Commentary on Rosen
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I will begin with two quotations, the first from the *Phaedrus*, the second from Derrida:

And once a thing is put in writing, the composition, whatever it may be, drifts all over the place, getting in the hands not only of those who understand it, but equally of those who have no business with it...And when it is ill-treated and unfairly abused it always needs its parent to come to its aid, being unable to defend itself or attend to its own needs. (275e translated by R. Hackforth)

Derrida comments on this passage with seeming relish:

...This almost insignificant signifier is at everyone's disposal, can be picked up by both the competent and the incompetent, by those who understand and know what to do with it and by those who, ... knowing nothing about it, can inflict all manner of impertinence upon it. ("Plato's Pharmacy",p. 144)

Now I suspect I am expected to inflict impertinence upon Professor Rosen's text because John Cleary told me (and I don't think he'll mind my saying so) he picked me to comment *qua* "analytic philosopher." Naively placed thereby in the "esoterics" camp, I shall strive to play out my role, at least to the extent of asking just what exactly subtle and playful writers like Derrida and Rosen *mean* by what they say. Happily, should Rosen feel his text is "ill-treated and unfairly abused," he is present to come to its rescue -- for he, unlike Derrida, countenances reference to authorial intentions. We agree in this, and share a concern to dis -
cern Plato's intention in saying what he did about writing and knowing, logos and episteme.

Rosen declares that Derrida's picture of Plato is "topsy-turvy," so I thought it might help to begin by reviewing this contrast. After that I will survey three broad stages of Plato's thought about writing and knowing, raising questions for Rosen as I do so.

Derrida examines Plato's attempt, in the Phaedrus, to contrast writing, which is false, static, dead, empty, removed from knowledge and being, with living speech, or the true writing inscribed in the soul possessing knowledge. But, says Derrida, Plato becomes forced to acknowledge that even this true writing, like all writing, presupposes difference, absence, negation, conceptual plurality, or non-being.

...What the parricide in the Sophist establishes is not only that any full, absolute presence of what is ... is impossible; but that the very condition of discourse -- true or false -- is the critical principle of the sumploke. (p. 166)

Derrida portrays Plato then as a tragic hero, like Oedipus after the parricide and blinding, his father now absent and invisible, seeking nonetheless to "see" with the meager, inadequate "supplement" called dialectic. The son still yearns for the presence of the lost father/being.

Rosen's Plato is not a bit tragic but clever and coy in the conviction that (somewhere) being is present; this Plato has stylistic affinities with Heraclitus, whose surface text of paradox must be penetrated to reveal the hidden logos ("The god whose oracle is at Delphi neither speaks nor conceals, but gives signs"; fragment 18 in Wheelwright, p. 20). But the Ideas which are commensurable with the soul in "a prophetic or visionary sense" (p. 273) are not, like Heraclitus' Logos, hidden "behind" things but instead above and beyond things, in the "hyperuranian" realm, or at "the roof of the cosmos" (p.286, Rosen). It seems to be the goal of erotic hermeneutics to arouse our souls, to allow them to be tempted to fulfill this wonderful possibility of a flight to Being. So Rosen wishes us to attend to the poetic/political/rhetorical strands of Plato's writing, which form the serious subtext of a playful surface. Rosen explains,