Speaking of the Written Word: Socrates' Critique of Writing in Plato's *Phaedrus*

Jenna Yuzwa

Inception

This paper was originally written for Dr. Beth Savickey's Performance Philosophy course in the winter of 2018. The assignment was to write an essay, which critically analyzes Socrates' critique of writing in Plato's *Phaedrus*.

Abstract

In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates is fundamentally concerned with how a philosopher should utilize the art of writing. One concern he raises is that such an activity will atrophy people's memories. This claim draws parallels with our increasing dependence on modern technology, which similarly threatens to impede our cognitive abilities. Socrates also asserts that it is not possible to pass on true knowledge via writing, but only through spoken discourse. Furthermore, written words lack the capacity to respond to or choose their reader in the way that a philosopher can with their interlocutor. Socrates' suggestion to be selective when choosing one's interlocutor initially appears to contradict his belief that philosophy should be practised inclusively. However, his assertion is not contradictory nor is it hypocritical. Instead, Socrates is remarking that spoken discourse is shaped by those who engage in it. Interlocutors can actively interact with each other and refine their arguments through the progression of the dialectic, in the way that a written text is simply unable to. In my argument, I will connect my analysis of the critique of writing to the way in which one progresses through academia today, that is, through writing.

★ ★ ★

How should a philosopher use writing? Is it possible to pass down true knowledge through this practise? Plato's *Phaedrus* seeks to investigate these very questions. In this text Socrates raises several concerns with respect to writing, and remarks that "[…] speech-writing is not shameful in itself […]. What's really shameful, though is getting it wrong—speaking and writing shamefully badly" (259d). In the Egyptian myth Socrates tells to offer his critique of writing, the king Thamous is wary of the negative implications of writing over speaking. According to him, writing will atrophy people's memories and true knowledge can only be imparted orally, not through writing. Moreover, Socrates remarks that written words are incapable of interacting with the reader or defending themselves, and a book cannot choose its reader in the way that a philosopher or dialectician can choose their interlocutor. Socrates' critique of writing reflects many of the risks associated with our growing dependence on "smart"[1] technology and it is particularly relevant in today's increasingly social media obsessed society. His claim that writing will cause people's memories to waste away mirrors our increasing reliance on computers and cell phones, which similarly seem to threaten the preservation and development of our linguistic and creative abilities. Additionally, the ease of internet access should make us the most informed generation of humans yet. However, the expanding prevalence of social media in our day-to-day lives arguably interferes with the retrieval of reliable, complete and balanced information. Just as Socrates notes his wariness with respect to writing, I would suggest that we too ought to be critical and skeptical of the impacts modern technology will have on our cognitive faculties.

---

[1] The term "smart" is itself is open to question since the world implies a type of intelligence. It is worth critically examining what intelligence is and if a machine can ever truly possess such a characteristic. Moreover, we might ask whether or not imposing such a term on a non-living thing is even appropriate.

First, it is essential to note that Plato himself is noticeably silent throughout the course of all his dialogues, and *Phaedrus* is no exception. Plato never appears as a character even when he is reportedly the narrator. Rather, in the Platonic dialogues there is continuous mediation between speakers who carry out the entire discourse, and no mediation between Plato and these words (Kosman 1992: 73-74). While it was common for playwrights and poets of the past (i.e., Shakespeare, Euripides, and Aristophanes) to remain silent since nothing beyond their literary works survived, L.A. Kosman remarks that Plato sets himself apart as a philosopher through the use of silence in his philosophical works. Furthermore, Kosman asserts that the speakers in the Platonic dialogues are not meant to be a spokesperson for Plato, because then we could not imagine this to be his voice. As such, he remarks that "[…] Plato is among the most cryptic of philosophers; whatever he may reveal to us though his written words, a component of that revelation is the fact of his standing hidden and silent behind them" (Kosman 1992:74). Although Plato authored the dialogue which I will be analyzing, I will refer to the critique of writing and the arguments put forth as those of Socrates.

Near the conclusion of the *Phaedrus*, the dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus turns to a discussion about the concerns of writing, particularly its value and Socrates' attitude towards it. The subject is introduced when Socrates reminds Phaedrus that their discussion has not yet covered what makes writing acceptable and what makes it undesirable. Socrates wants to know whether Phaedrus knows how to use words in a way that would please the gods. He asks: "So do you know the best way for either a theoretical or a practical approach to speech to please god?" (274b) Phaedrus admits he does not know of a way and this prompts Socrates to launch into a myth he claims to have heard from his predecessors who are the only ones who know the truth of this subject (274c). Thomas A. Szlezak notes that because the unity of thought is

challenging to comprehend, this brief section of the dialogue (which has come to be known as the "critique of writing") has frequently been examined separately from the overall context of the dialogue, and moreover, that there has been a lack of investigation into whether or not a concrete relationship between its claims and the structure of the other dialogues exists. He maintains that it is crucial to understand this critique of writing as the completion of the *Phaedrus* because such understanding will aid one in having an enhanced comprehension of the structure of the Platonic dialogues in general (Szlezak 1999: 30).

Before elucidating the myth itself, a brief discussion of Socrates' choice to use this form of storytelling to condemn the act of writing is in order. Ronna Burger claims Socrates' choice to recount a myth through the voice of an Egyptian god in order to outline the risks of writing and to condemn the activity of writing is quite suitable since "[…] the Egyptian mode of writing, indeed the Egyptian mode of life, exemplifies to the highest degree those very dangers" (Burger 1978: 116). Furthermore, Egyptian culture along with its reverence for the ancients, its fixation on the deceased, its strict adherence to the social hierarchy, and its recognition of kings who are gods makes it an appropriate source for a myth critiquing the art of writing. The response necessitated by the myth about writing (which ensues in the form of a dialogue), is representative of the response necessitated by the Platonic dialogue with respect to writing (Burger 1978: 115). Indeed, the choice of raising the concerns about writing through the telling of an ancient Egyptian myth appears to be a remarkably good fit.

In addition, Burger suggests that the problematic aspects of writing arise as a small point within an internal digression on the art of speaking (Burger 1978: 114). This claim however, is questionable because rhetoric and speech-making (topics which Socrates and Phaedrus spend a considerable amount of time discussing in comparison to the critique of writing) necessitate a discussion of

writing, as it is a significant component of rhetoric and speech-making. The concerns of writing arise after Socrates and Phaedrus have agreed on what constitutes rhetorical expertise. Thus, the critique on writing is arguably not a digression, but rather part and parcel of Socrates' and Phaedrus' dialectic on speech and rhetoric.

One concern Socrates raises about writing is with respect to memory, which he introduces by way of recounting a myth. Szlezak asserts that, "The fact that Plato[2] has recourse to the mode of mythological thought about the 'first discoverer' shows that he is surveying writing in its most fundamental aspect, for in mythological thinking the inalienable nature of things was established at their original creation" (Szlezak 1999: 31). The myth (which is in fact a Platonic invention) tells of two Egyptians, Theuth, an inventor of writing, and other academic subjects and Thamous, an Egyptian king. Szlezak remarks that Theuth is symbolic of the illusion that insight and wisdom can be achieved through writing, or in other words, through the means of signs which are foreign and outside of one's own soul (Szlezak 1999: 31). Socrates claims that Theuth told Thamous that writing would both enhance people's intelligence and improve their memories (274e). In his assessment of the harm or benefit he believes writing will bring to his people, Thamous replies it will do the opposite of what Theuth claims; indeed it would cause people's memories to waste away (275a). Thamous explains that, by trusting what is written down, people will remember what others have written, and become reliant on the marks they see on the page, rather than relying on their own inner resources. As such, Thamous remarks that Theuth's invention, "[…] is a potion for jogging the memory, not for remembering" (275a).

---

[2] As I have noted above, I shall refer to the arguments put forth in *Phaedrus* as Socrates' although the text was authored by Plato. Szlezak is one among other scholars who has chosen to refer to the claims made as Plato's not Socrates'. Despite the difference in opinion here about who is making assertions in *Phaedrus*, this quote is nevertheless supportive of my argument.

Socrates concludes his retelling by citing Thamous who remarks that "[b]ecause your students will be widely read, though without any contact with a teacher, they will seem to be men of wide knowledge, when they will usually be ignorant. And this spurious appearance of intelligence will make them difficult company" (275b). What this citation seems to imply is that those who are well read but lack the interaction with a teacher, will have the false belief that they have gained a substantial amount of knowledge and will also be arrogant with respect to their supposed intelligence. These individuals will not be familiar with the dialectical process of exchanging and imparting knowledge. Moreover, due to their arrogant attitude about their own intelligence, these individuals will become difficult people to be around. Furthermore, this quote appears to be demonstrative of Socrates' belief that true knowledge cannot be passed down through the written word, but only through the oral tradition. A remark which further illustrates this belief is when Socrates points out that "[…] anyone who thinks he can get a branch of expertise to survive by committing it to writing–and also anyone who inherits the work with the assumption that writing will give him something clear and reliable–would be behaving in a thoroughly foolish manner […]" (275d). Here, Socrates is asserting that knowledge cannot be immortalized in writing, but only through continued dialectic where knowledge is imparted to successive generations.

In support of this conception of practising philosophy, Jürgen Mittelstrass asserts, "[p]hilosophy cannot be spoken (in the form of textbook knowledge) but only practiced (in the form of philosophical dialogues or the realization of a philosophical orientation)" (Mittelstrass 1978: 136). As such, the dialectic is characterized by the possibility of questioning and answering. When philosophy is set down in written words its pragmatic connection with the dialectic itself dissolves. Moreover, what makes philosophical wisdom distinct from mere opinion, in the context of a spoken dialectic disappears in a written context (Mittelstrass 1982: 136-137). In addition, the objective of philosophical discourse is to communicate verbally for

the purposes of acquiring philosophical knowledge, and the Socratic dialectic is meant to develop a philosophical orientation and a philosophical subject. Philosophical dialogue includes theoretical aspects such as proof and refutation, as well as practical aspects including reciprocity in teaching and learning for the purpose of knowledge acquisition. For Mittelstrass, this understanding of philosophical dialectic is both Socratic–since it is taken from the Socratic activity of discourse – and Platonic because Plato presented it in a theoretical way in his literary dialogues (1982: 126-127).

Another criticism of writing offered by Socrates is that words remain passive on a page, unable to engage or interact with the reader or respond to additional questions they may pose. He claims written words are analogous to a painting in which "[t]he offspring […] stand there as if alive, but if you ask them a question they maintain an aloof silence" (275d). Socrates states that with written words "[…] you might think they were speaking as if they had some intelligence, but if you want an explanation of any of the things they're saying and ask them about it, they just go on and on for ever giving the same single piece of information" (275d). In other words, a written text will always say the same thing, regardless of the amount of times one consults it. It cannot expand further on what it says nor can it respond to any criticism raised by the reader. On the other hand, an individual present during the dialectic can engage in the dialogue as it unfolds, and as such can defend their claims, elaborate if required, and clarify their arguments. Thus, Socrates is suggesting that written text fails to be capable of interaction and engagement with its audience in the way that oral dialectic is able to. Tiffany Tsantsoulas holds that Socrates' critique of writing has shaped our perception of the dialogues in relation to Socrates' strict adherence to oral philosophy and the oral education of the Academy and therefore it has strong implications for our perception of Socratic pedagogy. Moreover, if *Phaedrus* does indeed depreciate writing and hold speech as superior in comparison, this communicates to us about

the way in which Socrates comprehends the objects of knowledge and their obtainment (Tsantsoulas 2014: 58-59). The dialogue of *Phaedrus* itself illustrates how speakers can defend and further support their claims in the way that a written text simply cannot. Early on in the discourse between Socrates and Phaedrus, Phaedrus completes his retelling of Lysias' speech by quoting the original speaker who remarks: "[i]f you think I have left anything out and you want to hear further arguments, you only have to ask" (234c). This citation emphasizes the point that when engaging in dialectic one can ask the speaker for clarification, whereas one cannot ask such questions of a written text, unless its author is present. Socrates and Phaedrus proceed to discuss the merits of this speech in a Socratic pedagogical fashion.

Yet another problematic aspect of writing according to Socrates is that, "[o]nce any account has been written down, you find it all over the place, hobnobbing with completely inappropriate people no less than with those who understand it, and completely failing to know who it should and shouldn't talk to" (275e). By this, Socrates is referring to the fact that a piece of writing cannot choose its reader in the same way that a philosopher or dialectician can choose their interlocutor. Because anyone with access to the written material can read it, the text may find itself in the hands of someone who has philosophical insight or it may wind up being read by someone whose interests, prior knowledge and intellectual capabilities are not aligned with the text. Socrates notes that the ability to select one's interlocutor according to the individual's suitability and the possibility of staying quiet when required, is advantageous when engaging in philosophical dialogue. With respect to "the living, ensouled speech of a man of knowledge" (276a) Socrates states, "[…] it knows how to speak to those it should and keep silent in the company of those to whom it shouldn't speak" (276a).

At this point, one may begin to question why a critique of writing which maintains that the practise is insufficient for passing down true

knowledge, is itself expressed through writing. Burger offers several valuable insights with respect to this apparent irony. As discussed earlier, while Socrates raises several criticisms about writing, he does not actually write anything down himself. Instead his words come to us through the text Plato has composed. Burger asserts that what enables Socrates to perceive the playfulness of writing and constrains him from engaging in the activity is knowledge of his self-ignorance, which is the greatest human wisdom. She claims that "In imitation of this Socratic love of wisdom, the *Phaedrus* announces its own knowledge of ignorance, through its claim to recognize its own appearance of wisdom without the reality, for the written work cannot replace the living process of thought which it only attempts to provoke in its reader […]" (Burger 1978: 113) In other words, the text is Plato's attempt to encourage those who read it to continue the Socratic tradition of practising philosophy through dialectic and to realize that merely reading a philosophical work is insufficient to impart knowledge and wisdom. Such recognition though is noted in the *Phaedrus* as the greatest human wisdom with respect to the product of writing. Furthermore, *Phaedrus* illustrates that the only text which would be capable of condemning the art of writing would need to be an imitation of Socratic irony (Burger 1978: 113).

Burger argues that Socrates forgoes writing because his acknowledgement of ignorance is apparent only through live dialectic which takes shape in accordance with the specific views and opinions of individual speakers. She notes that "[…] this ironic and erotic activity of living speech seems to be precluded by the silent written word, addressed to an unknown, potentially universal, audience. Only the written work capable of evoking the living response of its individual readers would be able to transcend the illusory appearance of objective authority" (Burger 1978: 114). The Socratic dialogue does indeed represent this type of written work because it creates its own valid authority by way of denying its appearance of immediate authority and hence does not allow its audience to remain passive. Thus, in shedding light on its own

dangers, the Socratic dialogue demonstrates the possibility of conquering the restraints imposed by the written text which is condemned by Socrates. Furthermore, Burger notes that texts can be "[…] resuscitated by the breath of thought […]" thus enabling it to come to life, defend itself, and be cognizant of when to speak or not to speak (Burger 1978: 114).

In response to the assertion that a book cannot choose its reader the way that a philosopher or dialectician can choose their interlocutor, it is worth noting the irony of Socrates advocating for discernment about who to engage in philosophy with. Socrates notoriously spoke about philosophy with anyone he met. With knowledge of his own self-ignorance and eagerness to learn, Socrates did not believe philosophy should be an elitist activity, limited to the upper-class or those with a high level of formal education. Instead he insisted that he could gain wisdom through discourse with the most common citizen. Why then, would Socrates be speaking in support of the notion that philosophers should be discerning about whom they speak to and remain silent around? Is it possible to reconcile what appears to be an inconsistency between Socrates' inclusive practise of philosophy and his claim that one should be particular about whom they speak with?

If one were to interpret Socrates as claiming that only certain individuals should take part in dialectic, or that philosophers should refrain entirely from speaking around certain individuals, this could be problematic for the person who is indeed seeking the truth, because it would mean shutting those out of the conversation who we do not perceive as capable of participating. We may wrongly pass judgement on someone and could thus miss out on potential knowledge or wisdom. We cannot simply rule someone out of a conversation entirely on the basis that they appear not to have worthwhile wisdom, because as much as they could potentially go wrong in their arguments, there is the possibility that a kernel of truth exists in their claims. Thus, it would not be wise of us to practise a

total exclusion of certain individuals when it comes to the philosophical dialogue.

As such, I would suggest that perhaps Socrates is not necessarily asserting for the complete and total exclusion of certain people from the philosophical dialectic. Instead perhaps he is reiterating here that we can in a sense "steer" the course of dialectic when it is carried out orally, in a way that is just not possible with written texts. To elaborate further, once a text is written it is possible for the text to be misinterpreted, misused and vilified. In addition, an author is only concerned with its audience while they are in the process of writing their book–the author has a general idea about who they are writing for (i.e. demographics such as education level, interests, age, gender, etc.)[3], but once the book has been published the author has no idea who will pick it up and in what context. As Socrates suggested earlier, the book cannot defend itself or offer any further explanation of its assertions, nor can it alter its contents based on its readers. On the other hand, when engaging in dialectic orally we can choose not only who we speak to but how we speak to them. This is not to say that we simply exclude certain people entirely, based on a judgement about their ability to contribute something of value to the conversation, but rather that when we engage in dialectic orally, we are better informed about who we are speaking with specifically, and thus how to speak with them (we choose our words in the present and shape our arguments accordingly). Also, when appropriate we know when it is right to stay silent, not as a means of censoring ourselves or refusing to share the wisdom we do possess, but rather to listen to and absorb the wisdom of another.

---

[3] It should be noted that, of course, the author will know few if any of the people they are writing for personally. While it is possible–and usually expected–that an author will make a deliberate attempt to know their potential audience in order to understand how to best compose their work to target their readers in an effective manner, the audience remains largely anonymous and impersonal.

After the criticisms of writing raised by Socrates, Phaedrus is prompted to inquire how one should use words. He asks: "[w]ell, is there any other way of using words? Does the written word have a legitimate brother?" (276a) The type of speech that can impart knowledge according to Socrates is dialectic, and written text is simply an image of this (276a). In elaborating on his critique of writing, Socrates offers a metaphor about a sensible farmer who nurtures his seeds with a desire to see them come to maturation. This sensible farmer would not choose gardens of Adonis[4] for the purposes of sowing the seeds he intends to produce a yield from, only to take pleasure in the beautiful growth of the plants in a short period. While the farmer may do such a thing as part of the Adonis festival, Socrates points out this farmer would use his skill in agriculture to sow the seeds he was serious about in proper soil and be pleased if these reached fruition in eight months. Likewise the philosopher or dialectician, would, "not seriously plant [the seed] in the Adonis-gardens of writing with logoi which cannot bring support to themselves and teach the truth adequately" (Szlezak 1999: 32). Instead the philosopher or dialectician will choose to, "[…] sow and write his gardens of letters for amusement, if at all, as a way of storing up things to jog his own memory when 'he reaches the age of forgetfulness', and also the memory of anyone else who is pursuing the same course as him" (276d).

According to Szlezak, there are three elements of the ritual of the garden of Adonis which Socrates cites as relevant evidence to his comparison. First, it is not possible for there to be a yield of a grain of seeds in the garden of Adonis. Similarly, in Socrates' view, writing

---

[4] Following the completed harvest, a small portion of seeds was set aside to be sown in shallow baskets, kept in dark conditions, and watered in a manner that would result in a lush sprouting of the grains, in a brief amount of time. These baskets would then be brought out into the extreme heat of the sun where they would subsequently wilt, without having produced a yield of grain. These withered plants were thrown in the sea by women during rituals.

also does not bear fruit. Furthermore, the insight and intensity that can be communicated via writing, is parallel to the abrupt illusory growth in the Adonis garden, and the subsequent rapid wilting of the plant (Szlezak 1999: 32). The next element which is relevant to his comparison is duration. The garden of Adonis matures within eight days, while the serious farmer spends eight months in pursuit of bringing his seed to fruition. Likewise, the accelerated process by which writing provides knowledge cannot adequately replace oral dialectic (Szlezak 1999: 32-33). The third element which Szlezak points out is choice. In the same way that the sensible farmer chooses appropriate soil for his seed, the dialectician or philosopher must also choose an appropriate soul for his "philosophical sowing". As discussed above, writing cannot choose its reader, and therefore cannot be utilized for philosophical sowing in the same way that is possible in the art of dialectic. In addition, the sensible farmer would not sow all his seeds in the Adonis garden, because then he would not produce a yield. Similarly, the philosopher or dialectician will choose to only sow a portion of his "grain-seed" in the gardens of writing, but will refrain from sowing those, which he is hopeful will produce a yield (Szlezak 1999: 33).

In response to the claim that writing is a potion for jogging the memory not remembering, it can be argued that this draws parallels to our contemporary use of technology. The advancement, especially over the past decade has seen our gadgets move toward the aim of becoming "smart," but has it made us less intelligent, or at the very least much more reliant on technology? With the introduction of tools like spellcheck and autocorrect, humans no longer have to possess complete accuracy in typing, nor are we required to be proficient spellers—not to mention one does not even need to put in the effort to look up the word in a dictionary. We now live in a world where our cell phones can anticipate the next word in our text message or email, so that all we need to do is select the "helpful" suggestion to add it to our message. Gone are the days where one needs to possess the creativity or spontaneity to

compose written messages. Thamous had claimed that writing would atrophy people's memories. How would he respond to our use of technology that not only can lead to an atrophying of our memories, but also of our creativity, linguistic and orthographic abilities?

Furthermore, in response to Theuth's claim that writing would increase the intelligence of Thamous' people, it is also possible to argue that modern technology similarly hinders rather than promotes our intelligence. Despite the fact that information is literally at our fingertips—with our access to the internet, one can research thousands upon thousands of topics—it is questionable whether this ease of access has indeed made us more astute than the generation who had to rely solely on borrowing or purchasing written material in addition to putting in more effort in order to track down the required information. Arguably more of us rely on the one-hundred forty character Twitter updates[5] to stay "informed" about what is going on in the world, rather than attempt to educate ourselves on the full story and its relevant details. At the risk of sounding like a complete Luddite, I am not arguing entirely against technology, nor do I deny the fact that it is to a certain extent beneficial and advantageous. I am suggesting however, that we be conscious of the relationship between our intelligence and our ever increasing dependence on technology. In a sense, Theuth was attempting to "sell" the art of writing to Thamous and his people, based on the claim that it would

[5] Moreover, one could be critical of the term social media, used to describe Twitter and other social networking platforms. While these platforms claim to exist as means to help us stay connected and social, they are inherently anti-social. Social media provides us with the opportunity to engage in conversation but in such a way that it is questionable whether we should still call this conversation. Interlocutors can maintain their anonymity, facial expressions and body language are virtually non-existent, and although we can communicate with those we have never met and will likely never meet, we are able to argue about situations or conflicts in which we base our opinions on questionable social media updates. It is highly doubtful that this is the dialectic Socrates and Plato had in mind.

make them more intelligent. This is comparable to the way in which technological companies are persistent in their attempt to sell us the latest smartphone or computer on the basis that the product will make our lives more convenient or help us stay better connected to one another. Perhaps we should not be so quick to embrace the latest technological trend which claims to make our lives easier, and instead be a little more critical and skeptical as to what this newfound convenience will cost us in terms of our cognitive abilities.

It would also be interesting to know what Socrates would have to say about the way in which academia proceeds today. While dialectic is still alive in the form of class discussions in universities, especially when it comes to philosophy, and academic conferences allow researchers in a field to participate in a discussion about their new findings, much of our knowledge tends to proceed through writing. Based on my personal undergraduate experience, I found that in universities, class discussions are usually only encouraged in the humanities department (however it should be noted that sometimes classes in these departments do not even encourage discussion, nor do they perceive such dialectic as significantly valuable) and are almost unheard of in departments such as science and mathematics. In addition, one progresses through their academic career on the basis of their written work; i.e., writing papers or exams, is for the most part the only way to proceed to complete and pass the course. Furthermore, when one enters into the world of academia at a graduate or post-graduate level, new research and the continuation of discourse carries on in large part via academic journals and similar publications.

In conclusion, Socrates' claim that writing will result in the atrophying of our memories relates in several ways to the potential smart technology has to diminish our cognitive capacities. As we continue to be bombarded with new forms of technology which promise to make our lives easier, we might ask if these so-called smart technologies are in fact draining our brains of the ability to complete

everyday tasks such as spelling or composing a simple sentence. By allowing smart technologies to occupy a greater presence during our day, are we freeing our minds up for more complex tasks or are we simply giving our minds more time to run idle? We might also ask what the costs to our creative capacities will be as a result of relying on such products. Moreover, it is important to note that even though the internet maintains a constant presence in our day-to-day lives, the advent of social media has arguably not resulted in us being better informed. Socrates maintains that writing in itself is not inherently problematic, but instead that issues arise when a philosopher utilizes it in an improper manner. Likewise, I would suggest that perhaps smart technology and social media are not in themselves problematic, but instead such issues reside within how we utilize these tools. Such technology and platforms can potentially be beneficial. Smart technology could relieve our minds of busywork so that we can work on the most demanding problems. Social media could offer each individual the opportunity—and some would argue it already does—to share their side of the story and offer their unique perspective about an event, rather than relying on a handful of media outlets to cover every angle of each multifaceted story. To reap such potential advantages we might further examine how to employ these tools in a way which strengthens our cognitive faculties and fosters further development rather than in ways which leads to possible decline and debilitation.

Works Cited

Burger, Ronna. “Socratic Irony and the Platonic Art of Writing: The Self-Condemnation of the Written Word in Plato’s ‘Phaedrus.’” *The Southwestern Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1978, pp. 113–26, JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43155369. Accessed 22 Feb. 2019.

Kosman, L. A. “Silence and Imitation in the Platonic Dialogues.” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy: Methods of Interpreting Plato and His Dialogues*, edited by James C. Klagge and Nicholas D. Smith, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 73–92.

Mittelstrass, Jurgen. “On Socratic Dialogue.” *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings*, edited by Charles M. Griswold Jr., New York & London, Routledge, 1988, pp. 126–42.

Plato. *Phaedrus*. Translated by Robin Waterfield, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009.

Szlezák, Thomas A. *Reading Plato*. Translated by Graham Zanker, New York & London, Routledge, 1999. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uwinnipeg/detail.action?docID=254191. Accessed 21 Feb. 2019.

Tsantsoulas, Tiffany. *Plato Exits the Pharmacy: An Answer to the Derridean Critique of the Phaedrus and Timaeus*. 2014, pp. 58–59, https://ruor.uottawa.ca/bitstream/10393/30692/1/Tsantsoulas_Tiffany_2014_Thesis.pdf. Accessed Feb. 20, 2019.