of herself to gaze upon - nor yet any other of those beloved objects, save only beauty; for beauty alone this has been ordained, to be most manifest to sense and most lovely of them all (250d).

This sense of a specific incarnation of Beauty in the sensible world refers back to the discussion in Section 4.2 concerning the later Plato’s break with his earlier two-world ontology. Here in the *Phaedrus* the Form of Beauty is no longer ontologically separated from the sensible world but is rather embodied within this very world. For the purposes of this section’s discussion of wisdom, the crucial point concerning “beauty” is one’s mode of access to it. Again, the concept of rational access is radically undermined by Plato. In a passage which must rank as one of the most intense paens to Eros in the history of philosophy, Socrates makes clear that it is not reason which should relate to this Beauty but rather a “madness” characterized by

every aspect of extreme emotion from shuddering fever and anguish to floods of passion and rejoicing -

when one who is fresh from the mystery, and saw much of the vision, beholds a godlike face or bodily form that truly expresses beauty, first there comes upon him a shuddering and a measure of that awe which the vision inspired, and then reverence as at the sight of a god; and but for fear of being deemed a very madman he would offer sacrifice to his beloved, as to a holy image of deity. Next, with the passing of the shudder, a strange sweating and fever seizes him: for by reason of the stream of beauty entering in through his eyes there comes a warmth, whereby his soul's plumage is fostered; and with that warmth the roots of the wings are melted, which for long had been so hardened and closed up that nothing could grow; then as the nourishment is poured in the stump of the wing swells and hastens to grow from the root over the whole substance of the soul: for aforesaid the whole soul was furnished with wings (251a-c).

Socrates then describes the analogous state of the lover who is “throbbing with ferment in every part” and alternating between great anguish and joy (251c-e); as with the first lover the throes of love allow her to regrow the wings of her soul (the section 248e-249d describes how the nonphilosophical soul cannot regrow its wings and return to its heavenly home in less than 10,000 years, but the philosophical lover can achieve this return in only 3,000 years). As Hackforth observes, while the “formal” aim of the *Phaedrus* may be to introduce a new philosophical dialectic the real underlying philosophical motivation is rather the “praise of the philosophic life as Plato and Socrates understood it” (p. 164), as a life guided by Eros rather than reason. In applying this point to Derrida's reading of Plato one can say that “Plato's Pharmacy” interprets the emphasis on *madness* in the *Phaedrus* as a sign of the “unravelling” of Platonic dialectic. In contrast the reading outlined by Hackforth (and other commentators such as Frutiger and Ferrari) sees Eros as being the very condition of Platonic dialectic, here understood as the “spiritual education” (241c) of the soul i.e the regrowing of the soul's wings.

One possible rejoinder to this interpretation of the *Phaedrus* as an anti-epistemological dialogue is the concluding discussion concerning the relationship between speech and writing, and the possible types of so-called “good” and “bad” writing and “good” and “bad” speech (cf. particularly 259e-261a). The relevance of this discussion for the problem of epistemology is located in the apparent identification which Socrates makes at this point between philosophy and “knowledge” -

Socrates: Well, the subject we proposed for inquiry just now was the nature of good and bad speaking and writing: so we are to inquire into that.

Phaedrus: Plainly.

Socrates: Then does not a good and successful discourse presuppose a *knowledge* in the mind of the speaker of the truth about his subject? (my emphasis; 259e).

Whereas the refutation of Lysias’ speech seemed to involve a radical critique of knowledge, now in the discussion concerning speech / writing it is the *episteme* of philosophy which appears to be privileged over the mere semblance of *episteme* which is characteristic of sophism -

Phaedrus: what I have heard is that the intending orator is under no necessity of understanding what is truly just, but only what is likely to be thought just by the body of men who are to give judgement; nor need he know what is truly good or noble, but what will be thought so; since it is on the latter, not the former, that persuasion depends (260a).

But as with the aforementioned “formal defect” (Hackforth, p.137) in the *Phaedrus*, one can explain this apparent inconsistency concerning epistemology without serious difficulty. The primary point to be noted is that the Platonic “knowledge” (259e) here described can only come by way of a continuous dialogue, preferably between a teacher and a pupil (276e-277a). The reciprocity involved in this relation already differentiates it from the subject-centred epistemology of the Cartesian type - one

cannot find truth by merely looking to one's isolated reason. Additionally, the position of the teacher as well as that of the pupil is open to continuous vulnerability - as Socrates says at one point, wisdom is proper only to the gods -

To call him (i.e. the dialectician) wise, Phaedrus, would, I think, be going too far: the epithet is proper only to a god; a name that would fit him better, and have more seemliness, would be "lover of wisdom", or something similar (278d).

The most revealing case in point is of course the teacher-pupil relation of Socrates / Phaedrus, where Socrates' position as teacher does not constitute a self-contained knowledge but is rather open to being educated by his interlocutor Phaedrus as well as by the outside context of the Ilissus.

Crucially, from a Platonic perspective, although Socrates seems to build the distinction between philosophy and sophism on a knowledge / delusion axis, the identification of Socrates / philosophy with "knowledge" is misleading if one takes it to be a refutation of the previous emphasis on Eros. The situation is analogous to Hackforth's discussion of the "formal defect" in the discontinuity between the emphasis on Eros *and* on a new method of rational dialectic. This discontinuity is superseded once one sees how the method of dialectic is actually employed in the argument of the *Phaedrus*. Far from being a conclusive rational system (such as Cartesianism) the method of dialectic is rather a nonfinalised method of *moving towards* the truth rather than actually fully grasping the latter. This point is reinforced by Socrates when he talks of philosophy as being grounded on "pieces" of knowledge as opposed to the "unity" of definition proposed by the dialectical method of *collection*. The case is similar with the problem of the "knowledge" which Socrates describes as being the definitive difference between metaphysics and sophism. Taken at his word, Socrates' philosophical ideal would exclude for example the very method

of dialectic which seems completely incapable of achieving “knowledge”. This point is reinforced by Socrates’ concluding prayer to Pan and the Nymphs of the local area (279b-c). The “knowledge” achieved by the dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus is through this very prayer thematised as irreducibly *mystical* (i.e. nonrational) and also crucially as *nonfinalised*. The prayer concerns the vulnerability of both Socrates’ and Phaedrus’ future about which only the gods seem to have knowledge - in their respective ignorance, Socrates and Phaedrus must rely on the epistemological inconclusiveness of prayer. One can also make reference in this context to the analogous prophecy made by Socrates concerning the future of the orator Isocrates with regard to philosophy (279a-b); a future similarly divested of certainty and made even more problematic by the hindsight available to Plato’s readers. The prophecy is described by Socrates as being “ a report which I convey from the gods of this place” (279b). To this extent, it is fair to question any simple reading of the reference to “knowledge” in the concluding section. Just as with the method of dialectic, the surrounding context is suggestive of an undermining of epistemology and a strong adherence to the ideal of a *love of wisdom* rather than a possession of wisdom.

Near the end of the dialogue (278b) , in summing up the prior arguments, Socrates explicitly reiterates the empirical context of the discussion, making clear that the banks of the Ilissus have been crucial (along with the local divinities) in inspiring his philosophical insight -

Socrates: Then we may regard our literary pastime as having reached a satisfactory conclusion. Do you now go and tell Lysias that we two went down to the stream where is the holy place of the Nymphs, and there listened to words which charged us to deliver a message (278b).

Any discussion of “wisdom” in the *Phaedrus* must therefore combine a sense of the subjective nonrationalism (i.e. the paradigm of “divine possession”) with the

emphasis on the objective nonrationalism (e.g. the divinisation of the Ilissus as an inspirational *place*). It is this doubling aspect of Platonism which makes it seem similar to the structure of deconstruction, but whereas Derrida reads this doubling as an “unravelling” Plato rather interprets it as providing the possibility within which philosophy can progress beyond the epistemological quagmire of Meno’s paradox. My last four chapters have been concerned to address the underlying problem from the perspective of Derrida’s interpretation of Plato in “Plato’s Pharmacy”, seeking in chapters 2, 3 and 4 to offer an alternative to the interminability of *différance*. The next three chapters will be focused on the same philosophical issue (“wisdom” *contra* “knowledge”) but primarily with regard to Derrida’s readings of Neo- and Christian-Platonism. In the next chapter, I will specifically concentrate on several Derridean texts so as to clarify the characteristic features of the deconstructive reading of Platonism. Having delineated the primary aspects of this reading, I will then in Chapters 6 and 7 attempt to provide a counter-interpretation of Platonism focusing on the work of Plotinus, Augustine, Boethius and Nicholas De Cusa respectively. I will continue to make reference to Plato’s own work and its relation to Derrida’s as appropriate. Finally in the Conclusion I will sketch one way in which the reworking of an ancient-modern quarrel points beyond deconstruction towards a renewal of Platonism.

CHAPTER 5 - DERRIDA ON “PLATONISM”: DECONSTRUCTION, APOPHASIS AND DIALECTIC

Section 5.1 - Prefatory Remarks

In the first four chapters, I introduced the problematic of ‘Derrida and Plato’. After setting the stage by exploring Derrida’s symbiotic relationship with Cartesianism, the first chapter outlined Derrida’s influential reading of Plato in “Plato’s Pharmacy”, which stresses an interminable *doubling* at the heart of the Platonic dialogues. In the next three chapters, I attempted to elaborate an alternative reading of Plato based initially on the influence of Heraclitus / Parmenides (chapter 2) and then on the interpretation of specific Platonic works, the *Meno* (chapter 3) and the *Phaedrus* (chapter 4). In this reading of Plato, I emphasised a three-tiered dialectic -

Stage 1 - The disabblingly arrogant (*tharraleon*) character of sophism

Stage 2 - The negative deconstruction of such sophism (practised by Derrida *and* Plato)

Stage 3 - The positive overcoming of *aporia* through faith (*pistis*) and striving (*orexis*) [practised by the Presocratics and Plato but *not* by Derrida].

My analysis of the relationship between Derrida and “Platonism” will follow a similar trajectory, locating an enigmatic dialectic in the latter which remains absent in the former. Before introducing the details of this debate, it will be helpful to clarify the relationship between “Plato” and what I have rather schematically termed “Platonism”. By “Plato”, I refer exclusively to the Athenian author of the famous dialogues. “Platonism” however is a more bastardised concept. It includes the neo-

Platonism of Plotinus, the early medieval Christian Platonism of Augustine, the dual pagan / Christian Platonism of Boethius and the late medieval Christian Platonism of de Cusa. In each of these cases, there are obvious differences between style and content. Fundamentally, however, each of the four examples remains an inheritor (and developer) of the Platonic legacy. There are other examples of course - the pseudo-Dionysius, Scotus Erigena, Bonaventura, Duns Scotus, Angelus Silesius [1] etc. Aside from questions of space, I have chosen the four thinkers specified because of their explicit advocacy of the three-tiered dialectic mentioned above. In other words, all four Platonists (like Plato himself) combine a provisional stress on negativity with an ultimate recourse to affirmation and the positing of wisdom.

This positive dimension differentiates these thinkers from Derrida but also from less positive aspects of the Platonic heritage. The “apophasis” which Derrida foregrounds in negative theology (most notably in the essay *Sauf le nom*) [2] is on my interpretation closer to the second stage of the Platonic dialectic than to the third i.e., closer to deconstructive impasse than to an overcoming affirmation. In the essay *Passions* [3] Derrida makes reference to the philosophical paralysis created by the Platonic term *khora* (taken from the *Timaeus*) -

khora discourages, it “is” precisely what disarms efforts at persuasion - and whoever would like to find the heart to believe or the desire to make believe: for example, in the figures, tropes, or seductions of discourse (p.xv, *OTN*).

This theme of a *discouraging* or *disarming* of philosophy is developed in the essay *Sauf le nom*. Derrida cites the complex “history” of negative theology as “one of the most remarkable manifestations of this self-difference” (p.71, *OTN*), i.e. the self-difference of the so-called History of Metaphysics. This “self-difference” is found most acutely at moments of *apophasis*, such as Plato’s reference to the *khora*. It is

this emphasis on *aporia* which links deconstruction to an already self-differing philosophical tradition. Alongside this emphasis on apophasis, however, there is also a strong *reactive* moment of philosophy, that of the dialectic of *Aufklärung* -

it is true that, *on the other hand*, and according to the law of the same *double bind*, the dissident uprooting (i.e. apophasis) can claim to fulfill the vocation or the promise of Christianity in its most historic essence; thereby it responds to the call and to the gift of Christ, as it would resonate everywhere, in the ages of ages, rendering itself responsible for testifying before him, that is, before God (*Aufklärung* rather than Enlightenment.....) [p.72, *OTN*].

The reference here by Derrida to *Aufklärung* is revealing. It can be referred back to the discussion in *Passions* of that exemplary thinker of *Aufklärung*, Kant. In *Passions*, Derrida outlines a deconstruction of Kantian morality centred around the concept of a dutiful and responsible *self*. The concept of a free selfhood is integral to a Kantian notion of *Aufklärung*. In the essay "What is *Aufklärung*?" [4], Kant makes this point clearly -

Aufklärung is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. *Sapere aude!* (Dare to be wise). "Have courage to use your own reason!" - that is the motto of *Aufklärung*. (p.462).

In *Passions*, Derrida outlines how this rationalism underlies the Kantian concept of responsibility and describes this conceptual matrix as "the most classically metaphysical definition of responsibility" (*Pass.*, p.10). As we saw above, this supposed affinity between Kantianism and classicism is extended in *Sauf le Nom* where Derrida describes the essentialism of Christianity as an *Aufklärung*. It is in contrast to this monolithism that Derrida emphasises apophasis in *Sauf le Nom*, a movement he describes as the "self-difference" (*OTN*, p.71) of the metaphysical tradition.

In this Preface I will not enter into the details of these analyses as these points will be developed in more detail in the succeeding sections where Derrida's texts will be examined closely. Here I will rather propose a more general question: if Derrida's equation of Kantian and classical morality is mistaken, does this not call into question his avowal of apophasis, an avowal which seems to be dependent upon the congruence of Kantianism and classicism? For me, this is a rhetorical question which I elaborate so as once again to thematize an *ancient-modern quarrel*. On my interpretation, there is a fundamental opposition between Kantianism (as a "modern" philosophy) and Derrida's so-called "classical metaphysics" which not only includes Platonism but cites the latter as the first defining moment of the Western heritage. This opposition centres around the difference between the concepts of "wisdom" (classicism) and "knowledge" (modernity). Derrida's critique of Kantian epistemology in *Passions* becomes in *Sauf le Nom* the basis of a critique of a classical *Aufklärung* and the advocacy of a very particular kind of negative theology. But the critique of Kantian epistemology does not hold for the critique of classical wisdom and thus the advocacy of negative theology becomes problematic.

One can relate this issue back to our original three stages of Platonic dialectic. An example of the first stage of this dialectic would be Kantian epistemology and the responsible and dutiful subject which it founds. In problematizing this Kantianism Derrida moves to the second stage -

responsibility would be *problematic* to the extent that it could sometimes, perhaps even always, be what one takes, not for oneself, *in one's own name* and *before the other* (the most classically metaphysical definition of responsibility) but what one must take for another, in his place, in the name of the other or of oneself as other, before another other, and an other of the other, namely the very undeniable of ethics (p.10 / 11, *OTN*).

Kantian epistemology is thereby undermined by an “other” which refuses to be reduced to the concepts of responsibility or duty. This brings Derrida from the first epistemological stage to the second deconstructive stage. In *Sauf le Nom*, Derrida repeats this movement but the first stage is now characterized as a classical *Aufklärung*, most particularly a Christian essentialism. This is contrasted by Derrida with a second stage of Platonic or Christian apophasis, most particularly the work of Angelus Silesius. The difficulty with this interpretation is that it hinges firstly on an identification of Kantianism (representing modern *Aufklärung*) with Christian essentialism (representing classical *Aufklärung*), and secondly an identification of deconstruction with Platonic / Christian apophasis. Both of these identifications are problematic. To put it succinctly, on my interpretation modern *Aufklärung* represents the first stage of the dialectic, Derridean deconstruction the second, and *both* classical “essentialism” and “apophasis” (at least of the Platonic / Christian variety) can be located at the third stage.

In other words, the respective identifications of Kantianism with classical *Aufklärung* and deconstruction with classical apophasis appear inadmissible. In the next section, I will develop the nature of this problematicity from the perspective of Derrida’s three essays, *Passions*, *Sauf le Nom* and *Khora* [5]. In the following section I will analyse two other relevant Derrida texts, ‘How to avoid speaking: Denials’ and *The Gift of Death*.

Section 5.2 - Questioning Derrida's "Crisis" - On the Problem of the "Problem"

Each of these three essays, *Passions*, *Sauf le Nom* and *Khora*, forms an independent work and can be read as such. If it has nonetheless been judged advisable to publish them simultaneously, this is because, in spite of the singular origin of each of them, the same thematic thread runs through the three. They form a sort of *Essay on the Name* - in three chapters or three steps.

Derrida (OTN, p.xiv /xv)

Derrida here tells us of a common "thematic thread" linking the three essays, *Passions*, *Sauf le Nom* and *Khora*. This commonality concerns the question of "the name". The essay which is published first in the English translation edition, "Passions", puts forward a deconstruction of what is termed a "classically metaphysical" (OTN, p.10) attitude towards the name. This attitude for Derrida is represented by the system of Kantianism, most particularly its moral system e.g. the Kantian concepts of duty and responsibility -

There would be a concept and a problem (of this or that, of duty, for example, it matters little for the moment), that is to say, something determinable by a knowing ("what matters is knowing whether") and that lies before you, there before you (*problema*).....like an *object* pro-posed or posed in advance....therefore quite as much a *subject* proposed (p.10, OTN).

While 'Passions' outlines a deconstruction of this Kantian subject-object epistemology, Derrida is keen to emphasise a positive aspect of the relation between Kant and deconstruction -

we cite once more the *Groundwork for a Metaphysics of Morals* of Kant, our exemplary "critical reader", indebted as we are, as his heirs, to the great philosopher of critique (p.8, OTN).

The propositions of "Passions" are thus adumbrated "against Kant" (p.7, OTN), but this "against" is ambiguous. With reference to Derrida's description of contemporary philosophy as being "indebted" (OTN, p.8) to Kant, "as his heirs" (OTN, p.8) the suggestion would appear to be that deconstruction represents a development of

Kantianism rather than a simple refutation of it, a kind of neo-Kantianism (obviously in the general sense rather than with regard to the specific school of neo-Kantianism). This claim is consistent with the earlier discussion of Derrida's relation to Husserl, and of Husserl's own Cartesian / Kantian heritage. Indeed a little further on in the text Derrida makes an implicit reference to Descartes when he states that the so-called classically metaphysical system of naming / responsibility involves the positing of the same "I think" as accompanying all one's representations, a clear invocation of Descartes' *Cogito ergo sum*.

For Derrida, the philosophical difficulty or problem stems from this very positing of a self-identical "I" or a determinable knowing by Descartes or Kant (and here Derrida seems to see the great difference between Descartes and Kant as being insignificant in relation to their more fundamental agreement) -

responsibility would be *problematic* to the further extent that it could sometimes, perhaps even always, be what one takes, not for oneself in *one's own name* and *before the other* (the most classically metaphysical definition of responsibility) but what one must take for another, in his place, in the name of the other or of oneself as other, before another other, and an other of the other, namely the very undeniable of ethics (p.10, *OTN*).

This very "otherness" becomes irreconcilable with the classically metaphysical definitions of responsibility and duty outlined by Kant (and themselves developed from the "I think" of Descartes). "Passions" proposes a different way of thinking about responsibility and about the "I" -

At a certain place in the system, one of the elements of the system (an 'I', surely even if the I is not always and "with all candor" (*sans facon*) "me") no longer knows what it should do. More precisely, it knows that it must do contradictory and incompatible things (p.6, *OTN*).

The "I" no longer *knows* what it should do. In other words, the epistemological project of Descartes and Kant has given way to a deconstruction of the knowing I and

what remains is for this “I” to do “contradictory and incompatible things”. This is perhaps the passage where one can make greatest sense of Derrida’s earlier declaration that we are all “heirs” (p.8, *OTN*) of Kant. For in speaking of “contradiction” and “incompatibility”, one is still speaking an epistemological language, however negative. This conception of deconstruction as a kind of neo-modernism (rather than a post-modernism) is given credence by Derrida’s concluding remarks in “Passions” concerning an emphasis on “democracy” (*OTN*, p.29) and the “hyper-responsibility of a subject” (*OTN*, p.29). Here modernity is intensified rather than debunked. Derrida also introduces an enigmatic concept of the “secret” (*OTN*, p.25) which he significantly distinguishes from Platonism, neo-Platonism and Christian Platonism -

There is something secret (il y a du secret): neither a learned ignorance (in a Christian brotherhood practising a kind of negative theology), nor the content of an esoteric doctrine (for example, in a Pythagorean, Platonic, or neo-Platonic community). In any case, it cannot be reduced to these because it makes them possible (*OTN*, p.25).

This is a crucial passage for bridging the gap between the first essay in the English edition of *On the Name*, “Passions”, and the later two essays, “Sauf le Nom” and “Khora”, as the latter deal explicitly with the issues of Platonism and Christian Platonism. It would seem that when Derrida earlier referred to the Cartesian / Kantian concept of responsibility as “classically metaphysical”, he was implicitly positing a continuity in the philosophical tradition extending back to Plato, through neo-Platonism and Christian Platonism, and up to Descartes and Kant. According to “Passions”, this is the continuity of the epistemological subject-object relation, of the knowing ‘I’ representing to itself a set of moral ‘problems’. And it is in response to

this epistemological monolithism that the now deconstructed 'I' must do "contradictory and incompatible things" (p.6, *OTN*).

In "Sauf le Nom", Derrida seems to change perspective somewhat. Deconstruction now no longer appears at the end of a rather monolithic heritage but is related to specifically subversive movements *within* this heritage, most notably the movement of negative theology -

the one onto-theology, *the one* phenomenology, *the one* Christian revelation, *the one* history itself, *the one* history of being, *the one* epoch, *the one* tradition, self-identity in general.....that finds itself contested at its root.....negative theology is one of the most remarkable manifestations of this self-difference (p.71, *OTN*).

"Sauf le Nom" is therefore suggesting that deconstruction is not a critique of metaphysics *per se* to the extent that there is no metaphysics *per se*. Metaphysics is rather always subject to its own "self-difference" as manifested by, for example, negative theology. Nonetheless, this self-difference or self-deconstruction is not always apparent and the more reactive epistemological structure outlined in "Passions" seems to be shared in common by Platonism, Cartesianism and Kantianism. It is this more repressive aspect of metaphysics which seems to be the *raison d'être* of deconstruction. Derrida's work would appear to be an attempt to continuously remind reactive metaphysics that it must cut loose and begin to "self-differ" (this of course is the crucial import of Derrida's famous term "*différance*"). One can therefore read the transition from "Passions" to "Sauf le Nom" as precisely a representation of this requirement - one must deconstruct epistemological essentialism and supplement it with a kind of thinking akin to negative theology in its emphasis on "contradiction" and "incompatibility". On this interpretation, one thus has a clear Derridean perspective on the history of philosophy. Deconstruction is nothing "new"

or “original”, but rather a re-emphasising of subversive aspects of the metaphysical tradition.

The difficulty with this Derridean interpretation is not so much, as is often claimed, that it simply posits metaphysics as monolithic. For it is clear that Derrida’s emphasis on negative theology is precisely a rejection of such monolithism. The difficulty (on my interpretation) is rather that the specific continuity which Derrida *does* ascribe to metaphysics overgeneralises the epistemological paradigm. Not only Descartes and Kant, but Platonism, neo-Platonism and Christian Platonism are all interpreted as inherently epistemological. For example, in “Sauf le Nom”, Derrida describes the work of Angelus Silesius as a “fracture” (*OTN*, p.66) of the “Augustinian” and “Cartesian” *cogitos* (*OTN*, p.66), failing to take note of a crucial distinction between an Augustinian emphasis on *faith* and a Cartesian emphasis on *knowledge* (cf. especially Ch.7 below). In a fascinating earlier section, Derrida does however make reference to a certain agnosticism in Augustine’s *Confessions* -

Confession does not consist in making known - and thereby it teaches that teaching as the transmission of positive knowledge is not essential. The avowal does not belong in essence to the order of cognitive determination; it is quasi-apophatic in this regard. It has nothing to do with knowledge - with knowledge as such (p.39, *OTN*).

This apophasis however, Derrida suggests, should be distinguished from Augustinian “charity, fraternity.....revelation, memory and time.....we won’t elaborate on that here” (*OTN*, p.40). The implication, as with metaphysics in general, is of there being a reactive Augustine and a “self-differing” Augustine, Augustine the positive ontologist and theologian and Augustine the negative theologian (the second strand linking him with Silesius and Derrida). “Sauf le Nom” is in effect a eulogy to a most extreme variant of negative theology -

Perhaps this precisely, that this theology would be nothing.....the discursive possibilities of the *via negativa* are doubtless exhausted, that is what remains for us to think. Besides, they will be very quickly exhausted; they will always consist in an intimate and immediate exhaustion (*exhaustion*) of themselves, as if they could not have any history.....briefly, a critique of ontology, of theology, and of language (p.49/50/55, *OTN*).

My difficulty with Derrida's preference for apophasis and the *via negativa* is that it stems from a very selective interpretation of "positivity". Returning again to the relation between "Passions" and "Sauf le Nom", it is fair to say that they more or less correspond to the first and second stages of the Platonic dialectic outlined in the analysis of the *Meno* in Chapter 3. In "Passions", one has Derrida's elaboration of the system of Cartesian / Kantian positive morality and philosophy which is analogous to the epistemologism of Gorgias as advocated by Meno at the beginning of the dialogue. By the end of "Passions", one has a complete breakdown of this system and a description of an unstable 'I' who must do "contradictory" and "incompatible" things. This is already close to the impasse of Meno's paradox which results from Socrates' deconstruction of sophism. In "Sauf le Nom", this thinking of paradox is taken to the extreme limits of negative theology, to use Derrida's actual term, to "exhaustion". What is striking is that there is no analogue to Socrates / Plato's third stage of positive faith (*pistis*) in truth. If included at all (as in the case of Derrida's reference to Augustine's concepts of charity, memory etc.) it is identified with the first reactive stage of epistemologism.

In other words, the positive possibilities for philosophy are defined exclusively in epistemological terms. One's choice seems to be between knowledge and apophasis and as (according to Derrida) the "I" finally ends up knowing nothing, one is left with the inevitability of being as apophatic or negative as one possibly can be -

We are in absolute exemplarity as in the aridity of the desert, for the essential tendency is to formalize rarefaction. Impoverishment is *de rigueur* (p.49, *OTN*).

This theme of 'impoverishment' is developed further in the final essay of the Derridean trilogy, "Khora". This latter Platonic motif is introduced in the *Timaeus* as an extremely enigmatic "third term" which resists the categories of binary logic. Again, Derrida is keen to locate two primary moments of the Platonic text, that of the apophatic *khora* and secondly the more reactive metaphysical movement which directs the *Timaeus* in more general terms. Derrida describes this second movement as "the cosmo-ontologic encyclopedia of the *Timaeus*" and interprets this system as being transgressed by *khora* -

If the cosmo-ontologic encyclopedia of the *Timaeus* presents itself as a "probable myth", a tale ordered by the hierarchized opposition of the sensible and the intelligible, of the image in the course of becoming and of eternal being, how can one inscribe therein or situate the discourse on *khora*?.....It *exceeds* or *precedes*, in an order that is moreover, alogical and achronic, anachronistic too, the constitutive opposition of mytho-logic as such, of mythic discourse and of the discourse *on* myth (p.113, Kh).

Plato's "khora" is therefore another sign, according to Derrida, of the "self-difference" of philosophy, a movement within philosophy which resists the "cosmo-ontologic encyclopedia" of reactive metaphysics. The *Timaeus* is, as it were, a microcosmic example of this generalized problem at work -

The ontologico-encyclopedic conclusion of the *Timaeus* seems to cover over the open chasm in the middle of the book (p.104, *OTN*).

One has already seen Derrida describe this movement in both "Passions" and "Sauf le Nom". In the first case, a "classically metaphysical" concept of responsibility (exemplified by Kantianism) was resisted by an irreducible "otherness". In "Sauf le Nom", this movement of otherness was linked to specific aspects of negative theology, most notably the work of Angelus Silesius. Crucially, here Augustine was

noted as being both a thinker of ontologico-encyclopedic metaphysics (e.g. via his concepts of eternity and memory) *and* a thinker of apophasis (through his emphasis on nonepistemological confession). Derrida also generalised this point to the history of philosophy, positing a project of self-identity which existed side by side with specific moments of “self-differing”.

It is this interpretation of the history of philosophy which also guides Derrida’s reading of “khora” in the eponymous essay. In the *Timaeus*, the “khora” is that which “exceeds” and “precedes” the ontologico-encyclopedic logic. But the “dominant effect” (*OTN*, p.120) of “Platonism” has been to “cover up” and “dissimulate” (*OTN*, p.119) this “khora” with a “thetic abstraction” (*OTN*, p.120). Drawing on Hegel’s interpretation of Plato, Derrida states that this dominant reading of Plato as a thinker of thesis and ontology is not some extrinsic imposition onto his work from outside -

this logico-philosophical evaluation is not *applied* to Plato. It derives already from a certain “Platonism”.....A certain programme of this evaluation seems already legible in this work (the *Timaeus*) [*OTN*, p.102/3].

And this “programme” of logico-philosophical evaluation is not specific to the *Timaeus*. Derrida generalises this evaluation to “Platonism” and in a further move to “philosophy” -

The forces that are thus inhibited continue to maintain a certain disorder, some potential incoherence, and some heterogeneity in the organization of the theses.....”Platonism” is not only an example of this movement, the first “in” the whole history of philosophy. It commands it, it commands this *whole* history. A philosophy as such would henceforth always be “Platonic”. Hence the necessity to continue to try to think what takes place in Plato, with Plato, what is shown there, what is hidden, so as to win there or to lose there (*OTN*, p.121).

While this may be Derrida at his most polemical, it is nonetheless revealing as regards the perspective of deconstruction - “ a philosophy as such would henceforth always be “Platonic”. Here Derrida is reiterating the continuity of metaphysics we saw

described in “Passions” and “Sauf le Nom”. Philosophy, according to Derrida, can only posit its theses by “covering up” the “heterogeneity” of inhibited “forces”. This structure of philosophy is inaugurated by Plato (“the first”) and maintained in the “whole history” (i.e. through Descartes, Kant etc.). Having said this, there is already in Plato an emphasis on *apophasis* and negativity which will be repeated in the tradition of negative theology. Already at the beginning of philosophy, therefore, there is a manifestation of the “self-difference” or otherness of philosophy -

But what is said about *khora* is that this name does not designate any of the known or recognised or, if you like, received types of existent (*OTN*, p.96).....Simply this excess is nothing, nothing that may be and said ontologically. This absence of support, which cannot be translated into absent support or into absence as support, provokes *and* resists any binary or dialectical determination, any inspection of a philosophical type, or let us say, more rigorously, of an *ontological* type (*OTN*, p.99).

This final reference to an exemplary “philosophical” or “ontological” type is followed by a reference to the Hegelian dialectic. One is thinking concerning this philosophy and ontology, according to Derrida, “after Hegel and according to him” (*OTN*, p.100), which is also “after Plato, with Plato” (*OTN*, p.100). But returning to the ancient-modern problematic it seems clear that one is at least not entitled to treat as identical the Platonic and Hegelian dialectics. In “Khora”, for example, Derrida describes philosophy as the -

subordination of myth, as a discursive *form*, to the *content* of the signified concept, to the meaning, which, in its essence, can only be philosophical (*OTN*, p.102).

Once again, Derrida is here understanding philosophy in exclusively *epistemological* terms. Everything becomes subordinate to the “content of the signified concept”. But as we described in Chapter 3, the Platonic dialectic is rather based in “faith” (*pistis*). This faith-dialectic is introduced as a projected antidote to the very impasse resulting

from *a lack of knowledge* in Meno's paradox ("how can I recognise that which I do not know"). On my interpretation, Plato's emphasis on faith is a direct critique not simply of lack of knowledge, but of the value of knowledge itself, as it breeds overconfident (*tharraleon*) assertion. This also accounts for Socrates' dismissal of the idea that philosophers have any "expertise" to inculcate.

Applying this interpretation to Derrida's reading, one can say that Platonic dialectic is far closer to the "khora" than is Hegelian dialectic. Derrida's explicit introduction of a type of battle scenario ("to win there or to lose there") is misleading in the measure to which the prospective opponents are wrongly described. If it is a case of philosophy *vs.* the "khora", one must at least explicate the fundamentally different models which one can call "philosophical". Derrida describes an exclusively epistemological (Cartesian / Hegelian) model. To conclude this section, I will outline a philosophy based on Platonic dialectic and evaluate the possible responses which such a philosophy might make to the claims of a deconstructive "khora".

Derrida prefaces the "khora" essay with a quotation from Jean-Pierre Vernant which is relevant to our problem. Vernant (like Derrida) is interested in a "structural model" which can be contrasted with "the logic of the *logos*" -

the structural model of a logic which would not be that of binarity, of the yes or no, a logic other than the logic of the *logos* (quoted, *KH*. p.88).

The difficulty with Vernant's interpretation stems from his making "logic" and "*logos*" interdependent. It is far from evident that "*logos*" means either "yes or no" in a binary logical sense. Heraclitus' use for example of the term *logos* testifies to this difficulty. For Heraclitus, *logos* represents precisely a *coincidence of opposites* and Vernant fails to take account of this alternative view of *logos* which is historically proximate to Platonic philosophy. In Chapter 2, I considered Heraclitus' influence on

Plato. Here one does not need to ascribe an exact Heraclitean view of *logos* to Plato. It is rather a case of exemplifying the problematicity of making *logos* and 'logic' interdependent. It is this identification which guides Derrida's interpretation. To this extent, the "khora" is seen as exceeding logos / logic, as being *irreducible* to the categories of philosophy.

However, if one re-evaluates the Platonic concept of "logos" (beyond this direct association with logic) then the irreducibility of the "khora" becomes qualified. From this perspective (which is effectively an epistemological perspective) the "khora" *is* irreducible. But if one interprets "logos" in Plato's historical context as a development of Heraclitean / Parmenidean ideas, the "khora" is no longer as subversive as it may at first appear. In other words, if one returns for example to the *Meno*, the Platonic dialectic there articulated is itself precisely a subversion of logic. Its second stage involves a complete deconstruction of sophistic logic, of in effect "yes or no" binary thinking. This second stage resembles very closely the thematics which surround the concept of the "khora" in the *Timaeus*. Meno's paradox (like the "khora") involves an apparent paralysis of all philosophy.

There is of course a third stage in the *Meno* but this does not involve a return to some prior epistemologism. It is rather belief or faith (*pistis*) which is introduced as the movement beyond "khora", or perplexity. One can argue that this third stage is unsuccessful, that it fails to overcome perplexity and the paralysis of philosophy. But one must at least distinguish (as Vernant / Derrida *do not*) this third stage of a specifically Platonic *logos* from a binary logic of "the yes or no". In failing to make this clear distinction Derrida seems to opt too early for an *excess* over "logos", a stress on "impoverishment", "exhaustion", "apophasis" etc. If philosophy is defined

exclusively in logical / epistemological terms then the Platonic concept of “khora” as an epistemological undoubtedly leads back to the deconstruction *ad infinitum* which Derrida describes. But defined otherwise, via the Presocratic heritage, as a love of wisdom (*philo - sophia*), as primarily striving (*orexis*), philosophy already involves this self-deconstruction. By the same token, this philosophy also involves a simultaneous positive affirmation, a movement beyond apophasis and exhaustion.

It is at this point that one can perhaps locate a limit-point of Derrida’s thinking. It is this limit which Platonism allows one to, as it were, transgress. In the next section, I will analyse how deconstruction attempts to resist this Platonic movement in two revealing texts on apophasis and dialectic, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials” [6] and *The Gift of Death* [7].

Section 5.3 - On “Denials” and *The Gift of Death*

It is perhaps *The Gift of Death* which best exemplifies Derrida’s thinking on the philosophical issues surrounding dialectic, Platonism and Christianity. Originally published as “Donner la mort” in 1992, this essay shows a strong continuity with Derrida’s earlier work but the relationship between deconstruction and Platonism is now more explicitly clarified. *The Gift of Death*, in its stated intention, is an analysis of the work of the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka. In his *Heretical Essays on the Philosophy of History* Patočka seeks to reaffirm a particular concept of “religion” (“Religion presumes access to the responsibility of a free self”; *GD*. p.2) which he derives from a reading of Christianity as fundamentally opposed to Platonism. But while this Derridean text is on one level concerned with a specific analysis of Patočka it is also instructive with regard to our own problematic. For Patočka (and Derrida

here concurs) the residual influence of Platonism is one of the primary factors in the “decline” of Western civilisation as a whole. Patocka takes up this question in his essay “La civilisation technique est-elle une civilisation de déclin, et pourquoi?” (cf. *GD*, p.1) and it is this thematic of the problematic nature of Platonism which I will address in this section.

Firstly, it is important to see how the analysis of Platonism in *The Gift of Death* differs from similar analysis in earlier texts such as “Plato’s Pharmacy” and “Khora”. In previous sections I have examined the latter texts (as well as several others concerning Platonism) which have all been linked in terms of their stress on the *dual* aspect of Platonism, its so-called “doubling” movement - Platonism is both a metaphysics *par excellence* and a completely self-deconstructive philosophy. This schema is repeated with great clarity in the text “How to avoid speaking: Denials”. Here Derrida is interested in distinguishing between what he calls “two movements or two tropics of negativity.....in the Platonic text” (“Denials”, p.101). He refers to these structures as being “radically heterogeneous” (“Denials”, p.101). In the first case Derrida identifies “the idea of the Good” which for Plato “has its place beyond being or essence” (“Denials”, p.101). This conception is found primarily in the *Republic* (509b et seq.) -

One of them [i.e. one of the movements of negativity] finds both its principle and its exemplification in the *Republic* (509b et seq.). The idea of the Good (*idea tou agathou*) has its place beyond Being or essence.....whatever may be the discontinuity marked by this beyond (*epekeina*) in relation to Being, in relation to the Being of beings or beingness (nevertheless, three distinct hypotheses), this singular limit does not give place to simply neutral or negative determinations, but to a hyperbolism of that, beyond which the Good gives rise to thinking, to knowing, and to Being. Negativity serves the *hyper* movement that produces, attracts or guides it. The Good is not of course in the sense that it is not Being or beings, and on this subject every ontological grammar must take on a negative form. But this negative form is not neutral. It does not oscillate between the *ni ceci - ni cela* (the neither / nor). It first of all obeys a logic of the *sur*, of the *hyper*, over and beyond,

which heralds all the hyperessentialisms of Christian apophases (“Denials”, p.102).

Derrida’s point here is that this first negative moment in Platonism remains metaphysical - in denying the predicate of “being” to the Good Plato is not putting the Good in suspension or doubting its existence in Derridean fashion. Rather “the idea of the Good beyond Being” suggests that the Good has an Existence greater than empirical being. Plato therefore subverts essentialism with this conception (and in this he is a deconstructionist) but only to replace this prior essentialism with what Derrida calls a “*hyperessentialism*” (“Denials”, p.102). At this point, Derrida refers specifically to the “hyperessentialisms of Christian apophases” (“Denials”, p. 102), and the suggestion is that while Christian negative theology (or apophasis) involves something of deconstruction it nonetheless supersedes this deconstruction with a hyper-positive predication. However, like all philosophical systems for Derrida Christianity is a *dual* structure, and I will analyse below how Derrida also identifies a radical deconstructive element in Christianity in the text *The Gift of Death*. In “Denials” Derrida is already identifying this deconstructivism in Plato. The second “tropic of negativity” (“Denials”, p. 101) which Derrida describes can be found in the *Timaeus* -

I will distinguish the tropics of negativity, which I have just outlined in such a schematic manner, from another manner of treating what is beyond (*epekeina*) the border, the third species, and the place. This place is here called *khora*; I am, of course, alluding to the *Timaeus* (“Denials”, p.104).

The “khora” for Derrida represents the most radical aspect of Plato’s thought in so far as it avoids the hyperessentialism which is present in “the idea of the Good beyond Being” and in the so-called “Christian apophases” (“Denials”, p. 102). Or rather the

“khora” avoids this hyperessentialism in its second moment which Derrida is careful to distinguish from a first more metaphysical aspect -

To be sure, one of these languages [in the *Timaeus*] multiplies the negations, the warnings, the evasions, the detours, the tropes, but *with a view* to reappropriating the thinking of the *khora* for ontology and for Platonic dialectic in its most dominant schemas. If the *khora* - place, spacing, receptacle (*hypodokhe*) - is neither sensible nor intelligible, it seems to *participate* in the intelligible in an enigmatic way (51a). Since it “receives all”, it makes possible the formation of the cosmos. As it is neither this nor that (neither intelligible nor sensible), one may speak as *if* it were a joint participant in both. *Neither / nor* easily becomes *both....and*, both this and that (“Denials”, p.105).

Derrida sees this first exposition of the “khora” (in the *Timaeus*) as still a form of “hyperessentialism” - the *neither / nor* of deconstruction becomes the *both / and* of metaphysics. To this extent, this first exposition of the “khora” is, for Derrida, analogous to the structure of the “Good beyond being” in the *Republic* (509b *et seq.*). In “Denials” Derrida describes how this first metaphysical “khora” has come to define the readings of the *Timaeus* in the history of philosophy, most notably inaugurated by Aristotle -

Aristotle provided the matrix for many of the readings of the *Timaeus* and, since his *Physics* (bk.4), one has always interpreted this passage on the *khora* as being *at the interior* of philosophy, in a consistently anachronistic way, as if it prefigured, on the one hand, the philosophies of space as *extensio* (Descartes) or as pure sensible form (Kant); or on the other hand, the materialist philosophies of the substratum or of substance which stands, like the *hypodokhè*, beneath the qualities or the phenomena (Derrida’s emphasis, “Denials”, p.105).

This is a crucial passage for our understanding of Derrida. As with essays such as “Khora” and “Sauf le Nom” Derrida wishes to distinguish between two aspects of the history of philosophy. In the next section of “Denials” Derrida will elaborate why he thinks Aristotle’s interpretation of Plato does not correspond to the “neither / nor” moment of the *Timaeus*, the *nondialectical* moment (“Denials”, p.105 - “something

that no dialectic, participatory schema, or analogy would allow one to rearticulate together with any philosopheme whatsoever"). But here he is rather concerned with the dialectical aspect of the *Timaeus*, what links it to the similarly dialectical hyperessentialism of the "Good beyond Being". Crucially, this interpretation also links Platonic dialectic to Cartesianism (the "Cartesian philosophy of space") and Kantianism (Kantian "pure sensible form"). This interpretation will be repeated by Derrida very clearly in *The Gift of Death* and one has already seen how Derrida generalises a certain interpretation of the history of philosophy from the specificity of Cartesianism (cf. Chapter 1, particularly the analysis of the "Cogito" essay).

The most important point here concerns a very evident *dualism* in Derrida's own work, between "dialectic" on the one hand and a philosophy of deconstruction on the other. Simply put, Derrida puts forward a critique of dialectical thought and in its place substitutes a philosophy of apophasis (e.g. the apophasis of the second moment of the "khora" discussed below). But Derrida's understanding of "dialectic" is extremely homogeneous - he tends to identify dialectic along the lines described in the passage on Aristotle, as a continuity between Plato, Descartes and Kant. The difficulties with this interpretation have already been described as it glosses over the fundamental philosophical disagreements in the history of the concept of "dialectic", most notably the disagreement encapsulated in the ancient-modern quarrel (cf. particularly Chapter 1, Chapters 3 and 4). The Platonic dialectic which is practised in the *Phaedrus* for example (when understood not in its formal aspect but rather as practised in the dialogue itself; cf. Chapter 4) is structured in accordance with a model of philosophy as Eros or "love of wisdom" rather than as the Cartesian dialectic which is grounded in a deductive system. Derrida's claim is that the failure of

philosophical dialectic must lead inevitably to a recourse to apophasis, but this claim is only valid if dialectic *as such* is proved to be a failure (to “unravel”) and remains provisional if one is only considering a particular kind of dialectic. Additionally, there is the question of the relation between apophasis and dialectic - Derrida seems to link *a priori* the concepts of dialectic and philosophical clarity such that authentic apophasis must remain andialectical. In *The Gift of Death* for example (*GD.*, p. 66) Derrida sees deconstructive “morality” (exemplified in the biblical figure of Abraham) as the subversion or “betrayal” (*GD.*, p. 66) of “essence as presence and manifestation”.

Again however it would seem that Derrida is working with a historically very specific concept of dialectic - in *The Gift of Death* as we will see below this model is unequivocally Cartesian / Kantian. In this section I will again contrast this model with that of Platonic dialectic as this contrast relates to Derrida’s reading of Platonism / the history of philosophy in *The Gift of Death*. But it is Derrida’s interpretation of the dual structure of Platonism in “Denials” which provides the groundwork for the later analysis to the extent that it sees the two respective “tropics of negativity” as being mutually exclusive. Plato is at different moments of his text (here the *Timaeus*) both a dialectician and a deconstructionist, but it is the latter deconstructionism which must be privileged over the former dialectics. For Derrida, the apophatic moment of the “khora” is what leads to the “unravelling” (“Plato’s Pharmacy”) of the first movement of dialectic. But the question I will address below is whether Platonism is not rather precisely an attempt to dialecticize the relation between “presence” and “apophasis”, a relation which Derrida is seeking to keep apart. Derrida’s grounds for this interminable separation or “deferral” (*différance*) consist in the inability of rationalism

to prove such a dialectical relation - here one could cite Derrida's early deconstructions of Descartes and Husserl (in the "Cogito" essay, *Edmund Husserl's "Origin of Geometry": An Introduction* and *Speech and Phenomena*). But what makes Platonic dialectic so resistant to Derrida's attempt at a paralysis of its progress is exactly the Platonic affirmation of *a lack of proof* (for example in the *Meno* where Socrates grounds philosophy in "belief" or *pistis* and makes a crucial distinction between positive and negative *tharraleos*, the latter agnosticism being cited as the proper attitude of the metaphysician). Platonic dialectic does not founder on apophasis; such negativity is rather the very condition of dialectical thought. One might also refer here to Socrates' paradigmatic rejection of rationalism in the *Phaedrus* and his invocation of Eros as being the only proper method of philosophy (and dialectic), a rejection which is all the more striking in being a critique of his own prior stand in the dialogue.

In "Denials", however, Derrida is rather concerned with keeping Platonic dialectic and apophasis strictly apart. Having outlined the first moment of the "khora" as being still too metaphysical, he now describes the second section of the *Timaeus* as being appropriately deconstructive -

The other language and the other interpretive decision interest me more...The synchronicity of a reading has no chance here and no doubt would lack exactly that to which it claimed to adjust itself. This other gesture would inscribe an irreducible spacing interior to (but hence also exterior to, once the interior is placed outside) Platonism, that is, interior to ontology, to dialectic, and perhaps to philosophy in general. Under the name of *khora*, the place belongs neither to the sensible nor to the intelligible, neither to becoming, nor to non-being (the *khora* is never described as a void), nor to Being....All the aporias, which Plato makes no effort to hide, would signify that *there is* something that is neither a being nor a nothingness; something that no dialectic, participatory schema, or analogy would allow one to rearticulate together with any philosopheme whatsoever, neither "in" Plato's works nor in the history that Platonism inaugurates and dominates. The *neither / nor* may no longer be reconverted into *both....and* ("Denials", p.105 / 106)

The second moment of the “khora” in the *Timaeus* is affirmed by Derrida to the extent that it no longer (in contrast with the first instance of “khora”) turns apophasis into hyperessentialism - in Derrida’s words, the *neither / nor* no longer becomes a *both / and*. It is this instance of “khora” which can be said radically to undermine Aristotle’s reading of Platonism (*Physics* Book 4, quoted above) as a harbinger of Cartesianism and Kantianism -

This [i.e. the “khora”] is neither an intelligible extension, in the Cartesian sense, a receptive subject, in the Kantian sense of *intuitus derivativus*, nor a pure sensible space, as a form of receptivity. Radically nonhuman and atheological, one cannot even say that it gives place or that *there is* the *khora*....It does not give place as one would give something, whatever it may be; it neither creates nor produces anything, not even an event in so far as it takes place. It gives no order and makes no promise. It is radically ahistorical, because nothing happens through it and nothing happens to it. Plato insists on its necessary indifference; to receive all and allow itself to be marked or affected by what is inscribed in it, the *khora* must remain without form and without proper determination. But if it is amorphous [*amorphon*; *Timaeus*, 50d], this signifies neither lack nor privation. *Khora* is nothing positive or negative. It is impassive but it is neither passive nor active (“Denials”, p.107)

Derrida’s reading of a duality in the history of philosophy is thus reinforced. On the one side, one has the philosophies of essentialism such as Cartesianism and Kantianism, and within this group there is also included the philosophies of *hyperessentialism* (the examples in “Denials” being the Platonic “Good beyond Being”, the first description of the “khora” and the “Christian apophases”). On the other side, one has the nonessentialist thinking of deconstruction which is practised not simply by Derrida but often by the essentialist philosophies in their “dual” nature. In “Denials” the obvious example is the dual thinking of the “khora” which at separate instances of the *Timaeus* is interpreted by Derrida as being alternately hyperessentialist (“both / and”; p.104; *Timaeus* 51a-52b) and nonessentialist

(“neither / nor”; p.105; *Timaeus* 50b-d). What marks the second instance of “khora” as nonessentialist and deconstructionist is precisely its *nondialectical* nature - it is *neither this nor that* (“Denials”, p.106). And what marks the first instance of “khora” (as well as the “Good beyond Being” and the “Christian apophases”) as essentialist / hyperessentialist or nondeconstructive is exactly its *dialectical* aspect - the “khora” becomes *both this and that*.

Derrida’s analysis of the nondialectical “khora” in “Denials” is primarily employed as a clarification of the fundamental difference between deconstruction and negative theology. While the apophysis of negative theology is often cited as being a precursor of Derrida’s work, “Denials” points to the radical aspects of the *Timaeus* as being a more accurate analogy and interprets negative theology as being rather a case of a metaphysical hyperessentialism -

No, what I write is not “negative theology”. First of all, in the measure to which this belongs to the predicative or judicative space of discourse, to its strictly propositional form, and privileges not only the indestructible unity of the word but also the authority of the name - such axioms as a “deconstruction” must start by reconsidering (which I have tried to do since the first part of *Of Grammatology*). Next, in the measure to which “negative theology” seems to reserve, beyond all positive predication, beyond all negation, even beyond Being, some hyperessentiality, a being beyond Being....No, I would hesitate to inscribe what I put forward under the familiar heading of negative theology, precisely because of that ontological wager of hyperessentialism that one finds at work both in Dionysius and in Meister Eckhart, for example..... (“Denials”, p.77).

Christian negative theology is therefore interpreted in “Denials” as being a hyperessentialist thinking “in service of a dialectic” (“Denials”, p.108) and here it is contrasted with the thinking of the “khora” which is “barren, radically nonhuman and atheological.....wholly other” (“Denials”, p.108). But the dual structure which Derrida has already shown to be present in Platonism is also constitutive of Christianity as a philosophical system. In “Denials” one is presented with merely the

dialectical aspect of Christianity (or strictly speaking, Christian negative theology), a dialectic which Derrida wishes to deconstruct. But Christianity also has a nonessentialist aspect and although this is nowhere thematised in “Denials” it becomes the central concern of *The Gift of Death*. While these two texts differ, as the former stresses the nondialectical elements of Platonism while the latter stresses the nondialectical aspects of Christianity, they fundamentally agree in an emphasis on *the nondialectical* as such. I will return to the significance of this point below after an analysis of some more particular points with regard to the structure of *The Gift of Death*.

At the beginning of this section, I outlined how this text was ostensibly an analysis of the work of Jan Patočka, the Czech philosopher. Patočka’s philosophy is very close to Derrida’s in being a concern with the open-endedness of history. Derrida quotes directly from Patočka’s *Essais hérétiques sur la philosophie de l’histoire* -

Such is the conclusion that the whole essay moves towards: Modern civilisation does not just suffer from its own faults, its own myopia, but also from failing to resolve the whole problem of history. But the problem of history cannot be resolved; it must remain a problem. The danger of the present time is that an excess of knowledge of detail might lead us to forget how to look at the question and the grounds that give rise to it.

It might also be that the question of the decline of civilisation has been badly put. Civilisation does not of itself exist. The question would be rather a matter of knowing if historical man can yet acknowledge history (*priznavat se k dejinam*) [Patočka, p.127; *GD.*, p.4]

In asking whether “historical man can yet acknowledge history” Patočka is making a similar point to Derrida’s in “Denials” when he distinguished between a *dual* structure of philosophy. The first philosophical typology there described, that of essentialist / hyperessentialist dialectic, would fail to “acknowledge history” in Patočka’s sense to the extent that such dialectics posit a resolution to the problem of history. For Patočka however, as for Derrida, “the problem of history cannot be resolved”. In

consequence, both thinkers privilege the nondialectical over the dialectical and in *The Gift of Death* their respective privilegings become concentrated in the apophatic elements of Christianity. Again a quotation from Patocka is instructive -

Because of its foundation (*zaklad*) within the abyssal profundity of the soul, Christianity represents to this day the most powerful means - never yet superseded but not yet thought right through either - by which man is able to struggle against his own decline (Patocka, p.117; *GD*, p.28)

In particular, the phrase “the abyssal profundity of the soul” is significant here. Christianity is emblematic for Patocka precisely because it (on his interpretation) does not seek to resolve the so-called *problem of history*. This is what links his analysis to the perspective of deconstruction. Leading into his analysis of Patocka, Derrida also refers to the “abyss (*l’abîme*)” [p.4] of history. Crucially he also uses this concept to follow Patocka in a distinction between Platonism and Christianity -

For at the heart of this history there is something of an abyss (*il y a de l’abîme*), an abyss that resists totalising summary. Separating orgiastic mystery from Christian mystery, this abyss also announces the origin of responsibility [*GD*, p.4].

It is “Christian mystery” and not the “orgiastic mystery” of Platonism which respects the open-endedness of history, “an abyss that resists totalising summary”. As with “Denials”, Derrida is opposing a dialectical thinking to a nondialectical (“abyssal”; *GD*, p.28) thought. But whereas, in “Denials”, it was Platonism (in the case of the “khora” at least) which was interpreted as being an abyssal thinking while Christian apophasis was interpreted as dialectical, here in *The Gift of Death* the roles are completely reversed. The “orgasm” (“orgiastic mystery”) of Platonism symbolises its dialectical nature - there is a fulfilment, a resolution to history. Derrida (following Patocka) is pointing to the fundamental difference between Platonism and Christianity with regard to their respective relationships to the “abyss” of history. Platonism, here

seen for Derrida in the dialectical aspect of its duality, is a “rationalism” (p.24, *GD*.) and Patocka denounces its residual influence on a Christianity which in its true essence is rather “abyssal”. Patocka presents Platonism as a dialectical philosophy attempting to resolve the “problem” of history into what Derrida terms a “metaphysics of knowledge” (*GD*, p.24). Christianity in contrast remains nondialectical in its recognition of a “beyond” of knowledge -

In the final analysis the soul [in the Christian mystery] is not a relation to an *object*, however elevated (such as the Platonic Good) [which implies therefore “such as in Platonism where the soul is the relation to a transcendent Good that also governs the ideal order of the Greek *polis* or the Roman *civitas*”], but to a person who fixes it in his gaze while at the same time remaining beyond the reach of the gaze of that soul (*Essais*, p.116; *GD*, p.25)

Patocka’s analysis is analogous to Derrida’s critique (in “Denials”) of a hyperessentialism in the Platonic concept of a “Good beyond Being” (*Republic*, 509 et seq.). The Platonic Good, for both Patocka and Derrida, remains an “object.....however elevated”. In contrast “Christian mystery” offers no such fulfilment; it is rather a recognition of the *abyss* which prevents philosophy from resolving the problem of history. The apparent inconsistency which exists in Derrida’s respective analyses of Platonism and Christianity in “Denials” and *The Gift of Death* is not in itself surprising. In “Denials”, Derrida had already stressed the dual nature of philosophy; each philosophy has its dialectical and nondialectical elements and the “inconsistency” between the two texts is therefore simply a question of emphasis - at different points, the respective elements of both Platonism and Christianity are being emphasised.

However, there is nonetheless a possible problem for Derrida in this context. While his hypothesis of a dualism gives credence to his differing emphases, nonetheless his

actual interpretation of what constitutes dialectic can be questioned. In both “Denials” and *The Gift of Death*, Derrida interprets Platonic and Christian dialectic on the model of essentialism / hyperessentialism which he links in both cases to the essentialism of Descartes and Kant. It is this essentialism which he contrasts with the apophasis of deconstruction (which is also manifested in certain moments of the Platonic / Christian texts). But if one can redefine Platonic / Christian dialectic *contra* Derrida, one must re-evaluate the relationship between dialectic and apophasis and perhaps the implicit justification which guides Derrida’s privileging of nondialectical thought. I will return to this point below after an examination of Derrida’s discussion of apophasis in *The Gift of Death*.

In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida employs the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac to exemplify the nature of authentic apophasis. Following Patocka, Derrida contrasts this apophasis with the philosophy of essentialism / hyperessentialism which is described as being central to Platonism (e.g. *GD*, pp.24 / 25). For Patocka the essentialism of Platonism is intrinsically linked to the “decline” of Western civilisation (“une civilisation de déclin”; quoted *GD*, p.1). Derrida himself seems to see such essentialism as an avoidance of what he terms “responsibility” -

To “subordinate responsibility to the objectivity of knowledge” is obviously, in Patocka’s view, to discount responsibility. And how can we not subscribe to this implication? (*GD*, p.24)

Platonism, for both Patocka and Derrida, in so far as it emphasises the “objectivity of knowledge” is not faithful to the true task of moral responsibility. This is where the story of Abraham and Isaac becomes paradigmatic in its moral and philosophical significance. God demands of Abraham (“without revealing his reasons”; *GD*, p.58)

the most extreme of gestures - to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. This story exemplifies the one-sidedness of the God-mortal relation as emphasised by both Derrida and Patocka. Abraham is incapable of “knowledge” concerning the nature of God as an “object”. Against Platonism which interprets the “Good beyond Being” as an *object*, the concept of Good for both Derrida / Patocka remains “absolutely other”;

On what condition is responsibility possible? On the condition that the Good no longer be a transcendental objective, a relation between objective things, but the relation to the other, a response to the other; an experience of personal goodness and a movement of intention. That supposes, as we have seen, a double rupture: both with orgiastic mystery *and* with Platonism. On what condition does goodness exist beyond all calculation? On the condition that goodness forget itself, that the movement be a movement of the gift that renounces itself, hence a movement of infinite love (*GD*, p.51).

There is a clear contrast in this passage between “the Good as a transcendental objective” which is supposedly representative of Platonism and “a movement of infinite love” which is said to be characteristic of Christianity. The former constitutes the nature of *dialectic* while the latter is representative of *nondialectical* thinking. A little later in *The Gift of Death*, Derrida clarifies the concept of God which must underlie his emphasis on “infinite love” -

God is himself absent, hidden and silent, separate, secret, at the moment he has to be obeyed. God doesn't give his reasons, he acts as he intends, he doesn't have to give his reasons or share anything with us: neither his motivations, if he has any, nor his deliberations, nor his decisions. Otherwise he wouldn't be God, we wouldn't be dealing with the Other as God or with God as *wholly other (tout autre)* [*GD*, p. 57]

This “wholly other” God is therefore the ground of Derrida's emphasis on an infinite responsibility as exemplified in the Abraham story. If one is to be responsible to this God, one must renounce any attempts at a dialectical understanding of divinity. It is this complete “otherness” which Patocka / Derrida interpret as being central to the essence of Christianity and which in *The Gift of Death* is contrasted with the

objectivism of Platonism. In an analysis of Baudelaire's text "The Pagan School" (GD., pp. 110 / 111), Derrida quotes Baudelaire's affirmation of Augustine in just this context, concerning a refutation of objectivism -

I admit all the remorse of St. Augustine for the too great pleasure of the eyes. The danger is so great that I excuse the suppression of the object (GD, p.111; "Pagan School" pp. 74-77).

This is then the fundamental characteristic of Christianity for Derrida. Whereas Platonism opts for a dialectic of the "object", Christianity (here in the case of Augustine) would completely "suppress" the object i.e. respect the "otherness" of God / the Good. But if this is the case, if Christianity and Platonism are so opposed, how is one to make sense of for example Augustine's traditional categorization as a "Christian Platonist"? In the argument I will develop in succeeding chapters, Platonism and Christianity are presented as completely "compatible" philosophical systems. I will outline this in more detail in Chapters 6 and 7, but in concluding this chapter it will suffice to take an aspect of the Augustinian example. If Derrida's Baudelaire reference can be shown to be a misinterpretation of Augustine, then one may reconsider the question of "otherness" and dialectic as it relates to Platonism and Christianity.

On one level, the Derrida / Baudelaire interpretation of Augustine seems well-founded. Bourke for example refers to the irreducible movement of apophasis or incompleteness in Augustine's thinking concerning God -

The answer to which Augustine comes.....is never an exhaustive description of God's essential nature. Like the One of Plotinus and the divinity of many medieval mystics, the God of Augustinian thought transcends all efforts at complete description (Bourke, p.140) [8]

To this point one can say that Augustine's Christianity is consistent with Derrida's emphasis on nondialectical thought, through for example the case of Abraham. But a

difficulty is encountered when one considers the event of the Incarnation and how this is developed into a Christology in Augustine's thought (we will also see this Christology in De Cusa's thinking). In a crucial passage of *The Gift of Death* Derrida distinguishes between Christian dogmas (such as the reality of the Incarnation) and a "nondogmatic doublet of dogma" (GD., p.49) which he sees as being characteristic of his own work and that of Patočka's -

If it [i.e. Patočka's philosophy] does involve Christianity, it is at the same time a heretical and hyperbolic form thereof. Patočka speaks and thinks in the places where Christianity has not yet thought or spoken of what it should have been and is not yet. The Christian themes can be seen to revolve around the *gift* as gift of death, the fathomless gift of a type of death: infinite love (the Good as goodness that infinitely forgets itself), sin and salvation, repentance and sacrifice. What engenders all these meanings and links them, internally and necessarily, is a logic that at bottom (that is why it can still, up to a certain point, be called a "logic") has no need of *the event of a revelation or the revelation of an event*. It needs to think the possibility of such an event but not the event itself. This is a major point of difference, permitting such a discourse to be developed without reference to religion as institutional dogma, and proposing a genealogy of thinking concerning the possibility and essence of the religious that doesn't amount to an article of faith [GD., p. 49].

Patočka's and Derrida's Christianity, as nondialectical and "heretical" (GD., p.49), "has no need of the event of a revelation or the revelation of an event". Derrida chooses the Abraham example precisely because of its nonmanifestation; indeed he describes the "moral" (GD., p.66) of the Abraham story as being a "betrayal of everything that manifests itself in general" (GD., p.66). But this interpretation of Christianity founders if applied to Augustine whose thought (although including apophatic elements) nonetheless involves a continuous emphasis on the *revelation* of God. I will examine Augustine's thinking in more detail in Chapter 7 but here one can refer primarily to his concept of Creation as a "visible God" ("the heaven and earth, they tell me to love thee") or to his Christology which, by definition, requires

an acknowledgement of the very “event” Derrida says Christianity can do without, both of these cases involving an emphasis on *manifestation* which is opposed to Derrida’s sense of the “wholly other”.

This issue also refers back to the question of the relation between Platonism and Christianity. In Chapter 4 I described how the *Phaedrus* is very much concerned with the question of the *manifestation* of the Forms (particularly the Form of Beauty) in the world. Nonetheless, it is inaccurate to refer, as Derrida does, to this Platonic philosophy of manifestation as a philosophy of the “object”. In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida (following Patocka) interprets Platonism as a “rationalism” and sees the Platonic concept of the Good as thus a rational “object”. But this is misrepresentative of Plato’s thinking in so far as we have already seen in Chapters 2 and 3 that the *Meno* and the *Phaedrus* (as two dialogical examples) are clear rejections of rationalism. In the *Meno*, rationalism in the guise of Meno’s initial invocation of Gorgias is completely deconstructed by Socrates / Plato leading to perplexity (*aporia*) and philosophical benumbment (*narkosa*). In the *Phaedrus* Plato actually thematises the need to make a philosophical conversion from rationalism in presenting Socrates as himself recanting his original defence of reason.

In the succeeding chapters I will outline how this critique of rationalism is continued by “Platonism” as a movement, most notably in the examples of Boethius and Plotinus. Boethius’ text *The Consolation of Philosophy* outlines how the divine figure of “Philosophy” *manifests* herself to Boethius as he finds himself without knowledge or direction. Crucially this manifestation cannot be properly accessed by “reason” but requires the further faculty of “intellectual vision” which is again an undermining of the hegemony of reason. Plotinus also, in his *Enneads*, disallows access to the

divine One through the employment of reason alone. What gives one access to this divinity is rather the nonrational state of “rapture” or “enthusiasm”, concepts which can be seen as being directly inherited from Plato’s *Phaedrus*. In *The Gift of Death* however Derrida makes no reference to this Platonic “nonrationalism”, rather continuously interpreting Platonism as a “philosophy of the [rational] object”.

As with our discussion of the “Cogito” essay in Chapter 1, this Derridean emphasis on a Platonic rationalism seems to derive from a failure to recognise the import of the *ancient-modern quarrel*. *The Gift of Death* presents the philosophical quarrel as being between a rational dialectic and a nondialectical apophasis. For Patocka, the primary example of the former rationalism is Platonism, but Derrida also links this rationalism to Descartes, Kant and Hegel. With regard to Descartes, he speaks of the “*chez soi as ego cogito*” (*GD*, p.92) and outlines the requirement to go beyond the rationalism of “who am I?” (*GD.*, p.92) to the deconstructive problem of “who is this ‘I’ that can say ‘who’?” (*GD.*, p.92). The general implication is that Platonism in its “rationalism” is analogous to the Cartesian philosophy.

Derrida also makes continuous reference to Kant in *The Gift of Death*, perhaps most notably in the following passage where he is addressing those philosophers or commentators who would label his deconstructive apophasis as having failed in its “ethical duty” -

Philosophers who don’t write ethics are failing in their duty, one often hears, and the first duty of the philosopher is to think about ethics, to add a chapter on ethics to each of his or her books and, in order to do that, to come back to Kant as often as possible (*GD*, p.67).

Derrida therefore sets up this philosophical problematic around the confrontation between deconstructive “otherness” (or nondialectical thinking) and the *rationalised*

responsibility of Kant's thinking. The implicit assumption (as with the earlier reference to Descartes) is that Platonism remains on the side of modern rationalism while Christianity is rather a case of deconstructive "otherness", a nondialectical relation to God. Finally with regard to Hegel, Derrida quotes Patocka's critique of "the Hegelian philosophy" (GD., p.62; Patocka p.82) ["the Hegelian philosophy assumes no justified hiddenness, no justified incommensurability"] and makes a claim concerning the continuity between Plato and Hegel, indeed from "Plato to Hegel" (which of course includes Descartes and Kant) -

In the end, secrecy is as intolerable for ethics as it is for philosophy or for dialectics in general, from Plato to Hegel (GD., p. 62).

"Dialectics in general, from Plato to Hegel". Once again, Derrida has set up a dualist reading of the history of philosophy; on the one side, one has the dialectical rationalism of Plato, Descartes, Kant and Hegel. But this rationalism fails to do justice to the complete "otherness" of "goodness" / God. In consequence dialectics must be rejected and a thinking of nondialectical "otherness" put in its place, where one avoids any kind of "manifestation" and rather privileges the "secrecy" (GD., p. 62) of apophasis. In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida finds this apophasis in a certain thinking of Christianity, citing as one example (through Baudelaire) the philosophy of Augustine (GD., p.111). In the following chapters I will attempt to undermine this Derridean interpretation of the history of philosophy. Rather than setting up (with Derrida) a duality between dialectical and nondialectical thought, I will rather focus on the question of *rationalist and nonrationalist dialectic*. Above, I referred to the specificity of Platonic dialectic in so far as it involved precisely a refutation of rationalism, and cited the particular cases of the *Meno* and the *Phaedrus*. I also briefly made reference to Plotinus and Boethius. In the following chapters I will

develop the issue of dialectic as it relates to the wider movement of Platonism. Crucially, I will interpret Christianity as a consistent extension of Platonic dialectic rather than (with Derrida) an undermining of dialectic. I will foreground the essence of Platonic / Christian dialectic as the most suitable answer to Derrida's claims concerning an interminable *différance*.

CHAPTER 6 - PLATONISM *CONTRA* DERRIDA I: THE CASES OF PLOTINUS AND BOETHIUS

Section 6.1 - Prefatory Remarks

It may appear curious to group on the one hand Plotinus and Boethius and on the other hand Augustine and De Cusa together in terms of an interpretation of Platonism. From a chronological perspective, the order would rather link Plotinus and Augustine and then Boethius and De Cusa. My justification for the particular scheme employed here however is philosophical rather than chronological - although Boethius was a Christian and wrote theological tracts, his central text (*The Consolation of Philosophy*) [1] with which I am here primarily concerned avoids reference to Christian faith. The *Consolation* is therefore closer in spirit to the work of the pagan Platonist, Plotinus, than it is to the avowedly Christian Platonism of Augustine and De Cusa.

This chapter in consequence focuses exclusively on the two former figures, Plotinus and Boethius. While their thinking is far from being identical, in both cases there is the unmistakable fundamental influence of Plato. In previous chapters I foregrounded Plato's distinction between wisdom and knowledge and attempted to show how Plato's criterion of wisdom can take one beyond the perplexity (*aporia*) attendant upon the deconstruction of knowledge. The work of Plotinus and Boethius is also a meditation on the ultimate limits of rationality. But in both cases, like Plato and unlike Derrida, the very necessary deconstruction of knowledge is accompanied by an equally urgent *constructivist* impulse. In the next sections I will analyse this

simultaneous deconstructivism and constructivism from the perspectives of Plotinus and Boethius respectively.

Section 6.2 - On “The One” or “First Existent” in Plotinus

For Plotinus, “Divinity” or “God” is a graded triad. In this section, I will be primarily concerned with the uppermost and primary aspect of this divinity, what Plotinus calls “the One” or “First Existent”. Plotinus’ discussion of the One is crucial because his discussion of the latter institutes the fundamental ground of Plotinian philosophy. As the exemplary neo - Platonist -

the system of Plotinus is a system of necessary Emanation, Procession, or irradiation accompanied by necessary Aspiration or Reversion - to - Source: all the forms and phases of existence flow from the Divinity and all strive to return Thither and to remain There (McKenna, *Enn.* p.xxxi).

There are certainly intrinsic differences between the Plotinian system so described and its Platonic equivalent. However, both share a significant problematizing of their fundamental principles. In Plato’s case, one could cite particularly *Republic* 509b (a section of which Plotinus is very fond) concerning the “Good beyond Being” but also, with reference to Chapter 3, the admission in the *Meno* of the lack of knowledge with regard to the Good.

As we have seen, there is a strong strain of epistemological scepticism in Plato and this is carried forward into Plotinian neo - Platonism. For Plotinus, our lack of knowledge of the First Principle disallows us ascribing Being to its nature or indeed even referring to it as the Good -

And yet this “He is” does not truly apply: the Supreme has no need of Being: even “He is good” does not apply since it indicates Being: the “is” should not suggest something predicated of another thing; it is to state identity.....It is not that we think it exact to call him either good or the Good: *it is that sheer negation does not indicate*; we use the term The Good to assert identity without the affirmation of Being [*Enn.*, VI (7) 38-39] (my emphasis)

The First Principle is therefore *neither* The Good *nor* Being. With this neither / nor strategy, Plotinus' work resembles that of Derrida. At this point, one is at the second stage of the *Meno*, the deconstruction of false *tharros*. However, as with Plato, Plotinus wishes to move beyond simple deconstruction. As he states in his own words - "it is that sheer negation does not indicate". If Plotinus were simply to adopt a neither / nor strategy, the danger would be that the system of Emanation and Reversion to Source would no longer retain a foundation. Grounded in simple negation it would remain *groundless* and this can be seen to be the consequence of Derrida's philosophy. While denying knowledge of the One, Plotinus wishes to maintain that there "is" nonetheless such a unifying principle. However -

the "is" should not suggest something predicated of another thing; it is to state identity (*ibid*).

The question thus hinges on the status of the term "identity". This is not an epistemological identity, a knowledge accruing to Plotinus of the essence of the One. In effect it is precisely the opposite. *Identity* marks the limits of epistemology. Plotinus is stating that the One is "unknowable", but that this does not make it any less the One. As such, Plotinus is subverting the hegemony of epistemology, the conviction that philosophy must base its principles on knowledge by giving epistemological evidence of their existence. Plotinus' simultaneous epistemological scepticism *and* faithful assertion of the One puts him at the forefront of the ancient-modern quarrel. One can trace the lineage of this Plotinian agnostic (non-knowing) wisdom back to Plato and the Presocratics. In Chapter 2, I foregrounded Parmenides' and Heraclitus' original sense of philosophy as *philo - sophia*; "love of wisdom".

This paradigm emphasised the wisdom of the search as much as the acquisition and indeed for both Presocratics perfect wisdom remained inaccessible to mortals.

This fundamental agnosticism was continued by Plato but as with the Presocratics the lack of knowledge was accompanied by an unshakeable faith or belief (*pistis*) in the One or First Existent. This double-edged strategy is repeated by Plotinus in the *Enneads*. As John Dillon observes -

Plotinus certainly emphasises the transcendence and otherness of the One, its superiority to Being and Intellect, and its unknowability by any normal faculty of cognition, but in a number of passages, he makes some attempt to explore what sort of apprehension the One might have of itself.....he became more cautious in his language on this subject as he came to write more, but he was always anxious to avoid the impression that the One was some sort of blank or negativity.....that the One is neither constrained by necessity nor yet random and accidental (p. xciv) [3]

A distinction which Boethius employs in *The Consolation of Philosophy* (discussed in more depth in the next section) is useful here as a clarification of the philosophical significance of Plotinus' own method. From an epistemological viewpoint, there is an apparent inconsistency between the admission of the One's "unknowability by any normal faculty of cognition" [*Enn.*, p. xciv] and its assertion as more than simply "a blank or negativity" (*ibid.*). Boethius runs into similar difficulties in the *Consolation* when he comes to discuss the question of divine foreknowledge and the freedom of human willing. *The Consolation of Philosophy* is a text written in the context of Boethius' imprisonment (and eventual execution) on what he believes to be false charges. Having always followed the right path of philosophy, he now wonders whether such a life is worthwhile if it will only end in unjust punishment, while those who deserve punishment (the "evil") go free. From his private disillusionment, Boethius moves to question metaphysics at a more general level and the *Consolation*

represents a dialogue between his own questioning spirit and a defence of metaphysics put forward by a female personification of Philosophy.

This dialogue becomes very relevant to the issue of the Plotinian One, particularly as it reaches its close. Here Boethius outlines what he sees as a paradox in the doctrine of divinity or the One. If there is divine foreknowledge there can be no room for human freedom and thus in consequence no room for human responsibility -

Therefore, human thoughts and actions have no freedom, because the divine mind in foreseeing all things without being led astray by falseness binds human thoughts and actions to a single manner of occurrence (p. 153)....Nothing more wicked can be conceived than this, for as the whole order of things is derived from Providence and there is no room for human thoughts, it follows that our wickedness too is derived from the Author of all good (p.153) [*Consol.*]

In Boethius' elaboration of the problem there is a certain Aristotelian influence which is absent in Plotinus. The conception of divine foreknowledge is rooted in Aristotle's conception of God as Self-Thinking Thought which is alien to Plotinus' view of the One as being devoid of all epistemological attributes. Nonetheless there is a fundamental parallel between the cases of Plotinus and Boethius in terms of the relation between epistemology and the divine. For Boethius, or rather for Philosophy responding to Boethius, while God or the One has knowledge of human affairs, this knowledge is *incomparable* to human knowledge. Strictly speaking one cannot properly refer to it as knowledge as this would be to diminish its status through a blasphemous anthropocentrism. V.E. Watts in his notes to the *Consolation* explains Boethius' position through recourse to a distinction made by Thomas Aquinas between "intellect" and "reason". He quotes directly from Aquinas -

intellect (*intelligere*) is the simple (i.e. indivisible, uncompounded) grasp of an intelligible truth, whereas reasoning (*ratiocinari*) is the progression towards an intelligible truth by going from one understood (*intellecto*) point to another. The difference between them is thus like the difference between rest and motion or between possession and acquisition (*Consol.*, p.157).

For Boethius, God or the One is the site of a perfect “intelligence” or “intellect”. This is precisely the foundation for divine foreknowledge of human affairs. If there was to be a perfect human rationalism which would understand all human action in advance, then there would be no room for human responsibility and one would have to locate the origin of evil in God. But as Aquinas states so clearly, the realm of reason is the realm of imperfect “motion” and “acquisition”. As such from an epistemological perspective human affairs remain free and open; chaotic even.

In other words, the necessity or inevitability of human action is only a conditional necessity and the specificity of divine necessity is so heterogeneous to human necessity (what Boethius calls “simple necessity”; e.g. “it is necessary that all men are mortal” [*Consol.*, p.166]) that it allows room for human responsibility and obligation

-

Avoid vice, therefore, and cultivate virtue; lift up your mind to the right kind of hope, and put forth humble prayers on high. A great necessity is laid upon you, if you will be honest with yourself, a great necessity to be good, since you live in the sight of a judge who sees all things (*Consol.*, p. 169).

Boethius thus resolves a difficulty of interpretation by pointing to a *heterogeneity* between the human and the divine and, more strictly, between reason and intelligence. This insight is directly applicable to the case of Plotinus. The “unknowability” (*Enn.*, p. xciv) of the One does *not* imply that the One is “some sort of blank or negativity” (*ibid.*). Once one accepts the limits of epistemology, a different space of philosophy opens up and the *Enneads* is very much an “initiation” into this different space. As with Plato, Plotinus favours the terms “wisdom” and “dialectic” (over the term “knowledge”) to delineate this philosophical method. In

Ennead 1, Section 3, under the title-heading of “Dialectic” (*Enn.*, p. 24), Plotinus states the following -

What art is there, what method, what discipline to bring us there where we must go? (*Enn.*, p. 24).....the virtue of Wisdom (i.e. the virtue peculiarly induced by Dialectic) is a certain super - reasoning much closer to the Universal (*Enn.*, p. 28).

Such statements lead Paul Henry (in “The Place of Plotinus in the History of Thought”, included in the Penguin edition) to describe Plotinus as the founder of a very specific kind of “speculative mysticism” (p. xlii). This mysticism leads as Plotinus says to a kind of “super - reasoning”. In Boethian terms, this super - reasoning would be closer to intellect than to reason. That is, Plotinian dialectic leads to the simple grasp of intelligible truths rather than the apparently endless attempt to deduce some truths from other truths. C.S. Lewis puts the matter well in *The*

Discarded Image -

A life of unmitigated *ratio* where nothing was simply “seen” and all had to be proved, would presumably be impossible; for nothing can be proved if nothing is self - evident (quoted by Watts in *Consol.* p. 157).

This is obviously a controversial claim but one which is nonetheless acutely Plotinian in spirit. It looks back to Socrates’ supersession of Meno’s paradox through faith (*pistis*); it looks forward to both Augustine’s “believe so that you shall understand” as well as Boethius’ distinction between the “conditional” necessity of divinity and the “simple” necessity of the mortal. Divine necessity is conditional because its “proof” is impossible. It is therefore self - evident or it is nothing at all and this is why Plotinus’ language concerning the One is simultaneously reverential and highly understated.

However, one is not here speaking of rational self - evidence. If such a thing as “divinity” is self - evident, it can only be so for the philosopher or dialectician once certain processes of initiation have been achieved. These are at various times called (amongst other names) “the Term” and “the Way” [cf. MacKenna, p. xxxix].

Stephen MacKenna lyrically describes these processes -

the main need, the cry, of man's nature is to become actually, as he always is potentially, Divine: all his faculties, images each of its next highest, culminate in the Intellectual-Principle or Intellective-Principle, the Intuitional or True-Knowing Faculty; and his duty, or rather his happiness, his blessedness, his deepest inner voice, is to labour his entire being into identification with this, the Divine in him: through this inner Divine, in an ecstasy away from all the lower and first, from all that links him to Matter, he may even in this life attain to the “possession” of the God-head in an ineffable act of identification, becoming UNIATE, one with God, actually God, and foretasting the blessedness of the final return after which he is for all the space of eternity to be with the Godhead, to be Divine, or to be God (*Enn.*, p. xxxix).

This is a crucial point for the understanding of Plotinus' relation to the more Christian Platonism which succeeds his work. Although I include Boethius in this chapter next to Plotinus as the author of the “pagan” or secular *Consolation of Philosophy*, one would have to agree with Henry Chadwick that the *Consolation* is open to a Christianized reading (*Chadwick*, p. 222) [4]. In addition, there is the fact that Boethius was a practising Catholic and the author of several theological tractates. In contrast, Plotinus' work, consciously or unconsciously, maintains a distance from Christianity. However, this distance can all too easily be overstated. There is the obvious matter of the absence of Christology but while this may be an insurmountable problem for a Christian theologian it is the affinities which are important from the perspective of this thesis.

The problem I am foregrounding in this thesis is the issue of the nature of philosophy, particularly with reference to the distinction between wisdom and knowledge.

Christian Platonism, as we will see below, involves a simultaneous epistemological scepticism and philosophical assurance. In other words, for Christian Platonists such as De Cusa, the limits of epistemology are not the limits of philosophy. Unlike Derrida who derives an interminable *doubling* from the lack intrinsic to knowledge, De Cusa sees this lack as constitutive of the philosophical journey towards a truth beyond knowledge. This issue relates back to the case of Plotinus.

In the Plotinian system, Divinity or The First Existent (the One) involves a graded triad. If one looks at this system from the perspective of knowledge, it appears *hierarchical*. As “unknowable”, the One appears to maintain a lofty distance from its subordinates -

Standing before all things, there must exist a simplex, differing from all its sequel, self-gathered not interblended with the forms that rise from it, and yet able in some mode of its own to be present to those others (*Enn.*, V.4) [p. 387].

This passage from Plotinus captures perfectly the paradox - the One must remain distant and yet somehow accessible. The difficulty from an epistemological perspective is that there can only be distance without accessibility. Human reason cannot reach the simplicity of the One. To this extent one can say that Plotinus' system is epistemologically hierarchical. The first principle is inaccessible not simply to human reason but also to the second and third grades of the triad of divinity. The second gradation which is known as the “Intellectual Principle” or “Divine Thought” [*Enn.*, p. xxxii] cannot accurately even be termed the “offspring” of the One in the measure to which the One is not involved in the multiplicity of generation. The third gradation, the “All-Soul” (*Enn.*, p. xxxiii) is at one further remove. As the product of the Intellectual Principle, it is the offspring of that which is not even an

offspring of the One. These Plotinian gradations thus seem to maintain a rigid hierarchical system.

However, this is only the case from an epistemological viewpoint. Because the One according to Plotinus is not only inaccessible to human reason but is itself so free of *episteme* as to debar the Aristotelian label of “Self-Thinking Thought, epistemological criteria alone are incapable of enabling communication between the different gradations of divinity. This is why the Plotinian system, in the context of “knowledge”, is hierarchical. Crucially however this is not a hierarchy of knowledge. In other words, the One is not superior because it is greater in knowledge than the Intellectual-Principle or the All-Soul. Quite the contrary. Rational knowledge increases in accordance with the lower level of gradation. To invoke the Boethian distinction, the Intellectual-Principle has less rational knowledge, less *reason* than the All-Soul, to the extent that the Intellectual-Principle is rather the grade of *intellect* (as opposed to mere *reason*). And of course the One is even devoid of intellect, never mind reason.

If this is a hierarchy therefore, it is a hierarchy which diminishes the value of reason / knowledge, first in relation to the more immediate faculty of intellection and then in relation to an enigmatic “unknowability” inaccessible even to the subtleties of intellect. Moreover, there is a sense in which this anepistemological (*agnostic*) Plotinian system can no longer even be referred to as hierarchical. What Plotinus calls the Term or the Way is the method by which one’s soul can come into contact with the One, despite the latter’s very unknowability. In fact this unknowability is a virtue rather than a vice insofar as it allows the individual soul to open up to “rapture” (*harpastheis*) and “enthusiasm” (*Enn.*, VI; 11, 12), what MacKenna calls “a going

forth from the self” (*Enn.*, p. lxxx). Paul Henry notes (in an essay included in the Penguin edition) how Plotinus prefers these terms which derive from a sense of touch (*haphē*) than the rather more epistemologically influenced sense of “vision” and “contemplation” (*Enn.*, p. lxxx).

Meditating on this point, Henry makes the crucial claim that this more “concrete and tactile phraseology” (*Enn.*, p. lxxx) signals not a hierarchical but a *concentric* [i.e. more equally distributed] Plotinian system. Emphasis on hierarchy in Plotinus derives from his subordination of epistemology. But beyond epistemology, a Term or a Way opens up for the Plotinian to a remarkably egalitarian fluidity between apparently rigid gradations. Here the value of knowledge is replaced with that of love -

He is borne, so to speak, to the inmost of Himself in love of that pure radiance which He is, He Himself being that which He loves (*Enn.*, VI, 8, 16).

The crucial point with regard to Plotinus’ system is that this love is not to be regarded as solely the attribute of the One whilst divested from all the other gradations. Rather, in line with the typical neo-Platonic thesis of “illumination” or “irradiation” (Dillon, in *Enn.* p. xci), the One involves an “undiminished giving” (*Enn.*, p. lxxiii) to the rest of the universe. Even “matter” has some participation (*metaskhein*) in this love or Good. As Henry observes -

matter, whatever its origin, has some participation (*metaskhein*) in the Good and it is not completely separated from it (*ou khoris*). The physical world Plotinus at no time regards as wholly bad, but, along with the Stoics and in opposition to the Gnostics, sees it as an harmonious whole, a theatre in which the least virtuous characters are necessary to the drama. For him, as for Plato, it is a “beautiful, visible God” (*Enn.*, p. lxvii).

Through the subordination of knowledge and the introduction of a specific kind of faith or mysticism, Plotinus, like Plato, thus arrives at a vision of Unity and Good.

The Derridean conviction that the loss of knowledge involves the loss of Unity, Good

etc. is therefore highly questionable from a Platonic / Plotinian perspective. The limitations of epistemology do not always have to imply negative consequences. As Plotinus shows, these very limitations may open the way for a very different kind of dialectic. To requote the passage on this dialectic (*Enn.*, I.3, p.27/28) -

What then, is Philosophy? Philosophy is the supremely precious....the virtue of Wisdom (i.e. the virtue peculiarly induced by Dialectic) is a certain super-reasoning much closer to the Universal.

This vision of a Universal beyond knowledge which is nonetheless accessible to a different kind of philosophic wisdom is continued in the work of Boethius (again under the direct influence of Plato). In the next section, I will analyse this Boethian metaphysic from the perspective of his masterpiece, *The Consolation of Philosophy*.

Section 6.3 - On *The Consolation of Philosophy*

In the *Prefatory Remarks* to this chapter, I outlined a justification for what might have otherwise appeared a strange decision i.e. the subversion of chronological order and the grouping of Boethius with Plotinus and (in the next chapter) Augustine with De Cusa. I pointed to the theoretical context of Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*, that is its nonChristian path of thought and its recourse to a seemingly pagan methodology. It was precisely this Boethian strategy which, in my view, brought him closer to Plotinus than to either Augustine or De Cusa. Nonetheless, the term "pagan" requires clarification. It in no way signifies an anti-religious perspective. Rather, with regard to the contrast with Christian Platonism, the pagan Platonism of Plotinus and Boethius (as indeed that of Plato himself) is most accurately described as a *nonChristian religious mysticism*.

From the point of view of Boethius, I am obviously referring here to the *Consolation* and not to the theological tractates which, explicitly at least, are Christian tractates. Even on this issue however, there is room for a reading of the Boethian theological tractates as *implicitly* pagan in intent and methodology. Chadwick alludes to this fact when he states that -

the tractates, other than the fourth, contain even more Neo-Platonism than the *Consolation of Philosophy* itself [Chadwick, p. 175].

It is this fundamental Neoplatonism which forges the link between the respective philosophical systems of Plotinus and Boethius. I have already outlined the intricacies of the Plotinian universe, in particular the graded triad of divinity. Appearing hierarchical from an epistemological perspective, the system becomes *concentric* once epistemology is superseded by a holistic mysticism. With Boethius, this is again the case. The “paganism” of the Plotinian and Boethian philosophies replaces revelation with “intellect” rather than simple “reason”. Moreover for Boethius as for Plotinus, human intellect is inferior to divine intellect. One difference between Plotinus and Boethius is that at times Boethius seems to opt for an Aristotelian rather than Platonic understanding of the One to the extent that he sees the One as having “divine foreknowledge” (Cf. for example *Consol.* p. 155, especially Book V of the *Consolation*). This is in clear contrast to Plotinus who believed any ascription of knowledge or consciousness to the One to imply a diminution of the power of divinity.

Despite this particular kind of Aristotelianism, Boethius nonetheless often reverts to a Platonic or neo-Platonic key when describing the First or God. Maintaining a long lineage which finds its source traditionally in Plato’s “Good beyond Being” (*Republic*, 509b), but which also has a Presocratic ancestry (cf. chapter 2), Boethius

continuously uses oblique language to describe the One. In Book IV for example, attempting to posit the fundamental order which rules the cosmos, Boethius becomes suddenly reticent, having recourse to an authority even prior to the Presocratics, that of Homer -

But as the *Iliad* puts it, “‘Tis hard for me to speak as though a God”. And it is not allowed to man to comprehend in thought all the ways of the divine work or expound them in speech [*Consol.*, p. 140 / 141].

This is a gesture which relates back to the earlier discussion of Plotinus. In emphasizing Plotinus’ simultaneous assertion of the absolute “transcendence” and “otherness” of the One [cf. Dillon, in *Enn.* p.xciv] and nonetheless its not being a simple blank or negativity, I employed the Boethian conceptual framework as an explanatory tool. The absence of Christian apologetics or dogma in the *Consolation* is nevertheless supplemented by an analogous mystical vocabulary and system. As with Christianity, reason is seen as being an inferior faculty incapable of accessing the One or God. In its place one finds for Boethius *intelligentia* or “intelligence”. In its ability to transcend the isolation of reason, intelligence is powerful but it still remains ultimately insufficient as is exemplified by the above quoted Boethian passage - “it is not allowed to man to comprehend.....all the ways of the divine work” [*Consol.*, p. 140 / 141]. Just below this statement in the *Consolation* one finds the incapacity of Boethius’ reason emphasized by his interlocutor Philosophy -

You are worn out by the prolixity of the reasoning and have been looking forward to the sweetness of song [*Consol.*, p. 141].

This reference to “song” brings the Boethian methodology very close to that of Plotinus’ Term or Way. As noted in the previous section, Plotinus is often inclined in the *Enneads* to adopt a “concrete and tactile phraseology” (*Enn.* p. lxxx). On one level, he replaces the faculty of reason with the nonetheless epistemologically

influenced “vision” or “contemplation”. But crucially this “super-reasoning” as he calls it in the *Ennead* on “Dialectic” [*Consol.* I, 3] is itself superseded by a more mystical emphasis on “rapture” (*harpastheis*) and “enthusiasm” (*Consol.*, VI, 11, 12), what MacKenna lyrically translates as “a going forth from the self”. Here in the *Consolation* Book IV we have an analogous Boethian recourse to “song” beyond the “prolixity of reason”. As with Plotinus, this transference from epistemology to a unifying mysticism allows the Boethian system to replace hierarchy with *concentrism*, a reversion to source -

Those things which stable order now protects,
Divorced from their true source would fall apart,
This is the love of which all things partake,
The end of good their chosen goal and close:
No other way can they expect to last,
Unless with love for love repaid they turn,
And seek again the cause that gave them birth [*Consol.*, Bk. IV, p.142].

This Boethian strategy gives a significant response to the questions which Derrida poses to Platonism and to philosophy in general. Boethius and Derrida share an epistemological scepticism, an *agnosticism* as it were. But whereas Derrida derives an interminable doubling from this scepticism which undercuts any attempt at philosophical constructivism, Boethius employs this philosophical *crisis* to reevaluate the very nature of the metaphysical project -

It is because you men are in no position to contemplate this order that everything seems confused and upset.....Everything that is known is comprehended not according to its own nature, but according to the ability to know of those who do the knowing [*Consol.*, p. 157, Book V].

Boethius thus admits that everything “seems confused and upset”, he admits there is a philosophical crisis. But crucially and unlike Derrida, he believes this to be a crisis not *of* but *within* philosophy. He offers a prospective resolution of this difficulty by turning the tables on the accusers of philosophy. The contemporary confusion and

upset which in effect is Boethius' *lack of knowledge* concerning God and truth, cannot be said to imply a consequent *lack of God and truth in themselves*. In other words, the absence of the object may only be an absence in relation to the ineptitude of the subject. And of course this is ultimately the moral of Boethius' tale.

Philosophy answers his questioning as follows -

Let us, then, if we can, raise ourselves up to the heights of that supreme intelligence. There reason will be able to see that which it cannot see by itself - it will be able to see how that which has no certain occurrence may be seen by a certain and fixed foreknowledge, a knowledge that is not opinion, but the boundless immediacy of the highest form of knowing [*Consol.*, Book V, p. 162].

The section [Book V, Section V] then closes with an exhortation (in the form of a song) to elevate one's thoughts to enable one to overcome the ineptitude of human subjectivity -

You who raise your eyes to heaven with thrusting face,
Raise up as well your thoughts, lest weighted down to earth,
Your mind sinks lower as your body rises high [*Consol.*, p. 16].

This philosophical blueprint is not intended as an abstract meditation. As with Plotinus' "concrete and tactile phraseology", Boethius' move beyond epistemology leads to mysticism as a way of life. Abstract hierarchy is superseded by a very intimate union with the One, which from an epistemological perspective seemed so distant and remote. In Book III, Boethius had already made this more practical aspect of his endeavour clear through an emphasis on *happiness* as only possible through "participation" [*Consol.*, p. 102] in divinity.

Of course any accusations of abstraction on Boethius' part are already out of court, so to speak, from the very beginning of the *Consolation* with regard to the latter's very *raison d'être*. Boethius is no longer an ivory tower metaphysician but a prisoner unjustly awaiting torture and execution in a dark cell. His dialogue with Philosophy is

intended as a *consolation* in the most profound of senses - a helpless mortal seeks salvation. Amidst all the metaphysical questioning one can forget this most *material* (materialist) of bases. Those who accuse Platonism of negating the material or sensible in favour of the supersensible (cf. for example Heidegger's "Language in the Poem") [5] find here a rather uncomfortable rejoinder. This is again made clear in the passage on *happiness* in Book III -

Since it is through the possession of happiness that people become happy, and since happiness is in fact divinity, it is clear that it is through the possession of divinity that they become happy.....so those who possess divinity necessarily become divine. Each happy individual is therefore divine. While only God is so by nature, as many as you like may become so by *participation* [*Consol.*, p. 102].

It is perhaps the last phrase which is the most revealing. The theory of *participation* is a central Platonic tenet. It is most clearly elaborated by Plato at *Sophist* 248e and is the basis of the link between the material and the spiritual world. The sensible can be said to *participate* in the supersensible. As such, there can be no question of rejecting the sensible world in the name of some intelligible realm. The doctrine of participation lends credence to the view of a *concentric* rather than hierarchical universe. Plotinus develops this view of participation, most notably in his theory concerning matter. Matter maintains a participation (*metaskhein*), despite its lowly origin in the Good and is not completely separated from it (*ou khoris*) [Henry, in *Enn.* p. lxvii].

This then is the traditional Platonic lineage which Boethius develops through his tenet of human happiness as a participation in divinity. Boethius represents a crucial historical juncture in this line of thinking, as he perhaps more than any other thinker signifies the bridge between the Platonic doctrine of participation and the Christian

doctrine of the Incarnation. Boethius in effect is the prime exemplar of the strong affinity between Platonism and Christianity. Some commentators would no doubt point, in opposition to this view, to a chronological issue. Surely St. Augustine of Hippo, they might say (not to mention Origen and Clement), is a more appropriate bridge between Platonism and Christianity to the extent that first, he is a Christian Platonist and second, he precedes Boethius.

There is of course an undeniable truth in this reference to Augustine. Nonetheless with Augustine, Platonism had already become *Christianized*; it had already lost some of its original Platonic flavour. The paradox is that Boethius, a full century later (and despite the undoubted Augustinian influence on his work) maintains Platonism and Christianity as almost two parallel lines which never fully converge;

Between Boethius and Augustine there are also many notable differences. Most important of these is the difference in the ways in which the two men speak of the relation between faith and reason: for Augustine, parallel and reconcilable ways of knowing the truth; for Boethius parallel ways which can only meet at certain points.....[Chadwick, p. 251].

The individual integrity of both Christianity and Platonism are therefore more readily discernible in the work of Boethius than in that of Augustine. The two are set out side by side and one awaits their reconciliation. In this sense, Boethius builds a bridge between Platonism and Christianity, but does not cross. From either a Platonic or Christian perspective, this may appear to be Boethius' failing. But from the viewpoint of this thesis, there is no real philosophical difficulty at issue. Platonism and Christianity (or more specifically Christian Platonism) represent compatible but independent metaphysics, both equally useful in the attempt to offer a response to the challenge of Derrida and deconstruction. Both stress the role of wisdom over knowledge, both stress concentricism over hierarchy. In this chapter, I have attempted

to outline this emphasis from the perspective of the (neo)Platonism of Plotinus and Boethius. In the following chapter, I will attempt a similar analysis from the point of view of the Christian Platonism of Augustine and Nicholas De Cusa.

CHAPTER 7 - PLATONISM *CONTRA* DERRIDA II - THE CASES OF AUGUSTINE AND DE CUSA

Section 7.1 - Prefatory Remarks

the thinking of Being, precisely because it does not substitute Being for God, can think God as the example par excellence of a mode of thought oblivious to difference (Gasché, *Inventions of Difference*, p.156) [1]

The context of the above quotation from Rodolphe Gasché is his attempt to outline (and defend) Derrida's critique of the positing of God as "an absolute and universal grounding efficiency" (*ID*, p.154). In essays such as "Denials", Derrida is keen to stress that this universalist grounding is not simply an attribute of affirmative theisms but also intrinsic to the projects of negative theology, which he therefore wishes to distinguish from deconstruction. In other words, Derrida's critique of epistemology (e.g. in the case of Husserl) is extended to include negative theology as itself a misguided epistemological absolutism. As Gasché puts it above, such negative theology would be "oblivious to difference" (*ID*, p.156).

In this chapter, I will challenge this interpretation not simply of negative theology but also of a particular kind of affirmative theology (that of Augustine). In the case of De Cusa, one can say that he is *both* a positive and negative theologian. This *doubling* effect one has already encountered in Plotinus and Boethius. For Plotinus, intellect can say little if anything of the nature of the One and yet through rapture and enthusiasm even the low form of human soul has the prospect of making contact with this highest principle. Similarly, Boethius' *Consolation* is addressed to a particular individual in a sorry plight (Boethius himself) with all the attendant material and

lowly context. Here Boethius is stressing a positive philosophy / theology which can address even the merely particular. And yet God also remains ultimately inaccessible as is evinced by the closing discussion in the *Consolation* concerning divine foreknowledge and human freedom. Although the simultaneous reality of both foreknowledge and freedom seems contradictory, Boethius (or rather the personification of Philosophy) maintains that this is only contradictory from a human perspective, the divine perspective remaining *beyond* our cognition. This is in effect a subtle kind of negative theology.

This simultaneous positive and negative theology is continued by Augustine and De Cusa. Such a *doubling* strategy is a crucial rejoinder to Gasché who (with Derrida) claims that such theologies as Christian Platonism are “oblivious to difference”. For both Plotinus and Boethius, the One or God always remains outside the sphere of human reason. To this extent, both thinkers emphasise an irreducible *difference*. Similarly, Augustine and De Cusa are far from thinking that all difference can be reduced. Bourke for example makes the point that -

any attempt at presenting his (Augustine’s) views in an organised, logically developed system of philosophy is doomed to end in distortion. Augustine’s notion of “order” (*ordo*) places great stress on symmetry but great emphasis on using a variety of inner discoveries to reach a desired end (Bourke, p.21)[2]

This stress on “particularity” and “contingency” is linked by Augustine (as with Boethius) to the “incomparable” nature of the divine in relation to the human. From a philosophical perspective, therefore, there can be no ultimate finalization of Augustinianism -

The answer to which Augustine comes.....is never an exhaustive description of God’s essential nature. Like the One of Plotinus and the divinity of many medieval mystics, the God of Augustinian thought transcends all efforts at complete description (Bourke, p. 140).

Book 10 Chapter 6 of the *Confessions* [3] is a particular case in point. Having expressed an “assured” love of God and a conviction that Creation itself is a visible God (“the heaven and earth, they tell me to love thee”), Augustine nonetheless introduces *difference* into his discussion. In seeking to answer the question “But what do I love, when I love Thee” (*quid autem amo, cum te amo*) Augustine is forced to employ the language of negation and analogy -

But, what do I love, when I love Thee? Not the prettiness of a body (*non speciem corporis*), not the gracefulness of temporal rhythm, not the brightness of light (that friend of these eyes), not the sweet melodies of songs in every style, not the fragrance of flowers and ointments and spices, not manna and honey, not limbs which can be grasped in fleshly embraces - these I do not love, when I love my God (*non haec amo, cum amo deum meum*). Yet I do love something like a light (*et tamen amo quandam lucem*), a voice, an odor, food, embrace of my inner man, wherein for my soul a light shines, and place does not encompass it (*ubi fulget animae meae, quod non capit locus*), where there is a sound which time does not sweep away, where there is a fragrance which the breeze does not disperse, where there is a flavor which eating does not diminish, and where there is a clinging which satiety does not disentwine (*et ubi haeret quod non diuellit satietas*). This is what I love, when I love my God (*hoc est quod amo, cum deum meum amo*) [*Confessions* Book 10 Chapter 6].

This is a revealing passage for an understanding of Augustine’s philosophy, highlighting both the positive and negative movements of his thought. One can refer this Augustinian dialectic back to Plato’s dialectic in the *Meno*. There are three stages -

1) In the first case, there is the *existing orthodox philosophy* or *mode of predication*.

In Plato’s case, this is obviously sophistry but for Augustine one might imagine a naively positive predication of God.

2) A deconstruction of this orthodoxy in Plato’s case via Meno’s paradox, and in Augustine’s case through the employment of a negativizing vocabulary (“But what do

I love, when I love Thee? Not the prettiness of a body (*non specium corporis*). This is also the stage at which, on my interpretation, Derrida's thought remains.

3) The overcoming of negation through an affirmation which respects difference but which nonetheless through faith (Plato - *pistis*) or love (Augustine - *amor*) posits a philosophical Unity. Crucial here also is the difference between *wisdom* and *knowledge*. For Plato and Augustine, one cannot *know* but this conviction is rather grounded in a philosophical wisdom which is often closer to ignorance than to knowledge.

I will develop these points from an Augustinian angle in more detail in the next section. However, to conclude these prefatory remarks I will briefly introduce De Cusa's perspective on these matters and will deal with the latter's thought in more detail in Section 7.3. I referred above to Augustinian wisdom as being often closer to ignorance than to knowledge. De Cusa, in developing this fundamentally Platonic perspective, emphasises the concept of "learned ignorance". This is nowhere more clearly expressed than in his central text "De Docta Ignorantia" -

Truly the precision of combinations in corporeal things and the suitable adaptation of the known to the unknown so far exceeds human reason that Socrates believed that he knew nothing except his own ignorance, the most wise Solomon asserted that all things are difficult and inexplicable in speech, and a certain other man of divine spirit said that wisdom and the locus of the intelligence are hidden from the eyes of all the living. If, therefore, this is true as even the most profound Aristotle affirms it to be concerning the most manifest things in nature, in his *Metaphysics*, then the difficulty which befalls us is like that of owls trying to look at the sun. Indeed, in order that the appetite within us not be frustrated, we desire to know that we are ignorant [quoted Moffitt-Watts, p. 33] [4]

Again, the comparison with Derrida is helpful. The recourse in this passage to the successive agnosticisms of Socrates, Solomon, "a certain other man of divine spirit" (this could be Plato, Plotinus, Augustine or Boethius - De Cusa was influenced by

each) and Aristotle exemplifies a specific continuity between De Cusa and Derrida. There is an inbuilt *impossibility* in the task of philosophy. But the crucial last sentence of the passage marks De Cusa's move beyond the deconstruction of epistemology -

in order that the appetite within us not be frustrated we desire to know that we are ignorant

This "knowledge" of ignorance is not simply a recourse to paradox for the sake of paradox. As Moffitt-Watts observes, what marks De Cusa's metaphysics as historically important is the simultaneous positing of a metaphysical *disjunction* and a *constructive* role for philosophy [Watts, p. 74]. In other words, De Cusa first outlines a disjunction between human knowledge and divine reality which appears unsurpassable. This is the De Cusian moment of deconstruction. Epistemology cannot reconcile the finite with the infinite -

there is no proportion between the finite and the infinite (*infiniti ad finitum proportionem non esse*).....[quoted Watts, p. 25].

However, as Moffitt-Watts notes, there remains in De Cusa "a potent affirmation of human creativity" [Watts, p. 74]. Once again therefore (as with Plato, Plotinus, Augustine and Boethius) one has a *doubling* strategy which follows the first two phases of Derrida's own thinking but moves beyond these into a third *constructive* phase. I will analyse the details of this project from a De Cusian perspective in the third section of this chapter. Below, however, I will first concentrate on Augustine.

Section 7.2 - Augustine's *Love of Wisdom*

This thesis (in chapter 2) has already traced the importance of the Presocratic understanding of philosophy for the development of Platonic metaphysics. In chapter

1, I outlined how Derrida's understanding of philosophy can be seen to have been influenced by Husserl and can be traced back fundamentally to the Cartesian revolution in philosophy. This thesis depends upon a radically alternative view of philosophy as epitomized by, for example, a particular strand of Platonic thought. Crucial to this alternative view is the distinction between *wisdom* and *knowledge*. Although Augustinianism differs from the thinking of Plotinus and Boethius (the previous two examples) in being avowedly a *Christian* Platonism, the philosophical implications of this thinking remain strikingly similar.

This continuity is summed up in Augustine's famous dictum "unless you will have believed, you will not understand" (*nisi credideritis, non intellegitis*) which was transformed by some later medievals into the principle of "faith seeking understanding" (*fides quaerens intellectum*). Once again one has in this instance a case of Platonic dialectic being split into two stages. The first stage involves a (negative) diminution or deconstruction of knowledge. The second phase is a (positive) affirmation of *wisdom* beyond knowledge. Augustine clarifies this logic in his text *On the Trinity* -

Yet action, by which we use temporal things well, differs from contemplation of eternal things; and the latter is reckoned to wisdom, the former to knowledge [14:21, p. 37] (5)

A little later in this text Augustine comments that "no one doubts but that the former (wisdom) is to be preferred to the latter (knowledge)" [14:25]. This judgement is grounded in Augustine's three-tiered system of "vision" or "seeing", which Bourke outlines as follows [EA, p. 11] -

- 1) corporeal seeing
- 2) cogitating

3) intellectual vision

It is the relationship between the second and third levels which interests us here. For Augustine, the second level of “cogitating” involves “the rational cognizance of temporal things” [*On The Trinity*, [14:25], *EA*. p. 40]. This is also described as “the word of knowledge” [14:25]. In the context of Augustine’s principle “unless you will have believed, you will not understand” (*nisi credideritis, non intellegitis*) one can say that for Augustine the second level of cogitating is insufficient to bring us to an understanding not simply of God, but of Creation or the sensible world in general. “Creation is a Great Book”, he declares in a crucial Sermon [Mai 126.6; *EA.*, p. 123] but this Book is unreadable by reason alone.

Instead it requires the third level of intellectual vision, what Augustine calls in *On the Trinity* the “intellectual cognizance of eternal things” [14:25] or “the word of wisdom” [14:21]. Although this is undeniably a Christian Platonism (the Incarnation being a central Augustinian tenet), in his emphasis on intellect and wisdom Augustine can be firmly placed in the tradition which proceeds from Plato through to Plotinus and Boethius. The Christian Platonism of Augustine and De Cusa remains part of this lineage. The essence of Augustine’s wisdom leads one towards God but it resists the divinisation of man which was to become such a central part of modernity -

to attain to these [divine truths] with the eye of the mind is the lot of the few; and when they are attained as much as they can be, he himself who attains to them does not abide in them but is, as it were, repelled by the resounding of the eye itself of the mind, and so there comes to be a transitory thought of a thing not transitory [*On the Trinity*, [14:23], *EA*. p.38].

This passage is crucial because it highlights another important difference between *wisdom* and *knowledge*. I have already outlined the claim that wisdom involves a concern of the intellect with eternal truths, while knowledge involves the rational

understanding of temporal truths. Additionally, however, while knowledge seeks to possess its object, wisdom remains *separated from* or “repelled” by eternal truth. This reminds one of Heraclitus’ stress on *orexis* or “striving”. Philosophy is not simply wisdom but *love of wisdom*, the striving for or journey towards wisdom. Parmenides’ poem is an analogous meditation on this distance from Truth. In Plato’s *Meno*, the shift from a negative *tharros* (of the overconfident sophists) to a positive *tharros* is best read as an invocation to “take heart”. This is far from, for example, Descartes’s ideal of reducing everything to a series of “clear and distinct ideas” or Husserl’s attempt to make philosophy a “rigorous science”. Plotinus also thematizes the “wandering” of the soul from the One, and for Boethius, divinity must always remain beyond human comprehension, whether through reason or even through intellect.

The substitution of wisdom for knowledge by Augustine should not therefore be seen as simply the replacing of one transcendental signified by that of another. The nature of philosophical wisdom (as understood by Platonism) is fundamentally heterogeneous to the nature of epistemological knowledge. This is precisely the crux of the *ancient-modern quarrel*. At issue is the very nature of philosophy itself - is metaphysics to be an epistemological project or a project which attempts to transcend the limits of knowledge? In the *Confessions* Book 7, Augustine describes his own philosophy as “the way of man’s salvation”. He is very critical of the reductionism of epistemology as for example in Book 7 where he outlines his disagreement with the Manichees [*Confessions*, p.109]. For Augustine, the Manichees exemplify a philosophy of “the things of space” [*Confessions*, p. 107], a description which tallies with his discussion in *On the Trinity* of the “cognizance of temporal things” or “the

word of knowledge” [14:25, *EA* p. 40]. In the *Confessions*, Augustine is unequivocal in his condemnation of this mode of epistemology -

I should utterly have vomited them up [the Manichees] from my overcharged breast, because they had no way of escape, without horrible sacrilege of heart and tongue, from what they held and said of You [*Confessions*, Book 7, p. 109].

This attack is not simply directed at the Manichees but rather at the nature of the epistemological project which they exemplify. Having been himself an initial convert to the “word of knowledge”, Augustine rails against what he sees as an epistemological failure to think of God as anything other than “a corporeal substance” [*Confessions*, p. 107]. He describes his earlier situation in terms of three tiers or levels -

A) God

B) the light of wisdom directed towards God

C) the light of reason directed towards the corporeal [*Confessions*, p. 115, Book 7].

For Augustine, the Manichean epistemology remained at the third and lowest level and under its influence he became stifled -

those lower things became greater than I and pressed me under so that I could neither loosen their grip nor so much as breathe [*Confessions*, p. 115].

It is “the Platonists” [*Confessions*, p. 123] whom Augustine credits with taking him beyond the “word of knowledge” to the “word of wisdom”. These “Athenian” [*Confessions*, p. 117] texts direct his mind from a thinking rooted in “space” and the “corporeal” [*Confessions*, p. 107] to a metaphysics of “incorporeal” truth -

Now that I had read the books of the Platonists and had been set by them towards the search for a truth that is incorporeal, I came to see Your invisible things which are understood by the things that are made [*Confessions*, p. 123, Book VII].

This is reminiscent of Augustine's "Creation is a Great Book". God is as it were the Divine Artist and the created world is perhaps his greatest work. As Plato observed, the world is a "visible God". We can therefore direct ourselves towards the incorporeal through a realization or recognition of the divine elements within the realm of the corporeal. To an astute philosophical eye, the "invisible" is "visible". Again however, this philosophical wisdom is attained by the "wise" (the Platonists) but denied to the "knowledgeable" (the Manichees). The Book of Creation can therefore only be read given the proper methodology and here Augustine puts himself in the tradition of Platonic wisdom.

Augustine nevertheless does have some criticisms to make of Platonism. Although directing his attention toward the "incorporeal", his reading of the Platonists led him to become arrogant concerning his wisdom -

I had begun to wish to appear wise, and this indeed was the fulness of my punishment; and I did not weep for my state, but was badly puffed up with my knowledge [*Confessions*, p. 124, Book 7].

This concern regarding a "puffed up" philosophy highlights the continuing Pauline influence on Augustine. It reminds one of Paul's declaration "Beware lest anyone seduce you by philosophy" (Col. 2:8). Here in the *Confessions* Augustine would seem to be prepared to go only so far with Platonism. While moving beyond the epistemology of the Manichees, the thinking of the "incorporeal" in Platonism still remains too close to the arrogance of wisdom. However, one would have to make qualifications to this blunt pronouncement. In the first case, there is Augustine's specific response to Paul's declaration which appears in his treatise *Morals of the Catholic Church*. Bourke outlines the nature of this response which, crucially, is not anti-philosophical as such -

Augustine clarifies that Paul does not wish to downgrade the love of wisdom; “This [philosophy] generates so much pride that they seem to dwell in the very heavens that they so frequently discuss. So the soul should restrain itself from craving for this sort of empty knowledge, if it proposes to serve God with an unsullied mind”.....So it is in reference to this that a person is warned to avoid false images [Bourke, p. 211].

Applying this Augustinian theology to the Manichees, it may well be that Augustine’s critique is well justified. But the question of “Platonism” poses a more difficult problem. For example, can Socrates be recognised in the description concerning “pride” and the “craving for empty knowledge”? If anything, Augustine’s concern directly echoes the logic of Meno’s paradox and as such it is difficult to understand Augustine’s criticisms in this context. The same argument could be employed to absolve Plato and Plotinus and the later Boethius and De Cusa of guilt. So what are we to make of this negative reference to Platonism?

Firstly, it is important to make clear that Augustine *does* distinguish (positively) between Manichean epistemology and Platonic wisdom. Even therefore if Platonism is inadequate, it is less inadequate than epistemology. Secondly, one can wonder as to the exact sense of “Platonism”. Notwithstanding the reference to the “Athenians” it is clear that little if any of the original dialogues were available to Augustine. It is therefore unfair to categorise the accusations of Book 7 as simply referring to “Plato”. However, Augustine’s fundamental difficulty with “Platonism” is irrefutable to the extent that it captures the chasm between Platonism and Platonic - Christianity -

I did not find that the Word became flesh.....these books did not tell me that He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men.....I did not read that in due time he died for the ungodly [Confessions, p. 116 / 17].

This Augustinian Christology is of course absent in earlier Platonism. Above however I made the point that the more secular or pagan Platonism of Socrates / Plato,

Plotinus and Boethius' *Consolation* could be made compatible with the more Christian Platonism of, for example, Augustine and De Cusa. In other words, Augustine's ultimate reticence concerning Platonism is not fatal to the effort of this thesis to outline a Platonic wisdom in opposition to Derrida. This is because, firstly, Augustine says many positive things about Platonism. Without Platonism there would by definition be no Christian Platonism. In the second case, when one considers Augustine's criticisms of Platonism in the context of Pauline suspicion and Tertullian's absolute disavowal of philosophy, they appear very moderate. These two qualifying points lead us to the question of compatibility. Despite Augustine's wariness in the face of Platonic wisdom, it seems clear that Augustinianism and Platonism are wholly compatible metaphysics. To conclude this section, I will outline an analysis of this compatibility from the perspective of the problem of "wisdom".

In the *Confessions*, as we saw above, Augustine distinguishes between two crucial levels of human intellection - the level of reason trained on the things of space and temporality, and the level of intellectual vision which is directed towards the incorporeal truths of eternal wisdom. At the first level, he locates the despised Manichean philosophy, of which initially he had been a follower. At the second level, he locates the writing of the "Platonists" whom he credits with enabling him to leap from a thinking of the corporeal to a thinking of the incorporeal. Nonetheless, he expresses ultimate reservations about these Platonists with regard to two crucial points -

- 1) They do not recognise that the Word became flesh i.e. they do not recognise the Incarnation as a philosophical truth.

2) They consequently lack a necessary “humility” and are prone to become “puffed up” with arrogance.

Addressing the first point one can say that Plato at least can be absolved of responsibility for not recognising the Incarnation in the measure to which he historically preceded Christ. In addition, there are strong resonances of a divine “participation” in the mortal in Plato’s work. This can even be traced back as far as Heraclitus -

Fragment XCII - Immortals are mortal, mortals immortal, living the other’s death, dead in the other’s life [p. 70 / 71, Kahn]

[*athanatoi thnetoi, thnetoi athanatoi, zontes ton ekeinon thanaton, ton de ekeinon bion tethneotes*].

This emphasis upon the *reciprocal* relation between the mortal and the immortal is developed by Plato through his doctrines of the immortality of the soul, of participation of the finite in the infinite, and of *anamnesis* or remembrance from past lives. While neither the Heraclitean nor Platonic conceptions of the human / divine relation directly mirror the Incarnation, they are extraordinarily similar. While from a theological perspective they remain incompatible, from a philosophical perspective they are very close to being compatible. In this context, Augustine’s critical remarks concerning the absence of a Platonic Christology can be seen as relatively insignificant from a philosophical viewpoint i.e. outside the specifics of Christian dogmatics.

Additionally, considering the case of Plotinus one could argue that the Plotinian concept of the Term or Way bears affinities to the import of the Incarnation to the extent that it involves an individual soul partaking of the One. The case of Boethius is

more clearcut in so far as he was a practising Catholic and alongside the *Consolation* wrote five theological tractates which were meditations on the reality of the Incarnation and the exact nature of Christ. Boethius' work is almost a microcosm of the larger relation between Platonism and Christian Platonism, the *Consolation* representing a pagan wisdom (of "participation" in the infinite) while the tractates invoke the Incarnation. While Boethius himself was keen to stress a "disjunction" between faith and reason [cf. Chadwick, p. 180], the concept of *intellectual vision* (or "intelligence") which he introduces in the *Consolation* [p. 157] is clearly of Augustinian origin. Boethian Platonism therefore also appears to evade the (prior) criticisms of Augustine. As for De Cusa, his philosophy is perhaps nothing other than an extended Christology and bears a very profound Augustinian trajectory (cf. Section 7.30).

Augustine's first criticism of Platonism therefore would seem to be philosophically unjust although from a dogmatic theological perspective it is undoubtedly irrefutable. His second criticism concerns the nature of Platonic "wisdom" - according to Augustine, the latter lacks a necessary "humility" -

Further I read [in the Platonists].....that of His fullness souls receive that they may be blessed, and that by participation in that wisdom which abides in them they are renewed that they may be wise. But I did not read that in due time He died for the ungodly.....For Thou hast hid these things from the wise and hast revealed them to the little ones, that those who labor and are burdened should come to Him and He should refresh them, because He is meek and humble of heart; and the meek He directs in judgement, and the gentle He teaches His ways.....[*Confessions*, Book 7 p.117].

Augustine then elaborates how far the Platonists remain from this humility and meekness -

But those who wear the high boots of their sublimer doctrine do not hear Him saying: Learn of me for I am meek and humble of heart and you shall find rest for your souls; and if they know God, they have not glorified him as God or given thanks: but become vain in their thoughts; and their foolish heart is

darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they become fools [*Confessions*, p. 117, Book 7].

In this passage, Augustine has therefore both commended *and* criticised Platonism. In the first case, he credits the Platonic doctrine of “participation”, for it is this philosophy which has elevated him from the spatio-temporality of the Manichees to his vision of “incorporeal” things. However, the second part of the passage outlines his grievances. The “height” and “sublimity” of Platonism is said to disdain what Augustine regards as a necessary “meekness” and “humility” of heart. There is a lack of praise and thanks to God and this “vanity” transforms Platonic wisdom into foolishness. As with the problem of the Incarnation, one can ask how accurate this description of Platonic wisdom really is. I will take one example from Plato’s *Meno* to exemplify not simply the inaccuracy of Augustine’s description but more importantly how close Socratic / Platonic wisdom is to what Augustine will present as a specifically Christian wisdom.

At *Meno* 96A, Socrates introduces the issue of the uniqueness of philosophical wisdom in so far as it attempts to deal with the question of “whether virtue (*arete*) can be taught” (95e). But this uniqueness is not asserted positively or vainly as Augustine would have us believe in terms of a “higher” and more “sublime” doctrine.

Quite the contrary -

Socrates: Well, can you name any other subject (*pragmatos*) in which the professing teachers (*phaskontes didaskaloi*) are not only refused recognition (*homologountai*) as teachers of others, but regarded as not even understanding it themselves (*houde autoi epistasthai*), and indeed as inferior (*poneroi*) in the very quality (*pragma*) of which they claim to be teachers; while those who are themselves recognised as men of worth and honour (*kaloι kagathoi*) say at one time that it is teachable and at another that it is not? When people are so confused (*tetaragmenous*) about this or that matter, can you say they are teachers (*didaskalous*) in any proper sense of the word? [*Meno*, 96a-b].

If there is a Socratic / Platonic vanity here, it is certainly difficult to find. In the *Confessions* Book 7 (quoted above) Augustine had stated that “professing themselves to be wise, they become fools”. But here in the *Meno*, the “professing teachers” (*phaskontes didaskaloi*) are shorn of all authority. They are not merely divested of superior wisdom; they are in fact said to be inferior (*poneroi*) to non-teachers, to those professedly without wisdom. The Greek term here is particularly negative - *poneroi* could also be translated as cowardice, badness, ill-conditioned, evil, worthless. This is an example of Socrates’ conviction that philosophical wisdom leads to an *emptying* of knowledge, a realisation that one knows nothing. As Socrates concludes, amidst all the ensuing confusion (*tetaragmenous*), “can philosophers be said to be proper teachers (*didaskalous*)?” The question is self-evidently rhetorical and at 96d Socrates outlines his fears -

Socrates: I fear, Meno, you and I are but poor (*phauloi*) creatures.....(96d, p.357).

Again Plato’s choice of phrase is not insignificant - *phauloi* can mean slight, easy, paltry, petty, bad. It refers to persons low in rank, the mean, common, worthless, those of no account. It can also refer to the uneducated and physically ugly. One is thus quite far from the heights and sublimity of Augustine’s supposed Platonism. What is crucial in this context is that Socrates / Plato not only replace knowledge with wisdom, but define this wisdom as absolute lowliness, a complete lack of vanity and power. It thus bears a striking affinity to the very Christian wisdom with which Augustine will seek to replace Platonism [6]. Despite the reference to Christ one cannot help thinking of Socrates when one reads the following passage from the *Confessions* -

They scorned to learn from Him, because He is meek and humble of heart. For thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them to the little ones (*Confessions*, p.125).

The upshot of the analysis of Augustine is not to denigrate the great thinker from Algeria. It is rather to bring Augustinian Christianity closer to its Platonic predecessors, to give a genuine meaning to the term “Christian Platonism”. In the next section, I will analyse how this Platonic / Augustinian legacy is developed through the very singular work of Nicholas de Cusa.

Section 7.3 - De Cusa on “Wisdom”.

De Cusa is no different from the figures already discussed in being steeped in a very particular philosophical history. In the first place late Plato is an obvious influence on his work - one can cite for example the *Parmenides* as being crucial to the development of De Cusa’s own dialectics of unity and plurality (cf. Moffitt-Watts, p.22). Additionally, Boethius’ *De Trinitate* (via the commentary on this text by Thierry of Chartres) is pivotal to the formation of De Cusa’s distinction between *complicatio* and *explicatio*. For Boethius, *complicatio* is the “enfolding” of all created things in God, that is God represents the grounding context in which all things are maintained. *Explicatio*, on the other hand, is the “unfolding” of God in created things - in other words, the primacy of God which enfolds the universe manifests itself (unfolding) through the very things of the universe. This Boethian idea bears striking resemblances to the Platonic conception of *participation* in the Good or Being - the Good unfolds in beings which themselves are enfolded in the Good. It is developed by De Cusa who maintains its overarching sense while also applying it to the relation between “faith” and “understanding”. Here De Cusa is influenced both by Boethius’

cosmology and Augustine's conditioning of faith by understanding. As Moffitt-Watts observes -

[echoing Augustine].....knowledge rests upon first principles, which are taken to be true on the basis of faith.....understanding is the unfolding (*explicatio*) of faith and that faith in turn is the enfolding (*complicatio*) of understanding. Without true faith there can be no understanding: "Therefore the intellect is directed by faith and faith is extended through the intellect" (p.83, Moffitt-Watts).

De Cusa's most famous text, "De Docta Ignorantia", develops this philosophy of faith seeking understanding through an emphasis on an irreducible metaphysical and epistemological *disjunction*. This conception is most clearly articulated in De Cusa's principle that "there is no proportion between the finite and the infinite" (*infiniti ad finitum proportionem non esse*). To this point one would seem to be quite close to Derrida's idea of an infinite *différance* - De Cusa, like Derrida, would seem to believe in an andialectical moment, an "unravelling" of philosophical truth. In terms of the Platonic text, one could locate this moment as that of Meno's paradox. And De Cusa certainly describes in vivid terms in the "De Docta Ignorantia" a state of "intellectual death" which seems very reminiscent of the Menoian / Derridean situation -

if, freed from the body in which it was subject to the conjectures of time, the intellect reaches not its desired end.....it is rightly said to fall into intellectual death.....thrown into the very gulf itself of confusion.....without extinction and without end, it ever dies in agony. This is a life bitter above all imagining, for it is death in life, it is being in nothingness, and knowledge more empty than ignorance.....(p.85/86, "OLI") [7].

It seems appropriate on first inspection to link this Cusian passage to a similar nihilistic trajectory in Derrida. For example, one could cite Derrida's opening and closing passages in "Plato's Pharmacy". The text initially opens with a reference to the Greek term *kalaphos*, meaning "a blow, knock, slap.....", or also "penetration,

hollowing out, scratch” [PP., p. 63]. The text concludes with amongst other terms, another brief reference to *kalaphos*. In this final context, Derrida is keen to stress how Plato (and by implication “Platonism”) are grounded in an exclusion of this *kalaphos* which refuses to be excluded. Plato can only helplessly contrive to avoid this reality [“Plato gags his ears” (*Platon se bouche les oreilles*)]. Derrida sums up the futility of this Platonic gesture as follows -

Il y a là cendre [There is there, flame]

This Derridean apocalypticism bears striking resemblances to the sense of “intellectual death” as described by De Cusa in “De Docta Ignorantia” as it does similarly to Plato’s description of the states of perplexity (*aporia*), benumbment (*narkosa*) and laziness (*argous*) in the *Meno*. But as with Plato’s attempt to bring Socrates out of the Menoian paralysis, so too with De Cusa’s conception of “intellectual death”. This stage or phase of thinking represents for De Cusa the consequence of a fundamentally misguided methodology. The issue of “what is philosophy?” again becomes crucial here. Prior to his description of the state of “intellectual death”, De Cusa has clearly delineated that such a phase does not signify a proper or inevitable state of affairs. Quite the contrary; intelligence in its most proper sense, far from being interminably confused in a labyrinth without exit, actually “embraces within itself incorruptible forms” -

An intelligence is above time and unsubjected to temporal corruption, for by its nature it embraces within itself incorruptible forms.....[“OLI”, p. 85].

This transition from “intellectual death” to a supra-temporal “intelligence” appears highly problematic from a philosophical point of view. How is this leap across the chasm [“the very gulf itself”, “OLI” p. 85] effected and with what justification? It is this very problematicity which appears insurmountable. For Derrida, there can be no

possible move from intellectual death to supratemporality. And how, one might ask, can De Cusa believe himself to have so succeeded?

Before offering an appraisal of the success or otherwise of De Cusa's method, it is crucial to note that, contrary to first impressions, De Cusa and Derrida are not facing the same problem. For Derrida, the issue is one of a *lack of knowledge* - one can never "know" a supra-temporal intelligence and thus one is limited to an interminable circle of *différance*. For De Cusa, however, it is the very emphasis on a lack of knowledge (or rather the emphasis on "knowledge" as a philosophical paradigm) which constitutes the problem. It is for De Cusa not so much a matter of too little knowledge as too much. This agnosticism (or anepistemologism) is of course readily apparent in the very title of De Cusa's most famous text, "De Docta Ignorantia". One has an "ignorance" or lack of knowledge but this ignorance is not negative - it is rather positive; a "learned ignorance".

This sense of a positive learnedness cannot derive from epistemology in the measure to which De Cusa's emphasis on ignorance is precisely a critique of knowledge as a value. Its source is most clearly and eloquently explicated by De Cusa in his dialogical text, "De Sapientia" or "Concerning Wisdom" [8]. This pivotal text comprises two books and has been acclaimed as "the most important discussion of wisdom in the late Middle Ages" [cf. Dolan, Introduction to De Cusa, *Unity and Reform* p. 99]. The text involves two interlocutors, a "Citizen" and an "Orator", the first representing lay wisdom and the second a professional expertise. The crucial aspect from the perspective of the difference between De Cusa and Derrida is that while professional expertise is deconstructed, the reader *is* presented with a positive alternative. To this extent, the Cusian text follows an analogous trajectory to that of

Plato's method in the *Meno* - an initial positing of sophistic knowledge, a consequent deconstruction of this sophism, leading to *aporia* and finally an affirmation of wisdom beyond the limits of epistemology.

Significantly, Cusa's text exemplifies the compatibility between Platonic and Christian ideals of wisdom. In Chapter 6, I introduced the problem of the relation between Platonism and Christian Platonism - as the former remains irrevocably a pagan philosophy, can it be seen as reconcilable with a Christianity founded on dogmatics (the Incarnation, Redemption etc)? There I came to the conclusion that Platonism and Christianity represented irreducibly singular but nonetheless compatible thought-systems. Here in the case of Cusian wisdom, this compatibility is so pronounced as to become almost an identification. I will clarify this point through an analysis of "De Sapientia" with reference to "De Docta Ignorantia" where necessary.

Perhaps the most explicit invocation of Platonism in "De Sapientia" concerns what De Cusa refers to as the "foretaste" ["CW", p. 107] of wisdom. This concept is introduced as a resolution to a philosophical situation uncannily similar to the problematic described by Plato in the *Meno*. There, having deconstructed the value of knowledge, Socrates faces a paradox as outlined by Meno. How, Meno asks, if there can be no knowledge of truth, is one to recognise truth when one finds it? In response, Socrates puts forward the path of *pistis* (faith) as an answer - one *believes* that there is a truth. While this solves the difficulty of starting upon the search for truth, it still leaves unresolved the issue of recognisability. One can believe that one will find something but unless one has some sense what that something is, one may well find it without realising this fact. In answer to this more difficult objection,

Socrates introduces the crucial Platonic theme of *anamnesis* or remembrance, the idea that all learning is a process of recollecting truths. Here one can see a clear Pythagorean influence on Plato - the soul exists prior to its embodiment in a state of wisdom and while this wisdom is more or less forgotten upon entrance of the soul into the body, nonetheless a trace of "truth" remains.

De Cusa develops this point through his concept of a "foretaste" of wisdom -

life itself is an intellectual spirit having in itself a certain innate foretaste through which it searches with great desire the very font of its own life. Without that foretaste it could neither seek after it nor know when it had acquired it. It is due to this that it is moved toward it as its proper life. Every spirit finds it sweet to ascend continually to the very principle of life even though this be inaccessible [p. 107, "CW"].

Like Plato (and unlike Derrida), De Cusa here offers a projected solution to the problem outlined by Meno's paradox. If epistemology is unable to find truth through its criterion of knowledge, are we not destined to an interminable wandering of philosophy, a discipline apparently going nowhere? This sense of misdirection or what Derrida terms (inventing a neologism) *destinerrancy*, is provisionally reinforced in the *Meno* by Socrates' description of philosophers as lacking any expertise, as being but "poor creatures" (*phauloi*) [Meno, 96d, p. 357]. The term Socrates employs in this context ("*phauloi*") is very strong, having the sense of triviality, pettiness, meanness, worthlessness. When one combines this passage with the prior section in the *Meno* where Meno speaks of perplexity (*aporia*) and benumbment (*narkosa*) and Socrates admits to feeling the same, the overarching mood of the *Meno* seems strongly Derridean. I reiterate this aspect of Plato's thinking (what one might term a *nihilistic* phase) because it is crucial to an understanding of De Cusa's own solution.

Prior to even Plato, this mode of thinking can be referred back to our analysis in Chapter 2 of the Presocratic philosophers, Heraclitus and Parmenides. In particular, Heraclitus' concept of *orexis* or striving is revealing. For Heraclitus, truth can never be accessible as such to the human - philosophy is always a *love* of an unachieved wisdom rather than a wisdom possessed. This conception of lack or absence is also of course central to Plato's work - in the *Meno* it is perhaps best emblematised by the two contrary uses of the term *tharros*. In the first case, Plato uses it negatively to refer to a sophistic possession of knowledge or wisdom; literally an "over-confidence". In the second case, however, Plato employs "*tharros*" positively to refer to a philosophising "confidently". Faced with *aporia* and perplexity, the philosopher (as exemplified by Socrates) must "confidently" carry on striving after wisdom. Unlike the negative sense of *tharros* which has an air of finality attached to it (the sophist would know the truth), the positive sense of "confidently" carries with it an air of nonfinality, of endless openness or vulnerability amidst the striving.

It is this second sense of *tharros* which implicitly guides De Cusa's thinking in both "De Sapientia" and "De Docta Ignorantia". Through his concept of a "foretaste of wisdom", De Cusa avoids the infinite regress of Meno's paradox while at the same time avoiding the negative over-confidence (*tharros*) of sophism. De Cusa speaks of the intellectual spirit "ascending continually" to the principle of life, giving the sense that the destination is never properly reached - it is the continuous *ascent* which is emphasised. This idea of nonfinality is also clarified by De Cusa's description of the principle of life as "inaccessible" [p. 107, "OLI"]. A little later, De Cusa eloquently clarifies this movement of the intellectual spirit -

Since this vital motion cannot find rest except in that infinite life which is the eternal wisdom, the motion which will not cease in the attainment of the finite which never touches the infinite. It is moved with a continual desire to reach it

and the delightfulness of the attraction is never lessened. For wisdom is such a pleasant food that it satisfies without diminishing the appetite and thus provides a delight that never ceases [p. 111, "CW"].

One therefore avoids "intellectual death" through a specific satisfaction of the intellectual spirit but this satisfaction is never final or exhaustive. As De Cusa observes in "De Docta Ignorantia", "you shall be satisfied, and with no disgust of satiety, for this immortal food is life itself" ["OLI", p. 95]. This sense of an insurmountable *disjunction* between desire and ultimate satiety is grounded in De Cusa's theological conviction that the intellectual spirit (which is infinite) cannot be satisfied with the temporal while nonetheless such intellectual spirit can never fully attain divinity but only *participate* in it inadequately. In the first case, De Cusa makes clear in "De Docta Ignorantia" the sense of the infinite striving of intellectual spirit -

Praised be God who has given us a mind that cannot be satisfied with the temporal. Its desire having no limits, it recognises itself as above all time immortal, from its insatiable desire within time ["OLI", p. 95].

In "De Sapientia" however it is also made clear that the human can only partially transcend the temporal. Intellectual desire may take us beyond the limits of temporality but it can never fully attain to union with the divine -

even though it [God / infinite wisdom] literally communicates itself to all things as something infinitely good, yet it cannot be received by any as it is...intellectual sweetness. This is the image of the sweetness of eternal wisdom which is the quiddity of quiddities and an inproportionable comparison of one sweetness to another [p. 114, "CW"].

Human "wisdom" [strictly speaking; "human love of wisdom"] is inproportionable to divine wisdom, the latter "communicating" itself to its "image". One should note the similarity to the Platonic concept of "participation", and also to Heraclitus' statement that "the human is to the divine as a child is to an adult". In each of these cases one of

the most significant philosophical implications is the strong critique of anthropomorphism; the human is irrevocably limited - to quote De Cusa's famous principle, there is no proportion between the finite and the infinite. Applying this to the ancient-modern quarrel one can speak of *a critique of subjectivity*. This critique is implicit in several of the passages from both "De Sapientia" and "De Docta Ignorantia". In the former, the first negative reference to subjectivity occurs in the context of De Cusa's stress on the "incomprehensibility" of the infinite "object" -

it comes to pass that the very inaccessibility or incomprehensibility of its infinite life becomes that which is most desired and longed for. It is as if a man discovers that the treasure of his life is innumerable, unweighable and immeasurable. And this very awareness of the incomprehensibility is most desirable *not because it refers to the one comprehending* but to the.....incomprehensible loveliness of the thing loved ["CW", p. 107] (my emphasis).

The negative reference to subjectivity is crucial here - "not because it refers to the one comprehending". The focus is shifted from the locus of comprehension, the subject, to the object being comprehended, the objective or extra-subjective. A little later in "De Sapientia", De Cusa explicitly states that the eternal wisdom will not be obtained if the criterion of subjectivity is maintained -

the eternal wisdom will not be obtained unless the possessor keeps nothing of his own. That which we have of our own are our vices and that which we have of the eternal wisdom are nothing but good things [p. 112, "CW"].

This could not be more unequivocal - subjectivity is "vice", a phrase which reminds one of Meister Eckhart's call to an "annihilation of self" in his text "On Detachment"[9]. Both Eckhart and De Cusa are here strictly within the medieval tradition of the anti-subjective, the "objective" (however mystical or elusive the object may be). In "De Docta Ignorantia", this theme is reiterated by De Cusa. He first speaks of charity by which he appears to mean a movement outside the concerns

of the self towards the object; charity would be the relinquishing of subjectivity by the subject in a move outside itself towards God -

Charity is the form of faith.....when body and soul themselves are reckoned as nothing by comparison with Him, then have you certificate of a most powerful faith.....[p.91, "OLI"].

Again, several sections later, De Cusa states that no man could so love Christ that he could not possibly be loved more by Christ ["OLI", p. 93]. Subjectivity is once more a site of that which is less. It is at this point that De Cusa clarifies perhaps the most crucial implication of this philosophy (particularly as it relates to the ancient-modern quarrel). He distinguishes between the "vegetative" ["OLI", p. 84] and "intellectual" ["OLI", p. 94] aspects of subjectivity as they relate to their respective objects. In this context, "vegetative" seems to have a broader than usual sense, including all kinds of rationalism which claim to exhaustively understand their objects. The nature of vegetative power, De Cusa states, is that it "transmutes nourishment into its own system" ["OLI", p. 84], the food becomes "the nature of the feeder" ["OLI", p. 95] - in other words, the "object" is reduced to "subjective" terms. In contrast, in genuine philosophy, where the subject is as it were deconstructed -

the food of life is eaten ever, but never to become the nature of the partaker....the intellect becomes the thing it understands ["OLI", p. 96].

The focus is therefore shifted - from rationalism where the object becomes subjective to the life of "intellectual spirit" where the subject, as it were, becomes its object. It is clear in applying this De Cusian logic to Derrida's work that one cannot simply locate deconstruction at the level of "vegetative" subjectivity. Indeed Derrida has continuously repeated the very need to deconstruct "subjectivity". Rather the kernel of the issue lies at the level of the "objective". It is here that De Cusa and Platonism

on the one side and deconstruction on the other radically diverge. While both agree that subjectivism and rationalism reduce the “object” to anthropocentric parameters, for Derrida there can be no objective “outside” of rationalism. As he observes in “Cogito and the History of Madness” -

Hegel again, always [“Cogito”, p.49].

For De Cusa however, (as for Plato), this is an excessively fatalistic perspective. Following a strong Platonic heritage, De Cusa invokes the notion of *Form* to posit a resolution to the crisis of rationalism -

Wisdom, which is itself the equality of being, is the word or reason of things. It is, as it were, an infinite intellectual form and the form that gives the formed existence to a thing. Therefore, an infinite form is the actuality of all formable forms and the most precise equality of them all [“CW”, p. 113].

De Cusa goes on to give this concept of Form a theological specificity -

The art or wisdom of God the Father is the most simple form and yet it is the only and most equal example of infinite formable forms, regardless of how variable they may be [“CW”, p. 114].

On first inspection, this may give the impression that what is at issue here is a simple matter of philosophy vs. theology. In so far as De Cusa invokes God as an Infinite Form, is he not irreducibly a theologian? Derrida on this interpretation would be the philosopher seeking (but not finding) *reasons* for truth and existence. However, this kind of interpretation is very misleading. Returning to our original discussion of the origins of “philosophy” in Presocratism, we there defined philosophy as “love of wisdom”. In this sense, De Cusa is precisely nothing more than a philosopher - he is the philosopher *par excellence*. This also reintroduces the question of the relation between Platonism and Christianity. While the concept of God is fundamental to De Cusa, nonetheless Plato’s nonChristian concept of Form performs a closely analogous function. This complicates the idea of the issue being simply one of philosophy vs.

theology. It is not so much a matter of trying to subtract theological elements from De Cusa as of saying that the strict distinction between philosophy and theology is highly problematic.

For a thinker so outspoken on the need for interdisciplinary contamination and the deconstruction of academic boundaries (cf. for example “The Law of Genre”[10]) Derrida seems surprisingly determined to maintain the hegemony of philosophy. As we saw in Chapter 5, Derrida understands the possibility of dialectic in exclusively epistemological terms. But this is to exclude a whole range of alternative possibilities. Beyond rationalism, there is for example always the possibility of a dialectic based on *faith* rather than knowledge. It is this particular path of transcending Derrida’s aporetic crisis on which I have concentrated in this thesis, in this chapter through an analysis of the respective systems of Augustine and De Cusa. In my Conclusion, I will give a brief overview of some of the most crucial claims of this thesis and attempt to make suggestions as to how some of the problems which have been foregrounded might be resolved or at least more clearly addressed.

CONCLUSION

I - A General Overview

Ernst Cassirer in one of his important texts on Platonism (*The Platonic Renaissance in England*) [1] describes the philosophy of Nicholas De Cusa as “a form of scepticism, a conception of “ignorantia”, which in its consequences nullifies the form of the great medieval systems” [Cassirer, p.14]. This thesis has been concerned to focus on the mode of scepticism exemplified, often conceived as nihilism, as a generalizable trait of Platonism as a whole. I have successively traced this movement through the works of Plato, Plotinus, Boethius, Augustine and De Cusa himself. But one should not be misled by this sceptical bent to see Platonism as a philosophy of negativity. Cassirer’s conclusion concerning De Cusa is also generalizable to the wider movement of Platonism -

But this very nullification carries with it the germ and the requirement of a new positive basis of faith [p. 14, Cassirer].

It is this philosophical positivity which, I have claimed, gives Platonism its contemporary relevance. When one analyses Derrida’s philosophy, one has a very close analogue of the first two stages of Platonic dialectic, but the third positive stage is absent. The first stage of a misguided epistemologism and the second stage of a rigorous deconstruction are indeed present. This makes the confrontation between Platonism and deconstruction all the more powerful - the crux of the issue becomes located in the attempted transition from the second to the third stage. For Derrida, this transition cannot take place, it is philosophically impossible. For Platonism on

the other hand this transition must take place if philosophy is to have any genuine future.

Starting from Chapter 1, my claim has been that Derrida's resistance to the transition from the second to the third stages actually has its roots in a philosophically determined position - that of a development of Cartesianism, in effect a *neo-Cartesianism*. Concentrating there on Derrida's early work on Husserl and, in particular, on the 1963 essay "Cogito and the History of Madness", I attempted to demonstrate a clear foregrounding by Derrida of the *idea* of infinity. In the "Cogito" essay, Derrida attempts to extricate this "idea" from the more repressive "deductive system" of Descartes. In so doing he both agrees and disagrees with Foucault's famous assessment of Descartes in *Madness and Civilisation*. Derrida agrees with Foucault concerning the repressive nature of the Cartesian philosophical system as such. He disagrees however on two counts -

1) In the first case, he disagrees with Foucault that Cartesianism represents a fundamental rupture in the history of philosophy. Rather Derrida posits a continuity linking the ancients to the moderns which he describes as "a history of Reason", an interpretation which is perhaps most succinctly summated in his phrase "Hegel again, always".

2) Secondly, he demarcates an isolated moment in Cartesianism which *does* succeed in transgressing the repression of the overarching "deductive system". Foucault had claimed that Descartes' "radical doubt" was not genuinely radical in so far as it excluded the possibility of madness. Derrida counters that the radicality of the "madness" example (while itself excluded for strategic reasons) is nonetheless

transmuted to the example of “dreams” and thus a *genuine* radicality is maintained by Cartesianism.

This defence of Descartes has specific relevance to the problem of Cartesianism but also has broader implications with regard to Derrida’s reading of philosophy *per se*. This is where points 1 and 2 interconnect. In the first case, Derrida introduces what he elsewhere terms a “quasi-transcendental” reading of philosophy. Philosophy is *double*, as it were. It is both repressive and liberating. This is a theme which recurs in “Plato’s Pharmacy” - the Platonic text is both repressed and liberated. The sense in which Derrida seems to understand these terms is revealing. From the perspective of repression, it is *dialectic* which is the prime example. In the “Cogito” essay Derrida seeks to undo the dialectics of Descartes’s “deductive system”. Similarly in “Plato’s Pharmacy”, any attempt by Plato to draw a strict dialectical line between metaphysics and sophism is “unravelling”. This finally leads to Derrida’s polemical contention that Socrates actually deserved the hemlock (cf. “A Poison Deserved”), i.e. he really was a sophist.

In contrast, it is the nondialectical or even anti-dialectical moments of both Plato and Descartes’s texts which are seen by Derrida as constituting a genuine movement of deconstruction. In the “Cogito” essay Derrida declares “I philosophise only in terror” and invokes the Kierkegaardian dictum, “the instant of decision is a madness”. This stress on “terror” and “madness” is directly linked by Derrida to the nondialectical status of the “idea” in the “Cogito” essay. Here it is contrasted with the attempted “reassurance” of the project of “philosophy” -

philosophy is perhaps the reassurance given against the anguish of being mad at the point of greatest proximity to madness. This silent and specific moment could be called *pathetic* [“Cogito”, p.59]

In the context of his reading of Descartes, Derrida would seem to have a strong case here. The very validity of the Cartesian project (its historical *raison d'être*) is premised on its introduction of the criterion of a clear and distinct idea as a philosophical paradigm. In instituting the "Cogito, ergo sum" principle Descartes explicitly expresses his disdain for the previous systems of the ancients which he describes pejoratively as having been built on "nothing but sand and mud". Whereas the premoderns tended to move from the objective reality to the subjective idea, Descartes turns this system on its head. The individual becomes as it were the locus of the cosmos; it is reality which proceeds from the subject -

never to accept anything for true which I did not clearly know to be such; that is to say, carefully to avoid precipitancy and prejudice, and to comprise nothing more in my judgement than what was presented to my mind so clearly and distinctly as to exclude all ground of doubt (p. 15, *Discourse on Method*).

To this point, Descartes would seem to have avoided Derrida's suspicions concerning the "pathetic" and "reassuring" aspect of philosophy. Descartes is here explicitly declaring the need for an avoidance of deception or doubt. However, by the end of the *Meditations*, Derrida's point would seem to have been irrevocably confirmed. Having set out from the principle of autonomous subjectivity, Descartes now seems to condition this principle through recourse to the existence of a transsubjective God -

even the rule which I stated above that I held, namely, that the things we grasp very clearly and very distinctly are all true, is assured only because God is or exists and because he is a perfect Being, and because everything that is in us comes from him.....if we did not know that all that is in us which is real and true comes from a perfect and infinite Being, we would have no reason which would assure us that, however clear and distinct our ideas might be, they had the perfection of being true [*Meditations*, p.58 / 59].

The ultimate Cartesian standard therefore is not a clear and distinct idea of God, but rather a God who verifies that clear and distinct ideas are, by definition, true. On Descartes's own terms, this philosophical manoeuvre constitutes a failure of method.

He has not succeeded in refounding philosophy as he had originally declared. Crucial to our question is Derrida's very specific response to this failure of Cartesianism -

if philosophy has taken place.....it is only in the extent to which it has formulated the aim of thinking beyond the finite shelter ("Cogito", p.56).

Here Derrida is reiterating what he has previously interpreted (*contra* Foucault) as the radical moment of Descartes's project - the *idea* of infinity. The final invocation of the objective existence and Being of God as a philosophical standard by Descartes is judged by Derrida to be inadmissible. This refers back to his description of the "reassurance" of philosophy as being "pathetic". Nonetheless Derrida still wishes to salvage a possibility for philosophy, a partial escape route. In the above quotation, he allows for a certain "taking place" of philosophy as being a possibility - "if philosophy has taken place...". By "taking place" he would seem to be implying that the philosophical project may be viable or successful if it manages to avoid the "pathetic" reassurance previously described.

Derrida's sense of the nature of this viability is revealing -

.....only in the extent to which it has formulated the aim of thinking beyond the finite shelter ["Cogito", p.56].

This stress on "thinking" is crucial. Descartes's original project had been founded on a new clarity of subjective thinking. But in the *Meditations* Descartes ultimately reinvokes the premodern standard of the objective i.e. God as ultimate Object. In recognising this failure, Derrida nonetheless wishes to focus on "the intentional meaning of this project itself" ("Cogito", p.310) -

One cannot allege that the philosophical project of the "infiniteist" rationalisms served as an instrument or as an alibi for a finite historico-political-social violence (which is doubtless the case) without *first* having to acknowledge and respect the intentional meaning of this project itself. Now within its own intentional meaning, this project presents itself as the conceptualisation of the infinite, that is, of that which cannot be exhausted by any finite totality ("Cogito", p.310).

What is at issue here is the reason for and significance of the Cartesian failure for philosophy in general. According to Derrida, Descartes failed because his philosophy invoked a transsubjective God which was not admissible in terms of the criterion of subjective clarity and distinctness. This much is clearly defensible. However Derrida then proceeds to delineate the *only* possibility for philosophy (“only in the extent....” [“Cogito”, p.56]) as a reemphasis on a subjective thinking separated from its objective context (“beyond the finite shelter”). In other words, Derrida is suggesting that any attempt to dialecticize an “idea” of infinity into some kind of objective existence is invalid in the measure to which one cannot “know” infinity as an object. This aspect of the “Cogito” essay reiterates several themes which appeared in Derrida’s first text (from 1962), his *Edmund Husserl's "Origin of Geometry": An Introduction*, most notably his stress there on the “Idea in the Kantian sense”. In the *Introduction* Derrida focuses on Husserl’s attempt to dialecticize the Kantian Idea into a metaphysical truth which is intrinsic to the *lebenswelt* or world as such. In the particular context of geometry, Husserl puts forward strong criticisms of naive objectivism such as the system of Galileo, which posits geometrical truth as supra-temporal. According to Husserl, Galileo pays no attention to the “origin” of geometry; he acts as if geometrical truth had simply fallen from the sky. In opposition to this vulgar objectivism, Husserl invokes the transcendentalism of Kant. In the first case, geometrical truth must have a subjective aspect, what he terms the Idea in the Kantian sense. Secondly, this aspect points to a specific kind of historical contingency - truth is not simply discovered as an extrasubjective object. It is also “created” by the subjective geometer.

This is clearly a move away from Galilean objectivism and indeed from vulgar objectivism in general. It is also however a move away from a simple Kantianism. With Husserl, the Kantian phenomenal / noumenal distinction becomes dialecticized into an attempted symbiosis between subjectivity and objectivity. Derrida's point in the *Introduction* however is that this project is an ultimate failure. And analogously to the situation of Descartes, Derrida believes that it is the *dialectical* moment in Husserl that must be avoided. What Derrida derives from Cartesianism is an "idea" of infinity, an ideality which nonetheless refuses to be dialecticized into a truth of metaphysics.

We are now in a position to reapply this Derridean philosophy to the deconstructive readings of Plato and Platonism. In the case of the reading of Plato in "Plato's Pharmacy", Derrida's primary focus is on the *Phaedrus*. Derrida emphasises the "unravelling" of dialectic in this dialogue particularly through the case of "writing" -

If we extend ourselves by force of play. If we then write a bit: on Plato, who already said in the *Phaedrus* that writing can only repeat (itself), that it "always signifies (*semainei*) the same" and that it is a "game" [*PP.*, p.65].

"Plato's Pharmacy" is a meditation on how Plato cannot so easily control "writing" - and "*écriture*" here comes to signify what Derrida in *Limited Inc* refers to as "the real history of the world". What is at stake is thus the very possibility of metaphysics -

if the network of opposing predicates that link one type of writing to the other contains in its meshes all the conceptual oppositions of "Platonism" - here considered the dominant structure of the history of metaphysics - then it can be said that philosophy is played out in the play between two kinds of writing. Whereas all it wanted to do was distinguish between writing and speech [*PP.*, p. 149].

The philosophical distinction between speech and writing, it is therefore claimed by Derrida, is inadmissible, and this inadmissibility is then generalized to the "history of metaphysics" which is described as being "played out" i.e. "unravelling" or

interminably deconstructed. The inadmissibility of the speech / writing distinction is therefore a paradigm case of the failure of philosophical distinction or normativity *per se*. In Chapter 4, I considered the specifics of the speech / writing issue in the *Phaedrus* and more generally with regard to Derrida's concept of phonocentrism. However, here I will rather concentrate on the question of philosophical normativity. The issue once again revolves around the precise meaning Derrida gives to philosophical normativity and what he considers to be threatening to its very basis. He has already described Platonism as "the dominant structure of the history of metaphysics" (*PP.*, p. 149). It is perhaps a reference to the *Meno* in "Plato's Pharmacy" which is most revealing in this context. The reference concerns *Meno* 80a-b, where Meno accuses Socrates of "exercising magic and witchcraft" [*PP.*, p.118] and of reducing others to "perplexity" [*PP.*, p.118]. There is also in this passage a warning from Meno to Socrates concerning the danger of being "arrested as a wizard" [*PP.*, p.119] which considering the *Meno* was apparently written directly after Socrates' execution, adds a sense of gravitas to the problem. Derrida's point is that the Socratic method precisely as a kind of "magic and witchcraft" is indistinguishable from sophism. But it is the very possibility of such normative distinctions (e.g. Platonism / sophism, speech / writing etc) which constitutes the basis of what Derrida terms the "history of metaphysics". If such distinctions are untenable, then Plato's philosophy and more generally metaphysics as such are subject to an interminable deconstruction.

The difficulty with this Derridean interpretation lies again in his tendency to reduce Platonism and philosophy *per se* to an exclusively epistemological enterprise. Returning to the *Phaedrus* which is the primary concern of "Plato's Pharmacy", one

can trace several possible Platonic responses to Derrida's attempted deconstruction. In the first case, the *Phaedrus* is centrally concerned with the question of philosophical methodology. In contrast to the Cartesian paradigm of a clear and distinct subjective idea, the *Phaedrus* very much exemplifies the paradigm of the Object or Form in Platonism. For example at 277d-e, Socrates describes the philosophical object as being a study of the just, the fine and the good and crucially outlines how any subjective interpretation of this Object cannot be final. Even those who succeed in speaking accurately of such Forms cannot be ascribed the title of "being wise" -

Socrates: To call him wise seems to me to be too much, and to be fitting only in the case of a god; to call him either a lover of wisdom - a philosopher - or something like that would both fit him more and be in better taste [*PP.*, p.131; *Meno* 278d]

This is a reinvoking of the Heraclitean / Parmenidean standard of thinking as described in Chapter 2. Philosophy is not a matter of wisdom, even less knowledge, but rather a love of or striving for (*orexis*) wisdom. This is a crucial point with regard to the *Phaedrus* to the extent that the latter dialogue when interpreted in epistemological terms appears bizarrely disorganised. Derrida in fact makes reference to the common interpretation of the *Phaedrus* as being an ununified text [*PP.*, p. 67]. Diogenes Laertius for example describes the *Phaedrus* as perhaps being Plato's first attempt at a dialogue, which consequently manifests "a juvenile quality" (*meirakiodes ti*) [*PP.*, p. 66]. H. Raeder, in 1905, took the alternate view that the "badly composed" *Phaedrus* was rather a proof of "old age", or as Derrida describes it "senile impotence" [p.67, *PP.*].

Now Derrida wishes to distance himself from these interpretations, preferring to see the *Phaedrus* as “a rigorous, sure and subtle form” [PP., p.67]. However, Derrida’s point is that Plato’s subtlety in subverting epistemological certainty in the *Phaedrus* has the consequence of an interminable *doubling*. In other words, on this interpretation, Plato would be the first self-deconstructor, a worthy precursor of Derrida.

This is where I wish to question Derrida’s reading. Because Derrida interprets philosophy in exclusively epistemological terms, it would seem that one is either an epistemologist or a deconstructionist; one is either possessed of knowledge or one is destined to a journey without origin or destination, a “destinerrancy”. On my interpretation, however, what makes the *Phaedrus* significant is exactly its construction of an alternative philosophical paradigm to epistemology. The *Phaedrus* manifests the same epistemological insecurity as Derrida’s essay “Cogito and the History of Madness”, but whereas Derrida is driven to emphasise an “idea of infinity” abstracted from dialectic, Plato rather seeks to reconstruct dialectical thinking. At 276c-d for example Socrates outlines the nature of dialectical thinking as having to focus inevitably on “pieces” of knowledge; dialectic is therefore not absolute but fragmented. Similarly, Socrates states that philosophical arguments can only point us in the right direction, they cannot be said to be full expositions of the truth (on this point cf. Rowe p.8).

These qualifications of dialectical certainty are perhaps best understood in the context of Plato’s declaration in the *Seventh Letter* of the increasing “perplexity” (325e) which accompanied his philosophical development -

The result was that I, who had at first been full of eagerness for a political career, as I gazed upon the whirlpool of public life and saw the incessant movement of shifting currents, at last felt dizzy, and, while I did not cease to

consider means of improving this particular situation and indeed of reforming the whole constitution, yet, in regard to action, I kept waiting for favourable moments, and finally saw clearly in regard to all states now existing that without exception their system of government is bad. Their constitutions are almost beyond redemption except through some miraculous plan accompanied by good luck (326, a-b, p. 1575 / 1576) [2].

The situation described in the first part of the passage is almost Derridean - a dizzying whirlpool of shifting currents. And the final solution posited is far from Cartesian clarity and distinctness - "some miraculous plan accompanied by good luck". What makes the *Phaedrus* significant is that this sense of the miraculous and of chance are not allowed to spiral *ad infinitum* (à la Derrida) but are rather grafted onto a constructive dialectical method. This method is explicitly described as "nonfinal" (278d) but nonetheless the "pieces" (276c-d) of knowledge one has access to as a philosopher are regarded as directing us towards the whole. This is again reminiscent of the *Meno* where Socrates disavows both the *tharraleon* of epistemology and the *aporia* of Meno, surpassing both these options with the more vulnerable *tharros* of the true philosopher - a striving grounded in *pistis*.

This central aspect of Plato's work is of course developed through the tradition of Neo- and Christian- Platonism, and I have attempted in this thesis to clarify the nature of this development. Again one can highlight Derrida's neo-Cartesianism as a major stumbling block to his efforts to offer representative interpretations of Platonism. In the three essays "Passions", "Sauf le Nom" and "Khora" [cf. Chapter 5] Derrida is driven to *apophasis* as the only solution to the crisis attendant upon the deconstruction of Platonic metaphysics. However, in Chapters 6 and 7, I have tried to outline an alternative philosophical perspective to *apophasis*, through the analysis of the varied systems of Plotinus, Boethius, Augustine and De Cusa. It is perhaps De Cusa's concept of "learned ignorance" (*docta ignorantia*) which is most emblematic of the

dual movement in Platonism of “nullification” and positivity. Whereas Derrida tends to see such nullification or ignorance as the motor of deconstruction, Platonism rather sees it as the condition of possibility for a new model of metaphysics.

Derrida’s most recent text on this question *The Gift of Death (Donner la mort)* [analysed in Chapter 5] follows Jan Patočka in its analysis of Platonism as a philosophy fixated on the epistemological “object”. Significantly, Derrida here distinguishes this epistemologism from a more deconstructive thinking which he (again following Patočka) now links to Christianity. The Christian philosopher Derrida looks to in this context is Søren Kierkegaard, particularly to his motifs of fear and trembling, pure exteriority and subjectivity. *The Gift of Death*, in its primary thematics, bears an uncanny resemblance to the themes outlined almost thirty years before in the essay “Cogito and the History of Madness”.

It is this continuous subtext in Derrida’s work which I have attempted to make explicit in this thesis. I have argued that Derrida’s emphasis on an interminable *différance* is not historically neutral but is rather conditioned by a development of the Cartesian paradigm. In the “Cogito” essay, Derrida identifies a failure in the philosophical project - Descartes’s “idea of infinity” cannot be epistemologically proven to be a “thing-in-itself” i.e. God. Derrida derives the conclusion that such an ideality cannot be dialecticized *de jure* and as such it is the specificity of the idea *as idea* which constitutes the future of philosophy. But by extending this problem outside the parameters of Derrida’s work onto the issue of an ancient / modern quarrel, I have attempted to put forward a critique of deconstruction.

The failure of the Cartesian system to achieve “objectivity”, I have claimed, does not prove the inadmissibility of “objectivity” as such. Even less does it necessitate an

increased recourse to the paradigm of subjectivity (Derrida's movement in *The Gift of Death*). Instead, to the contrary, it is the claim of this thesis that Cartesian "objectivity" is the epiphenomenon of Cartesian "subjectivity", the latter rather than the former being the locus of the Cartesian failure. To this extent, the attempt to resolve the failure of Cartesian "objectivity" should start with a redefinition of objectivity, outside the parameters of subjectivism. It is premodern (i.e. preCartesian) metaphysics which provides us with an exemplary model in this regard. It is evidence of Derrida's residual Cartesianism that he fails to invoke the positive aspects of the premodern heritage, preferring instead to dwell on the negative dimensions of *apophasis*. The Cartesian failure becomes a generalized failure, and Derrida does not recognize that this failure itself depends upon an acceptance of the Cartesian terms of reference.

I have foregrounded Plato and Platonism as cases of resistance to these limitations of philosophical thought. Chronologically there is the difficulty that the latter (obviously) precede Descartes and modernity and therefore cannot precisely be said to resist modern rationalism. Two brief rejoinders might be articulated. Firstly sophism, in its stress on the importance of the individual (e.g. Protagoras' "man is the measure" principle) and its conception of philosophy as *techne* is a close analogue of modern rationalism. To this extent, Plato's continued resistance to sophism represents very much a prelude to the larger, more contemporary debate. Secondly, in this thesis I have chosen to concentrate on the Platonic tradition from a premodern perspective. But there are of course many examples of Platonic thought *within* the modern epoch and this thinking has unsurprisingly always been recognised for its unequivocal resistance to rationalism and positivism. The Cambridge Platonists [3] stand as

perhaps the most eloquent examples of this thinking but up to our own day such philosophers as Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch have retained an explicitly Platonic allegiance. This is not to mention the vast array of thinkers who exemplify an obvious Platonic influence, most notably for example Hans-Georg Gadamer or Leo Strauss [4].

In speaking of an ancient / modern quarrel, therefore, I have not been intending to raise a question of merely antiquarian interest. True to the sense of Platonism as a continuously renewed, *striving* (rather than possessing) metaphysics, this thesis foregrounds a problem which I believe to be of significant contemporary importance. In effect I have been attempting to do a Derrida on Derrida. In outlining a residual Cartesianism in Derrida's thought, I have been employing Platonism to deconstruct deconstruction. Perhaps *différance* is not the infinite deferral and differing Derrida would have us believe but rather a perspectival stifling of constructive philosophical resources. Here there is a potential stifling, not simply of the historical resources of Plato and (Neo / Christian) Platonism, but also of more contemporary sources of resistance to modernism which, on my interpretation, constitute more promising exemplars of "post-modern" thinking. The second and final part of this Conclusion will briefly look at two such examples, those of Iris Murdoch and Simone Weil.

II - Murdoch, Weil and a Postmodern Platonism

A collection of Iris Murdoch's most important essays has recently been published under the title *Existentialists and Mystics*. In the Foreword, George Steiner refers to

the fundamental affinities between Murdoch's project and that of (the historical movement of) Platonism -

The programme is precisely that mapped in Neo-Platonism, in Augustine and in Dante's *Paradiso*. But with a formidable difference. It does not postulate "God". There is no need for any formal creed, let alone any generalised diffuse deism [Steiner, *EM*. p. xv].

In earlier chapters (particularly Chapter 6, with reference to Boethius) I spoke of the "compatibility" between paganism and Christianity. One example in this context is the way the Platonic doctrine of "participation" might be seen as analogous to the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. It is with this broader sense of "Platonism" in mind (as not being restricted to one particular creed, whether Neo-Platonic or Christian) that one can best come to interpret Murdoch's eschewal of the postulate of "God". In saying that Murdoch's thought follows "precisely the programme" set out in, for example, Augustine but then abstracting "God" from the equation, Steiner seems to be stating a contradiction. But if we reintroduce the problematic of the *ancient-modern quarrel* here as an explanatory tool, the contradiction disappears.

Steiner's point is precisely that there is something *philosophically fundamental* which Murdoch shares with Neo-Platonism, the Christian Platonism of Augustine and Dante's Aristotelianism, and that this fundamental agreement makes their obvious differences (with regard to creed) of derivative importance. Secondly, this common agreement is at its most philosophically powerful when it is posited as a unified opposition to the thinking of what Murdoch calls "existentialism", a term which is here used specifically with regard to Sartre but which is more generally extendable to modern philosophy beginning with Descartes and leading to Derrida.

Murdoch focuses particularly on how the Platonic "Idea of Perfection" (this is the title of one of her most famous essays) became "a function of the will" [p. 301]. Her point

in this context directly relates to the earlier discussion of how the Platonic *Ideon* should not be confused with what Derrida calls “the Idea in the Kantian sense” or Descartes’ “idea of infinity” -

Goodness [becomes] not an object of insight or knowledge, it [becomes] a function of the will..... The idea that “good” is a function of the will stunned philosophy with its attractiveness.....metaphysical entities were removed [EM, p. 301].

Previously, that is strictly speaking *prior to Descartes*, “Goodness” was an *object*. In other words, prior to Descartes, “goodness” was a “reality” (a term Murdoch uses advisedly; EM, cf. p.332) independent of subjectivity. Murdoch’s “Idea of Perfection” therefore, like Plato’s Idea (of which it is a direct descendant), is perhaps less confusingly rendered the “Form of Perfection / Goodness”. From Descartes on, however, the Idea becomes *subjectivized* (i.e. it becomes dependent upon the subject’s “idea”). In effect the Idea becomes an *idea*. This process is increasingly radicalized through the historical period of modernity and Murdoch traces its development up to a pivotal intensification with the work of Stuart Hampshire whom she describes as getting rid even of the proper “subject” (“the substantial self”; EM., p. 305) while replacing it with a “solitary omnipotent will” [EM., p. 305]. Although Hampshire’s thinking falls more within the bounds of so-called “analytic” philosophy, Murdoch believes a strictly compatible movement to characterize so-called “Continental” philosophy. Here one can cite Murdoch’s thought as a useful antidote to those who would have us believe in a strict divide between “analytic” and “continental” philosophy, opening up the possibility of a renewed debate between them.

From the perspective of “continental” thinking, her particular focus is on Jean-Paul Sartre whom she describes as a “romantic rationalist” [cf. EM., Foreword p. xxii].

The latter description for Murdoch is a pejorative one. On the one side, the charge of *romanticism* signifies a failure of existentialism to achieve its stated goal of returning us to “real” existence. On the other side, the *rationalism* charge symbolises the over-reliance of existentialism on the paradigm of subjective reason. The Murdochian solution to these twin perils is the introduction of what she terms *mysticism* (see especially Steiner, *EM.* p.xxii). Here Murdoch draws particularly on the work of Simone Weil as well as more traditional Platonic sources. In “The Idea of Perfection”, Murdoch quotes Weil’s famous declaration: “will is obedience not resolution” [*EM.*, p. 331]. This is, as it were, the condensing of the essence of Murdochian *mysticism* into one phrase.

The conception that “will” is “resolution” refers directly to the kind of view espoused by Hampshire (and Sartre) and for Murdoch is a direct development of Cartesian rationalism. The subjective will can be said to *resolve* philosophical and existential problems in the measure to which with Hampshire and Sartre the paradigm of subjectivity has been placed at the centre of philosophy. The criterion of value has been switched from the *object* to the *subject*. This point has been clarified above but it is important to reiterate it here in the specific context of Weil’s declaration to the extent that Weil turns this modernist revolution on its head. By stating that “will is obedience not resolution”, Weil (and following her, Murdoch) is *taking the power away from subjectivity and returning it to objectivity* and she is doing this within the very language of modernism. By couching this transformation in terms of a self-definition of “will”, Weil seems to be adhering to the very emphasis on subjectivity characteristic of modernity. But while the linguistic form of the statement might appear modernist, the philosophical content could not be more subversive of the

Cartesian project. The subject must be “obedient” to its object; the locus of power no longer resides with the Cogito but with the very *other than self*, a transformed emphasis which the title of Gordon’s text on Murdoch captures powerfully; *Iris Murdoch’s Fables of Unselfing*.

But how is such “unselfing”, such “obedience” to the objective to be achieved? -

Where virtue is concerned we often apprehend more than we clearly understand and grow by looking.....I have used the word “attention”, which I borrow from Simone Weil, to express the idea of a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality [*EM.*, p. 324 / 327].

The process of modern philosophical thinking has thus been turned upside down - instead of the subjective mind instituting its “resolution”, the philosophical mind must rather *attend* to that which is independent of it. It is the *object* which is now determining of philosophical truth. And it is this which constitutes the inherent *mysticism* of Murdochian and Weilian Platonism. If truth resides in the object it remains “other” to the subject. In contrast to the clarity and distinctness of the Cartesian object, the Platonic object is unclear, indistinct, *mystical*. Indeed for Weil (and perhaps less radically for Murdoch) this renewed attention to the object should eventually lead to an “annihilation” of subjectivity, another “mystical” tenet which can be traced most notably to Meister Eckhart’s thinking. Weil moves from the evocative principle of “To see a landscape as it is when I am not there...” [*Gravity and Grace*, p.37] (6) to the more radical “destruction” of the “I” outlined in the following passage -

We possess nothing in the world - a mere chance can strip us of everything - except the power to say “I”. That is what we have to give to God - in other words, to destroy. There is absolutely no other free act which is given us to accomplish - only the destruction of the “I” [*GG.*, p.23].

The tone of this passage is unmistakably Weilian and perhaps a little too extreme for the more sober thinking of Murdoch. There is also the difference that Weil is a more avowedly Christian Platonist than Murdoch, notably in the former's employment of the term "God" (which Murdoch tends to omit; see Steiner quotation above). These (important) differences are emblematic of something not often accredited to premodern metaphysics (at least by Derrida) - its inherently *pluralistic* nature. The similarities between the thought of Weil and Murdoch matter more than the differences, but there *are* significant disagreements and this disaffinity is an inevitable (if ironic) consequence of a thinking focused exclusively on the "object". Or rather it is an inevitable consequence if one's focus is exclusively on a *mystical object* as it is with both Weil and Murdoch.

Existentialism had claimed to return philosophy to ordinary experience and thus to reopen the rigid structures of metaphysics. But in claiming that truth resided in subjectivity, each existentialist thinker (as him / herself a subject) became according to Murdoch the locus of truth *per se* and thus laid claim to a definitive and final, closed philosophical system. As Steiner observes -

Murdoch came to feel that the existentialist commitment to the actual world was in some deep sense, spurious. Existentialist ontology and models of consciousness were abstractions, dogmatic mythologies of closure [No Exit] (Steiner, *EM*. p. xiii).

Subjectivism therefore appeared to give much room for philosophical freedom, but ended in dogmatic univocity. Objectivism (or "realism") in contrast appeared to give no room for freedom or disagreement to the extent that there was only one objective reality to be apprehended. Ironically, however, because in such realism the power is taken away from subjects to offer definitive interpretations of the "object" (to the extent that the locus of emphasis is on the object and not on the subject) a new space

of philosophical openness develops within which provisional interpretations can be offered but no final solutions or “resolutions”. This kind of “*mysticism*” (the term here signifying for Murdoch the *unknowable* nature of the object) has been described throughout the thesis as it grounds the various movements of Platonism, the most obvious case being De Cusa's concept of *docta ignorantia*.

Here we see its return in a contemporary setting with the work of Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch. As Murdoch observes in *Existentialists and Mystics* -

I offer frankly a sketch of a metaphysical theory, a kind of inconclusive nondogmatic naturalism [*EM.*, p. 335].

This disavowal of conclusiveness and dogmatism by Murdoch creates its own problems. Steiner wonders whether the ensuing vulnerability of this contemporary brand of Platonism might falter beneath the strength of Dostoevsky's “If there is no God, all is allowed” [*Foreword, EM.* p. xvi]. Do we not require conclusiveness and dogmatism if we are to avoid, for example, Derrida's *dissemination*? If the answer to this question is “yes”, the philosophical movement of Platonism will not cure our woes. Weil in particular is unrelenting on this point -

Affliction in itself is not enough for the attainment of total detachment. Unconsolated affliction is necessary. There must be no consolation - no apparent consolation. Ineffable consolation then comes down [*GG.*, p. 12].

To requote another Weilian principle: “the will is obedience not resolution”. But although there is no subjective resolution (“no consolation”) there is, it could be said, an *objective resolution*. Even Weil acknowledges this with her reference to an “ineffable consolation”. What differentiates Platonism from deconstruction is that the former combines subjective confusion with a continuous acknowledgement and reverence for an Object beyond this confusion (however inaccessible). Murdoch makes an analogous point when she considers the term “reality” -

Philosophical difficulties may arise if we try to give any single organised background sense to the normative word “reality”. But this word may be used as a philosophical term provided its limitations are understood [*EM.*, p. 332].

On this interpretation, there is a “reality”, there is an “Object”, there is a “God”, however much we may be reticent in employing these enigmatic terms. It is this *faith* (*pistis*) which makes Platonism such a specific and important part of the discussion concerning the future of philosophy, with particular reference to the so-called epoch of postmodernity.

NOTES

Introduction

1. John Deeley *New Beginnings: Early Modern Philosophy and Postmodern Thought* [Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1994] (hereafter Deeley)
2. John Searle "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida" *Glyph* 2, 1977
3. Christopher Norris *Derrida* [London, Fontana, 1987]
4. Simon Critchley "A Commentary on Derrida's Reading of Hegel in *Glas*" *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* no.18 [Autumn / Winter 1988], pp. 21-7 (hereafter Critchley)
5. David Luscombe *Medieval Thought* [Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997] (hereafter Luscombe)
6. *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes* Edited by John Cottingham [Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992]
7. René Descartes *Meditations on First Philosophy. With Selections from the Objections and Replies* Edited by John Cottingham [Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996]
8. Stanley Rosen *The Question of Being: A Reversal of Heidegger* [Yale University Press, 1993]
9. It could be objected here that Aristotle (as a pre-modern) was, like Descartes and Kant, a "rationalist", thus problematising my thesis of an "ancient-modern quarrel". A similar argument might be put forward for St. Thomas Aquinas. In response, firstly, this thesis is concerned with *an* ancient-modern quarrel, not *the* ancient-modern quarrel. In other words, my thesis only requires a quarrel specifically between Platonism and deconstruction as a condition for its possibility (and this quarrel I here take to be clearly self-evident).
Nonetheless, outside the stated limits of the thesis, a strong case can be made for a fundamental quarrel between Aristotelianism and Cartesianism. For Aristotle, the Cartesian requirement of "proving" one's existence would have been absurd. This absurdity is implicit in the distinction between Aristotle's *phronesis* (or "practical reason") and Descartes's "rationality". Aristotle's emphasis on *phronesis* is grounded in a common sense realism (inherited by St. Thomas) which is completely absent from the moderns, beginning with Descartes. In contrast to Descartes's emphasis on the *subject*, Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is clear in its advocacy of the primacy of the *object*:
Plainly, therefore, it also falls to one discipline to study the things that are qua things-that-are.....In every case, the fundamental concern of a discipline is with its primary object, i.e. that on which the others depend and to which they owe their being called what they are [Aristotle *Metaphysics*, Book IV, Chapter 2 in *A New Aristotle Reader* edited by J.L. Ackrill (1987, Oxford, Oxford University Press)].
10. Derrida *La Voix et le phénomène. Introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* [Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1967]. *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* edited and translated

with an introduction by David B. Allison [Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973] (hereafter *SP*)

11. In succeeding chapters, I will refer to Cartesianism and its developments within modernity as being various kinds of “epistemologism”. By this term, I simply mean to signify the transition which has taken place between the ancients’ ontological emphasis on “being” (shared by Plato and Aristotle) to the modern’s epistemological emphasis on “knowledge”. For an excellent discussion of this “ancient-modern quarrel” cf. Heidegger’s discussion in *Early Greek Thinking* of the fundamental disagreement between Parmenides’ “thinking and Being are One” and George Berkeley’s “to be is to be perceived”. For Heidegger, the attempt to translate one into the other represents a tragic philosophical mistake.

12. Edmund Husserl *Cartesian Meditations* Translated by Dorion Cairns [The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1973]

13. Derrida *Glas* [Paris, Editions Galilée, 1974]. Translated as *Glas* by John P. Leavey Jr. and Richard Rand [Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1986]

14. Derrida “Cogito and the History of Madness” (hereafter “Cogito”) in *Writing and Difference* translated with an introduction by Alan Bass [Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1978]. Originally published as *L’écriture et la différence* [Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1967] (hereafter *WD*).

15. For the *Phaedrus* cf. Hamilton, Edith and Cairns, Huntington (editors) *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* [New York, Pantheon, 1961]

16. With special referenc to Eric Voegelin *Order and History* 4 volumes [Louisiana State University, 1957]

17. “The Time of a Thesis: Punctuations”. Translated by Kathleen Mc Laughlin. In *Philosophy in France Today*. Edited by Alan Montefiore [Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983], pp. 34-50. This text was not published in French until 1990 in the collection *Du Droit à la philosophie* [Paris, Galilée, 1990]

18. For the *Meno* cf. footnote 15

19. Augustine *Confessions* trans. by F.J. Sheed [Hackett, 1992]

20. Bill Readings *Lyotard: Art and Politics* [London, Routledge, 1991]

21. For Lyotard cf. for example *L’Inhumain: causeries sur le temps* [Paris:Galilée, 1988]; for Deleuze cf. for example *Difference and Repetition* translated by Paul Patton [England, The Athlone Press, 1994]. For Bataille cf. for example *The Accursed Share* translated by Robert Hurley [New York, Zone Books, 1988]

Chapter 1

1. “Ousia and Grammē” in Derrida *Margins of Philosophy* [Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982] translated by Alan Bass. Originally published as *Marges de la philosophie* [Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1972]

2. For Deeley cf. Introduction footnote 1

3. “La Pharmacie de Platon” (hereafter *PP*) in *La Dissémination* [Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1972] translated as *Dissemination* by Barbara Johnson [Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981] (hereafter *DS*)

4. For “Cogito” cf. Introduction footnote 14

5. Cf. Introduction footnote 12

6. Derrida, *Introduction à L'Origine de la géométrie par Edmund Husserl* [Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1962]. *Edmund Husserl's "Origin of Geometry": An Introduction*. Translated with an introduction and afterword by John P. Leavey Jr. [Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1989]
7. Cf. Introduction footnote 10
8. "Genesis and Structure" in *WD*
9. Cf. Introduction footnote 13
10. Michel Foucault *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* [Tavistock, 1967]
11. René Descartes *Meditations on First Philosophy* edited with an introduction by Stanley Tweyman [London, Routledge, 1993]
12. *PP.*, p. 76 / 86 [English edition - all further references are to this translation, unless otherwise stated]
13. Cf. Simon Critchley *The Ethics of Deconstruction* [Oxford, Blackwell, 1992]
14. Aristotle *Metaphysica* translated by W.D. Ross [Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1908]
15. Cf. Introduction footnote 15
16. *Ibid.*
17. Isocrates *Against the Sophists* in *Works* [Loeb edition]
18. L. Robin *La Théorie Platonicienne de l'amour* 2nd edition [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964]
19. Cf. Introduction footnote 15
20. *Ibid.*
21. Cf. Introduction footnote 3
22. Cf. Introduction footnote 15
23. *Ibid.*
24. Stéphane Mallarmé *Les Fenêtres* in *Collected Poems* [London, 1994] edited by M. Weinfield
25. *Ibid.*, p. 56 / 57
26. Simone Weil *Gravity and Grace* [London, Ark, 1981]

Chapter 2

1. James Joyce *Ulysses* [London, Penguin, 1992]
2. James Joyce *Finnegan's Wake* [London, Faber, 1964]
3. Eduard Zeller *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy* 13th Edition [Dover, 1980]
4. W.K.C. Guthrie *The Greek Philosophers: From Thales to Aristotle* [New York, Methuen, 1967], p.4 (hereafter *GP*)
5. Cf. Introduction footnote 15
6. *Ibid.*
7. Charles H. Kahn *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*. An Edition of the fragments with translation and commentary [Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979], p.7 (hereafter Kahn)
8. A.H. Coxon *The Fragments of Parmenides* [Netherlands, 1986] (hereafter Coxon)
9. Cf. Introduction footnote 16

10. A.E. Taylor *Plato the man and his work* [London, Methuen, 1926]
11. In *Collected Dialogues* p. 145 [cf. Introduction footnote 15]
12. Mitchell H. Miller Jr. *Plato's Parmenides - the Conversion of the Soul* [Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1986] (hereafter Miller)

Chapter 3

1. W.K.C. Guthrie *The Protagoras and the Meno* [Penguin, London, 1956]
2. "The Double Session" in *DS* [cf. Chapter 1, footnote 3]
3. Cf. chapter 2, footnote 3

Chapter 4

1. Cf. Introduction footnote 15
2. Kenneth Sayre *Plato's Late Ontology* [Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1983] (hereafter Sayre)
3. Cf. Introduction footnote 15
4. Constance C. Meinwald *Plato's Parmenides* [New York, Oxford University Press, 1991] (hereafter Meinwald)
5. Rowe *Phaedrus* with translation and commentary [Warminster, Aris and Phillips, 1986]
6. G.R.F. Ferrari "Platonic Love" [hereafter *PL*] in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* Edited by Richard Kraut [Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992]
7. Cf. Introduction footnote 15
8. Hackforth *Plato's Phaedrus* [Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1952]
9. Meister Eckhart "On Detachment" in *Sermons and Treatises* Volume 3 [Shaftesbury, Element Books, 1987]
10. Nicholas De Cusa "De Sapientia" ("Concerning Wisdom") [hereafter "CW"] in *Unity and Reform: Selected Writings of Nicholas De Cusa* Edited by John Patrick Dolan [University of Notre Dame Press, 1962] (hereafter *UR*)
11. "De Docta Ignorantia" ("Of Learned Ignorance") [hereafter "OLI"] in *UR*
12. "De Sapientia" is De Cusa's most famous *Idiota* dialogue
13. Frutiger *Les Mythes de Platon* [Paris, Alcan, 1930]

Chapter 5

1. For a lucid analysis of these and other medieval thinkers cf. Etienne Gilson *La Philosophie Au Moyen Age* [Paris, 1962]
2. Derrida, *Sauf le Nom* [Paris, Editions Galilée, 1993]. Translated by John P. Leavey Jr. as "Sauf le Nom" in *On the Name* [Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1995] (hereafter *OTN*). All further references to this text are to the English translation in *OTN* ("Sauf le Nom" rather than *Sauf le Nom*) unless otherwise stated..
3. Derrida, *Passions* [Paris, Editions Galilée, 1993]. Translated by David Wood as "Passions": An Oblique Offering" in *OTN*. All further references to this text are to the English translation in *OTN* ("Passions" rather than *Passions*) unless otherwise stated.

4. Kant "What is Enlightenment?" in *Kant Selections* edited with Introduction, notes and bibliography by Lewis White Beck [New York, Macmillan, 1988]
5. Derrida, *Khora* [Paris, Editions Galilée, 1993]. Translated by Ian Mc Leod as "Khora" in *OTN*. All further references to this text are to the English translation in *OTN* ("Khora" rather than *Khora*) unless otherwise stated.
6. "Comment ne pas parler: Dénégations". "How to avoid speaking: Denials" [hereafter "Denials"] translated by Ken Frieden in *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*. Edited by Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser [New York, Columbia University Press, 1989]. The original is in *Psyché: Invention de l'autre* [Paris, Galilée, 1987]
7. Derrida, *The Gift of Death* translated by David Wills [Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995].(hereafter *GD*). Originally published as "Donner la mort" in *L'éthique du don, Jacques Derrida et la pensée du don* [Paris, 1992]
8. V.J. Bourke *Augustine's Love of Wisdom: An Introspective Philosophy* [Indiana, Purdue University Press, 1992] (hereafter *Bourke*)

Chapter 6

1. Boethius *The Consolation of Philosophy* translated with introduction by V.E. Watts [Penguin, 1969] (hereafter *Consol.*)
2. Plotinus *The Enneads* translated with a Foreword by Stephen MacKenna and introductory essays by John Dillon and Paul Henry [Penguin, 1986] (hereafter *Enn.*)
3. John Dillon's Introduction to MacKenna's translation of the *Enneads*
4. Henry Chadwick *Boethius: The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology and Philosophy* [Clarendon, 1981] (hereafter Chadwick)
5. Martin Heidegger "Language in the Poem" in *On the Way to Language* [USA, Harper and Row, 1971]

Chapter 7

1. Rodolphe Gasché *Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida* [Harvard University Press, 1994] (hereafter *ID*)
2. Bourke, p. 21. For full reference cf. Chapter 5, footnote 8.
3. Cf. Introduction footnote 19
4. Pauline Moffitt-Watts *Nicolaus Cusanus: A Fifteenth-Century Vision of Man* [Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1982] (hereafter Watts). For "De Docta Ignorantia" cf. chapter 4, footnote 11
5. Cf. *The Essential Augustine* (hereafter *EA*) edited by V. Bourke [Indiana, Hackett, 1964]
6. The apparent Augustinian misinterpretation here may be due to an overhasty identification (on our part) of Augustine's "Platonists" with Plato. Augustine may be rather referring to the Neo-Platonism of Plotinus and in particular of Porphyry. Given this interpretation it is easier to align the Socratic / Platonic stress on "ignorance" and "poverty" with Augustine's emphasis on "humility" and to reinterpret his critique of the "Platonists" in the *Confessions* as *not* being directed at Plato. Indirectly, this would also make the analogy between Platonic "exemplarism" and Augustinian Christology all the stronger and help the claims of this thesis to be locating a

connected "Platonic" lineage. With regard to Plotinus' place in this line, it could be argued that the criticisms in the *Confessions* are more directed at Porphyry's development of Plotinus than at Plotinus' own thinking.

7. Cf. Chapter 4, footnote 11

8. Cf. Chapter 4, footnote 10

9. Cf. Chapter 4, footnote 9

10. Derrida "The Law of Genre" originally in *Parages* [Paris, Editions Galilée, 1986]. Translated by Avital Ronell *Glyph* 7, 1980, pp. 176-232.

Conclusion

1. Ernst Cassirer *The Platonic Renaissance in England* [London, Hackett, 1956] (hereafter Cassirer)
2. Cf. Introduction footnote 15
3. Cf. footnote 1
4. For a fascinating and relevant text on Gadamer and Strauss' respective interpretations of Plato cf. Catherine H. Zuckert *Postmodern Platos* [Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996]. This text also analyses the respective interpretations of Plato put forward by Nietzsche, Heidegger and, crucially, Derrida.
5. Iris Murdoch *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* [1997, Random House, London] (hereafter *EM*)
6. Simone Weil *Gravity and Grace* [London, Ark, 1952] (hereafter *GG*)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

NB: This is not an exhaustive bibliography but only refers to the works primarily consulted during the preparation of this thesis.

A: Works by Derrida

Introduction à l'Origine de la géométrie par Edmund Husserl [Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1962]. *Edmund Husserl's "Origin of Geometry": An Introduction*. Translated with an introduction and afterword by John P. Leavey, Jr. [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989] (revised edition).

La Voix et le phénomène: Introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967]. *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*. Edited and translated with an introduction by David B. Allison [Evanston, Ill.; Northwestern University Press, 1973]

De la grammatologie. [Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1967]. *Of Grammatology*. Translated with an introduction by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak [Baltimore, Md.: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976]

L'écriture et la différence [Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967]. *Writing and Difference*. Translated with an introduction by Alan Bass [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978]

* includes "Cogito and the History of Madness" and "Force and Signification"

La dissémination [Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972]. *Dissemination*. Translated with an introduction by Barbara Johnson [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981]

* includes "La Pharmacie de Platon"

Marges de la philosophie [Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1972]. *Margins of Philosophy*. Translated by Alan Bass [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982].

Positions [Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1972]. Translated under the same title by Alan Bass [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981]

Glas [Paris: Editions Galilee, 1974]. Translated under the same title by John P. Leavey Jr. and Richard Rand [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986]

"The Time of a Thesis: Punctuations". Translated by Kathleen McLaughlin in *Philosophy in France Today*. Edited by Alan Montefiore [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983], pp. 34-50. This text was not published

in French until 1990 in the collection *Du Droit à la philosophie* [Paris: Galilee, 1990]

"Deconstruction and the Other". In *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage*. Edited by Richard Kearney [Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984]

"The Law of Genre" in *Parages* [Paris, Editions Galilée, 1986]. Translated by Avital Ronell in *Glyph 7*, 1980.

"Comment ne pas parler: Dénégations", in *Psyché: Inventions de l'autre* [Paris: Editions Galilee, 1987]. "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials". Translated by Ken Frieden in *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*. Edited by Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser [New York: Columbia University Press, 1989], pp. 3-70

De l'esprit: Heidegger et la question [Paris; Editions Galilee, 1987]. *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*. Translated by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989]

Feu la cendre [Paris, Editions des femmes, 1987]. *Cinders*. Translated with an Introduction by Ned Lukacher [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991]

Ulysse Gramophone: Deux mots pour Joyce [Paris, Editions Galilée, 1987]. Translated as "Two Words for Joyce" by Geoff Bennington in *Post-Structuralist Joyce: Essays from the French*. Edited by Derek Attridge and Daniel Ferrer [Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984].

Limited Inc. edited by Gerald Graff [Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1988]. French edition under the same title [Paris: Editions Galilée, 1990]

"Force de loi: Le fondement mystique de l'autorité". "Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority". *Cardozo Law Review II*, nos. 5-6 [1990]

Circumfession [Paris; Editions du Seuil, 1991]. Translated under the same title by Geoffrey Bennington [Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993]
*this text is primarily a meditation on Augustine's *Confessions*, *Circumfession* being a kind of Derridean (nonmetaphysical) analogue of the latter.

"Donner la Mort" in *L'ethique du don, Jacques Derrida et la pensée du don* [Paris, Editions Galilée, 1992]. Translated by David Wills as *The Gift of Death* [Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1995].

Sauf le Nom [Paris, Editions Galilée, 1993]. Translated by John P. Leavey Jr. as "Sauf le Nom" in *On the Name* [Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1995].

Passions [Paris, Editions Galilée, 1993]. Translated by David Wood as "Passions" in

On the Name

Khora [Paris, Editions Galilée, 1993]. Translated by Ian McLeod as "Khora" in *On the Name*.

B: Works by Plato / Platonism

Plato

Greek Texts - Burnet, John *Platonis Opera*. 5 volumes. Oxford, Clarendon Press [1900 - 7]

Translations - Hamilton, Edith and Cairns, Huntington (editors) *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* [New York: Pantheon, 1961]

Jowett, Benjamin *The Dialogues of Plato*. Fourth Edition. 4 volumes [Oxford; Clarendon, 1953]

Plotinus

Plotini Opera edited by Paul Henry and H.R. Schwyzer. *Editio maior* in 3 volumes, Paris / Brussels, 1951-73; followed by the *editio minor* in 3 volumes [Oxford Classical Texts Series, Oxford, 1964-83]

The Enneads. Translated by Stephen MacKenna and B.S. Page [London, Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952]

Augustine

Confessionum edited by P. Knoell. Revised by M. Skutella [Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1934]

Sermones. Patrologia Latina 38

De Trinitate. Patrologia Latina 42

De Civitate Dei. *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 40. Academiae litterarum caesarae vindobarensis. Vienna: C. Geroldi, 1866

Bourke, V. (ed.) *The Essential Augustine* [Indiana, Hackett, 1964]

Chadwick, H. trans. *Confessions* [Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991]

Dodds, M. trans. *The City of God* [New York, Random House, 1950]

Sheed, F.J. trans. *Confessions* [Indiana, Hackett, 1992]

Boethius

Boethii Philosophiae Consolatio, ed. Ludovicus Bieler, *Corpus Christianorum Series*

Latina XCIV, Turnholti 1957

Watts, V.E. trans., *The Consolation of Philosophy* [London, Penguin, 1969]

Stewart, H. and E. Rand trans. Boethius, *The Theological Tractates and The Consolation of Philosophy*, rev. ed., rev. trans. of the *Tractates* by S. Tester, 2 volumes [Loeb Classical Library, 1918]

De Cusa

Opera Omnia [Leipzig, Felix Meiner, 1932-]

"De Docta Ignorantia" ["Of Learned Ignorance"] in *Unity and Reform: Selected Writings of Nicholas De Cusa* Edited by John Patrick Dolan [University of Notre Dame Press, 1962]

"Of Learned Ignorance" translated by G. Heron with an introduction by D.J.B. Hawkins [Hyperion Press, Westport, 1954]

"De Sapientia" ["Concerning Wisdom"] in *Unity and Reform*

C: Other Works Consulted

Ackrill, J.L. (ed.) *A New Aristotle Reader* [Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987]

Aristotle *Metaphysica* translated by W.D. Ross [Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1908]

Armstrong, A. *St. Augustine and Christian Platonism* [Villanova, Villanova Press, 1967]

Armstrong, A.H. "Platonic Eros and Christian Agape" *Downside Review* 79 [1961, 105-21]

Armstrong, A.H. *Plotinus* [London, Allen and Unwin, 1953]

Barrett, H. *Boethius: Some Aspects of his Times and Work* [Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1940]

Bataille, Georges *The Accursed Share* translated by Robert Hurley [New York, Zone Books, 1988]

Bataille, Georges *Oeuvres Complètes* [Paris: Gallimard, 1970] (12 volumes)

Bataille, Georges *Visions of Excess* [Selected Writings 1927-1939] Translated and edited by Allan Stockl [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985]

Bluck R.S. *Plato's Meno*. Edited with an Introduction and Commentary [Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1961]

Bourke, V. *Augustine's Love of Wisdom: An Introspective Philosophy* [Indiana,

- Purdue University Press, 1992]
- Bourke, V. *Augustine's View of Reality* [Villanova, Villanova Press, 1964]
- Caputo, John D. *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project* [Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1987]
- Carr, David *Phenomenology and the Problem of History: A Study of Husserl's Transcendental Philosophy* [Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1974]
- Cassirer E. *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*. Translated with an Introduction by Mario Domonoti [Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963]
- Cassirer, E. *The Platonic Renaissance in England* [London, Hackett, 1956]
- Chadwick, Henry *Boethius: The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology and Philosophy* [Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1981]
- Cornford F.M. "The Doctrine of Eros in Plato's Symposium" in *Plato: A Collection of Critical Essays Volume 2: Ethics, Politics and Philosophy of Art and Religion* edited by Gregory Vlastos [New York, Doubleday, 1971]
- Cottingham, John (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes* [Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992]
- Coxon, A.H. *The Fragments of Parmenides* [Netherlands, Van Gorcum, 1986]
- Critchley, Simon "A Commentary on Derrida's Reading of Hegel in *Glas*" *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* no. 18 [Autumn / Winter 1988], pp. 21-7
- Critchley, Simon *The Ethics of Deconstruction* [Cambridge, Blackwell, 1992]
- Crombie, I.M. *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines*. 2 Volumes [London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962]
- Culler, Jonathan *On Deconstruction* [London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982]
- Deeley, John *New Beginnings: Early Modern Philosophy and Postmodern Thought* [Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1994]
- Deleuze, Gilles *Difference and Repetition* translated by Paul Patton [London, Athlone Press, 1994]
- Descartes, René *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies*. Edited by John Cottingham [Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996]
- Diogenes Laertius *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 2 Volumes translated by R.D. Hicks [New York, Putnam, 1925]
- Eckhart, Meister "On Detachment" in *German Sermons and Treatises Volume 3* [Shaftesbury, Element Books, 1987]
- Ferrari, G.R.F. *Listening to the Cicadas: A Study of Plato's Phaedrus* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983]
- Ferrari, G.R.F. "Platonic Love" in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*. Edited by Richard Kraut [Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992]
- Foucault, Michel *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* [London, Routledge, 1989]
- Friedlander, P. *Plato*. Translated by Hans Meyerhoff. 3 volumes. [New York: Pantheon, 1958-69]
- Frutiger, P *Les Mythes de Platon* [Paris, Alcan, 1930]
- Gasché, Rodolphe *Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida* [Harvard University Press, 1994]
- Gerson, Lloyd P. *Plotinus* [Routledge, 1994]
- Gilson, Etienne *La Philosophie au Moyen Age* [Paris, 1962]

- Gordon, David *Iris Murdoch's Fables of Unselfing* [London and Columbia, 1995]
- Grube, G.M.A. *Plato's Thought*. Second Edition [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980]
- Guthrie, W.K.C. *The Greek Philosophers: From Thales to Aristotle* [New York, Methuen, 1967]
- Guthrie, W.K.C. *The Protagoras and the Meno* [London, Penguin, 1956]
- Hackforth R. *Plato's Phaedrus* [Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1952]
- Hegel *Logic* translated by W. Wallace with a foreword by J.N. Findlay [Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975] (first volume of the *Encyclopaedia*)
- Hegel *Philosophy of Nature* edited and translated with introduction and explanatory notes by M.J. Petry 3 volumes [London, Allen and Unwin, 1970] (second volume of the *Encyclopaedia*)
- Hegel *Philosophy of Mind* translated by W. Wallace with foreword by J.M. Findlay [Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971] (third volume of the *Encyclopaedia*)
- Heidegger, Martin *Sein und Zeit* 15th Edition [Max Niemeyer, Tübingen 1984]
Being and Time. Translated by J. MacQuarrie and E. Robinson [Blackwell, Oxford, 1962]
- Heidegger, Martin *On the Way to Language* [USA, Harper and Row, 1971]
- Heidegger, Martin *Poetry, Language, Thought* [London, Harper and Row, 1971]
- Heidegger, Martin *Early Greek Thinking* [London, Harper and Row, 1984]
- Husserl, Edmund *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge* [ed. S. Strasser, 1950]. *Cartesian Meditations*. Translated by Dorion Cairns [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960]
- Husserl, Edmund *Der Ursprung der Geometrie* [originally published as an Appendix to Husserl's *Krisis*]. *The Origin of Geometry*. Translated by John P. Leavey Jr. [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989]
- Isocrates "Against the Sophists" in *Works* [Loeb, 1956]
- Joyce, James *Finnegan's Wake* [London, Faber and Faber, 1964]
- Joyce, James *Ulysses* [London, Penguin, 1992]
- Kahn, Charles H. *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* An edition of the fragments with translation and commentary [Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979]
- Kant, Immanuel "What is Enlightenment?" in *Kant Selections* edited with introduction, notes and bibliography by Lewis White Beck [New York, Macmillan, 1988]
- Kraut, Richard *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* [Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992]
- Lewis, C.S. *The Discarded Image* [Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1964]
- Lyotard, Jean-Francois *L'Inhumain: causeries sur le temps* [Paris, Galilée, 1988]
- Luscombe, David *Medieval Thought* [Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997]
- Mallarmé, Stéphane "Les Fenêtres" in *Collected Poems* edited by H. Weinfield [Berkeley, University of California Press, 1982]
- Meinwald, Constance C. *Plato's Parmenides* [New York, Oxford University Press, 1991]
- Miller, Mitchell H. *Plato's Parmenides - The Conversion of the Soul* [Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1986]
- Moffitt-Watts, Pauline *Nicolaus Cusanus: A Fifteenth-Century Vision of Man*

- [Leiden, EJ Brill, 1982]
- Murdoch, Iris *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* [London, Random House, 1997]
- Norris, Christopher *Derrida* [London, Fontana, 1987]
- Patch, H. *The Tradition of Boethius: A Study of his Importance in Medieval Culture* [Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1935]
- Patocka, J. *Essais hérétiques sur la philosophie de l'histoire*, trans. Erika Abrams [Lagrasse, Verdier, 1981]
- Raeder, H. *Platons philosophische Entwicklung* [Leipzig, 1905]
- Readings, Bill *Lyotard: Art and Politics* [London, Routledge, 1991]
- Robin, L. *La Theorie platonicienne de l'amour* 2nd edition [Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1964]
- Rosen, Stanley *The Question of Being: A Reversal of Heidegger* [New Haven, Yale University Press, 1993]
- Rowe, S. *Phaedrus* with translation and commentary [Warminster, Aris and Phillips, 1986]
- Sayre, Kenneth *Plato's Late Ontology* [Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1983]
- Searle, John "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida" *Glyph* 2, 1977
- Sharples, R.W. *Plato. Meno*. Edited with translation and notes [Chicago, Aris and Phillips, 1985]
- Taylor, A.E. *Plato the Man and his Work*. Fifth Edition [London: Methuen, 1948]
- Tertullian *Selections in The Early Christian Fathers: A Selection from the writings of the Fathers from St. Clement of Rome to St. Athanasius*. Edited and translated by Henry Patterson [Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1956]
- Thierry of Chartres *Commentary on Boethius' Trinitate in Commentaries on Boethius by Thierry of Chartres and his school* edited by N.M. Häring [Pontifical Institute, Toronto, 1971]
- Voegelin, Eric *Order and History* 4 volumes [London, Louisiana State University, 1957]
- Weil, Simone *Gravity and Grace* [London, Ark, 1981]
- Zeller, Eduard *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy* 13th edition [New York, Dover, 1980]
- Zuckert, Catherine H. *Postmodern Platos* [Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996]