Final set of reflection questions for the course:

Foucault’s ‘The Discourse on Language

1. Beginning on p. 517, Foucault presents several rules or principles of discourse through which, he claims, societies exert their power by coopting the inherent power of language. **First**, describe the rules that he lists as the three “types of prohibition”. For Foucault, these rules are especially apparent in how sexual, political, and religious discourse is regulated by various institutions. **Second**, provide some concrete examples of these rules that you see at play in our society or social institutions. **Third**, reflect on how such rules not only govern the kinds of linguistic moves that can be made within these various language games, but also how the determine or help to define the identities of those who participate in these games. For example, how do the rules governing sexual discourse help to shape certain sexual identities or behaviours as legitimate versus deviant? Or how do the rules governing religious discourse help to shape the pious versus the impious or the legitimate bearers of religious truth versus illegitimate bearers of religious truth. **Finally**, you can present your own argument as to whether such rules are legitimate or should be changed or abandoned.

2. Foucault also discusses the rules of discourse associated with the distinction between madness and rationality. He suggests that those these rules have changed from the Middle Ages to now, the change is not necessarily one of progress. In other words, our treatment of the mad is no more humane than in medieval society. For this reflection, explain what the rules of discourse are, how they have and have not changed, and then present your own argument as to whether contemporary treatments of the mad have improved since the middle ages.

3. Beginning on p. 525, Foucault starts to lay out his proposal for exposing and possibly subverting the societal power encoded in various discursive practices and the primary ‘texts’ or ‘narratives’ that structure our lives. **First**, explain the four methodological principles that he intends to employ. **Second**, imagine and explain what it would look like to apply these principles to our own defining “religious or judicial texts” (see pp. 519-520, where he describes these). **Finally**, provide your own brief critique as to whether these methods should be employed.

Derrida’s ‘Plato’s Pharmacy

Throughout this piece, Derrida illustrates how Plato’s *Phaedrus* privileges the spoken word (Logos) over writing. He also shows how the Logos is aligned with patriarchal figures. What textual evidence does Derrida present to support this reading? Do you find it compelling? To what extent can the meta-narrative of Christianity incorporate Derrida’s critique of phallocentrism, as well his intentional blurring of the reading/writing distinction?

Figuring out what Derrida means by terms like ‘deconstruction’ and ‘phallocentrism’ is a task in itself.