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Plato Under Review: What Is Going Wrong in Academic Philosophical Writing

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Abstract: This paper addresses the problem of stylistic pluralism in philosophical writing, arguing that its progressive narrowing to the form of the paper is not just an esthetic issue but can also have negative effects on the development of academic research itself. The contribution is divided into two parts (Sections 1–3 and 4–5). In the first part, after introducing the problem and outlining the main features of the *philosophus academicus*'s writing, two main forms of criticism of "paper-centrism" in academic philosophy are discussed—one more "anti-academic" and the other more "intra-academic". In light of these criticisms, the issue of the relationship between form and content in philosophical writing is analyzed with particular respect to the problem of the sense of truth, arguing that style communicates philosophical values beyond content. In the second part, this thesis is illustrated by examining, as a case study, the specific sense of truth conveyed in Plato's dialogues—first through a literary analysis of Platonic writing, and then through a thought experiment inspired by media theory. Finally, the ethical and epistemic concerns raised by the growing "mono-stylism" of philosophical writing are brought together into a unified framework, by proposing a preliminary sketch of an ethics of philosophical research and pointing to some possible examples of alternative research practices.

Keywords: philosophical writing; ethics of research; metaphilosophy; media philosophy; philosophy and literature; dialogue

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1. From Styles to Style: The Writing of the Philosophus Academicus

The styles of philosophical writing have historically been highly diverse and original—even in a "wild" way (Danto 2005, p. 159). In recent decades, this fact has raised the issue of whether philosophical texts can be considered, in all respects, works of literature (for a first look, see, e.g., Horn et al. 2006; Rudrum 2006, pp. 159–218), with an extreme position represented by the idea that the common thread of philosophy as a literary genre is determined neither by specific content nor by specific forms but by its belonging to a tradition. It is the well-known image of philosophy as a "family romance" (Rorty 1978, p. 143) which tends to push the philosophical discourse toward a linguistic game that speaks about its own speaking rather than expressing itself on how things are or could be. However, one does not need to claim that philosophy is a self-referential textual game to state not only that different styles of philosophical writing can exist but also that philosophical inquiry has always concerned both "what" and "how" to write. This does not simply mean that philosophy has found expression in many literary genres, as if it were a branch of literature (*philosophy as literature*—e.g., Diamond 1993; Murdoch 1998; Nussbaum 1990); rather, traditional philosophical discourse seems to have taken shape by defining its own genres (*philosophy as writing*—e.g., Caramelli 2024), which—for example—can be

grouped into the Dialogue, the Meditation, the Essay, the Commentary, and the Treatise (Lang 1980, pp. 450–53).

The issue of stylistic pluralism in philosophical writing is crucial today because, in an effort to remove any possible contamination with literary styles (and to avoid, as much as possible, another *Sokal affair*),[1] philosophical writing styles have been progressively reduced to a single format—the only one accredited with the title of being scientific. This is a rather self-evident fact for those who (aspire to) work in academia, but it is also supported by more structured analyses conducted using the tools of sociology. Beginning particularly at the end of the 19th century, institutionalized philosophical activity has increasingly been carried out under a fourfold mechanism of professionalization, specialization, internationalization, and fragmentation, which is accompanied by the stylistic and expressive formatting of the paper (Heidegren and Lundberg 2024, pp. 2–3). At first glance, this—let us say—"fourfold root of the principle of sufficient academicness" appears to resonate particularly faithfully with the analytic spirit, or—if one prefers—with the Anglo-Saxon empiricist tradition (Ferrell 2002). Notoriously, analytic philosophers conceive of their own activity by modeling it after the method of natural scientists rather than those of writers, as continental thinkers do. While the latter see philosophy as a more nuanced constellation of practices and styles of thought, analytic philosophers tend to have a more restricted and restrictive view of the specificity of philosophical work, as well as of the modes of philosophical expression.

Thus, the analytic mode of thought would be explicitly grounded in demarcating the boundaries of what counts as properly philosophical writing—unlike continental thought (Boyce 2016). In the latter, indeed, there would be such stylistic "promiscuity" that the idea of an intersection or even an overlap between philosophical and literary writing styles seems far less critical. On this basis, the analysis of the removal of writing from philosophical discourse, suggested by several perspectives (Derrida 1972; Kittler 1981, 2009; Noë 2023, pp. 72–73, 236), would apply much more on the continental side than on the analytic one—or, to put it differently, it would apply to both but in different ways. On the one hand, the removal would be the forgetfulness of those who do not explicitly address what they normally do with full expressive freedom; on the other, it would be the eradication of those who publicly advocate for radical expressive rigor. This is notoriously the inspiration behind Carnap's rejection of metaphysical propositions, which can be read precisely as a struggle to determine what are, what can be, and—above all—what should be the philosophically admissible writing styles.

In the twentieth century, this kind of opposition between the two traditions of thought was particularly widespread and captured the spirit of the time quite effectively. Today, however, it has begun to be at least softened, or in any case reconsidered with greater critical distance: of course, distinctions can still be traced in terms of canonical references, argumentative styles, relationships with extra-philosophical dimensions, and the use of logic and/or history—but without necessarily reducing these differences to mutually uncommunicative orientations, or even to opposing camps (for a recent attempt at reassessment, see (D'Agostini 2022)). In relation to the present discussion, adopting a less dichotomous perspective allows us to recognize that it would be premature to conclude that Carnap's battle has indeed been successful—making contemporary academic philosophy analytic in its modes, even when it is not in its themes. In other words, it would be an excessive simplification to see the triumph of analytic thought in the affirmation of the format of the scholarly article or contribution format—even monographs are now more often than not a collection and/or revision of papers, and conference talks are paper readings.

On the one hand, analytic-philosophical writing is itself plural and rich: we can think not only of prominent historical figures such as Wittgenstein (Mazzeo 2024; Perloff 2012), or of more contemporary authors like Cavell and Williams (Babbiotti 2024), but also of

the various cases in which analytic thinkers have written literature or even aspired for their work "to be performed as ballet" (Vrahimis 2019, p. 255). On the other hand, there is a strand in continental philosophy that adheres to a way of writing that is "anything but the result of careful stylistic literary concerns" (Vrahimis 2019, p. 255), but is rather concerned with conforming as faithfully as possible to the thematic and jargon-based conventions of its canonical authors, with the aim of carving out a research niche in which to be positioned as the ultimate expert. Thus, it is more appropriate to describe the current writing environment through the conceptual persona of the philosophus academicus—also considering the works of sociology of academic labor related to the French tradition (from (Bourdieu 1988) to (Pinto 2007)).

The philosophus academicus must satisfy a series of writing norms, both explicit and implicit. Regarding venues, they must bear the hallmarks of certified scientific rigor and—above all—be at the top of the global influence scale: the philosophus academicus must aim to publish in high-impact journals internationally or—at least—in those ranked highly according to national classifications. On the purely writing side, the philosophus academicus must adhere to strict editorial uniformity constraints but, above all, must design and produce the contribution by following a structure that requires an abstract, keywords, an introduction in the form of a state of the art, the definition of the specific thesis, the argumentation of the thesis through comparison with the reference literature, and a summarizing conclusion—typically without exceeding 8000–9000 words. This is associated with a particular writing style, in which, for example, the reader is not addressed directly, colloquial tones are avoided, a formal yet not solemn register is adopted, explanations are given, technical and rigorous language is used as much as possible, key notions are preliminarily defined, and the number of subordinate clauses within a sentence is reduced, and so on. Additionally, the philosophus academicus must not only remove the author's name and explicit self-references from the manuscript to be submitted but must also write the text in such a way that it becomes as anonymous and neutral as possible, since any stylistic element that could identify the author risks undermining blind peer review. The philosophus academicus has to be a generic, average and unidentifiable writer.

Undoubtedly, constraints of this kind respond to scientific and pedagogical needs that, in many ways, appear indispensable from the perspective of forming reliable professionals rather than relying on the genius of exceptional individuals (Tripodi 2016). Yet, despite this principle, academic institutions tend not to explicitly teach how to write academically, as if one should absorb the required behavior by osmosis and as if one were expected to perfectly master a language that the vast majority of global researchers are not native speakers of—not simply English in general, but rather academic English (Molinari 2022). A striking example is the writing of reviews: it is an integral part of the "papery" writing environment, yet it continues to be a kind of *Far West*, not only contractually (a paradigmatic case of labor extraction) but also literarily. Indeed, the review genre is governed by a strange mix of anarchy and dictatorship: it is an indiscriminate yet rigid canon. It is almost entirely entrusted to the talent and sensitivity of the individual, leaving editors with the task of having the luck to pair each paper with the "good cop" (Reviewer 1), who poses as a true peer wishing to collaborate in knowledge building, and the "bad cop" (Reviewer 2), who poses as the primus inter pares aiming to maintain disciplinary hygiene by addressing dysfunctional behaviors or eradicating dangerous ideas—or even eliminating a potential competitor. In short, everyone writes, must write reviews, and must do so in the right way, yet no one is taught how to do it—exceptions aside.

However, the problem is not so much that this training process is not explicit and systematic enough, but rather its normalizing vocation, inspired by the "myth of a universal form of writing" and the "dream of a universal form of language" (Peters 2008,

p. 829). This tendency is increasingly met with dissatisfaction, as its consequences seem to undermine some vital roots of philosophical research. The next section discusses some of these criticisms.

2. An Oppressive Style? The Paper and Its Critics

There can be at least two critical attitudes towards the philosophus academicus's writing style and practice. One, more combative and revolutionary, tends to promote a polarity between academia and its outside (Section 2.1), while the other, more integrated and reformist, is more concerned about the future of philosophy as an academic discipline (Section 2.2). After presenting these perspectives in the first two sub-sections, I will critically discuss them, introducing the idea that the dissociation of form and content in philosophical expression is not only an ethical or aesthetic issue, but also an epistemic one (Section 2.3).

2.1. Writing Styles and Lifestyles: The "From-Outside" Criticism

The "from-outside" criticism of paper-centric writing denounces the "process of standardizing thought" within academia, which is making philosophical activity increasingly conventional, even exposing it to the risk of suffocation. Specifically, if it is true that "philosophy is basically done by writing", i.e., that the written word represents "its means, or rather, its raw material" (Garcés 2024, p. 99), then the keys to understanding the ongoing homogenization should be sought in the writing practices within academia. The problem is precisely the "neutralization of the conflict around the paper or scientific research article", a textual format that ultimately devalues not only all other forms of writing but also any other "cultural and social activity" and even teaching itself (Garcés 2024, p. 100). By becoming the standard, the paper constitutes "not one way of writing among others" but rather a format that "presents parameters of validity and a recognized place of enunciation for any content that is seeking to be academically relevant", producing a series of decisive effects on writing and, consequently, on philosophical thought (Garcés 2024, p. 100).

Specifically, four harmful consequences emerge (Garcés 2024, pp. 102–4). *First*, the dissociation between form and content: "although we have picked up the bad habit of studying authors by separating the 'doctrinal' contents from the substance of their texts, in philosophical writing, form and content require each other and are inseparable". Such dissociation turns philosophy into a purely theoretical discourse and "annuls its embodied and experimental nature": by completely eliminating the corporeality of thinkers, their voices are also suppressed, silencing them. In a paper, the speaker is "the expert", addressing other experts, making this figure "the only recognizable and appraisable type of academic in today's university". *Second*, there is the "annulment of experience" of the writer in the writing process, which becomes a tool for following the research lines favored by evaluation committees or for treating ideas and authors as mere objects of investigation rather than as conversationalists in thought. *Third*, there is a "dramatic, arbitrary, and violent" split between the inside and outside of philosophical writing: inside, everything that is calculable, visible, and evaluable finds space, while outside, not only all other genres once considered philosophical but also all forms of communication intended for those beyond the expert community are relegated. *Fourth*, academic writing today is increasingly confined to English as its only language, neglecting the fact that philosophizing "always entails a linguistic decision, a commitment to render the language, whether one's own or adopted, in a different way".

In light of all this, philosophers should resist the asphyxiation of thought and escape the academic cave by reclaiming writing as a self-transformative operation, i.e., as an "exercise in embodied abstraction" that challenges its author—a practice that is "necessarily connected with a way of life" (Garcés 2024, pp. 105–9). In this case, the issue is not simply

about advocating for a greater plurality of philosophical writing styles but about looking at philosophy as a way of living, revitalizing the link between writing style and lifestyle, and emphasizing the tension between "education and de-education", "the academic option and the feral option" (Garcés 2024, pp. 114–22). Philosophy is not a theoretical, impersonal discourse but a concrete, first-person practice, of which writing is an integral yet not exhaustive part (see also Fischer 2024; Shusterman 2022).

2.2. Writing Styles and Reading Styles: The "From-Within" Criticism

The "from-within" criticism highlights the dangers of the disciplinary hegemony of an approach founded on the interplay between the aspiration to a naturalistic objectivity, the pursuit of increasingly stringent professional standards, and adherence to a transmissive view of language. This combination is potentially harmful since "the current method of philosophical expression has its virtues" and it is not a problem per se, but it has become an "orthodoxy" that—being regarded as "the only acceptable genre of philosophical writing" (Stewart 2013, pp. 9, 168)—damages the philosophus academicus's curriculum in at least three ways.

First, writing homogeneity fosters a climate of "intellectual intolerance" that is evidently unsuitable for "stimulating creativity and originality", as it does not simply not accept, but actively discourages "variations in philosophical expression" (Stewart 2013, p. 168). Despite "the countless societies, conferences, and philosophical journals", philosophical expression "has never been more conformist in its history than it is today", replacing the traditional "atmosphere of open-mindedness, tolerance, diversity, and plurality" with an "inflexible dogmatism" (Stewart 2013, p. 169). *Second*, the philosophus academicus even faces the danger of "illiteracy", becoming not only unaccustomed to writing in other ways but also to reading different types of texts, thereby losing the ability to "recognize the importance or philosophical value in texts that are written differently" (Stewart 2013, pp. 9, 165). *Third*, in lamenting that "Plato, Hume, or Kant did not write in a manner more similar to the current ways of philosophical writing", the philosophus academicus fails to see how "different theories and philosophical arguments lend themselves to different forms of expression": the ways ideas are expressed are "inextricably linked" to the content of philosophy; a philosophical theory consists of both its content and its form (Stewart 2013, pp. 10, 159).

2.3. Form and Content: A Question of Truth

The main strength of these critiques of academic writing is also their main limitation. They are particularly effective—even rhetorically powerful—in addressing the problem of the dissociation between form and content, which represents their actual point of convergence. However, the way they approach this issue and the framework within which they situate it risk overlooking some crucial aspects. On the one hand, the anti-academic or extra-academic perspective leads to a strong emphasis on the importance of lifestyle, thereby framing the relationship between form and content as an almost exclusively existential and/or political issue. On the other hand, the view already situated within the dynamics of academic reproduction culminates in a denunciation of a cultural and educational dead end, thereby framing the relationship between form and content as an almost exclusively pedagogical and/or training issue.

Ethical dimensions like these are, of course, central and should not be ignored (as I will consider in Section 5), even though their outcomes may not be fully compatible or equally approachable. Working toward the transformation of society—or at least of the relationship between academic discourse and its social context—is one thing; working toward the reorganization of teaching practices and the training of students and future scholars is

quite another. In any case, the more pressing issue here lies elsewhere: especially if one aims to resonate with the prevailing academic sensibility, it is necessary to emphasize—at least also—the more properly epistemic component associated with the implicit faith in the "miracle of immaculate conception" that characterizes the way the philosophus academicus engages in writing. It is the idea that philosophical meaning is "self-generating", and the effectiveness of its formulation is entirely incidental (Lang 1980, p. 445). On this view, writing a paper rather than a dialogue does not affect the ideas, whose meaning is already fully given, merely awaiting manifestation. Based on this principle of synonymy, content is considered indifferent to form and can be isolated from it, so that, philosophically, all that counts is "the 'what' which is asserted, not the 'how' by means of which the 'what' puts in an appearance" (Lang 1990, p. 11).

Thus, on the one hand, the two diagnoses outlined above are accurate: the philosophus academicus does not perceive the "how" as the object of a genuine choice or inquiry; on the contrary, it does not have to be. Given the supposed indifference of form, it seems only natural to select the one that appears the most neutral and transparent, capable of conveying content with the utmost clarity, linearity, and efficiency. The choice appears mandatory, dictated solely by the need to serve the content, which, in turn, demands a form that transmits it without unnecessary deviations or wasted effort. Consequently, the paper emerges as the most natural candidate for expressing philosophical ideas: even Plato, in this logic, should be blamed for his delightful but impractical writing style, one that forces us into the annoying task of stripping away all the noise that obscures the true, unambiguous essence of his message. Yet, on the other hand, both criticisms tend to underestimate the more theoretical dimension of the problem: writing mono-stylism does not only entail socio-political, pedagogical–cultural, or—even, if one wishes—aesthetic consequences (such as stylistic monotony), but also has more properly epistemic implications, as it directly impacts the very conception of truth.

This assertion may sound rather grandiose, but the next section will clarify its implications.

3. The Sense of Truth: Style as Meta-Communication

In a famous contribution on the problem of "philosophy as/is/of literature", Danto highlights a certain tension between the fact that philosophy is perhaps the branch of writing most fertile in generating forms of literary expression and the close connection between the professionalization of philosophy and the almost uncontested rise of the paper format. According to him, this format involves "much more than a simple assertion of truth", i.e., the transmission of true statements, because it implies both a "transformation of the audience" (the readers as disembodied professional consciences) and a "form of initiation and life" (Danto 2005, p. 141)—that of the philosophus academicus. Furthermore, the paper format presupposes the existence of isolated, hyper-specialized problems that are extremely difficult yet soluble, to the extent that they can be tackled and brought closer to resolution "in fifteen pages more or less" (Danto 2005, p. 139). These elements define a specific philosophical truth—not just one or another particular finding (a research output), but rather a distinct "way to find it" (a research method), that is, a given *conception of truth*: "the concept of philosophical truth and the form of philosophical expression are internally enough related that we may want to recognize that when we turn to other forms we may also be turning to other conceptions of philosophical truth" (Danto 2005, p. 140).

It is important not to read this passage too superficially. Danto is not simply stating that there is a correspondence between form and content in the sense that—for example—it would have been particularly difficult to develop the Kantian articulation of transcendental aesthetic, analytic, and dialectic by writing in the style of *Ecce Homo*. Danto is making a more fundamental point, one that reveals what any possible intrinsic correspondence

between the substance of a philosophical idea and its formal appearance presupposes: a philosophical style conveys a certain conception of truth even before it conveys specific truths. In hermeneutic terms, a given style communicates a certain *sense of truth*, making a text something that does not merely state what is true or false but also indicates on what level and in what manner the distinction between true and false should be determined. To clarify this crucial point, we can apply the principles of the pragmatics of communication (Watzlawick et al. 1967), which distinguish between communication ("Nice hole in the sweater!") and meta-communication, or communication about communication ("Let's stop using sarcastic tones"). Adopting this terminology, philosophical texts do not merely communicate (say some-thing), but also meta-communicate (say some-*how*): they convey both a message (truth) and a metamessage (sense of truth). If communication is explicit, directly addressing its content, meta-communication is instead implicit, being embedded in the manner of writing—in style. Ultimately, form not only hosts certain communicative content ($\text{Content}_{\text{C}}$), but it also presents its own meta-communicative content ($\text{Content}_{\text{MC}}$), and it is precisely $\text{Content}_{\text{MC}}$ that sets the space of possibilities (leeway + constraints) for $\text{Content}_{\text{C}}$.

The way a philosopher writes is consubstantial with the way a philosopher thinks, which in turn shapes what a philosopher thinks. Recognizing this has nothing to do with an aestheticization of philosophical texts or their reduction to literature; rather, it does justice to the specificity of *philosophical* discourse, which—to put it euphemistically—is highly sensitive not only to *what to think* (What is the truth?), but also to *how to think* (How do we find the truth?). Without a doubt, issues related to the aesthetics of philosophical texts also deserve attention—reading a well-written text can, after all, be more enjoyable, enrich the experience, enhance comprehension, and so on. However, the point is that the elaboration of philosophical concepts—even before engaging with the question of writing with style in the sense of writing well—also consists, and in some respects primarily, in an inquiry into the very way in which such elaboration can or should take place— including, crucially, how ideas can or should be written down. Thus, "mono-stylism" both affects *how to write*—which may seem like a secondary issue—and *how to think*—a restriction that appears, at the very least, controversial. Failing to consider the meta-communicative dimension of philosophical writing results, ultimately, in not questioning how truth is understood—that is, how its pursuit is conceived.

The claim that form meta-communicates truth is particularly strong and opens itself up to some possible objections. Taken in its generality, it may seem to suggest that every thinker has an irreducibly personal style, such that each philosopher ends up not only saying something different from the others but also outlining a radically idiosyncratic conception of truth. Arguing something like this may not be impossible, but it certainly strikes me as implausible—and, in any case, it is not what I intend to argue. What I do wish to stress, rather, is that style carries a genuinely (meta)communicative dimension, and that philosophers *can* engage in an explicit inquiry into that dimension—not that they must always do so equally, nor do they necessarily do so at all times. As has been aptly noted (Babbiotti 2024, pp. 1–17), achieving a genuinely idiomatic style requires deliberate choice, focused awareness, and sustained practice. Not every philosopher—or aspiring one—has aimed, or must aim, for the highest degree of such achievement. To put it simply (though perhaps not too simplistically), great philosophers are those who most directly and programmatically take on this challenge—because they recognize that what is at stake is the very enterprise of thinking itself. Thus, the issue is not so much that the philosophus academicus might adopt a style that is more casual or less personal. Rather, it is that the opposite seems increasingly unthinkable—or, at the very least, that too little attention is

paid to what becomes lost when one entirely neglects reflection and inquiry into one's own way of writing.

Therefore, the best way to understand the meta-communicative character of style—and the risks of "mono-stylism"—is to examine the case of a philosopher who truly engaged in the pursuit of an idiomatic style. One possible name—and a particularly significant one—is suggested by Danto himself, who laments how all contemporary papers on Plato treat him "as though he were in effect a footnote to himself, and being coached to get a paper accepted by *The Philosophical Review*" (Danto 2005, p. 140). Indeed, it is easy to imagine not only that Plato's dialogues would never pass our peer-review procedures, nor just that—more critically—he would not even attempt to submit one of his dialogues at some point, but also that—the true tragedy—he would eventually abandon the idea of writing anything other than papers. Such a conclusion seems, on the one hand, plausible—if not obvious, given the current state of academic publishing—while on the other, so arbitrary (given the lack of counterevidence) that it appears to be nothing more than mere speculation. To provide greater substance to this argument, I will take a closer look at what lies behind the stylistic choices in Plato's dialogues, focusing in particular on their meta-communicative function.

To this end, the next section proposes an analysis of the style of Platonic dialogues by adopting a hybrid literary and medial approach. Following the distinction proposed by Eco in his study of Thomas Aquinas' work (Eco 2007, pp. 510–11), the perspective will not be that of the "Plato-ologist", who seeks to provide a complete and philologically impeccable exposition of Plato's doctrine, nor that of the "Plato-ist", who anachronistically attempts to solve contemporary problems in the spirit of the "divine Plato". Rather, the approach will be "reconstructivist", meaning that Plato's position will be experimentally interrogated on questions he could never have explicitly addressed, yet in a way that remains faithful to his own philosophical vision.

4. Writing Dialogues: Plato's Meta-Communication

Following some now-classical works in media studies, it has become almost commonplace to situate Platonic philosophy at a crucial turning point in human history: the transition from oral to written culture (Havelock 1986; Ong 1982). Placing Platonic thought within this context allows it to be understood—or at least properly contextualized—on three levels: not only in terms of what Plato says (his critique of writing and the theme of unwritten doctrines) and what he thinks (the general "scriptomorphism" of his thought: (Villers 2005)), but also in terms of how he writes. Here, the focus will be on the latter dimension.

According to a widely accepted view, dating back at least to Schleiermacher's pivotal interpretation, Plato wrote dialogues to "mimic" oral dialogue, considering this the only suitable way to present philosophical theses and arguments—if they had to be put into writing (Frede 1992). This means that Plato's intent was not only to transmit certain ideas and knowledge (truth) but also—if not above all—to transmit a method for discovering and articulating them (a *sense* of truth). Therefore, the $\text{Content}_{\text{MC}}$ of Platonic dialogues is that one thinks by conversing (with others as well as with oneself)—a principle that is sometimes explicitly articulated at the $\text{Content}_{\text{C}}$ level. Specifically, written dialogue allowed for the replication of the "back-and-forth" of oral conversation, during which a specific question could be explored while maintaining focus on a leading thread without easily straying from the point—something particularly important for counteracting the tendency of sophists to engage in persuasive monologues amounting to endless streams of words. Thus, the $\text{Content}_{\text{MC}}$ of the dialogues is that truth is not a doctrine presented and transmitted ex cathedra (as a dogma), but rather something to be discovered and shared dialectically, i.e., through co-participation in an open, frank, and critical exchange

governed by a set of pragmatic rules such as reciprocity, responsibility, non-contradiction, and coherence (Cossutta 2003).

Today we tend to think that this dialogical and co-participatory conception of truth requires all interlocutors to be on equal footing. However, to avoid reducing Plato to a mere advocate of (ideal) democratic confrontation in the modern sense, it is important to remember that dialectical interaction implies an asymmetry of roles as well—between the one who leads the dialogue and the one who allows themselves to be led (Szlezák 2021). In this sense, the $\text{Content}_{\text{MC}}$ of the dialogues is that searching for truth is not just an exercise in detached analysis but a way of engaging and revealing the true souls and characters of interlocutors, and even of changing their life (Seeskin 1984), by acting on both presentative (i.e., direct and explicative) and representative (i.e., symbolic and exhibitory) registers (Lang 1983, pp. 84–99). In short, the dialogues meta-communicate that ideas must be elaborated dialogically—not just in the sense of an exchange of ideas between peers at a distance, as typically occurs in contemporary scholarly debate, but in the form of a "question and answer" conducted in co-presence, and that is particularly pressing and aimed at awakening the minds of individuals.

But how does Platonic writing actually manage to meta-communicate in this sense? To answer, we can start with the prologue of the *Theaetetus* (142a–143c), which contains a direct exchange between Euclides and Terpsion before the actual interlocution between Socrates, Theaetetus, and Theodorus in which the dialogue consists.[2] In their preliminary conversation, Euclides tells Terpsion that he once met Socrates, who recounted the dialogue he had had with the other two. When Terpsion asks to hear the details of Socrates' exchange, Euclides responds that he cannot recall it from memory but that—at the time—as soon as he returned home, he took notes and then reconstructed the entire dialogue in writing, thanks also to further accounts from Socrates himself and the corrections he provided to Euclides' earlier notes. At that point, Euclides and Terpsion agree that a slave should read the book aloud, as both feel too tired to read it themselves. Before proceeding, Euclides offers one final clarification: the dialogue is reported not in the way Socrates recounted it, using expressions such as "and I said", "and I affirmed", "he admitted", "he disagreed", but instead, Socrates and his interlocutors speak directly. In this way, Euclides emphasizes, potentially annoying insertions have been avoided.

The following two sub-sections offer an interpretation of the meaning and the implications of this exchange by integrating two distinct approaches: the first is based on a literary analysis more closely tied to the Platonic work (Section 4.1), while the second revolves around a thought experiment of a more heuristic and speculative nature (Section 4.2).

4.1. Stories Without Narrative: The Originality of Plato's Writing

What Euclides describes is, in itself, evident: the dialogue he transcribed, which is read aloud by a slave, listened to by Euclides and Terpsion, and read silently by us, is not presented as a chronicle—i.e., under the explicit description of a narrating voice—but as a direct account, without any extradiegetic intervention. This choice makes the text more fluid, eliminating fragmentations that would disrupt the rhythm of the exchange and hinder the reader's full engagement. The key point is that this prologue serves as a kind of literary manifesto for Plato the writer: breaking the "fourth wall" of the fiction of dialogical writing, Plato establishes the guiding principle that governs all of his dialogues, making Euclides his ideal author. Let us proceed step by step.

Euclides can be considered Plato's "ideal" author without completely overlapping with him for two reasons: one relates to Plato's actual stylistic choices, and the other to the affordances of writing itself. With regard to stylistic closures, Plato behaves only partially like Euclides. For instance, Platonic dialogues often contain prologues, both internal and

external, sometimes even narrative and/or anticipating or formulating the underlying thesis of the forthcoming exchange (as in *Ion*). Additionally, there are cases where the dialogue starts in medias res without an introductory context but then transforms into a long monologue (*Timaeus*), or instances where a written text is read by figures who do not participate in the exchange (*Phaedrus*). Furthermore, although there are no entirely narrated dialogues, Plato often employs narrative inserts like those Euclides claims to have avoided, such as "I added", "I exclaimed", "he said", and so on. In general,[3] we can distinguish direct or dramatic dialogues (e.g., Gorgias, *Meno*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Laws*), indirect or narrated dialogues (e.g., Charmides, *Lysis*, *Republic*, *Parmenides*), and mixed dialogues (e.g., Protagoras, *Phaedo*, *Symposium*). With regard to the affordances of writing, a crucial semiotic structural aspect must be emphasized—following Barbieri's's (2017, pp. 8–24) analysis. In literary narration, stories are told, meaning a narrating voice must describe what has happened or is happening—unlike media that can *stage* without describing or commenting, such as theater, cinema, and comics, which directly exhibit situations and actions. In this regard, Plato the writer must confront a constitutive limit of the alphabetic medium, which forces him into a dilemma.

To ensure that the dialogues meta-communicate the principle that truth is found dialectically, written dialogue had to resemble as closely as possible a mere "transcription" of an oral dialogue. Yet, the total transcription of a dialogue seems to go against the very conventions of the written medium—not so much at the level of Content_C, which remains largely fictitious in Platonic writings, regardless. Rather, the challenge lies precisely in the difficulty of staging the dialogue as if it were taking place in real time. What, then, was the solution? Plato took two non-mutually exclusive paths. One was to emphasize that the written text should never be confused with real dialogue. Indeed, Plato explicitly highlights this issue: since writing enables communication without immediate personal address, it is "communication become virtual" (as noted by Husserl 1970, pp. 360–61)—a feature that, both in his time and today, carries the risk of prioritizing pseudo-interactions at a distance over real in-person exchanges. Indeed, when viewed primarily from the reader's perspective (in *Phaedrus*, the writer, Lysias, does not appear), one should never confuse a virtual dialogue (written) with a real dialogue (spoken): in the latter, one truly interacts, being able to press the interlocutors and listen to what they truly have to say, while in the former, no "Q&A" is possible. However, there is also a second option to ensure that—despite all limitations—the first most closely resembles the second: to move creatively to extract the maximum from what the medium could actually offer.

Plato also takes this second path, adopting the optimal stylistic form given the conditions—fully aware, according to some interpreters, of the philosophical and literary significance of the choice (Capuccino 2020; Hösle 2006), and, according to others, borrowing the form from drama—particularly from comedy (Nikulin 2014). Plato, therefore, rejects the use of an omniscient external narrator. Platonic narrators—sometimes heterodiegetic (talking about others) but more often homodiegetic (talking about themselves)—are always intradiegetic (internal to the narrative), or extradiegetic (external to the narrative) only insofar as they belong to a secondary narrative within the main one (as in *Phaedo*). There is never an "extradiegetic + heterodiegetic" narrator: the discourse is always placed in the mouths of the characters themselves—among whom, notably, Plato never appears directly (Edelstein 1962). This does not mean that Plato is entirely anonymous, in the sense that his authorial voice fails to emerge in various oblique ways, or that his texts do not contain positions that can properly be attributed to him (Szlezák 2021). Rather, it means that his fundamental authorial gesture consists precisely in not introducing external figures tasked with explanation—let alone an "essayist" commenting, exposing, and arguing.

In this way, the intended $Content_{MC}$ can properly be that—even while acknowledging the epistemic asymmetry between the dialectician and their interlocutors—the discovery of truth does not occur through a doctrinal exposition delivered by a philosopher who disregards the specific position of the interlocutor, but rather through the establishment of a dialectical exchange in which the participants are led to think for themselves—that is, reflectively and coherently. The mimesis of *dialogueness* is thus as refined and integral as possible, making writing not an invitation to merely *read* what someone thinks, but to *join* the conversation, to reproduce a similar one, or even the same one—keeping in mind that, at the time, reading was still a recitative act.

From this perspective, the differences with contemporary academic styles are striking—at least in three main respects. First, the goal is not to turn dialectic into a doctrine to be meta-analyzed as an external object and formalized independently of its actual exercise (as would later happen, for example, with Apel and Habermas). Second, the philosophical exchange is not conceived as a distant interaction between peers striving to remain as neutral and detached as possible. Third, the space of discussion is not obsessively delimited in order to keep it as narrow as possible and shielded from any form of transgression linked to the presence of a genuinely other point of view—one that may be confusing and disorienting, and that must nevertheless be directly confronted. Even if we were to regard the Platonic approach as outdated or somehow less fruitful, the fundamental point is that Plato's attention to the style of his writings responds to a genuinely philosophical need to do justice to a specific conception of truth—one that differs from the that conveyed by the writing of the philosophus academicus. Indeed, the typical "cognitive closure" of the paper format makes it structurally impervious to additional information and situated reasoning, implying a solitary, almost angelic thinker engaged in processing propositions (Pezzano and Gualeni 2024, p. 261).

4.2. Giving Voice to Words: Between Writing and Video-Making

Now, to further appreciate the originality of Plato's writing style and to more deeply understand the need to meta-communicate the dialogue at the $Content_{MC}$ level, I propose a counterfactual line of reasoning—this time with a more explicitly heuristic function, and less focused on the specific choices Plato actually made or could have made. In particular, taking inspiration from media theorists such as (Flusser 2011, p. 3) and (Kittler 1999, pp. 4–7), I suggest a thought experiment based on a question as simple as it is challenging: what might have happened if the communicative means available to Plato had been different from what they actually were?

Let us imagine the exact same Athens in which historical Plato lived ($Plato_{\alpha\beta}$), but with one substantial difference: Athenian citizens do not rely solely on the newly emerging alphabet writing system but are also beginning to experiment with the nascent analog audiovisual medium, which enables the recording and sharing of information in audiovisual form.[4] To isolate the key issue more effectively, let us introduce an admittedly unrealistic clause: the two media cannot be used simultaneously—one must rely either on alphabetic writing or on video recording. One uses a stylus, or one uses a video camera, tertium non datur. Let us now imagine a fictional Plato ($Plato_{AV}$), who shares the same philosophical beliefs as $Plato_{\alpha\beta}$ but—unlike him—is faced with a significant choice: which medium is best suited for transmitting not only dialogued $Content_C$ but also dialogical $Content_{MC}$?

$Plato_{AV}$ shares with $Plato_{\alpha\beta}$ the view that the transition from direct dialogue to virtualized dialogue presents certain fundamental limitations. However, he also acknowledges that, despite these limitations, one must engage with new media as they emerge. After all, every spoken word must eventually separate from its "father" (destined to die), posing the problem of how to preserve memory as faithfully as possible. Therefore, $Plato_{AV}$ sets

aside any biases and begins to compare the possibilities offered by each medium. Initially evaluating the alphabetic medium, he realizes a paradox: the oral transmission of dialogues can only be indirect, requiring a recounting by someone else. While this does not necessarily distort Content_{C}, it does alter Content_{MC}, since the *form* of the dialogue is lost—it turns into a monological narration. Oral dialogue cannot immediately meta-communicate its own structure in oral recounting; it can only do so in actual performance. This is both its strength and its weakness. On the other hand, the alphabet allows for a direct written record of dialogues—if one skillfully navigates various narrative filters, as we have seen. It thus offers the opportunity to preserve form alongside content. Of course, the written medium is not identical to live dialogue and should never be confused with it. Yet, for this very reason, writing allows one to demonstrate how spoken dialogue unfolds, making its structure visible without explicitly stating it. For these reasons, the alphabet is a *pharmakon* that must be handled with care and awareness.

After reflecting on these points, Plato_{AV} has a eureka moment: the audiovisual medium is also a *pharmakon*, but its benefits make it particularly competitive compared to the alphabet. On the one hand, unlike written words or painted images, audiovisual images are no longer static, dead—they move; and yet, they too remain silent in the face of inquiry: an audiovisual dialogue is still a virtual one. Additionally, embodiment and sensory immersion introduce powerful mechanisms of engagement that can blur the boundaries between the virtual and the real, while also obscuring the presence of a director's perspective. On the other hand, however, the audiovisual recording allows for the *staging* of a dialogue's unfolding in a way that is significantly richer and more faithful than alphabetic writing. This holds true for both Content_{C} and Content_{MC}.

With regard to Content_{C}, the alphabetic medium can only preserve the voice *in a silenced form*: there are no actual paralinguistic elements (tone, volume, pauses, rhythm, etc.) or extralinguistic elements (gestures, movements, facial expressions, etc.)—except for punctuation marks. By contrast, in the audiovisual medium, what is said is both *heard* and *seen*. With regard to Content_{MC}, the audiovisual medium can directly *show* dialogueness—the very essence of dialogue—without needing to describe it explicitly. In this way, orality is not merely evoked but better preserved and conveyed. There is no need to struggle to push the narrator aside or to simulate the rhythm and dynamism of dialogical exchange. Moreover, the audiovisual medium allows for a more nuanced portrayal of dialectical confrontation and its pitfalls. For example, it can illustrate how someone might exclaim, "I agree with you, Socrates", with little actual conviction; it can reveal the body language of a speaker who circles around the issue without ever making a direct point; it can expose the manipulative techniques of rhetorical persuasion.

In short, the audiovisual medium does greater justice to both the *truth-bearing content* and the *sense of truth* embedded in dialogue. Plato_{AV} thus chooses it—always with the clear awareness that, like any medium, it should neither be uncritically celebrated nor used uncritically, as might be explored in a video-*Phaedrus*.

5. Plato and Us: For an Ethics of Philosophical Research

At this point, what lesson can we draw from the Platonic case just discussed in relation to our contemporary landscape? First of all, we can more clearly see that Plato would not manage to have an essay accepted by *The Philosophical Review* because he would aim to convey a sense of truth that is different—not eo ipso "better" or "worse"—from that implied by the written paper. Moreover, if we consider the thought experiment just discussed to lead to at least plausible conclusions, we could even say that such a philosophical urgency would be so intense that Plato might prefer to submit a video-dialogue rather than a written one. In doing so, he would align himself with those scholars who are actively

challenging even the most deep-rooted conventions, without calling into question the rigor of research or advancing overtly anti-academic or extra-academic claims—which should not be dismissed outright, but whose radical nature makes them even more difficult to implement within institutional settings. I am referring to those approaches—from art and media studies to social sciences—that consider media other than the alphabetic-typographic not only as a new object of research or teaching, but also as a form through which to conduct research and teaching—beginning to engage with a range of both theoretical and practical issues, such as the management of peer review processes, the transformation of knowledge practices, the renewal of research infrastructures, and so on (e.g., Cazeaux 2017; Della Puppa and Moretti 2024; Faden 2008; Keathley 2011; Keathley et al. 2019; Kreutzer and Binotto 2023; Kuttner et al. 2021; Mittell 2019; Moretti 2023; van den Berg and Kiss 2016).

However, with this I do not mean to suggest that the philosophus academicus should, by default, behave like Plato—that is, relentlessly pursue an idiomatic writing style or directly experiment with other media (as imagined in the figure of Plato_{AV}). This is, in any case, a path that some philosophical scholars have already begun to explore, both through alternative textual forms (e.g., Gualeni 2023, 2025) and through other types of works, such as video games (e.g., Gualeni 2013, 2017, 2018) and comics (e.g., Pezzano 2024b; Sousanis 2015). Not to mention cases involving more established philosophers—who are therefore also freer to experiment, with more or less communicative aims: I am thinking of writings such as Williamson's's (2015) tetralogue, Badiou's's (2010) theatrical text, or media explorations such as the YouTube channels *Jeffrey Kaplan* and *Carefree Wandering*, by Jeffrey Kaplan and Hans-Georg Mueller, respectively. All these examples—and others like them—are indeed useful references for imagining alternative practices and for understanding how, for example, a philosophy practiced through other media could, even if only in broad terms, meta-communicate that truth may be pursued not only on the amodal plane of purely verbal concepts, but also on a more distinctly modal and even multimodal level. Nevertheless, my point is not that the philosophus academicus should take them as direct models or necessarily engage in such experiments. My point is, to begin with, more minimal—though no less relevant: philosophers cannot prematurely abandon the explicit inquiry into which *sense of truth* they wish to communicate through their work—and whether they truly want to continue writing only papers.

The reasons for this call are manifold and concern the need for consistency within a discipline whereas scholars from entirely different backgrounds and approaches have pointed out—self-criticism is more the rule than the exception (Jaeggi 2024, p. 559), and where it can lead not only to different but even to better practices (Williamson 2024, p. 392). In particular, the task now is to bring together in a single framework the considerations that emerged in the critiques of "mono-stylism" discussed in Section 2—mainly related to ethical concerns in a broad sense—with the more strictly epistemic issues raised in the rest of the discussion. In this way, it becomes possible to outline the fundamental contours of an ethics of philosophical knowledge and work—one that begins by problematizing the assumption that philosophical research must develop by writing *exclusively* in the form of papers and by reasoning *only* in "papery" terms. Inevitably, such an orientation also calls into question the broader institutional and social infrastructure within which philosophical activity takes place—but I will return to this point in the conclusion of the next section.

In light of all this, and by way of an initial thematic proposal, I suggest considering five dimensions: (i) scientific progress; (ii) epistemic conduct; (iii) psychological integrity; (iv) social responsibility; (v) medial awareness.

(i) *Scientific progress*. The philosophus academicus navigates between the Scylla of being innovative and original and the Charybdis of not crossing certain disciplinary and methodological boundaries. Philosophers thus face the "paradox of professionalism",

in which "fundamental improvements are only possible if one is prepared to move forward in a strictly non-professional manner" (Feyerabend 2012, p. 140). Consequently, methodological conformity jeopardizes the progress of philosophical discourse itself (Feyerabend 1975; Norris 2013, pp. 61–94). In other words, at some point, it becomes difficult—if not impossible—to say some-thing new without, in principle, also saying some-*how* new. This restriction harms not only the career of the philosophus academicus individually but also the discipline of philosophia academica as a whole. The limits of how we write risk meaning the limits of how we think. Believing that there is only one sense of truth risks constraining our possibilities for conceptual elaboration within an excessively narrow framework.

(ii) *Epistemic conduct*. Since the 1980s, epistemology—intersecting with virtue ethics—has increasingly recognized the role that intellectual virtues play in epistemic activity. Traditionally, epistemology was associated with possessing justified true beliefs, regardless of the mental stance adopted by the subjects (DePaul and Zagzebski 2003). However, recent discussions on how to cultivate intellectual virtues and avoid intellectual vices emphasize, on the virtue side, *open-mindedness* (Baehr 2011, pp. 140–57), and on the vice side, *closed-mindedness* (Cassam 2019, pp. 32–42). A commonly discussed case is the conspiratorial mind, but the philosophus academicus is not immune to echo chambers. Even philosophers can fall into forms of mental sclerosis that blind them to perspectives that challenge established ways of thinking and acting. Significantly, while comprehension rigidity can manifest in "the analytic philosopher who cannot make sense of Plato or Hegel or the continental philosopher incapable of appreciating Quine", an emblem of comprehension openness can be found in Socrates, "so eager to learn and open to learning" that he approaches each new situation with an attitude of self-examination, asking, "What can I learn here?" rather than saying, "Let me defend my position at all costs" or "how can I shut down every objection?" (Roberts and Wood 2007, pp. 205–6). Taking for granted that writing philosophy exclusively means writing papers does not seem to foster the kind of flexibility and adaptability that should be at the foundation of philosophical mental gymnastics. Nor is such a direction supported by the tacit—though increasingly explicit—assumption that a paper not written in (standard) English is not properly philosophical, or at least not capable of offering an original contribution to the debate. This belief, among other things, risks erasing the space for more situated philosophical traditions—those tied to specific contexts—as if the only possible form of philosophy were an abstractly universal one, detached from its own originating humus. This, however, is far from proven, as the entire body of postcolonial thought reminds us.

(iii) *Psychological integrity*. The pressure to write in a specific way, for specific journals, with a specific frequency, and with specific references risks inverting the relationship between means and ends. This can lead to behavioral distortions, including actual cheating practices: not only self-citations and citation clubs/rings (academics citing each other) but also "salami slicing" (fragmenting the same research into multiple articles), secondary citations (citing works without reading them), coercive citations (citations "suggested" by editors or reviewers), false blind reviews, and fake co-authors—up to data hacking (Baccini and Petrovich 2023; Biagioli and Lippman 2020; Dani 2018; Lee 2014). Presumed incentives to conform to norms can turn into disincentives that encourage dysfunctional behaviors. Beyond these external pressures, the formatting of academic writing fosters a scenario where motivations for writing become increasingly extrinsic rather than intrinsic. The philosophus academicus faces the risk of "value capture", where the need to conform to rigidly pre-established criteria undermines the personal motivations that should drive a career

in philosophical research—such as the pursuit of truth, wisdom, and understanding (Nguyen 2024, p. 470). "Why this topic? Why this cite? Haven't I heard this paper before? 'Career advancement' is the road more traveled, meaning, it functions as a principle of selection"; if philosophers are worried "to demonstrate literacy or publish an article", they soon renounce "to provoke others to think, to change their minds about some issue, or to transform how they vote, eat, or inhabit language" (Lysaker 2018, pp. 95–6, 21).

(iv) *Social responsibility*. In itself, academic activity can take shape across a variety of writing genres, depending on the specific needs of research, teaching, and communication (Healey et al. 2020). By writing only papers, philosophers become unaccustomed to engaging with forms of communication beyond their own "bubble"—not just the so-called "general public" but even experts from other philosophical or scientific bubbles. This contributes to the growing gap between research and communication, knowledge and dissemination, exacerbating the crisis of expertise and epistemic authority (Eyal 2019)—a crisis that has become even more pressing in the aftermath of the pandemic. Such a fracture is particularly critical for philosophers, as it deprives them of the public role that, despite its historical fluctuations and variations, has always been considered an integral part of their identity—even without needing to frame it in the form of "philosopher-king" or "philosopher- revolutionary". The vacuum left by philosophers withdrawing from public discourse is ready to be filled by the new sophists of the moment. Even if philosophers were not meant to transform the world, that does not mean they should be indifferent to it.

(v) *Medial awareness*. Philosophical writing is also shaped by its media. Even without endorsing a deterministic view (e.g., that Nietzsche's style was "produced" by the typewriter: (Kittler 1999, pp. 198–214)), the technical tools with which philosophers write are not neutral to what is written (Coeckelbergh 2017, pp. 76, 135). Just consider, for example, how the writing of philosophical paper is already being influenced by the possibilities opened up by generative artificial intelligences, and their "distributed authorship" (Gunkel 2024).[5] More generally, the rise of new, hybrid, and multimodal media raises the question—both theoretical and practical—of whether and how philosophical discourse might also take place through forms of *visual thinking*, such as comics, videos, or video games—thus becoming an endeavor for the many kinds of non-exclusively verbal thinkers (Pezzano 2024a, 2024b, 2025). This does not mean that philosophy should abandon writing and reading; rather, it means recognizing that reading and writing are no longer merely about arranging letters in sequence. Philosophers are therefore called to ask whether new "iconolinguistic" practices (Stöckl 2004) can serve not only as objects of study but also—perhaps most importantly—as new potential media for their own discourse, thus aligning with those strands of academic research that investigate ways of producing and communicating knowledge not exclusively bound to traditional forms of literacy (Molinari 2022, pp. 73–98).

Ultimately, the growing "mono-stylism" of academic philosophical writing—by making it normal to inquire solely into what to say while entirely neglecting the question of how to say it—risks precluding the very possibility of practicing philosophy in an open context, both in terms of inclusivity and in relation to broader social realities, ultimately putting at risk the advancement of philosophical ideas themselves. The way we write shapes the way we think, and the constraints imposed by the paper format may restrict not only our modes of expression but also our capacity to engage with philosophical problems in their full depth. In short, the risk is that we become worse philosophers—ethically, socially, professionally, and scientifically.

6. Conclusions

This paper set out to investigate the problem of stylistic "mono-stylism" in academic philosophical writing, arguing that its dominance is not merely an aesthetic limitation but raises deeper epistemic, ethical, and institutional concerns. The first part (Sections 1–3) introduced the concept of the philosophus academicus and outlined the historical, sociological, and methodological factors that have led to the dominance of the paper format (Section 1). Then, I critically examined two major lines of criticism—one external and more radical, the other internal and reformist—both converging on the problematic dissociation between form and content, whose epistemic implications I have particularly emphasized (Section 2). Building on this, I argued that writing style plays a meta-communicative role in conveying not only philosophical ideas—that is, specific truths—but also a method of finding them—that is, a particular sense of truth (Section 3).

The second part (Sections 4 and 5) illustrated this thesis through a case study of Plato's dialogues. By analyzing the literary features of his writing, and by engaging in a speculative thought experiment on alternative media, I showed how Plato's stylistic choices respond to a distinct philosophical need: that of conveying the very structure or dialogical and dialectical reasoning (Section 4). Finally, the paper proposed a preliminary framework for an ethics of philosophical research, organized around five key dimensions—scientific progress, epistemic conduct, psychological integrity, social responsibility, and medial awareness—with the aim of encouraging a more reflexive and plural approach to philosophical inquiry and expression (Section 5). Undoubtedly, such a framework remains, at this stage, largely programmatic and in some respects even visionary. However, it represents a necessary step toward making fully explicit the assumptions and implications that often remain implicit in current philosophical practice—or that, although informally acknowledged by various scholars, find little or no space in formal research, often due precisely to the difficulty of breaking out of the vicious cycle imposed by the rhythms of academic work. After all, this very text—as is evident—questions the centrality of paper writing, while nonetheless adopting that format. This, however, should not be interpreted as personal inconsistency or hypocrisy, but as indicative of a broader systemic condition.

In fact, the spread of new approaches and attitudes cannot simply be left to individual goodwill: it also depends on the existence of a broader sociocultural humus, including institutional structures, infrastructures, and incentive systems. Yet this should not become a reason to reject any possibility of change a priori or to deem every individual effort in this direction futile. In this sense, having also pointed to a number of significant and concrete examples of alternative research practices—including, specifically, in philosophy—I hope to have offered a glimpse of how change is indeed possible, and how it can begin. Not everything is at stake on the level of writing—whether alternative or canonical—but beginning to explicitly acknowledge this order of problems in one's work, be it traditional or experimental, is an essential component in contributing to the creation of an atmosphere conducive to broader change. After all, academic institutions are historical entities: the ancient Academy, the medieval universitas, and the contemporary campus are not the same thing—nor will the university of the future be. And with this, we arrive at exactly 12,739 words (abstract, references and notes included).

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Notes

[1] I am referring to the publication in 1996 of a deliberately nonsensical article by physicist Alan Sokal in a cultural studies journal, aimed at exposing the perceived lack of rigor in certain postmodern academic circles. The episode, further discussed in *Intellectual Impostures* (Sokal and Bricmont 1998), is often cited as a warning against obscure or overly literary styles in scholarly writing.

[2] For all of Plato's works, I referred to Plato (1967–1986).

[3] According to the same classical distinction made in *Republic* III, 392d–394d.

[4] The experiment freezes media evolution at this stage for the sake of simplification and greater adherence to the specific point discussed in this contribution. What interests me is not simply the claim that, among all possible media, Plato would have chosen the audiovisual one if he had had the opportunity. Rather, I aim to highlight that—assuming there had been a real possibility of choice—we cannot take for granted that the alphabet would have been the medium of preference. On the contrary, precisely in light of his philosophical concerns, Plato would have had good reasons to consider a different one. In this sense, the argument could be further developed by noting, for example, that the video game would have allowed Plato to incorporate an interactive component as well, leveraging it for educational purposes. In other words, he would have acted as a designer who exploits the constrained nature of gameplay to, say, prevent the player from behaving like a sophist and evading questions by getting lost in wordplay. On this basis, rereading interpretations of Plato's dialogues in light of new media opens up entirely unexplored horizons. Consider the following: "the dialogues as forms of play with an educational purpose" (Krentz 1983, p. 43); and "unlike a treatise which sets forth the philosophical products of its author, Plato's dialogues invite their reader to participate in a philosophical process, to ask questions and search for answers through the reader's own investigation of issues under discussion" (Krentz 1983, p. 36). In this regard, it is worth mentioning the first episode of the video game *Pro Philosopher* (Fallon and Reznitskaya 2013), which represents an attempt to make Platonic dialogue interactive by transposing it into the form of a video game.

[5] Many journals have begun providing guidelines for documenting the use of LLMs, as these models do not currently meet authorship criteria. Fair enough. But, for example, who guarantees that peer reviewers are not *ChatGPT reviewers*? There are already several AI-powered services on the market promising to make peer reviews not only faster but also smarter. Overall, the actual impact of the growing presence of generative AI tools in the academic arena remains to be fully assessed and explored. To give just one example, they might indeed risk amplifying the dysfunctional behaviors mentioned above—both in scale and in nature—but, as argued by some scholars (e.g., Watermeyer et al. 2024), they could also foster the exploration of slow scholarship practices and serve as catalysts for (re)engagement with scholarly craftsmanship.

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