

“We are the Disease”: Truth, Health, and Politics from Plato’s *Gorgias* to Foucault

C. T. RICCIARDONE

University of California, Berkeley

ABSTRACT: Starting from the importance of the figure of the *parrhesiastes*—the political and therapeutic truth-teller—for Foucault’s understanding of the care of the self, this paper traces the political figuration of the analogy between philosophers and physicians on the one hand, and rhetors and disease on the other in Plato’s *Gorgias*. I show how rhetoric, in the form of ventriloquism, infects the text itself, and then ask how we account for the effect of the “contaminated” philosophical dialogue on our readerly health. Is the text placebo, vaccine, or virus? All of these options, I argue, complicate Foucault’s prescription for *parrhesia*, requiring us to think anew the continuing political ramifications of the metaphor of care.

Let me begin by relating an anecdote that serves as a kind of epigraph. Over a century ago, the socialist Aleksandr Ivanovitch Herzen is reputed to have exhorted a group of anarchists about to overthrow the tsar: “We are not the doctors. We are the disease.” His pithy remark is often glossed by leftists as a strident protest against reformism in favor of total revolution; for a certain species of environmentalist, it is a cue to see the latest tsunami as Mother Nature’s immune system battling humanity’s cancerous spread. Sometimes, too, the declaration is simply misunderstood by critics who take it to mean that the U.S. and other bellicose Western governments have become part of the problem rather than the solution. All of these readings reiterate the traditional values that Herzen challenged—namely, that doctors are good, disease is destructive—and so they anesthetize the political substance of his move. My hunch, in contrast, is that by claiming the position of disease rather than doctor, Herzen shifts our understanding of the terrain of politics and the possibility of our agency in a more radical way.

Why am I ventriloquizing Herzen to speak of disease and politics in the same breath, and this under the supposed aegis of Platonic philosophy? The analogy

of politics and medicine is at least as old as Alcmaeon of Croton, who in the fifth century B.C. described health with the political term *isonomia* (equality) and disease as the regime of *monarchia* (monarchy).¹ And the physician is frequently invoked in Greco-Roman philosophy as an analogy for the philosopher, as Michel Foucault has prominently pointed out.² But it is not merely the case that medicine is the overlapping term of two separate analogies to politics and philosophy. Rather, as Emile Benveniste finds in a startling linguistic analysis, there is a deep resonance between the doctor, politician, and philosopher in the very bones of Indo-European languages. Benveniste defines the common root *med, from which we derive “medicine,” as meaning “to take measures of order with authority and reflection; to apply a deliberate plan to confused situation.”³ He concludes that the doctor in Indo-European language and culture was a sort of genre of leadership, and moreover, that the authority of both physician and king was underwritten by the capacity for reflection and discernment: that is, by the capacity of the philosopher. Benveniste’s work concretizes and substantiates the deep co-constitution of truth, medicine, and politics in the West. And this ancient connection in turn suggests that Herzen’s metaphor was not mere poetics.

Although the medical-philosophical-political triad becomes especially important for Foucault in the specific context of the Epicurian, Cynic, and Stoic philosophies that especially inform his work on the care of the self, it is already fully developed in Plato’s *Gorgias*, that famous diatribe against the Sophists. In this dialogue, Socrates aligns himself as a truth-teller with doctors; as a corollary he denigrates oratory, if not as the black plague itself, at least as the rat that carries the infected fleas. And the analogy is overtly political: Plato deploys it to attack the power of the rhetors and the Athenian *demos*, and install instead the philosopher as a physician-king (Part I). Just *how* to read the politics of this analogy, however, quickly becomes more complex: as in Thucydides’s account of the mysterious plague of Athens, the disease of rhetoric infects even the doctor who attempts to treat it. Thus we see that Socrates, in his role as *parrhesiastes*, employs a ventriloquism that obviously contradicts his claim to dispense healthful, philosophical truth (Part II). Plato’s rhetorical duplicity in the name of truth requires us to question the effect of the text on our readerly health. Is the text placebo, vaccine, or virus? (Part III). All of these options, I argue, attune us to the way our subjectivities are structured in this medical metaphor, and thereby complicate Foucault’s prescription for *parrhesia* as a therapeutic and political practice of self-care. Finally, then, through the French philosopher we return to Herzen’s exhortation to ask: as readers, as rhetors, as subjects, what does it mean—politically and philosophically—to reject the role of doctors and take up the standpoint of disease? (Part IV).

As a whole, then, the paper firstly offers fresh seed for the well-trod field of the rivalry between rhetoric and philosophy in ancient Athens. For the language of

doctor and disease is not simply a new way of recasting their mutually-supportive opposition, but enriches our understanding of the stakes of that debate by establishing its connection to the vital arenas of health and politics. Reciprocally, the paper also extends our understanding of the widespread prevalence of the metaphors of plague and health in classical Greece, deepening one aspect of G. E. R. Lloyd's recent and rich study on that subject.⁴ Finally and most powerfully, however, the paper provides a historical perspective that problematizes Foucault's discussion of the care of the self—and so engages with contemporary discussions of health as a moral and political precept, discussions ongoing today in the medical humanities, science and technology studies, and Western popular culture.

I.

In Plato's *Gorgias*,⁵ Socrates relies on the craft of medicine to exemplify and legitimize his role as a philosopher. The dialogue begins with the squeaky bat voice of Chaerephon, who serves as Socrates's mouthpiece during the interrogation of Polus, who in turn stands in for the master sophist Gorgias. The subject, of course, is the nature of the rhetorical craft. To prove his point (that rhetoric is *not* a craft like the others), the very first example to which Chaerephon turns is that of medicine. Indeed, the fact that the specific doctor here referred to is Gorgias's brother Herodicus perfectly sets the stage for the fraternal but fractious confrontation between the doctor-philosophers and the disease-orators.⁶

In this debate, Socrates represents himself as physician and his process of argumentation or *logos* as prescription. So he urges one of his more unruly interlocutors, "Don't shrink back from answering, Polus. You won't get hurt in any way. Submit yourself nobly to the argument, as you would to a doctor (*hōsper iatrōi parexōn*), and answer me. Say yes or no to what I ask you" (475d5–8).⁷ The philosopher here assumes the benign authority of the doctor to advance his argument about the good, already revealing his political aspirations (of which more soon) in the act of submission that he requires.⁸ Though Plato employs the metaphoric "as" (*hōsper*) here, to understand the relationship between the doctor and philosopher as a simile underestimates the profound affinity he wishes to draw.⁹ Not only do philosophers have the properties of physicians, but medicine in its proper being is philosophical.¹⁰ In Socrates's view, medicine is a *tekhnē* or craft only insofar as it has "investigated both the nature of the object it serves and the cause of the things it does and is able to give an account of each of these" (501a1–3). That is, doctors practice a craft insofar as they are philosophers, and not insofar as they are *effective* in curing disease (a tough case to make to our litigious present!).¹¹ The identity between the two crafts is so complete that Plato alternates between metaphorizing medicine as the essence of philosophy, and figuring philosophy as the nature of medicine.¹²

However, this intimate bond between physician and philosopher requires its negative counterpart to achieve its full force: the philosopher-doctor's legitimacy comes directly from the threatening disease of rhetoric. Socrates introduces this threat early in the dialogue, as he outlines his four-part schema of flattery. According to him, there are four crafts that care for the body and soul (medicine and gymnastics, justice and legislation), to which correspond four species of flattery (cooking and cosmetics, oratory and sophistry). The "knack" (*empeiria*) of cooking may please the palate, but not Plato: it causes corpulence while masked as medicine. In the same way, oratory disguises itself as justice while secretly inflating and degrading our non-bodily being (465b1–465d7). In this schema, rhetoric¹³ in its two forms rots and disorders the soul. Because in Plato's hierarchy the soul outranks the body, the rhetor's crime far outweighs the fraudulence of cooking and cosmetics.

The political stakes of these definitions of oratory and philosophy are thus immediately made clear: oratory and sophistry are imposters of healthful practices of legislation and justice, while the philosopher is the doctor to whom the patient must submit in order to be cured of his insalubrious penchant for rhetorical flair. Indeed, the political context is ever-present, as the discussion returns again and again to the juridical framework, to examples of tyrants.¹⁴ Two pivotal moments near the end of the *Gorgias* cement this etiologico-political reading: in a rapid one-two, Plato exploits the tropes of disease and doctor to discredit the material and democratic power of the rhetors, while simultaneously promoting the philosopher to the role of authoritarian leader.

Plato's first blow falls during the final showdown with Callicles, directly on the heads of Pericles, Themistocles, and Miltiades. According to Socrates, these revered leaders and renowned speakers, who were commonly extolled by the rhetors to buttress their profession, plagued rather than profited Athens. They worsened the city's health by feeding her desires, he says, whereas a wise doctor-leader would have disciplined and controlled them. Snidely, Socrates suggests that Callicles, in his ignorance of true health and sound politics, has implicitly equated the politicians, who expanded the city, with wine-vendors, bread-bakers, and pastry-makers. The philosopher's response to his own proposition bears quoting at length for its stinging invective as well as its scholarly grist:

The men you're mentioning to me are servants, satisfiers of appetites! They have no understanding whatever of anything that's admirable and good in these cases. They'll fill and fatten people's bodies, if they get the chance, and besides that, destroy their original flesh as well, all the while receiving their praise!

diakonous moi legeis kai epithumiōn paraskeuastas anthrōpous, ouk epaiontas kalon k'agathon ouden peri autōn, hoi, an houtō tuxhōsin, emplēsantes kai pakhunantes ta sōmata tōn anthrōpōn, epainoumenoi hup' autōn, prosapolousin autōn kai tas arkhaias sarkas. (518c3–7)

Worst of all, he continues, the citizens are so *deluded* that they take these leaders/bread-bakers as heroes instead of the scum they are; so that the Athenians

will lay the blame for their illnesses and the destruction of their original flesh not on those who threw the parties, but on any people who happen to be with them at the time giving them advice. Yes, when that earlier stuffing has come bringing sickness in its train much later, then, because it's proved to be unhealthy, they'll blame these people and scold them and do something bad to them if they can, and they'll sing the praises of those earlier people, the ones responsible for their ills.

hoi d' au di' apeirian ou tous hestiōntas aitiasontai tōn nosōn aitious einai kai tēs apobolēs tōn arkhaiōn sarkōn, all' hoi an autois tukhosi tote parontes kai sumbouleuontes ti, hotan dē autois hēkēi hē tote plēsmonē noson pherousa sukhnōi husteron kronōi, hate aneu tou hugieinou gegonua, toutous aitiasontai kai psexousin kai kakon ti poiēsousin, an hoioi t' ōsi, tous de proterous ekeinous kai aitious tōn kakōn enkōmiasousin. (518c7–e1)

Thus, Socrates concludes, “the city is swollen and festering” (*oidei kai hupoulos*) (518e4). For the first time, the disease of rhetoric has infected not only the individual psyche, but the body politic. From this will follow an obvious but still implicit corollary: the ministrations of the philosopher-doctor will have to assume grander proportions as well.

How has the body politic been constituted and contaminated in this text? The passage from individual to social corruption takes place through the material body. Although in Plato's schema oratory is supposed to affect the soul, in the passage above the corruption is thoroughly and doubly corporeal: the famed orators both “fill and fatten” the body (*emplēsantes kai pakhunantes*) and “destroy” its “original flesh” (*prosapolousin tas arkhaias sarkas*). Although in the previous paragraphs Socrates has focused on individual bodies and characters, here his language constitutes the *polis* as a unified body: the “original flesh” recalls the original size of Athens before its imperial expansion under the leadership of these skilled rhetors. It is the “enfleshment” of the city, the rhetorical act of endowing it with a material body, which transfers the individual corruption of the soul to the deterioration of the social whole. The body, with its desires and appetites, can be the vehicle of the care of the character; conversely, it has here become instead the mechanism of infection of the social. In other words, the body for Plato is the *medium of contamination*.

Alexander Nehamas puts the point even more strongly, arguing that for Plato, the flesh—our embodied life—becomes the very disease from which we suffer. He amplifies: “the illness is life itself: the soul's imprisonment in the body. False belief is, so to speak, that disease's central symptom.”¹⁵ That is, the deception (caused

by rhetoric) is only a symptom of an original malady of corporeality. Just as the body is doubly ruined in the above passage, in its “original flesh” as well as by the addition of fat, the soul is swollen by rhetoric, but first and originally warped by its entombment in the flesh.¹⁶ Here, then, the operation of the metaphor mirrors the metaphysical process: in the text, the body substitutes for the soul and thus serves as the medium of contamination from individual to social; in the Platonic worldview, the body becomes the vessel of the soul and thus debases the soul’s original purity.¹⁷

On the foundations of a hierarchy in which the body is a debased realm, then, Plato’s inversion of his own metaphor becomes more than a convenient literary switcheroo. In representing rhetoric’s effects in the political body rather than the soul, he accomplishes two aims. First, it allows him to scoff at the genuine material power of the orators, which fulfills the unavoidable basic needs of the *demos*, as “merely” satisfying the bodily appetites; in fact, those who appear to be leaders are really only “servants” (*diakonous*) (518C4). At the same time, however—and this is his second blow—he evacuates the position of influence upon the soul that was originally held by rhetoric, creating a vacancy into which philosophy can step. In contrast to the base corruption of oratory, then, the power of the philosopher becomes a higher, transcendent force that disciplines the soul. But because it maintains its own link to the physical through the metaphor of medicine, philosophy becomes the panacea that combats the bodily sickness caused by rhetoric through its superior power over the health of the soul. In this complex chiasmatic exchange between body and soul, rhetoric and philosophy, then, Plato secures for the philosopher a transcendent or metaphysical power that trumps the “merely” physical power of the rhetors. At the same time, the rootedness of medicine in the body lends quiet material heft to his political aspirations.

And so in what follows, Socrates styles himself the lone doctor-philosopher-politician that the sickly Athens needs. He goads Callicles:

Now, please describe for me precisely the type of care for the city to which you are calling me. Is it that of striving valiantly with the Athenians to make them as good as possible, *like a doctor*, or is it like one ready to serve them and to associate with them for their gratification?

e π i poteran oun me parakaleis tēn therapeian tēs poleōs, diorison moi: tēn tou diamakhesthai Athēnaiois hopōs hōs beltistoi esontai, hōs iatron, ē hōs diakonēsonta kai pros kharin homilēsonta? (521a2–5, emphasis added)

The correct answer is the former, of course, and the role of doctor constitutes his unique political power, leading to one of Socrates’s most famous boasts: “I believe that I’m one of a few Athenians—so as not to say I’m the only one, but the only one among our contemporaries—to take up the true political craft and practice the true politics” (*epixeirien tēi hōs alēthōs politikē tekhnē kai prattein ta*

politika) (521d6–8).¹⁸ In so doing, Socrates acknowledges that he risks death, making him a true *parrhesiastes*. For as the philosopher-doctor-statesman, Socrates dispenses moral and political truth/health, whether the unenlightened *demos* likes it or not: “I’ll be judged the way a doctor would be judged by a jury of children if a [cook] (*opsopoioi*) were to bring accusations against him” (521e3–4). The vivid image translates a political vision in which an ignorant, infantile mass is lead and improved by a single wise man responsible for their bodies and their souls—a vision that centers on the anti-democratic and verges on religious fervor.

In short, through a deft mixing of his own metaphors, Socrates has radically displaced the traditional sites of power and prestige of ancient Athens, thus opening up a transcendental position of knowledge/power into which he neatly inserts himself. It seems that we need not venture to *The Republic*, then, to find evidence of Plato’s authoritarian ideology, advanced in medical terms. However, that Socrates delivers this message in “a real popular harangue” (*hōs alēthōs dēmēgorein me*), as he openly acknowledges, underscores the fact that his bid for philosophical power is thoroughly rhetorical (519d5). In other words, the vile pestilence rhetoric taints Plato’s prescription for social and moral health—complicating the matter of reading his political program.

II.

It does not require a terribly sharp acumen to observe that Socrates is infected by the bug of rhetorical trickery, whether construed as long speeches, wearing of masks, or obvious flattery. Indeed, as above, Socrates openly confesses his rhetorical failings, hamming up his performance of the *parrhesiastic* or truth-telling role. Plato casts him as unwillingly, but at least honestly, employing narrative accounts only when rhetoric is unavoidable—usually because of the stupidity of his opponent (465e4–6). As Foucault notes, *parrhesia* is “a sort of ‘figure’ among rhetorical figures, but with this characteristic: that it is without any figure since it is completely natural. *Parrhesia* is the zero degree of those rhetorical figures which intensify the emotions of the audience.”¹⁹ That is, it is precisely in his medico-political role as a truth-teller that Socrates is employing rhetoric in the most devious way: his performance of *parrhesia* works rhetorically to conceal his use of rhetoric.

In other words, Socrates’s confessions and protestation of sincerity may lull the reader into overlooking more fundamental oratorical “corruptions” of philosophical practice. He continually reverts to rhetorical ploys, including peppering his speeches with flattering blandishments (every opponent is his most “marvelous friend”); deliberately assuming insincere postures; and, as above, masking his schemas with mixed up metaphors. All of these are compelling and well-known instances of the rhetorical posture of Socrates’s philosophy. Trickiest

of all, however, is Plato's use of the deceptive masks he himself critiques; that is, the prevalence of *ventriloquism* in the dialogue.

Think of the opening scene, in which the character of Chaerephon seems to exist only to articulate Socrates's questions, while Polus speaks for Gorgias (447c9–448c9). Or later, when Socrates assumes the voices of the now-familiar doctor, physical trainer, and financial manager to badger Gorgias into saying what good oratory produces, concluding: "So come on, Gorgias. Consider yourself questioned by both these men and myself, and give us your answer" (452d1–3). Or when he "instructs" Polus on how to question him dialectically:

SOCRATES: Ask me now what craft I think cookery is.

POLUS: All right, I will. What craft is cookery?

SOCRATES: It isn't one at all, Polus. Now say, "What is it then?"

POLUS: [Alright, I'm saying it.] (*phēmi dē*)

SOCRATES: It's a [knack] (*empeireia*). Say, "a [knack] for what?"

POLUS: [Alright, I'm saying it.] (*phēmi dē*)

SOCRATES: For producing gratification and pleasure." (462d9–e1)

Thinking in a similar vein, Daniel Boyarin points out the "scriptedness" of this exchange, invoking metaphors of stage, performance, and artifice.²⁰ What is written into this script, however, is Socrates routing his questions through Polus's mouth, just as he makes his voice issue from the doctor or from Chaerephon. I'll add one final instance of ventriloquism, perhaps the most striking: when Socrates dispenses entirely with his pretense to dialogism with the non-compliant Calicles, saying summarily, "Haven't we agreed many times already that this [looking after the well-being of the citizens] is what a man active in politics should be doing? Have we or haven't we? Please answer me. Yes we have. *I'll answer for you*" (515c, emphasis added). And of course, we must not forget the very first order of ventriloquism, in which Plato speaks through his characters.²¹ In each of these instances, Plato, Socrates, or another character forces his words to emerge from another's mouth.

More than a dialogue, then, the text becomes a rabbit warren of throats, a labyrinth of unlocatable voices. In the *Gorgias*, ventriloquy seems to have "gone viral." Indeed, the infectious life-cycle of a virus is itself a species of ventriloquism; or, put differently, ventriloquism is a metaphor for the operation of the virus: an organism that inhabits another body, expresses itself and lives through the mechanisms of that body. The virus of ventriloquy is one that, unlike healthful philosophy, can never be sincere or true to itself, except by borrowing the voice of another. The prevalence of this practice of oral masking in the *Gorgias* illustrates not only that Socrates is infected by the disease of rhetoric, but, to paraphrase Nietzsche, portrays him as a parasite that lives only by multiplying himself in his unwilling hosts.²²

To an astonishing degree, then, Socrates's philosophical practice of truth-telling involves the assumption of multiple identities, a polyphonous and parasitical form of puppetry. And so Foucault's question, "Who can be a *parrhesiastes*?" when asked of Plato's *Gorgias*, will not yield a single answer. This is crucial, because the argument that *parrhesia* is or can be a technique of the self becomes more complicated when the self who speaks truth is multiple, shifting, or *not even oneself*. In other words, Plato's poly-logue deliberately suggests that not even the philosopher can monologically question himself; what is required is neither an interlocutor nor a doctor, but a kind of ventriloquism.²³ Imagine the nightly trial of your soul: do you really play both judge and defendant, or do you assume the voices of others—rivals, mentors, ghosts, heroes—to question your own actions? In the *Gorgias*, at least, Socrates's *parrhesia* is an interrogation via ventriloquy: it is a medico-philosophical practice of truth-telling, which, paradoxically, must be expressed in the infectious rhetorical structure of the virus.²⁴

III.

The *political* implications of the double or multi-voicedness of the text, however, depend fundamentally on how we decide to read the presence of these multiple voices. It is traditional to approach philosophical texts as though they offer a prescription: for how to live the good life, how to think about problems of good and bad, how to outwit any opponent in a debate. And the *Gorgias* certainly provides answers to these sorts of queries, or can be read as doing so. If we simply take Socrates's words at face value, then the dialogue defines the good life as the moral life, and the moral life as one that pursues not social consensus but eternal philosophical truths.

If Plato writes us a prescription for truth in the *Gorgias*, however, that pill may turn out to be a placebo: a little white and black capsule that cures us of our penchant for rhetorical corruption only by itself employing deceit.²⁵ This reading would run parallel to Malcolm Schofield's argument concerning Plato's "noble lie," in which, as one commentator puts it, "the end of getting Athenian intellectuals to abandon the moral premises on which Athenian society was built was so vital . . . that it justified the means, even when the means were very far from an approach to truth at all."²⁶ That is, in the text-as-placebo, Socrates instills a desire for truth that *deceives*. Not only does Socrates himself dissimulate with his masks and maneuvers, as we have seen. Further, the will-to-truth itself disguises itself as eternal and unmediated, as direct a process as cauterization or surgery. Though Socrates admits that he himself is ventriloquized by his "beloved, philosophy," he positions himself as her faithful recorder: "For she always says what you now hear me say, my dear friend, and she's by far less fickle than my other beloved" (482a4–6). But as Nietzsche reminds us in "Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense,"

the philosophical drive to truth is fundamentally an impulse that forgets that the primordial human way of being-in-the-world—our language—is always already metaphorical and therefore “false.”²⁷ From the Nietzschean perspective, then, the Socratic placebo of philosophical truth lies to us in the fundamental sense that it dissimulates our creative capacity as humans. Thus, understanding the text as placebo at least partially undoes the authoritarian truth-cure on offer in the *Gorgias*, by embracing the deception that always-already accompanies truth.²⁸

Score one for disease.

In a related but distinct way of reading the text, one might argue that Socrates’s rhetorical or “deceptive” maneuvers in the *Gorgias* do not sugar-coat and disguise the truth, but paradoxically protect it. That is, Plato may have intended Socrates’s marked use of oratorical techniques to *immunize* his listeners against Gorgias’s rhetorical pathogen: this reading construes the contradiction between content and form in the dialogue as a device deployed to excite the listener’s ability to distinguish truth from deception. Indeed, the sea of literature which purports to discover what Plato “really” meant would seem to have been effectively vaccinated in this way.²⁹ In understanding the deceit in the text as vaccine rather than placebo, the second accent is conceived positively, as providing immunity against the more virulent forms of oratory practiced by Gorgias and his followers.

Score one for the doctors.

Finally, as hinted above, a third possibility exists: that the text itself is the disease, or at least a carrier of it. By this I do not mean that the text is plagued by the confusion of philosophy and rhetoric, but rather, that it *is* the plague: a virus that replicates and transmits itself, always evolving in response to new stimuli and counterattacks. If this is the case, we see the text’s symptoms—including its opposition between philosophy and rhetoric and its language of philosophical health—not only in the subsequent Western philosophical tradition, but disseminated in literature and discourse far beyond the borders of the Western world. This reading, of course, diverges in at least two further ways. Either the malady at stake here is the drive to truth, as in a Nietzschean formulation; or, conversely, the text infects its readers with the ailment of rhetoric. Perhaps both views are mutations of the same strand.

But wait—is this set of options anything more than winged metalepsis, a series of figurative substitutions, a transgression of the logically separate worlds of text and body?³⁰ Have we only mistaken a mask for the character, and the character for a mask? I do not think so. Metalepsis instead names the corridor by which Plato’s work is most productive, most powerful. As we saw above with the exchange of body and soul, his work not only invites but instigates an exchange of registers. These metaleptical moves are internal to the text; our work is to name and explain their workings. And that means that rather than choose between them (which would amount to reducing the text to only one of its characters), we must

understand the dialogue as their interplay. By virtue of the range of its possible effects—placebo, vaccination, or infection—the dialogue becomes *the clinic*.³¹ We can think of the text as the institutional site that puts subjects and objects into order, while still leaving room for the idiosyncrasies of the practitioners, visitors and their ailments. And so, depending on temperament or fate, some of us close the book feeling better but none the wiser (having been on the placebo side of a double-blind test); others with a renewed zest for life, resolved to go to the gym and speak plain and true (having had an adult vaccination); and still others itching in odd places or carrying a dormant super-infection (having been contaminated). Or indeed, why not some combination? It is well-known that doctors produce disease as well as cure it, and not just as a side effect.³² Without siding with any argument of perpetual undecideability (for today more than ever it is necessary to side and decide), understanding the dialogue-as-clinic allows us to make better sense of its multiple, coincident, and contradictory effects.³³ We can apprehend its problematic in a multi-faceted way: as anthropologists, if you like, striving to be cognizant of the desires, conscious and unconscious, of all parties. The result is a capacious reading, in that it allows for the truth that there is something profoundly healing here; and also for an opposing truth: that something here makes us itch.

And yet—it must be said that within the clinic of the *Gorgias*, the range of reactions is still clearly circumscribed to benefit the doctors and the philosophers. Consider: Whichever way we interpret the double accent—whether we are doctored or infected by the text—we read ourselves into the role of object, not agent. We remain patients, *passive*. Our readerly submission to the operation of the metaphor is not only figurative, but also effectively political. That is, despite our power of interpretation, we are caught within a semiotic system that would actually limit our imaginative and subjective possibilities to the subordinate and passive role of the non-knower. And this position, we share the fate of the Athenian multitude in the *Gorgias*. For as we have seen, the physician-philosopher metaphor expands in the dialogue to underwrite the potentate, and the infected body becomes social rather than individual, thus justifying an authoritarian philosopher-doctor-ruler who “knows best.”³⁴ With the age-old lure of power, the dialogue tempts readers to try to assume the role of authoritarian doctors and truth-tellers (who nonetheless deceive). The only other option on offer is passive infection or treatment. Despite the gap we have tried to prop open with the lever of interpretive agency, we remain, in the clinic of the *Gorgias*, in the position of the ignorant, penetrated body.

And these aspects of our position—our bodies and our ignorance—are two prominent faces of illness within Plato's system, as we have seen.³⁵ That is why, whether the *text* is rightly understood as placebo, vaccine, or virus, we are forced to realize, with Herzen, that *we* are the disease. There will be much more to say

about this below. For now it is clear that the image of the clinic of the *Gorgias* is congruent with a widely held view, namely that Plato's anti-rhetorical rhetoric advances a political solution that is undesirable by our contemporary democratic dreams.³⁶ But my reading adds just this much: we understand why none of the reactions, from collusion to rebellion, have made us healthy. Having mapped out the clinic of the *Gorgias*, perhaps we can finally illuminate the exit. Foucault, in casting the patient in the role of physician, making the subject the doctor of her own disease, tries to do exactly this. Let us see how well he fares.

IV.

We have seen how Plato maneuvers the concepts of truth and health to organize a socio-political hierarchy. In contrast, in both his written work and lecture material of the 1980s, Foucault is fascinated with these same themes in the locus of the individual. In documenting the transformation of ancient advice about the care of the self (*epimeleia heautou*), he is particularly concerned to differentiate Hellenistic practices (those of the Stoics, Epicureans, and Cynics) as a sort of "golden age" of the care of the self, distinct from the Platonic precepts and the Christian code that historically bracket them.³⁷ Such practices of self-examination, including a nightly review of the day, letter writing, submission to a philosophical guide, journal keeping, as well as a physical regimen, do not entail the break with the self that is common to Christian conversion (rather, they encourage a break with the world). They are not a mere stopping point to on the way to the government of others, as they are for Plato (rather, the self is "absolutized" as an end in itself). *Parrhesia* now becomes important not as speaking truth to power, but as the power of truth, spoken by a philosophical and therapeutic master, to transform his disciple.³⁸ It is just one of a set of positive practices of self construction, exemplary of the technologies of the self, which

permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.³⁹

Politically and intellectually, these techniques seem at first to offer a way out of the omnipresent powers of subjectification that Foucault has spent the majority of his career delineating. Foucault's analysis of power in terms of discourse, relationality and subjectivity leads him to imagine resistance in those same terms. Within this framework, the self becomes essential to political resistance because it is the only object that can be willed always and absolutely, from and to the self.⁴⁰ As his friend and interlocutor Paul Veyne puts it: "The self is the new strategic possibility."⁴¹

Though commentators have tended to emphasize the creative or auto-poietic aspect of the care of the self, what is fundamentally at work is our now familiar

triad of health, truth, and power. In the Hellenistic version, we see a reoccurring and linked concern with one's psychic and physical *health*, with transformative *truth* that returns one to oneself, and a regime that surpasses self-control to become *power* over oneself.⁴² Foucault is well aware of the strong basic connection between the philosophical doctrine of self-care and medicine, opting not to dwell on it more deeply because the bond is "ancient, traditional, well-established, and always repeated."⁴³ Yet he does so at his peril, for it is precisely the medical aspect of self-care that shapes its political potential. Governing oneself also, by necessary reflexivity, involves being governed; in the texts, this aspect of submission manifests *through* the connection with health. As Foucault remarks, "You see that the need for a master or an aid arises in connection with good and bad health, and so in fact with correction, rectification, and reform."⁴⁴ The same structure of authority that we saw in Plato remains embedded in Foucault's rendering of Hellenistic notion of health, but routed through the authority of a chosen philosophical master or friend. By restoring to the patient the agency of the doctor, does Foucault neutralize Plato's anti-democratic implications?

I am not convinced that it does. Foucault's turn, often termed ethical but actually political, internalizes and leaves intact the authoritarian relation of doctor-patient. While in itself the act of submission is not necessarily damning—only the crudest libertarianism aims for a freedom divorced from its necessary dialectic with compulsion—one wonders whether his displacement of the medical-political structure into the self does not only create subjects more pliable and congruent to the practices of subjectification that we worry about. That is, the discourse of self-care seems suspiciously well-suited to producing subjects who take on the task of adjusting themselves to the uninhabitable, to the condition of original disempowerment. It calls to mind the painfully ambivalent situations of the professional-mother-wife who reads Jon Kabat Zinn and struggles to be "mindful" of her anger when she's left again with the kids and the dishes; of the young cognitariat worker burdened with debt and therapy bills. Meanwhile, in the U.S. in 2012, both Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul and Green Party candidate Jill Stein played up their medical careers as part of their campaigns. Precisely *because* Foucault's internal model of doctor-patient mirrors the external model of the physician-politician, it leaves us vulnerable to surrendering our autonomy to an external authority. The analogy does not go away when it goes inside, and to replace the cop inside your head with the doc is not much improvement. Indeed, one must ask why Foucault does not choose to see the practice of self-*parrhesia* as externally produced. As many commentators have noted, it remains unclear how the practices of self-care at issue in Foucault's later work differ substantially from the kinds of subjectification that concern him in his earlier projects.

Foucault's allies respond to this very question by explaining that he came to realize that every instance of power begets its own resistance.⁴⁵ Alexander Nehamas is representative: "Since power is productive, the subjects it produces, being themselves forms of power, can be productive in their own right."⁴⁶ Certainly. But that is no guarantee that what we produce, least of all ourselves, will be resistant to the oppressive forms of authority—the self as such is not necessarily, or at least has not been shown to be, the *sine qua non* of political resistance. (To list only a few alternatives, it has been suggested in recent years that the essence of political resistance is instead the relationship of love, the multitude, or the event.) At a minimum, the point is this: while it is certain that revolutionary subjects and communities must at some level involve care, that is not the same as saying that practices of care will be revolutionary. The medical metaphor that offered such promise, then, is an authoritarian dead end in Plato's *Gorgias*, and at best a question in the Foucauldian iteration. Positioned as passive non-knowers by both the content and form of the first, we remain fundamentally disabled in the second, without a clear path to produce resistant subjectivities.

However, Foucault unwittingly provides an out. In making the subject her own doctor, he imports and underlines *the disease that we ourselves are*—returning us directly to Herzen's claim. He empowers the subject to become the doctor and carry out her own treatment only on the condition of re-inscribing the patient diseased by (self)delusion. Just as the moral valence of the philosopher-as-doctor depends on the threat of social disease, the therapeutics of the self requires a sick, and split, subject. Foucault acknowledges this.⁴⁷ But in fact, the subject in his account inhabits not only a dual but a triple consciousness: in addition to doctor and patient, we are also, at least at first, the disease. The Stoics characterize the relevant malady as *stultitia*: Latin for stupidity or foolishness, but more vividly described by Foucault as the condition of being "prey to the winds of external representations," without the ability to discriminate these from one's own subjectivity.⁴⁸ What passes for healing is a slow disengagement of the sense of self from the subject position of disease: I am not that, not them. We become "healthy" by instilling inside our own heads a voice that monitors, sorts and classifies our receptive capacity. And yet, it is already the voice of the doctor who can make the discrimination between the patient (some kind of stable, coherent entity) and the illness (a temporary, properly external condition). The disease itself, on the other hand, makes no such distinction. Its life, its vitality depends instead on making such a distinction untenable, in opening up and exploiting the passages of receptivity and exchange. Its ambitions are as fierce and potentially universalist as the doctor's. The difference between "I am diseased" to "we are the disease" is one of perspective: from the position of the authoritative doctor-self who sees a sick patient, to the position of the organic being whose life consists in the strategic, difficult, and vital processes of transmission.

But whether we submit to the external philosopher doctor Socrates, or carry out our own self-diagnoses, we are to understand ourselves as first and primordially crippled, the victims of the disease that *we ourselves are*. Foucault's attempt at empowerment of subjects as their own doctors rests upon the "original flesh" of a pathologized receptivity to others. Within Plato, adopting the position of disease means beginning from our status as unknowing bodies; in the Foucauldian version of the care of the self, it means focusing on our ability to transmit representations rather than, or at the same time as, our vulnerability to them.⁴⁹

Claiming the role of disease could trigger a bold and multi-front engagement with the traditional discourse of health, truth, and power, a shift away from the overcoded dynamic between doctor-patient to the fresh possibilities (agonistic as well as symbiotic) of the disease. There is a great deal to say about this, but I will here venture only a couple brief and provisional remarks. Firstly, "we are the disease" would inaugurate a politics that begins modestly from where we are (sick) instead of aiming at where we are not (health). It is an inductive rather than deductive, processual rather than teleological mode of doing politics. The second, related point is that, as ignorant, we are less in need of expert truth than of opinion and debate. The disease of ignorance must lead to experiment and disagreement—in a word, to democracy. Instead of binding ourselves or being bound to truth, we are left with a world of infinitely contestable, infinitely variable statements, a world both fearsome and free.⁵⁰

In his study of the parasite (and recall that ancient Egyptian medicine, for example, conceived all disease on the model of the parasite⁵¹), Michel Serres reminds us that we can never know whether the parasite's interruption of the system will be good or bad, small or large.⁵² And so we must also somberly confront the fatality of the host: our own finitude, and the destruction that we are in our creative being. Fatalities are not a side effect that we can minimize—fatalities are our mode of life. At a minimum, then, claiming the position of disease must transform the way that we approach what we call ethics. But seeking to cure the disease that we actually are? Nothing less than suicide and submission.

NOTES

1. See W. H. S. Jones, *Philosophy and Medicine in Ancient Greece* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1946).
2. Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–1982*, trans. Graham Burchell, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005), esp. 97–100. Michel Foucault and Joseph Pearson, *Fearless Speech* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001), 112.
3. Emile Benveniste, "The Medical Tradition of the Indo-Europeans," in *Antiquities*, ed. Nicole Loraux, Gregory Nagy, and Laura M. Slatkin, Postwar French Thought

- (New York: New Press, 2001). Benveniste lists such Greek terms as *medomai* (to care for), *mēdomai* (to decide), and *medōn* (chief), as well as their Latin and Sanskrit counterparts, to demonstrate this medical-philosophical-political nexus.
4. G. E. R. Lloyd, *In the Grip of Disease: Studies in the Greek Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
 5. For the sake of depth and brevity, I limit myself here to the one dialogue, though medicine is a crucial and complex theme also in at least the *Republic*, *Timaeus*, *Sophist*, *Laws*, and *Phaedrus*. Suggesting the profundity of the indebtedness, Hans-Georg Gadamer asserts that the famous Platonic forms (*eidos*) may have come first from medical usage. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Enigma of Health: The Art of Healing in a Scientific Age*, trans. Jason Gaiger and Nicholas Walker (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), 40. Lloyd provides an excellent synthetic overview of medical themes in the Platonic corpus in chapter 6.
 6. See Roslyn Weiss, "Oh Brother! The Fraternity of Rhetoric and Philosophy in Plato's *Gorgias*," *Interpretation* 30:2 (2003): 195–206. Weiss also sees this pair of brothers (one among eight such pairs in the dialogue) as the crucial one for determining the possible resolution of the conflict between rhetoric and philosophy. I cannot share her optimism in this respect, for two reasons: first, because there is nothing about the familial bond that guarantees resolution rather than conflict, and second, because the hierarchy of doctor/patient (and between brothers), as I shall show below, casts the relationship as one of authority and power rather than amicable equity.
 7. I have relied primarily on Donald Zeyl's translation of the *Gorgias*, consulting also Robin Waterfield's rendition. Where I have made emendations of my own, I have indicated them with square brackets.
 8. But were doctors in fact the authoritative figures they are today, or is it anachronistic to attribute a "white-coat effect" to the ancients? Brill (2006) takes care to point out that medicine was not, in Plato's time, an obvious choice for a paradigmatic *technē*, and according to Frede (1987), the doctrine of self-care was popular because of the abundance of itinerant and unaccountable quacks. Nonetheless, by Plato's time, the advance of Hippocratic doctrine meant that doctors were established authority figures, with some cities, including Athens, even appointing public physicians. Though sometimes the Hippocratic doctors emphasize healing as a collaboration with the patient (Jouanna 1999: 136), the greater emphasis is on the need for his or her obedience. Hence I think Lloyd correct to eventually conclude: "Plato knew well enough, to be sure, that ordinary doctors fell far short. Yet for the sake of the construction of the ideal philosopher-king, he evidently thought that the authority of doctors was sufficiently impressive for them to serve as paradigms for that" (149).
 9. For important *disanalogies* between the doctor and the statesman, see Lloyd, *In the Grip of Disease: Studies in the Greek Imagination*, 148–9.
 10. The close relationship between medicine and philosophy was not only a fancy of the philosophers. Though scholars disagree over the degree and direction of the influence, the literature taken as a whole demonstrates that the relationship between them was a two-way (if sometimes traffic-jammed) street. For an argument for their mutual influence, see James Longrigg, *Greek Rational Medicine: Philosophy and Medicine from*

- Alcmaeon to the Alexandrians* (London: Routledge, 1993). For treatments emphasizing medicine's debt to philosophy, see G. E. R. Lloyd, "Introduction," in *Hippocratic Writings*, ed. G. E. R. Lloyd (London: Penguin Books, 1978); Ludwig Edelstein, *Ancient Medicine: Selected Papers of Ludwig Edelstein*, trans. C. Lilian Temkin (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1967). For philosophy's debt to medicine, see Michael Frede, "Philosophy and Medicine in Antiquity," in *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, trans. Gilbert Highet, vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). For an account emphasizing the conflict between the two, see W. H. S. Jones, "Introduction," in *Hippocrates, Vol. 1: Ancient Medicine* (Loeb Classical Library No. 147) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1923).
11. Brill meticulously surveys all the ways in which medicine is *not* a paradigmatic *technē*, revealing the tensions and oppositions Plato had to overcome to make this now-familiar analogy. Sara Brill, "Medical Moderation in Plato's *Symposium*," *Studies in the History of Ethics* (2006). Gadamer, too, is frequently and broadly concerned with the tension between the "art" and "science" of healing. Gadamer, *The Enigma of Health: The Art of Healing in a Scientific Age*.
 12. The positive valence of the medical metaphor is so powerful that the orators, too, attempt to appropriate it, though with less success. For example, see 456b, where Gorgias responds to Socrates's attack by claiming that oratory might be valuable in persuading patients to take their medicine when a doctor cannot (only to be ultimately caught in a forced contradiction about justice). The comparison that Plato sets up here between the doctor and the rhetor mirrors the one taking place between Socrates and Gorgias, and predictably turns to the latter's disadvantage. That the analogy could easily go the other way is demonstrated by Plato himself, when in *Phaedrus* Socrates famously compares *rhetoric* rather than philosophy to medicine (I oversimplify, of course, for he goes on to fold rhetoric into philosophy). The relevant passage in that dialogue is from 270b to the end.
 13. In this paper, I do not distinguish between oratory and sophistry, referring to both with "rhetoric" or sometimes "oratory," since although historically distinct—the sophists were something like teachers of higher education and orators were 'public figures' who spoke in the courts and the assembly—for the purposes of Plato's argument, and thus my own, they are the same. Indeed, he has Socrates say as much: "They are one and the same, the sophist and the orator, or nearly so and pretty similar" (520a7–8). For the historical point, see G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
 14. Richard Stalley ably summarizes the literature and the philosophical issues underlying the politics in the *Gorgias*, especially pertaining to the definition of knowledge, in "The Politics of the Gorgias," in *Gorgias-Menon: Selected Papers from the Seventh Symposium Platonicum*, ed. Michael Erler and Luc Brisson, *International Plato Studies*, vol. 25 (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2007). More generally on the extent and kinds of power wielded by the rhetors, see Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989); Ian Worthington, "Rhetoric and Politics in Classical Greece: Rise of the *Rhētores*," in *A Companion to Greek Rhetoric*, ed. Ian Worthington (Malden, Mass.:

- Blackwell Publishing, 2007); Harvey Yunis, *Taming Democracy: Models of Political Rhetoric in Classical Athens* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996).
15. Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault*, Sather Classical Lectures, vol. 61 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 162.
 16. In her richly woven book, Brooke Holmes provides a more complex historical account of the emergence of the physical body in ancient Greece, and its relation to the soul, the symptom, and the ethical (and political) subject.
 17. For a precise description of the soul, its parts, and its analogical relationship to the health, the city, and politics, see G. R. F. Ferrari, *City and Soul in Plato's Republic*, *Lecturae Platonis* (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2003).
 18. The line “rhymes” uneasily with Glaucon’s remark in *Republic* III, upon hearing of the god of medicine’s rather eugenic policy of treatment: “a bit of a statesman, your Asclepius” (407e). Plato’s critical remarks about medicine here and in other dialogues seem to represent further refinements of his concept of just how medicine, philosophy, and leadership go together.
 19. Foucault and Pearson, *Fearless Speech*, 21. In fact, Foucault waffles on the question of whether *parrhesia* should be considered a rhetorical device, or whether it is opposed to rhetoric as a basically philosophical practice of truth-telling, depending on whom he is reading. Speaking of Seneca and Quintillian, he describes *parrhesia* as the “naked transmission of the truth,” concluding, “in a word, let’s say then that speaking freely, *parrhesia*, is in its very structure completely different from and opposed to rhetoric.” Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–1982*, 382, 85. But later, speaking more generally, he expresses the opposite view (372). Philosophically speaking, we might say that *parrhesia* cannot be wholly appropriated by or attributed to rhetoric or philosophy, because and to the same extent that those two cannot be wholly divided from one another. Historically speaking, however, *parrhesia* was a recognizable oratorical device, and hence we can be comfortable in accepting Socrates’s use of it as an instance of artful speech.
 20. Daniel Boyarin, *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 112–3.
 21. For further examples of Socratic ventriloquism, see also 455d (where Socrates speaks for potential pupils), 482a (philosophy, Socrates’s beloved, speaking through him), 505c–507c (Socrates finishes the discussion by himself, alternating as questioner/answerer).
 22. Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Problem of Socrates,” in *Twilight of the Idols and the Anti-christ* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2004).
 23. David Goldblatt reads ventriloquism as central to art to underline the non-originality of all creation, taking Socrates as well as Nietzsche, Foucault, Derrida, and others as exemplary. See David Goldblatt, *Art and Ventriloquism* (London: Routledge, 2006).
 24. Sara Brill is attentive to this same startling juxtaposition in *Republic*, though she is more interested in the intersection of the medical with the epistemological and the ethical than the political. In her lovely phrase: “That Plato would describe the convergence of philosophy and political power as a kind of falling together [*sumptōma* or symptom] that is also characteristic of violent activity and disease suggests that

- there exists a pathological element in the paradox of the philosopher king.” Sara Brill, “Diagnosis and the Divided Line: Pharmacological Concerns in Plato’s *Republic*,” *Epoché* 9:2 (2005): 298.
25. In his magisterial study of Hippocrates, Jacques Jouanna points out that such deceptive practices were rare but not unheard of among Hippocratic writers. He recounts “a feat of prestidigitation, which bordered on charlatanism” from Epidemics VI, in which the doctor tricks the patient with an earache into thinking he has removed some object from the ear. Jacques Jouanna, *Hippocrates* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 134.
 26. Boyarin, *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis*, 129; Malcolm Schofield, “The Noble Lie,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato’s Republic*, ed. G. R. F. Ferrari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
 27. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, “Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense,” in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche’s Notebooks of the Early 1870’s* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1979).
 28. In a contemporary but surprisingly consonant vein, Ed Cohen has argued that the sugar-pill in Western medicine today represents the capacity for humans to self-heal through the imagination rather than through scientific means: a space that bio-medicine tries simultaneously to deny, contain and appropriate. As such, in his view the placebo represents a populist political alternative, against the hegemony of bio-medicine over American health. Ed Cohen, “The Placebo Disavowed: Or Unveiling the Bio-Medical Imagination,” *Yale Journal for Humanities in Medicine* (2002).
 29. This trajectory runs parallel to Ferrari’s track in his sophisticated study of the *Phaedrus*. The scholars who debate the authenticity of the speech which Phaedrus presents as coming from Lysias, Ferrari there asserts, are provoked by Plato’s own gesture: they enact his very point about the dangers of the orphan writing and its absent father. But the astute reader may thereby learn better Plato’s lesson: “the inclusion of a supposedly ‘alien’ text goes some way . . . towards mitigating the general [negative] effects of writing” in the case of *Phaedrus*. G. R. F. Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas: A Study of Plato’s Phaedrus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 210–1. Ferrari here describes quite elegantly the functioning of the vaccine: exposed to the antigen of the text within the text, the reader may produce the antibody and be protected against the harms of Plato’s own writing. That we find this performative structure of immunization across a variety of Platonic texts may suggest, once again, that Plato’s use of medical vocabulary and metaphors goes beyond a convenient metaphor for philosophy or politics to a precise functional correspondence.
 30. On metalepsis, see Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980), 243–51.
 31. If you will pardon another anachronism. It is Foucault, of course, who brilliantly explains the emergence of the clinic in early nineteenth-century France and the political role that doctors then assume. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), esp. 33–5.

32. The classic work on this counterintuitive dysfunction is still Ivan Illich, *Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health*, 1st American ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976). Here Illich classifies iatrogenic, or doctor-produced, disease in three types: *clinical*, which refers to direct side effects and hospital-bred “super-infections”; *social*, which occurs when medical policies reinforce the sickening effects of industrial society; and *cultural*, which is a result of norms and narratives that deplete individuals’ resources for autonomous self-care. Appropriately, Illich is acutely aware of the moral and political aspects of practices of medicine, so much so that he at times equates health with liberty or autonomy (7, 242). He himself was so invested in these views that he is said to have refused treatment for a prominent cancerous growth on his face, surviving far beyond the three months of the doctor’s prognosis.
33. The indebtedness of this argument to Derrida will be long evident, and I do not presume to have innovated on his masterful work in his “Plato’s Pharmacy.” And yet, the *Gorgias*-as-clinic is distinct from Derrida’s characterization of *Phaedrus* as a pharmacy, and not only because we are dealing with different dialogues or because Derrida is interested in speech versus writing rather than speech (rhetoric) versus philosophy. In that deservedly famous work, Derrida destabilizes Platonic binaries from within by unfolding the polysemous nature of the *pharmakon*. In contrast, the analysis of the dialogue as clinic shows that its shape-shifting nature is a *result* of the interplay of binaries (doctor/patient, body/soul, rhetoric/philosophy, etc.), and that this multiplicity belies a fundamental unity of the institutional workings. In other words, binaries are no longer the problem, and polysemousness is no escape. We can, in the dialogue-as-clinic, see that multiplicity of meanings as part of Plato’s net. See Jacques Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” in *Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).
34. Roger Brock makes a similar claim regarding Plato’s use of the medical analogy, but his solution is to turn back the historical clock to a supposedly earlier, less authoritarian practice of self-care. Leaving aside the nature of such a “turn back,” the notion of self-care is not an adequate political response, as my discussion of Foucault will show. Roger Brock, “Sickness in the Body Politic: Medical Imagery in the Greek Polis,” in *Death and Disease in the Ancient City*, ed. Valerie M. Hope and Eireann Marshall (London: Routledge, 2000).
35. In section I. On disease as ignorance, see also Lloyd, *In the Grip of Disease: Studies in the Greek Imagination*, 147.
36. The literature on this is voluminous. Some places to start are Susan Jarratt, *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991); George Alexander Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963); Jacqueline de Romilly, *The Great Sophists in Periclean Athens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Edward Schiappa, *The Beginnings of Rhetorical Theory in Classical Greece* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999); Håkan Tell, *Plato’s Counterfeit Sophists* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011); Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People*.
37. Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality*, vol. 3, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1986); Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: Volume*

- 2 of *the History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990); Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–1982*; Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France 1982–1983*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Foucault and Pearson, *Fearless Speech*.
38. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–1982*, 242.
 39. Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954–1984* (London: Allen Lane, 1997), 221.
 40. Foucault's commitment to this principle eventually shines through his cautious conditionals: "I think we may have to suspect that we find it impossible today to constitute and ethic of the self, even though it may be an urgent, fundamental, and politically indispensable task, if it is true after all that there is no first or final point of resistance to political power other than in the relationship one has to oneself . . . it seems to me that the analysis of governmentality—that is to say, of power as a set of reversible relationships—must refer to an ethics of the subject defined by the relationship of self to self." Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–1982*, 252.
 41. Paul Veyne, "The Final Foucault and His Ethics," in *Foucault and His Interlocutors*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 231.
 42. That this triad reoccurs should be no surprise: Foucault is, at his core, interested in the relationship between power and truth, at the level of subjectivity or the self—and the self has deep ties to the notion of health. Hence studies of the discourse around the immune system will often show that this bioscientific notion betrays at its core a metaphysical concept of the self.
 43. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–1982*, 97.
 44. *Ibid.*
 45. This is the Foucauldian version of the old "where the danger is, also grows the saving grace" line, and comes with all the same problems.
 46. Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault*, 177.
 47. "This medico-philosophical theme which is so amply developed brings with it the schema of a relationship to the self in which one has to constitute oneself permanently as the doctor and patient of oneself." Frédéric Gros provides this quote in the course context to Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–1982*, 535.
 48. *Ibid.*, 131.
 49. Of course, to the extent that "we are the disease" represents a transformation of subjectivity, one might argue that it remains continuous with Foucault's insistence that the self is site of transformation and with practices of the self. Yes and no. On the one hand, subjectivity certainly remains a necessary site of revolutionary change. On the other, Herzen's "we" returns us uncompromisingly to the trans-subjective: if this is work on the self, it is collaborative in the deepest way.

50. On this point we might most usefully turn to Jacques Ranciere, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
51. Georges Canguilhem, "The Normal and the Pathological," in *A Vital Rationalist: Selected Writings from Georges Canguilhem*, ed. Francois Delaporte (New York: Zone Books, 2000), 321.
52. Michel Serres, *The Parasite* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

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