

INTERNATIONAL PLATO SOCIETY

5

DEZ 2005

ISSN 2079-7567
eISSN 2183-4105

Established 1989
<http://platosociety.org/>

PLATO JOURNAL

Société Platonicienne
Internationale
Associazione Internazionale
dei Platonisti
Sociedad Internacional
de Platonistas
Internationale
Platon-Gesellschaft

THE STRANGER'S POLITICAL SCIENCE V. SOCRATES' POLITICAL ART

In writing dialogues, Plato wrote something like prose dramas. His dialogues have characters, settings, and plots. Among the most important characters are the philosophers—and I begin from the observation that there is more than one. In the *Sophist* and *Statesman* Plato has Socrates exchange a few words with an Eleatic Stranger and then mostly sit and listen. In juxtaposing these two philosophers, Plato not merely pointed to the difference, but invited his readers to compare them.¹

The difference, according to the geometrician Theodorus who introduces the Eleatic at the beginning of the *Sophist* (216a), is that the Stranger is a “manly philosopher” (*andra philosophon*). In the conversation Theodorus and his student Theaetetus had with Socrates the previous day, Socrates had presented himself in the feminine guise of a “midwife,” having no wisdom of his own, but able to test and refute the opinions of others. At the beginning of the *Sophist*, the Eleatic states his willingness to explain his own understanding of sophistry, philosophy and statesmanship straightforwardly in one long speech. But, not wanting to appear to be lecturing Socrates, he decides to proceed by question and answer. He still puts forth his own views, however; he does not seek, in a backhanded, cowardly manner, merely to refute his interlocutor.²

Is the Eleatic a better philosopher than Socrates? Is that the reason Plato has the Eleatic lead discussions of sophistry and statesmanship (*politikê*) in dialogues that are said to take place the day after Socrates has been indicted (as the Eleatic could have learned from Theodorus and Theaetetus) right before Socrates' public trial? To answer that question, we obviously have to compare the understandings of sophistry, philosophy and politics these two Platonic philosophical spokesmen present. At first glance, Socrates and the Stranger have much in common. Both begin from Parmenides' insight that to be is to be intelligible. Both understand sophistry to be pretended wisdom. Both see dialectics to be the defining feature of philosophy. Both see that political associations arise from the need human beings have to defend themselves, and both point out that these associations will not be able to remain united and so able to defend themselves if they do not foster virtue in their citizens. Upon examination, however, it becomes clear not only that Socrates and the Stranger represent two divergent paths from Parmenides, but also that they have significantly different understandings of sophistry and of dialectics. As a result, they have very different understandings of the relation between philosophy and politics. Whereas in the *Republic* Socrates famously concludes that evils will not cease in cities until philosophers become kings, in the *Statesman* (299b-d) the Stranger tells Socrates that no one who understands the desirability and requirements of the rule of law will seek further knowledge by openly questioning the opinions of his fellow citizens (the way Socrates has).³ If he does, he knows that he can be hauled into court and accused not only of being a sophist but also of corrupting both young and old. In the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*, the Eleatic thus appears to be Socrates' philosophical accuser.

TWO DIFFERENT MODIFICATIONS OF PARMENIDES

At the beginning of the *Sophist* Plato indicates that both the Eleatic Stranger and Socrates agree with Parmenides to a certain extent, but that neither simply and completely adheres to the argument put forward by the older Eleatic. Theodorus' introduction of the Stranger leads Socrates to ask whether people in that place (Elea) think that the sophist, statesman and philosopher are one, two or three, in fact (*ergon*), or merely three different names for something that is really the same. When the Stranger says that he thinks that they are three, even though it is not easy to distinguish them in fact, readers see that he is not simply or unambiguously a follower of Parmenides. Parmenides had argued that everything that is, is one. By recalling the conversation with Parmenides he had when he was young, Socrates reminds Plato's readers that he, too, agrees with Parmenides, as opposed to all other previous philosophers and poets, that everything is not becoming or in flux. On the contrary, like Parmenides, Socrates argues that the only things that truly are, are the things which do not come into being or fade, but remain always the same, and that these eternally unchanging, purely intelligible things are the only things that can be known. Unlike Parmenides, however, Socrates suggests that there is an irreducible plurality of such eternally unchanging, purely intelligible "*eidê*."⁴ Socrates cannot say exactly how many or what "ideas" there are, even on his deathbed, but he regularly suggests that there are ideas of the good, the beautiful, and the just. Although particular, sensible beings can be said to "participate" in several different "ideas," Socrates insists that the ideas in themselves are completely distinct and separate entities that do not intermingle or co-exist with one another.⁵

When the Stranger is led to violate Parmenides' stricture concerning the impossibility of thinking or saying "what is not" in order to explain how a sophist can present a false appearance of knowledge, readers see that he, too, posits the existence of a plurality of fundamental *eidê* in contrast to his mentor's one. Indeed, he goes so far as to suggest that things could not be described and thus made intelligible in *logos*, if being itself were not differentiated into the "same" (*tauton*) and "other" (*heteron*).⁶ In contrast to Socrates, who clearly and emphatically distinguishes the eternally unchanging, purely intelligible ideas from the sensible, changing things that somehow participate in them, the Stranger speaks of *eidê* and *genê* (generated things or kinds of things) interchangeably. He clearly indicates that not all *eidê*, as he understands them, are eternal, when he identifies two kinds (*genê*) of persuasive speaking, public and private, as *eidê* (222d). In contrast to "friends of the forms" like Socrates, moreover, the Stranger argues that the *eidê* do not exist purely and independently of each other. On the contrary, he shows that the "greatest and first principle" (*megistou te kai archevou protou*) of being (*to on*) not merely coexists, but mingles with mutually exclusive conceptions or classes (*genê*, *ideai* and *eidê*) like motion and rest, same and other that are said to be among the greatest.⁷ Because he includes motion and rest among the greatest of the *eidê* that combine with being, the Stranger does not encounter the same kinds of difficulties Socrates and other "friends of the forms" do in explaining how sensible, changing things can participate in an unchanging purely intelligible order. Because his ideas include motion, the Stranger's account of the fundamental categories or kinds of intelligible existence can be combined with cosmology in a way Socrates' ideas cannot. In the *Statesman* we thus see

the Stranger attribute intelligence (*phronesis*) to the cosmos. As the Stranger reminds Theaetetus in the *Sophist* (249a-c), moreover, it is as impossible to conceive of either soul or intelligence (*phronesis* and later *nous*) without motion as it is to explain the intelligibility of things if everything is in motion.⁸

The Stranger's account of the ideas thus appears to provide a better basis for understanding the order of the world and the operations of human intelligence than Socrates' arguments about the good, the beautiful, and the just or "images" like the static "divided line." The problems with the Eleatic Stranger's approach emerge, ironically, when we critically examine his accounts of human activities like sophistry and statesmanship. Because he treats these strictly as forms of knowledge, he does not and apparently cannot explain why anyone engages in them, i.e., give an account of the human motivation or purpose. He does not pay attention to either the thumotic or the erotic desires and drives in which the intelligible and the sensible converge in human life.⁹

WHO OR WHAT IS A SOPHIST?

As Parmenideans, both Socrates and the Stranger recognize a difference between appearance and reality. They both thus speak about human beings who claim or appear to know what they do not and, perhaps, cannot know, whom they both call sophists. As the Stranger observes at the beginning of his analysis of the sophist, however, people can use the same name but, in fact, have very different ideas about it. And if we compare what the Stranger says about the sophist with what Socrates says in other dialogues, we find that their conceptions of the "beast" are different, because the knowledge each thinks a "sophist" claims, but does not in fact possess, is different.

Plato shows Socrates conversing with men who explicitly call themselves or are called "sophists" in the *Protagoras*, *Hippias Major and Minor*, and *Euthydemus*.¹⁰ Although Protagoras, Hippias, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus teach somewhat different subjects and skills—persuasive speech in the case of Protagoras, a comprehensive set of arts and sciences that includes speech in the case of Hippias, or how to defeat their opponents in argumentative contests in the case of the brothers—they all claim to teach their students how to become virtuous or, somewhat conventionally put, *kalos k'agathos*, and thus to live the best possible form of human existence.¹¹ By asking them what virtue is and why they teach what they do, Socrates shows that all these sophists understand themselves to be teaching their students the means of acquiring status and wealth.¹²

In the *Gorgias* (464b-465e) Socrates thus defines sophistry as a false imitation of one of the two branches of the art of politics, legislation. Forensic rhetoric is the false imitation of the other branch, corrective or punitive justice. This definition of sophistry was plausible to Socrates' audience, because the sophists all taught various forms of speech and argument, and laws were made, especially in democratic Athens, by persuading people in assemblies. The true art of politics, as Socrates defines it, aims at the formation or reformation of the human soul. The true art of politics, as he defines it, thus requires knowledge of the good—at least, knowledge of what is truly good for

human beings, if not of the good in itself. Sophistry is not an art, but only an imitation of an art, because it does not represent or rest upon the requisite knowledge. It is a mode of flattery, because in appealing to what the people want, it falsely suggests that they know what is good. For this reason Socrates argues in the *Republic* (492a-b), “the multitude seated together in assemblies or court-rooms or theaters or camps or any other public gathering” are the greatest sophists; in making policy decisions about what is noble, just or advantageous, whether formal or informal, the multitude claim, in effect, to know what is good. Sophistry and rhetoric are not truly arts, but are merely “knacks” (*empeiria*), Socrates thus states in the *Gorgias* (465a). If they were arts, practitioners and teachers would be able to give an account (*logos*) of what they do and why. Neither sophists nor rhetoricians can explain what they do, however, because they do not know the purported end (the good) for which the ability to speak their purvey is purportedly the means of attainment.¹³

The Stranger indicates that his understanding of sophistry is different from Socrates’ when he asks Theaetetus at the very beginning of their examination to agree that sophistry has the power of art (*technê*, 219a, 221c-d). By using another, simpler *technê*, angling, to demonstrate the diaeretic method he thinks they will need to use to pinpoint the distinctive features and character of sophistry, he continues to treat *sophistikê* as a form of art. In both the case of the angler and the sophist, he begins the diaeresis by dividing the productive from the acquisitive arts. When the Stranger applies this method to the sophist, however, he begins with an understanding of sophistry that seems close to Socrates’ understanding of sophistry and thus obscures the difference between them. Like the angler, the Stranger observes, the sophist appears to be a kind of hunter. He tries to lure and then capture wealthy, hence leisured young men by promising to educate them in virtue by means of persuasive speeches delivered to them in private, as individuals, rather than in public. Unlike older lovers, however, sophists ask a fee for their speeches rather than giving them as gifts. If the sophist sells not only the speeches of others but also those he has composed himself, the Stranger admits in his next several definitions and diaereses, sophistry appears on both sides of the dichotomy he drew between productive and acquisitive arts at the beginning of their definition of the angler. Both his interlocutor and Plato’s readers might begin to wonder, therefore, whether the Stranger’s bifurcating method will enable him to isolate or define the sophist.

The Stranger seems to be willing to raise questions about the power and accuracy of his method to show that the sophist resembles Socrates more than that self-proclaimed philosopher is willing to admit. By presenting a series of descriptions of the sophist as a seller of speeches—his own, those of others, or a combination—who travels from city to city or remains entirely at home, the Stranger shows that the sophist cannot be defined simply by the acquisitive aspect of his art.¹⁴ The sophist must also—and, indeed, decisively—be defined in terms of what he makes. Sophists not merely prove to be unable to make their students virtuous, even though they (falsely) claim to know how to do so and thus charge a fee for their lessons, as Socrates points out in his *Apology* (19e-20c); the Stranger suggests that sophists appear and thus lead others to believe that they are wise, even when they themselves know—and perhaps even like Socrates openly and emphatically admit—they are not.

To show how the sophist makes or produces (*poiein*) the false appearance of wisdom, the Stranger next observes (without explaining why he does so), that the sophist not merely hunts young men by producing and exchanging speeches for a profit. Bringing back together kinds of activity they had separated out in their definition of the angler (and so indicating further how poorly that art serves as a paradigm of sophistry), he observes that the sophist also engages in a kind of fighting or competition—in speech rather than by means of force, with individuals rather than groups, by question and answer rather than long speeches, artfully about any subject, but particularly with regard to the just and unjust. The Stranger then contrasts the sophists who compete with those (like Socrates) who idly converse with others without giving the audience pleasure.

Having proved unable to pinpoint the defining characteristics of the sophistic art by comparing it to various aspects of angling or, more generally, by defining it as a branch of the acquisitive art, the Stranger suggests that they try to understand sophistry in terms of another kind of menial task—sorting, sifting, or winnowing. Grouping these all together as arts of discrimination (*diakritikê*), he then identifies two basic kinds: the sorting of like from like as opposed to the sorting of better and worse. The first does not have a name, but it includes his own diaeretic method of argument (*logos*). His mode of sorting things does not, unlike Socrates' definition of an art, take account of whether the activity benefits the recipients or whether it looks ridiculous or dignified. In considering kinds of hunting, for example, it makes no distinction between a general and a lice-catcher. The Stranger's method seeks only to determine which things in the arts are related and which are not for the sake of acquiring intellectual understanding (*tou ktêsasthai gar heneka noun . . . katanoein*). The Stranger does not, like Socrates, claim that the acquisition of intellectual understanding is itself useful or beneficial.

The second kind of discriminating, sorting better from worse, is generally called purification (*catharsis*). In the case of the body, it includes washing the outside as well as cleansing the interior by means of gymnastic training or medicine. There are also two different kinds (*eidê*) of evils (*kakia*) from which the soul needs to be freed. By distinguishing wickedness, which is cured primarily by “justice” or punishment, from ignorance, which is cured by instruction, the Stranger shows that he differs from Socrates not only in argumentative method but also in substantive understanding of both the source and cure for human evil. According to Socrates, no one does evil willingly. Since everyone wants what is good (especially for himself), people do bad things, because they don't know what is really good. By leading individuals to admit that they hold contradictory opinions, particularly about what is noble and good (*kalos k'agathos*), and so refuting them, Socrates says in the *Gorgias*, he corrects or punishes (*kolazein*) them. For that reason he claims to be the only person in Athens at his time even attempting to practice (one of the two branches of) the true art of politics. The Stranger, too, maintains not only that refutation is an art but also that it cures the greatest form of ignorance and so benefits its subjects. Like Socrates, the Stranger thinks that believing that one knows what one does not know constitutes the greatest kind of ignorance. Further like Socrates, the Stranger believes most people have to be freed from this sort of ignorance before they will be willing to learn. Unlike Socrates, however, the Stranger does not appear to think

that virtue is knowledge. If it were, the cure for ignorance and vice would be the same (as it is, according to Socrates). The differences between the Stranger and Socrates with regard to the character and source of human vice thus appear to be rooted in their different understandings of the character, extent, and possible content of human knowledge. So, more obviously, are their different views of pretended knowledge or sophistry.

Like Socrates, the Stranger emphasizes (233a) that human beings cannot know everything. According to the Stranger, the distinguishing feature of a sophist proves to be his ability to give others the false impression or appearance of knowing all things (as opposed to Socrates' understanding of sophistry as the claim to know "simply" what is good for human beings). The sophist creates this impression or appearance by refuting others. As Socrates observes in his *Apology* (23a), people believed that he knew when he refuted others, even though he insisted that he knew only that he did not know. The Stranger himself does not want to agree with Theaetetus that the sophist is defined by his art (knowledge) of how to refute the opinions of others, however. As the Stranger describes it, the art of refutation constitutes an important part or stage in the art of education. As readers see in the way in which he examines first one and then another aspect of the popular understanding of sophistry in order to show that it is inadequate and inaccurate, the Stranger's own method of sorting like from like constitutes another way of cleansing human souls of false opinions, so that they can improve their intellectual understanding. Unlike the Socratic elenchus, however, the Stranger's mode of sorting is neither confrontational nor productive of *aporia* (and thus anger). On the contrary, we see in the *Sophist*, the Stranger gradually challenges and corrects widespread opinions, particularly the belief that the sophists are defined by their demand to be paid for lessons in virtue, that his interlocutor shares. The Stranger does not ask Theaetetus to state his own views and then criticize them the way Socrates did. He merely inquires whether Theaetetus agrees with a widely held view and then examines that view. He does not embarrass this interlocutor the way he does young Socrates in the *Statesman* by bringing out the inadequacy, if not contradictory character of his responses. In neither dialogue does the Stranger's often apparently circuitous, if not ridiculous method of bifurcation (in which the steps can hardly be said to be logically necessary or even, at times, consistent) leave his interlocutor in a state of *aporia*. On the contrary, the conversation culminates in a definition and so, presumably, an improved, because more precise understanding of the art or science in question.

Although Theaetetus says that people study with the sophists primarily because of the political knowledge they claim to purvey, the Stranger insists that it is the all-encompassing rather than the specifically political character of the pretended knowledge that is crucial. Because it is impossible for a human being to know everything in truth, the sophist's apparent knowledge must be false. In order to show how it is possible for a human being to appear to know everything, the Stranger has to explain a) how, contrary to the apparent teaching of his mentor Parmenides, something which is not (the case) can nevertheless appear to be (the case), and b) how it is possible to create completely verbal as opposed to visible images. The Stranger explains how it is possible to distinguish a copy from the original and thus appearance from reality by showing how we can

differentiate one thing from another without contradicting ourselves by simultaneously maintaining that it is (exists) and is not (does not exist). He explicitly says that he presents his famous teaching about the *koinonia* of the greatest *eidê* in order to show how *logos* is possible.¹⁵ He does not explicitly say how the sophist's ability to create images entirely in words is related to or different from the poets', even though in Book 10 of the *Republic* Socrates criticizes poets for seeming to make images of everything and so claiming to have a kind of comprehensive knowledge they do not possess. Although Socrates groups sophists and poets together with rhetoricians as people able to make persuasive speeches that use images, the Stranger does not even mention poetry (although it would surely be included among the "poetic" arts). The reason he does not may be that, in ancient Greece, the poets did not claim to be speaking out of their own knowledge; they claimed, instead, to be inspired by the gods and thus to speak for them. The images the poets created were, moreover, of the speeches and deeds of others. As the Stranger points out in his culminating definition, the sophist imitates using his own body. He does not pretend to be someone else, however, like an actor. On the contrary, the sophist makes himself appear to be all-knowing and wise by refuting others.

The Stranger's definition of a sophist fits Socrates better than the foreign teachers Socrates and others called sophists. Protagoras propounded the notion that "man is the measure," which Socrates disputed at length in the *Theaetetus*, and Hippias paraded himself as a polymath; both tended to give long persuasive speeches; neither was content merely to refute his interlocutors. Euthydemus and Dionysodorus did explicitly teach the art of refutation, but they did not content themselves merely with refuting their interlocutors; they, too, claimed to teach virtue. Nor did they ironically admit that they themselves did not know.

Why does the Stranger suggest that Socrates is the sophist par excellence, in contrast to the statesman and the philosopher? Like the public, political indictment, the Stranger's accusation appears to have two parts. First, the Stranger charges, Socrates does not speak truly when he says that he knows only that he does not know the most important things. As he himself admits in the *Gorgias*, Socrates has an art, which he calls the true art of politics! Socrates thus claims, in effect, to be not only a philosopher but also a statesman. All philosophers do not have to be kings or statesmen, according to Socrates, but all just rulers have to be philosophers. When Socrates says that he does not possess knowledge, but merely seeks it, the Stranger charges, Socrates does not merely "ironically" dissimulate about the character and extent of his knowledge. He makes himself look better and wiser than he is. The problem or deception does not lie simply in the fact that the people who listen to Socrates conversing tend to conclude that he knows that about which he refutes the opinions of others. The problem, more fundamentally, is that Socrates presents a false image of philosophy. Because human beings cannot know everything or the whole, Socrates concludes, philosophy consists and can only consist in a search for wisdom. Socrates claims to know, in other words, that human beings cannot attain knowledge properly speaking. Although the Stranger agrees that a human being cannot know everything, in both the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* he maintains that human beings can acquire particular kinds of knowledge. Likewise, because Socrates argues that evils will not end in cities until philosophers become kings, the Stranger will suggest in

the *Statesman*, Socrates also presents a false understanding of statesmanship. According to the Stranger, statesmanship constitutes a particular kind of knowledge; it is not the same thing as philosophy nor does the acquisition of statesmanship require or presuppose a philosophical education. The second and more fundamental charge the Stranger levels against Socrates is, therefore, that Socrates does not understand the character and kind of knowledge human beings can attain. Socrates thinks human beings can never achieve full knowledge (*epistêmê*), because the cosmos consists not only of eternally unchanging, hence purely intelligible entities but also of sensible, changing, and hence not fully intelligible things. And if the whole is not perfectly intelligible, it is difficult to say that or how it is perfectly good or to know what is good in itself. The Stranger suggests, on the other hand, that if the order or kinds of being are not hierarchically organized, a dialectician can sort out many different kinds of things and activities. The reason no human being can know everything is that there are so many different kinds (*eidê*). Human beings can, however, sort out and then come to know some specific kinds of things. In the *Republic* Socrates denies that anything short of knowledge of the good should be called science (*epistêmê*) and suggests that studies like geometry should not, therefore, strictly speaking, be called “arts”; the Stranger speaks of a variety of sciences as well as of arts.¹⁶ Statesmanship, as the Stranger defines it, proves to be one of these specialized sciences that includes knowledge of a great many other arts.

WHO OR WHAT IS A STATESMAN?

The Stranger’s suggestion that Socrates is a sophist is plausible in its immediate dramatic context. In the *Theaetetus* Socrates presented himself as an intellectual midwife, who could only help others to give birth, but had no ideas of his own. And in his *Apology*, which follows the dialogues with the Eleatic, Socrates says that he merely interrogated those who claimed to be wise to show that they were not. In the *Republic*, however, Socrates appears to do much more than refute the opinions of others when he describes his famous city in speech. That “paradigm,” which he finally says (592a-b) should be used by individuals in attempting to order their own souls, might not constitute knowledge, strictly speaking; but the speeches Socrates gives in that dialogue certainly consist in more than refutations. In order to show that Socrates is among the greatest sophists who concern themselves with the affairs of the city (291b-c), the Stranger needs to demonstrate that the statesman (*politikos*) does possess a kind of knowledge, but that knowledge does not consist either in the ability to refute others that Socrates suggested was a part of the true art of politics in the *Gorgias*, or in the knowledge of the ideas, especially the idea of the good, which Socrates argued in the *Republic*, philosopher-kings must have. If, as the Stranger concludes (305d-e), the royal art of the king (*basilikê*) or politics (*politikê*) does not itself consist in a kind of practice (*prattein*), but in knowing how to weave together all the arts that do have practical effects (*dunamenon prattein*), in order to produce and maintain a population sufficiently moderate and courageous to preserve the polity, it is different from both philosophy and sophistry (especially as the Stranger has defined them). According to the Stranger’s definition, neither Socrates nor his philosopher-king is a statesman.

In seeking the sophist, the Stranger had first (219b0c) divided those who had an art (*technê*) from those who did not, and then divided the arts between the acquisitive (*ktêtikê*) and productive (*poietikê*). But in seeking the statesman, the Stranger suggests, they must look among those who possess a science (*epistêmê*). Both arts and sciences are kinds of knowledge. The Stranger does not explicitly draw a distinction between these kinds of knowledge, perhaps because he will identify the science a ruler ought to possess with the royal art (*basilikê*). The initial division among the sciences he proposes is nevertheless different from the initial division of the arts he used to define the sophist. The first distinction he draws (259d-260b), using “arithmetic” (more precisely, number theory) as an example, between arts (*technai*) that simply produce knowledge (*to gnônai*) and those like carpentry or the handicrafts in general which have practical effects (*to prattein*) suggests that the sciences are more purely cognitive, if not theoretical, than the arts.

Readers may be surprised to learn that the kingly art is one of the former, according to the Stranger, “because a king can do much less by means of his hands and his body to maintain his rule than with the strength and intelligence of his soul” (259c).¹⁷ If a statesman is defined by the knowledge he possesses rather than the effects or products of his actions, moreover, it does not matter whether he has a position of power or not. Since the knowledge required to rule a slave, household, small city or vast empire is the same—the difference being merely one of size or number in the ruled—master, householder, statesman (*politikos*) and king are merely different names for people who have basically the same art.¹⁸ The Stranger’s emphasis on the purely cognitive character of the statesman’s knowledge appears to be a bit less strange, when he goes on to observe that instead of merely knowing how to distinguish one kind of thing from another, like a student of numbers, a statesman knows what orders to give others to bring something into being. At the end of the first set of diaeretic disjunctions between the purely cognitive and practical, injunctive or merely critical, self-originating as opposed to merely communicative arts, the statesman looks more like an architect than a carpenter. The question then arises, what kind of thing—living (*empsycha*) or not—the statesman brings into being with his commands.

In contrast to the Stranger’s emphasis on the primarily cognitive character of the statesman’s knowledge, his contention that statesmen deal with groups rather than with individuals in private seems commonsensical. There is no “politics” of one person. The humorous results of their attempt to determine the characteristics of the living beings the statesman herds are nevertheless infamous.

The reasons why the Stranger pushes young Socrates to describe human beings as featherless bi-peds or two-legged pigs rather than as rational animals are not so clear. The Stranger asks how the art of tending might be divided, and Socrates answers, again quite sensibly, that the art of nurturing human beings could be separated off from the nurture of other kinds of animals. At first, the Stranger’s objections to this division appear to be principled, if not technical. Socrates had not distinguished between a part and a species; all species are parts, but not all parts are species. In pointing out that the distinction Socrates drew between humans and other animals is analogous to that between

Greeks and “barbarians,” the Stranger suggests that the difference between humans and animals is merely conventional, not natural. He also complains that separating the division between humans and other animals is lop-sided and arbitrary, like a distinction drawn between the numbers between one and ten thousand, and all the other numbers. He says that distinctions according to species should be drawn down the middle, like that between male and female or odd and even. He does not state the fundamental principle explicitly—that things cannot be sorted merely according to the way they differ; they must also be the same as themselves. When the Stranger tells “manliest of all” young Socrates that other reputedly intelligent creatures like cranes might divide themselves off the same way, however, the Stranger’s objection appears to be more moral or pedagogical than technical. Human beings should not base their understanding of politics or statesmanship on the pride they take in their intelligence (especially when they are brilliant mathematicians like Theaetetus and young Socrates). As the Stranger will make clear at the end of his “myth,” human beings have to form political societies in order to preserve and protect themselves, not because we are particularly well-endowed by nature with reason, but because we are much less well equipped than other animals with means of defense.

In their second attempt to find the distinguishing characteristics of the herd the statesman tends, the Stranger thus begins with the distinction he first drew in the *Sophist* between tame animals, which can be domesticated, and wild animals, which cannot. He then divides those which can be domesticated according to whether they live in the water or on land, fly or walk, on two feet or four, with or without cloven hooves, have horns or don’t, and interbreed or not. All but the last of these characteristics are directly related to the animals’ ability to fight or flee from those who might attack; all are externally observable (in contrast to the desires, *erôs* and *thumos* of the human soul that Socrates emphasizes as moving people in politics). “It is now more evident than in their search for the sophist,” the Stranger states, “that his method of argument does not care any more for what is august than what is not or honor the great more than the small” (266d). The Stranger is not propounding a logical technique of definition, so much as he is gradually moving toward an understanding of politics as arising not from human nobility, but from human need. He indicates the limits of his bifurcatory method when he admits that there are two different ways, one longer and one shorter, that lead to somewhat different definitions of a human being. The Stranger acknowledges (266c), moreover, that both definitions are comical.

The problem the Stranger explicitly points out in the definition of the statesman to which they have come is that there are many different kinds of artisans who claim to know what to do (or command) to nourish and nurture the human herd. He does not explain why he needs to use a “large part of a myth” that he calls “childish” (268d-e) to distinguish the statesman from these other artisans. Only after he has retold and reinterpreted three old stories do readers realize that his initial definitions of the statesman as a wise commander (or legislator) and caring shepherd reflected, if obliquely, traditional views.¹⁹ The Stranger recognizes that mathematically educated young Athenians like Socrates and Theaetetus are not apt to believe that such old stories are literally true. He thus acknowledges that there is something playful about his use of the

myth. He sees that he will not be able to free the young from the misconceptions of the statesman they have inherited by confronting and trying to refute these views directly, the way the elder Socrates might have; if he did, the young men would simply tell him that they don't believe such old wives' tales. He thus proceeds more indirectly. Having shown that young Socrates retains something of the traditional view of a statesman as an all-wise commander and caring shepherd by arguing very untraditionally that the statesman's knowledge is more cognitive than practical and that the human herd he tends is a bunch of comically defenseless two-legged animals, the Stranger reinterprets three old stories to show that the traditional view is childish. In defining the statesman as a wise and caring shepherd, they have been looking up to him the way young children look up to their parents.²⁰ In adopting the image of the shepherd, the Stranger points out at the end of his myth, they have even implied that the statesman belongs to a higher species—that he is, in a word, a god.

As originally told, all three of the old stories the Stranger reinterprets—Zeus's changing the direction of the movement of the heavens to signal his preference for Atreus over Thyestes, the rule of Cronus in the golden age, and the autochthonous birth of the original inhabitants of cities like Athens and Thebes—represent accounts of the origins of political regimes. According to the Stranger, however, all three of these stories refer to one cosmic event. In explicating the reasons for, and the effects of, the reverse in the motion of the cosmos, which all three of these ancient stories reflect in different ways, the Stranger also gives an account of the origins of political rule. But the account he gives differs significantly from the tradition. Whereas the old stories suggest that political rule arises from the concern gods have for human beings, the Stranger reinterprets the stories to show that human beings have had to develop arts, particularly the political art, in order to protect themselves from hostile natural forces. The gods may have cared for human beings in the past, but the Stranger concludes his myth by pointing out, the gods no longer rule us directly. Human beings have to take care of themselves.

The Stranger's re-interpretation of the three old stories as reflections of one cosmic event points toward a kind of cosmology, but it clearly does not present a full explanation or explication of the order of the cosmos comparable to that found in the *Timaeus*.²¹ Although the picture of the cosmos the Eleatic Stranger presents has some things in common with the cosmic views presented by other Platonic philosophical spokesmen, it also differs from them in significant respects.²² According to the older, more traditional tales to which the Athenian Stranger recurs in the *Laws*, the gods care for human beings by ruling them or appointing other, suitable rulers and giving human beings the knowledge they need in order to survive. Like *Timaeus*, the Athenian thus urges human beings to seek to understand and imitate the divine order. According to the Eleatic Stranger's reinterpretation and revision of these tales, however, human beings have now and perhaps always lived in a world in which we have to rule and provide for ourselves.²³ Although he observes in passing that other old stories attribute the arts to gifts from gods like Hephaestus or Athena, the Eleatic maintains that the kinds of knowledge or "arts" human beings need to protect and preserve themselves are developed and acquired by the humans themselves without "divine" assistance or support.²⁴

The Stranger said at the beginning that he would need to use “a large part of a big myth” (268d) to distinguish the statesman from other human caretakers. Yet at the conclusion of his tale he blames himself and young Socrates for having “raised up an amazing bulk of the myth” and then having been “compelled to use a greater part than they should have” (277b). It is easy to see why the Stranger emphasizes how big his myth is: it concerns the origins, development and final character of the cosmos. As the Stranger’s use of the myth indicates, our understanding of the function or work (*ergon*) of the statesman depends upon our understanding of nature as a whole.

The first reason the Stranger criticizes himself for using a myth appears to be that his account of the cosmos is and remains essentially mythical. Unlike the explicitly mythical descriptions of the motions of the heavenly bodies given by Socrates, Timaeus and the Athenian Stranger, the Eleatic’s account of the effects of the reversed motion of the cosmos is not based on observations of the mathematically calculable orbits of the heavenly bodies. If the Eleatic had begun not with old stories, but with astronomical observations of the mathematically calculable orbits of the heavenly bodies, however, he would have been led, as Socrates, Timaeus, and the Athenian Stranger are, to emphasize the intelligible and thus beneficent order of the world. All three of these philosophers suggest that studying the intelligible motions of the heavenly bodies will help human beings learn not merely how the cosmos is ordered, but, even more important, how to order their own souls. Political societies are established and maintained, according to all three of these philosophers, to enable human beings not merely to preserve themselves, but to live the best life possible by acquiring as much virtue as possible.²⁵ Political societies should encourage at least some of their members to study the orderly movements of the heavens, because such studies help people learn how to become more virtuous by bringing order to their own souls.

Both in practice and in precept, the Eleatic Stranger objects that beginning with the first, the highest and most beautiful things does not result in a true or accurate view of politics.²⁶ As he emphasizes in giving an explicitly myth-based account, human beings did not observe and cannot know their origins. Rather than relying on high-minded speculations or inferences, we should begin from what we do know—our own immediate, present experience. He acknowledges that the existence of some beautiful intelligible things indicates that the cosmos has a divine origin. But, he insists, we do not know those origins. And when we reflect on our own experience, without the mythological or cosmological dressing up we have inherited, we are confronted with our own natural weakness.

The primary function or task (*ergon*) of the myth, it becomes clear at the end, was to free his young interlocutors from their tradition based preconceptions of the statesman as a superhuman commander and shepherd. At the conclusion of the myth, we thus see the Stranger introduce a new, much lowlier, essentially defensive paradigm of the art of politics—weaving.²⁷ The conclusion of the myth had raised a second problem, however. If statesmen are mere mortals and not gods, why should or would other humans consent to their rule? The relation between the knowledge of the statesman, the rule of law, and

the consent of the governed thus becomes central to the analysis of the basis and character of political rule that follows.

The Stranger said they had used more of the myth than they should, because its function was supposed to be merely cathartic. Human rule as the Stranger presents it is a completely and narrowly human phenomenon; it requires knowledge of what human beings need in order to survive and how to satisfy those needs. It does not require knowledge of nature as a whole or divine guidance. That is why the Stranger merely retold old stories and did not give a full cosmology. It is also the reason he does not include stories about the gods in the education of the young or the true opinions he says a statesman must establish at the end of the dialogue. If humans had not been misled by old stories and the false hopes of divine assistance they express, people could have obtained knowledge of the true origins of the arts from reflections on their own experience (or what we call history).²⁸

Although Young Socrates thinks they have defined the statesman at the end of the myth, the Stranger says that he is not satisfied. They have not yet uncovered the distinctive character of political knowledge. By presenting the way children learn their letters as a paradigm of the way humans generally acquire knowledge and then choosing an art practiced primarily by women as a paradigm of the art of politics, the Stranger emphasizes the source of its defensive character in physical weakness.²⁹

The Stranger quickly defines the character of the product of weaving (279c-d) by contrasting it in a series of bifurcations to arts that make or achieve some effect (*poiein*), as opposed to repelling or preventing (*mê paschein*). Then he points out that a weaver needs to employ two other kinds of artisans—those who know how to make the instruments she uses and those who produce the materials she weaves together with those instruments—in order to exercise her own art. To define the art of weaving, it will not suffice to determine what no other artisan but a weaver does (plaiting the warp and the woof); one also has to show how the weaver uses the products of other arts.

Having indicated more fully than he had in his first diaeresis how the statesman, like an architect or weaver, has to bring together the work of a variety of different artisans in order to bring something into being, the Stranger clarifies the difference between the kind of knowledge involved in this kind of coordination and that represented by other primarily cognitive arts like mathematics. And readers see that the Stranger has not entirely abandoned his initial definitions of the statesman as a commander and caretaker.³⁰ He used the myth to show that the knowledge involved is human, i.e., of things that come into being and are, therefore, not eternal, and that human beings seek and develop such knowledge not because of their extraordinary natural intelligence so much as their natural defenselessness. But, having demoted the status of statesmanship from the divine to the human and compared it to the relatively menial art of weaving, the Stranger now has to try to prevent the brilliant young mathematician from beginning to condemn the knowledge of the statesman or, even worse, denying that the statesman has any knowledge whatsoever.

The Stranger points out that, like other clever men who want to appear wise, the young geometer may later observe that everything that becomes can be measured mathematically and thus recognize one and only one kind of measurement. If he does, he will deny that the “arts” that bring beautiful and good things into existence are, strictly speaking, forms of knowledge.

There are two ways of determining whether something is excessive or deficient, the Stranger explains. The first way is that characteristic of mathematical arts—like calculation, geometry and astronomy—which measure things relative to each other in terms of a common standard, e.g., units, inches, pounds, motion. The arts which produce good and beautiful things or people—like architecture, weaving, and politics—also use this kind of measure. As Stanley Rosen points out, one has to know how big a man is to make an effective cloak.³¹ But this kind of measurement does not enable a cloak-maker to know how soft the woof should be to provide the requisite amount of warmth to repel the cold under the particular climatic conditions, or how tough the warp should be to make the cloak fit to repel rain.³² Arts (or kinds of knowledge) which involve a bringing together of a variety of different materials and skills have to employ a different kind of measure. Because the component parts of these arts are not commensurable, expert practitioners of these arts cannot determine how much of any given part or activity is fitting, opportune, or needful by using a single external standard to measure them. Such artisans have to look, instead, to a place in the middle or midst of things where all the requisite parts come together in the proper proportion to produce the desired outcome. They must look, in other words, to the mean (*metrion*).

The Stranger does not introduce the two different arts of measurement (*metrikê*) simply to describe the art of the statesman, however. He uses this methodological digression to defend his own apparently circuitous way of defining the statesman’s art. Just as they had “compelled ‘that which is not’ to be” in the *Sophist*, in order to show how it was possible for someone to make false images in speech, so, the Stranger first tells Socrates, “they must compel the more and less to become measurable relative not only to one another but also to the becoming of the mean, if anyone to become a scientific knower of matters of action [like a statesman]” (284b-c). But, observing that an explanation of “the precise itself,” which includes both arts of measurement would require an even more extensive argument than that he had presented about the being of that “which is not,” the Stranger concludes that it will be sufficient at present for them to believe that there are these two forms of measurement, because such a belief will prevent them from grouping all arts of measurement together without investigating the differences among them.³³

Using weaving as an example, the Stranger now admits that it is difficult to separate the art of the statesman from the products and services other artisans contribute to the final product by cutting down the middle. He thus jettisons his bifurcatory method, and proceeds, as Socrates does in the *Phaedrus*, to divide the art of politics as if it were a “sacrificial animal,” limb from limb.

The Stranger first cuts off all the arts that provide useful tools and services. The “tools” include instruments, vessels, supports, defenses, ornaments, raw materials, and all forms or sources of nourishment. The services begin with the labor of slaves, who obviously do not claim to be kings, and include merchants as well as free laborers, heralds, scribes, and priests. The most important public servants from which the statesman must be distinguished are, however, those who pretend to be statesmen by actually governing. These are “the greatest enchanters of all the sophists” (291c).

These “enchanters” do not look like imitators of the wise, i.e., they do not appear to be sophists as the Stranger had finally defined them in the *Sophist*. Like the sophists, as Socrates defined them in the *Gorgias*, they pretend to be legislators and kings. We see the connection between the Stranger’s earlier definition and his present identification of the “greatest” examples, however, if we think of the elder Socrates silently listening to the conversation. By refuting and so correcting his interlocutors in the *Gorgias*, Socrates had claimed to be the only person in Athens even trying to practice the true art of politics. But, as the Stranger indicated in the *Sophist* and argues more explicitly in the *Statesman*, Socrates cannot practice the true political art, because he does not possess it. If he did, he would know that people who, with reason, want to preserve the rule of law will not allow individuals to go around questioning the wisdom of their laws in private any more than they will tolerate them in public assemblies. Socrates is not a sophist only because he gives his interlocutors the impression that he knows everything by refuting everyone else; like the politicians, Socrates also appears to be an even greater “enchanter” and sophist when he claims that his refutations constitute the true political art!

Governments are usually characterized by the number of people in power, the Stranger observes. They are also differentiated by whether the rule is voluntary or compulsory, whether rulers are rich or poor, and whether their rule is by law or lawless. If the statesman or true king is distinguished from all others by his knowledge, however, none of these characteristics suffices to define him. But it is clear that, if the only true and best form of government requires knowledge, democracy never represents the best form of government, because few people are able to possess even lesser forms of knowledge, to say nothing of the complex kind of knowledge called statesmanship.

Those who would acquire and practice the art of politics face an obstacle, however, of a kind no other artisans or scientists confront. People recognize that expert physicians or pilots may not merely have to contravene the rules and go against accepted practice, but even have to force their patients or passengers without their consent to do what is good for them. Things are quite different in politics. Not only does a statesman have to see that a variety of activities are undertaken by others to produce a variety of incommensurable goods in order to preserve the life of the city. Those he must rule have also learned from bitter experience with lawless rulers who used their power to enrich themselves at the expense of their people, by force or fraud, that they must insist upon their rulers also obeying the law—to the letter—unless they can persuade the people beforehand to change the law or justify their lawless actions after the fact in a public audit. In either case the expert and his knowledge are subordinated to the opinions of those who do not have that knowledge. It is, indeed, their lack of knowledge that makes

the ignorant, but not entirely inexperienced, multitude insist that everyone be equally subordinated to received opinion or tradition. Not merely would someone who understands politics refuse to serve under such conditions. It becomes extremely dangerous for someone to try to acquire real knowledge of politics.

The Stranger does not explicitly state the most remarkable conclusion that flows from his argument: The reason it is so difficult to find the true statesman is that no true statesman will ever actually be found in office or exercising political power. The statesman is defined by his knowledge. As the Stranger pointed out at the beginning of the dialogue, that means that his art is not practical or productive so much as it is cognitive. He certainly does not need to hold a powerful position in the city in order to possess it. On the contrary, the Stranger has shown, no one who truly understands politics would accept a position of responsibility under the conditions those who lack the knowledge themselves would impose. He would not even try to benefit his fellow citizens in private, like Socrates, by showing them what they do not know, because he recognizes that, not knowing, they will prosecute and condemn him.³⁴ He would travel around anonymously, teaching others, the way the Eleatic does.

The fact that a true statesman will never seek or accept office does not mean that it is impossible to isolate and define the particular kind of knowledge he has. Having successfully distinguished the statesman, who would necessarily lay down laws as part of his rule, but not feel himself bound by them, from the law-abiding regimes that resemble his, precisely because they rule according to laws based upon a certain kind and degree of knowledge culled from experience, the Stranger is finally able to isolate and describe the distinctive kind of knowledge the statesman possesses. He will use the three kinds of knowledge or art that are closest to his in ruling—the arts of the rhetorician, the general, and the judge—but his art is not the same as any of theirs. There is a difference between the rhetorician’s knowledge of how to persuade (though not instruct) a large crowd and the statesman’s knowledge of when to use persuasion and when to use force. Likewise, it requires one kind of knowledge to fight wars, but another kind to determine when they should be fought. Rulers need to know how to apply their own laws and uphold contracts between particular people under specific circumstances, but such judgments are obviously subordinate to the laws rulers make. The true king or statesman knows how to care for everything in the city by weaving together these arts with the laws. On the basis of his comprehensive knowledge, like an architect, the statesman commands and supervises other artisans to produce and preserve political order.

Above all, the Stranger explains, a statesman needs to know how to weave together two different kinds of people—the moderate and the courageous—in order to preserve the city. Like the elder Socrates, the Stranger observes, most people think that courage and moderation are two kinds of virtue. He boldly suggests that, instead of being friendly, these two kinds of virtue are actually opposed. Whereas moderate people are gentle, slow, and orderly, courageous people tend to be quick, speedy and intense. These opposed virtues or natural inclinations in people create a problem for the statesman. Because moderate people tend to be “exceptionally well-ordered,” they live a “quiet life, minding their own business” (Socrates’ definition of political justice in the

Republic). As a result, moderate people are unprepared for war and become the prey of aggressors. The courageous, on the other hand, are always tensing up for wars, which they wage until they are defeated and enslaved by their enemies. If a city is to remain free and well-ordered, but able to defend itself, its population has to combine both these virtues. But, since like is naturally attracted to like, it requires art to produce the necessary composite. Like a weaver, a knowledgeable statesman must get others to test and purify the materials with which he will work by purging—punishing, exiling, killing or enslaving—people who prove themselves “incapable of sharing in a manly and moderate character and everything else that pertains to virtue” (308e). Then he must bind together the moderate and courageous both with divine ties, by seeing that they acquire true opinions about the beautiful, just and good things in the part of their soul that is related to the eternal, and with human ties, by arranging suitable marriages and exchanging children, with other cities as well as within the city itself, and by rewarding those with the requisite mixture with honors and offices.

By encouraging the docile Theaetetus and moderating the manly young Socrates, the Eleatic indicates that he himself possesses at least some of the knowledge he attributes to the statesman. He does not seek to apply that knowledge in his own or any other city, however, nor does he incite his young interlocutors to acquire and use it. For the Eleatic, the inquiry into the character and content of political knowledge is merely an opportunity to practice dialectics.

SOCRATES' RESPONSE TO THE STRANGER'S CHARGES

In the *Apology*, which is set right after the *Statesman*, Socrates replies to the Eleatic's implicit charges as well as to the legal indictment.³⁵ First, he responds to the Eleatic's suggestion that he is a sophist by observing that people who hear him refute others often believe that he knows that about which he refutes others. But in this very public place, he proclaims, as he does often in private, that he does not. Don't his own statements about his own knowledge and intentions count?

The Eleatic is not the first person, moreover, to have warned Socrates that he risks being hauled into court and condemned of a capital crime, if he continues philosophizing as he does. In the *Gorgias* Callicles threatened Socrates with the same fate. Admitting that he would be defenseless, Socrates insisted that it would be an unjust man charging a just one. In his *Apology* he is not quite so pessimistic about his ability to persuade his fellow citizens that he does not corrupt others. If they had passed a law forbidding a trial for a capital offense to take place on a single day, he predicts, he would have been able to convince them.

Socrates never admits that he has done anything illegal, much less unjust. The only law he says that he would disobey would be a decree by the court, allowing him to go free on the condition that he remains silent. Before his trial, Socrates reminds us, philosophy had not been outlawed in Athens. He had acquired a reputation by interrogating others for forty or more years. One of the contradictions he often brought out in the opinions of the people he examined was between what they declared was right

in public and what they wanted for themselves, but would not publicly admit. Socrates might have encouraged the individuals he examined to change their opinions (and thus perhaps cumulatively the law), but he always questioned individuals (*idiotes*); he never directly and openly challenged the validity of the law as law or urged others to disobey it. An old man who has to die soon in any case, Socrates tells the jurors, he will not propose exile. He stays and accepts his punishment in order to show both his fellow citizens and posterity in the terms they value, deeds as opposed to speeches, that he and his kind of philosophy do not threaten the legal or political order.

Socrates claims to have much less knowledge than either the Eleatic or his statesman. But neither the Eleatic nor his statesman has the only kind of knowledge that Socrates ever claimed to possess, knowledge of the erotic things.³⁶ By having Socrates listen silently as the Eleatic defines political science, Plato leads his readers to ask whether it is possible to have the knowledge needed to rule others without understanding the strongest human passions. Do most actual governments fail to do what is good and just merely because they lack the requisite knowledge, or do they lack the requisite knowledge, at least in part, because they unjustly desire to have more wealth and honor than others, believing like most human beings, ultimately, that pleasure is the highest good.

By juxtaposing these two philosophers, Plato shows his readers not merely how difficult it is to acquire knowledge, even of the human things; it is even more difficult to put such knowledge into practice, if and when it is acquired. By means of his dialogues, especially those depicting the trial and death of Socrates, Plato nevertheless demonstrated that it is possible to persuade non-philosophers that philosophy can have a beneficial effect on politics as well as on private individuals—even if that persuasion took a long time.

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NOTES

¹ Most commentators have noticed important differences between the arguments—both substantive and methodological—employed by the Eleatic Stranger and those attributed to Socrates in other dialogues. (Not every commentator does, however. In *Method and Politics in Plato's 'Statesman'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Melissa Lane simply “take[s] the liberty of identifying the Eleatic Stranger’s arguments with Plato’s” and “refuse[s] the liberty of speculating . . . on the relationship between Socrates and the Eleatic Stranger” [p. 8]). Those commentators who observe differences between the philosophical characters have disagreed, moreover, about what they are and what they mean. Kenneth Sayre, *Plato's Late Ontology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), Paul Friedlaender, *Plato*, trans. Hans Meyerhoff (Princeton: Princeton University Press), Vol. 3; G. M. A. Grube, *Plato's Thought* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), Paul Shorey, *The Unity of Plato's Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1903) and J. B. Skemp, *Plato's Statesman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952) all think the Eleatic Stranger articulates a later and better version of Plato’s own understanding than Socrates. These commentators “date” the dialogues not according to their dramatic setting, but on the basis of a supposed “chronology of composition.” But the validity of the assumptions underlying readings of the dialogues in terms of their supposed (but never proven) dates of composition has seriously been brought into question by Jacob Howland, “Re-reading Plato: The Problem of Platonic Chronology,” *Phoenix* 45 (1991): 189-214; Debra Nails, *Agora, Academy and the conduct of Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1995); Charles H. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Charles Griswold, “E Pluribus Unum? On the Platonic ‘Corpus,’” *Ancient Philosophy* 20 (1999): 361-97. As John M. Cooper points out, *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), xiii-xiv, there is little, if any external evidence about when Plato wrote any of the dialogues. Connecting the dialogues on the basis of their dramatic date rather than the chronology of composition, in *Plato's World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), Joseph Cropsey also identifies the Eleatic Stranger with Plato. But he argues that the godless universe described by the Stranger constitutes both the context and rationale for Socrates’ “caring” philosophy and so connects the arguments of Plato’s two philosophical spokesmen. In *Form and Good in Plato's Eleatic Dialogues: The Parmenides, Theaetetus, Sophist, and Statesman* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 216, 235-43, Kenneth Dorter goes even further by arguing that the Eleatic’s arguments are so far from being superior to Socrates’ that they have to be supplemented by the concern for the good characteristic of Socrates. Gerald Mara, “Constitutions, Virtue, and Philosophy in Plato’s *Statesman*,” *Polity* 13 (Spring 1981): 377-80, also finds Socrates superior. Both Seth Benardete, who emphasizes the dramatic unity of the “trilogy” in *The Being of the Beautiful* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), and Stanley Rosen, who incorporates the chronology of composition in his analysis of both *Plato's Sophist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 16-28, and *Plato's Statesman: The Web of Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 2-8, point out important differences between Socrates and the Stranger. Nevertheless, both maintain that the positions articulated by Plato’s two philosophical spokesmen are compatible in the end. Emphasizing the dramatic links between the conversations with the Eleatic Stranger and Socrates’ trial, Mitchell H. Miller, Jr., *The Philosopher in Plato's Statesman* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980), pp. 2-3, and Jacob Howland, *The Paradox of Political Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), pp. 3, 278-79, follow Rosen in suggesting that the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* represent the philosophical, as opposed to the political, trial of Socrates. According to Miller, the Stranger gives the philosophical defense of Socrates that Socrates himself could not present to a popular audience. Howland argues, on the other hand, that the contrast with the Stranger highlights and so implicitly condemns Socrates’ political immoderation. But Harvey Scodel insists that the Stranger should not be taken as Plato’s spokesman, because Plato is critical of him. Like Scodel, I shall argue that Plato uses the contrast between Socrates and the Stranger to bring out the limitations of the Stranger’s position. But, unlike Scodel, I also think that Plato uses the Stranger to criticize Socrates.

² In other words, the Eleatic employs what Michael Frede calls “didactic dialogue,” which he explicitly contrasts with the Socratic elenchus. See his “Plato’s Arguments and the Dialogue Form,” *Methods of Interpreting Plato and His Dialogues*, James C. Klagge and Nicholas D. Smith, ed (Oxford: Clarendon

Press, 1992), pp. 203-4. Frede observes that “the dialogue, unlike a treatise, is a piece of fiction in which the characters ... are made to advance an argument.” Frede believes that Plato’s “sympathies lie with the questioner of the dialogue, usually Socrates, but sometimes an obviously fictitious figure like Timaeus, the Eleatic Stranger, or the Athenian of the *Laws*. But . . . it is by no means clear . . . that [Plato] fully identifies himself with them” (p. 204). Frede takes no further account of the differences in Plato’s “questioners”, however, and the analysis of the particular kind of question and answer argumentation he presents is based on the Socratic elenchus. It does not describe Timaeus’ long speech or the kind of leading questions the Eleatic poses to his young interlocutors, instead of giving a long speech. The Eleatic’s questions are not primarily designed, like the Socratic elenchus, to make his interlocutors examine their own opinions; they are merely a convenient way of putting forth his own argument.

³ One, if not the most important effect of “young” Socrates becoming the interlocutor in the *Statesman* is that when the Eleatic addresses “Socrates,” it is usually not clear whether he is addressing simply the younger or also (and perhaps even primarily) the older Socrates, who is sitting and listening.

⁴ In the *Theaetetus* (180e-181a) Socrates points out that both he and the mathematicians (who dealt with purely intelligible concepts like number, point, and line) were caught in between those who taught that everything was in flux and those who argued that everything was one, the same, and hence motionless.

⁵Cf. Catherine Zuckert, “Plato’s *Parmenides*—A Dramatic Reading,” *Review of Metaphysics* 51 (June 1998): 840-71. Socrates first promulgates this thesis in his conversation as a young man of twenty with the elder Eleatic in *Parmenides* 128e-130a, reiterates it in the *Republic* 479a-e, and presents it as a “hypothesis” on his deathbed in the *Phaedo* 100b-e. In the *Philebus* 15a-b he says that disagreement about this question is the source of the greatest perplexity (*aporia*).

⁶Socrates makes a similar suggestion in the *Philebus* (17b-18d) when he observes that sound must be broken into distinct parts that can be put together again in specified combinations in order to become or be intelligible as speech or music. In these cases, as in the case of the Stranger, the divisions and the phenomena do not have to be eternal in order to be known. In Plato’s account of Socrates’ conversation with Parmenides, the elder Eleatic also seems to agree that such distinctions are needed (contrary to some readings of his poem), when he says (135b-c) that something like Socrates’ argument about the ideas is necessary, for philosophy to be possible. It is not clear in the dialogue how this claim is related to Parmenides’ critique of Socrates’ suggestions about the ways in which sensible things might be thought to participate in the eternal ideas or his own “gymnastic” demonstration of the consequences, first, of maintaining that one is, and, then, that one is not. Kenneth Sayre, *Plato’s Parmenides* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), and Mitchell Miller, Jr., *Plato’s Parmenides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) have both presented careful readings of the dialogue that show the steps of Parmenides’ argument or demonstration logically follow from one another. They conclude, therefore, that the upshot of the demonstration is not the aporetic contradiction or impasse it appears to be, i.e., that in a sophisticated way Parmenides argues that being both is and is not, one.

⁷ In *Method*, pp. 16-17, Lane argues that the meaning of *eidos* in the *Sophist* is so different from its meaning in “middle” dialogues like *Republic* or *Phaedo* that it should not to be translated with the same word, i.e., idea or form.

⁸ Because the Stranger does not criticize the “improved” version of the materialist understanding of being as the power of affecting or being affected the way he does the more precise doctrines which maintain that being is one, two or three and the “friends of the forms,” some readers think he subscribes to an understanding of being as power (*dunamis*), particularly because he begins his first example of *diaeresis* by dividing those who have an “art” (*technê*) from those who do not, but have some other power. (Cf. Rosen, *Sophist*, pp. 93, 101). The Stranger does not say that everything or all attributes are “powers,” however. In his subsequent discussion of being, he can simply remind Theaetetus that the claims that everything is in motion deprives everything of intelligibility, because he probably knows from their account of the

conversation Socrates had with Theaetetus the previous day (and, in any case, Plato's readers know) that Socrates has already shown the difficulties with the "improved" or "sophisticated" form of this thesis (even though the exchange in the *Sophist* also shows that Theaetetus has not remembered or absorbed Socrates' argument).

⁹ Neither *eros* nor *thumos* appears in the *Statesman*. In the *Sophist*, the Stranger contrasts the sophist with lovers who give their speeches and gifts freely to the youths they want to attract (and so for a time distinguishes Socrates from the sophists). Otherwise, the Stranger does not speak about *eros* or *thumos*, e.g., the *thumos* sophists aroused in Athenian "statesmen" like Anytus.

¹⁰ I exclude Gorgias and Thrasymachus, often included among the "sophists," because they claimed and were known particularly for their teaching of "rhetoric" as opposed to "sophistry," especially as defined and exemplified in these other dialogues.

¹¹ We do not see Socrates questioning Prodicus, with whom Aristophanes particularly associates Socrates himself as a sophist in *Clouds* (l. 360). Socrates refers to Prodicus' emphasis on the precise definition and use of words in several dialogues, and in the *Protagoras* he is said to have a circle of students around him the way Protagoras and Hippias do. By referring to his fifty-drachma exhibition in the *Cratylus* (384 b), Socrates shows that Prodicus also charged a fee.

¹² Pressed about the reasons anyone would want to attain political pre-eminence and position, these sophists concede that they teach their students how to maximize their pleasure—especially the pleasure human beings experience in feeling superior to others—with a minimum of pain (especially the pain involved in learning many difficult things). In the *Protagoras* (358a) all the assembled sophists agree that they teach such calculations. In the *Hippias Major* Hippias insists from beginning to end that he himself seeks to please his audience by describing models of human virtue or pre-eminence as conventionally understood for them to emulate. In the *Hippias Minor* Socrates shows that Hippias' own vaunting of his own comprehensive knowledge contradicts the conventional belief, to which Hippias also claims to subscribe, that Achilles is superior to Odysseus because the former is simple and honest, whereas the latter is crafty and knowledgeable, but devious. In the *Euthydemus* Socrates not only reports the brothers' insistence that they teach the only art necessary to make human beings virtuous and superior; he also shows how the students of the brothers take pleasure in—they laugh and applaud—their teachers' ability to best others in argument.

¹³ Both Scodel, *Diaeresis*, pp. 40-43, and R. S. H. Bluck, *Plato's Sophist* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 40-46, point out the contrast between Socrates' definition of sophistry and the Stranger's definitions in the *Sophist*, but neither identifies the centrality of knowledge of the good for Socrates, as opposed to the Stranger.

¹⁴ The complexity of the descriptions of the sophist as a seller as well as a producer have led commentators (as well as Theaetetus and the Stranger) to disagree about how many definitions of the sophist the Stranger actually offers, as well as what exactly those individual definitions are. The diagram in Howland, *Paradox*, p. 195, is particularly helpful in showing the causes or places in which the confusion occurs.

¹⁵ The "gist" of his brief and perforce incomplete, if not inadequate argument is: just as being is broken up into and yet constituted by different kinds, some of which combine with one another, whereas others do not, and words can be broken up into letters and yet are composed of them, some able to combine and some not, so *logos* is constituted by combinations of different kinds of words, names and verbs, some of which can be combined and thus produce true statements whereas others cannot. If the latter are nevertheless put together, they produce false, if not nonsensical propositions.

¹⁶ In the course of their seeking the sophist, the Stranger remarks at a certain point (253c) that they seem to have found the philosopher instead. The philosopher as the Stranger defines him has a science

(*epistêmê*)—perhaps the greatest—called “*dialektikê*.” This science consists in the “art” (the ‘ikê’ suffix suggests) of dividing things according to their class (*eidos*). Someone who has this ability (or power, *dunatos*) can perceive the one idea that extends through many things separately situated, the many such ideas that differ from one another and yet are included in one, the one that arises from the combination of many such wholes, and the many ideas that exist completely apart and separate from one another. So described, the Stranger’s understanding of dialectics and thus of philosophy bears the same name and initially looks very much like the peak of the education of the philosopher Socrates describes in the *Republic* (531d-534c). As in their respective conceptions of the *eidê* and the two different kinds of “sorting” they practice, however, Socrates and the Stranger prove to have different understandings of dialectics. According to Socrates, a person learns how to philosophize by gradually moving up the “divided line” from looking at reflections or images of sensible things to the things themselves, and then from these “things,” which are always changing and becoming, to the arts or “sciences,” which enable us to recognize and understand sensible things as embodiments of intelligible types and principles, finally to examine the purely intelligible concepts and assumptions upon which these “sciences” (which are not properly so called) are based. But, Socrates insists, such a person or movement should not be called dialectical “unless he [or it] is able to separate out the idea of the good from all other things” (534b). Neither naming nor apparently recognizing a supreme “idea of the good” among the “greatest *eidê*,” the Stranger does not identify *dialektikê* with the ability to isolate and give an account of the “idea of the good.” As a result, he does not sort and thus define things, as Socrates does, according to whether they are better or worse. He separates like from like by determining whether and the extent to which they are same and different. Rather than posit the “idea of the Good” as the highest and most fundamental source (*archê*) of both being and intelligibility like Socrates, the Stranger treats “being” as the most comprehensive “kind” (*eidos*) that can be defined and so understood only as differentiated into one and many.

¹⁷ Translations are taken from Seth Benardete, *Plato’s Statesman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

¹⁸ The Stranger obviously disagrees with Aristotle who begins his *Politics* (1252a7-23) by maintaining that kings, statesmen, household managers and slave masters do not differ merely in the number of people they rule. According to Aristotle, these four kinds of rule constitute different kinds of relations, “partnerships” or associations (*koinoniai*).

¹⁹ Miller’s discussion of the sources in *Statesman*, pp. 40-48, is extremely useful.

²⁰ Scott R. Hemmenway, “Pedagogy in the Myth of Plato’s *Statesman*,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 11, 3 (July 1994): 253-68 also emphasizes the pedagogical purpose of the myth. Hemmenway sees it primarily as a means of turning the attention of a young (and I would add wealthy) mathematician’s attention to the needs of the body (or, I would say self-preservation).

²¹ Christopher Rowe warns readers against taking the myth as “serious history or cosmology” in “The *Politicus*: Structure and Form,” *Form and Argument in Late Plato*, ed. Christopher Gill and Mary Margaret McCabe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 160, n. 17.

²² Like Socrates and Timaeus, the Eleatic Stranger begins by emphasizing that only the divine is eternal and unchanging. Because the heavens and the cosmos are visible and thus bodily, they are neither eternal nor perfectly intelligible. No human being could be present or know their origin. Like Socrates (or Er) in the *Republic* and Timaeus, the Eleatic thus presents his account of the cosmos and its motion explicitly as a “myth.” Socrates and Timaeus also observe that heavenly bodies move in opposite directions, but they depict these contrary movements occurring simultaneously as part of a beautiful, intelligible order they call good. Like the Athenian Stranger, the Eleatic Stranger suggests that the two kinds of motion remain in opposition. But, in dramatic contrast to the Athenian, who associates the orderly intelligible motion of the heavens with the gods and urges human beings to ally themselves with them in opposing the disorderly motion of the bad soul, the Eleatic sketches a two or three part development that culminates in a godless

universe—at the very least one in which the gods do not directly care for or take part in human affairs. Cf. Andrea Nightingale, “Plato on the Origins of Evil: The *Statesman* Myth Reconsidered,” *Ancient Philosophy* 16 (1996): 65-83.

²³ In both his account of the “Myth of the Reversed Cosmos,” *The Quarrel Between Philosophy and Poetry* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 68-77, and *Web*, pp. 40-63, Rosen persuasively argues that the previous eras represent different aspects of our current existence. The Stranger says that the cosmos now contains beautiful things from its divine origin, but he also emphasizes that it is not entirely beautiful or friendly to human beings.

²⁴ Because she takes the Stranger’s reference to these storied gifts to mean that the Olympian gods are present, even though the Stranger says that the god has departed in the “age of Zeus” and left both cosmos and humans to rule (*autokrator*) or take care of themselves, and she herself emphasizes the non-mythical, non-traditional character of the Stranger’s story, Lane, *Method*, pp. 108-14, understates the Stranger’s impiety. She also fails to see the fundamental reason the arts, especially the political arts, are necessary.

²⁵ Charles L. Griswold, “*Politikê Epistêmê* in Plato’s *Statesman*,” in John Anton and Anthony Preus, ed., *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989), Vol. 3, notes “a fundamental difference between the ES’s cosmology and that of Socrates . . . as well as a striking difference between their respective notions of political science and dialectic” (p. 150).

²⁶ In *Plato’s Statesman*, 2nd ed. (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1952), J. B. Skemp points out that “the *Timaeus* tries to give us a fully consistent cosmology in which astronomical facts have a supreme significance, whereas the *Politicus* uses for didactic purposes the notion of a periodic cosmic reversal which no astronomer could accept and which would be inconsistent even with the earlier half-mythical astronomy of the myth of Er in *Republic* X. Yet once the impossible ‘reversal of rotation’ is tolerated, the *Politicus* account seems to do less violence to observed facts than the *Timaeus* does—for the basic principle that reason causes circular physical movement leads in the *Timaeus* to extraordinary psychological and physiological conclusions” (p. 89).

²⁷ As both Lane, *Method*, p. 138, and Mary Louise Gill, “Models in Plato’s *Statesman*,” point out, the Eleatic’s understanding of “paradigms” is as different from Socrates’ as his understanding of the ideas. In the *Republic* Socrates treats the ideas themselves as the intelligible paradigms of which sensible things are imitations or embodiments. The Eleatic’s paradigms are, on the contrary, simpler forms of activity in which the component parts have the same relation to each other as the parts of the more complicated activity do to each other and the work (*ergon*), even though both the parts and the *erga* are different.

²⁸ Thucydides presents such an account in the so-called “archeology” at the beginning of his *History*.

²⁹ I disagree, therefore, with Rosen when he declares that “weaving is . . . also defective as a paradigm . . . because it is a peaceful, feminine art of the household” (*Web*, p. 153). Cf. Lane, *Method*, pp. 164-71, who points out the use of weaving as a metaphor for politics in Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*.

³⁰ Cf. Christopher Rowe, “Introduction,” *Reading the Statesman: Proceedings of the III Symposium Platonicum* (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 1995), p. 14.

³¹ Rosen’s discussion of the two kinds of measure in *Web*, pp. 123-25, is extremely useful.

³² Because the softness or toughness of the fiber used to make a cloak would appear to depend on its purpose, protecting people from the natural elements, commentators like Rosen have identified the mean with the purpose of the art in question. The Stranger does not define arts in terms of their ends (*telê*), however; he speaks instead about their work or function (*ergon*). He does not, therefore, talk about purposes or ends in this passage. Although ends and functions may appear to be very similar so long as we

are talking about things, human purposes have to be intentional whereas functions do not. It is possible to determine how something functions simply by observing it; to determine what a person's purpose is, however, it is necessary to talk to him. Unlike functions or deeds (*erga*), purposes are not visible. The Stranger's description of the mean as the measure of what is fitting, opportune, or needful sounds a great deal like Aristotle's definition of the moral virtues in terms of the mean. Because the Stranger's definition of the mean as the fitting, opportune, and needful sounds, in particular, like Aristotle's definition of practical wisdom, as knowing the right thing to do, in the right way, at the right time, by the right person, commentators like Rosen have taken the Stranger's description of the mean to refer to the prudence a statesman must possess. (Cf. *Web*, pp. 125-26). As Rosen admits, however, the Stranger does not mention *phronesis* in this passage any more than he does *telos*. Although the Stranger says that good and bad people differ primarily in exceeding or falling short of the mean (283e), he does not propose the mean as a measure of human character or virtue. He introduces it as the kind of measure that has to be used in the productive arts more generally, those which fabricate things as well as those which form or educate human beings.

³³ As Benardete, *Statesman*, p. 116, points out, the "precise itself" looks like the "good in itself." Jacob Klein, *Plato's Trilogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 175, identifies them, and thus argues, p. 177, that the Eleatic's statesman must be a philosopher. The Stranger does not explain "the precise itself" any more than Socrates explained the "good in itself." The precise obviously does not have the moral connotations of the good, however. Nor are the reasons the two philosophers give for their failure to explain the primary and most important "thing" the same. Whereas Socrates tells Glaucon that he cannot even state his opinion about the good in a way the young man could understand, the Stranger tells young Socrates that it would take too long to explain the precise itself. He postpones the explanation; he does not indicate that such an explanation cannot be given or that he himself could not give it. Contrary to Klein's inference, the Eleatic never says that a statesman needs to know the precise in itself. He thinks they can specify what a statesman knows without giving the lengthy argument necessary to explain the precise itself.

³⁴ In "Killing Socrates," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 121 (2001): 63-76, Christopher Rowe refuses to accept this conclusion, although he admits the dialogue points in this direction, because he thinks such a reading would amount to saying "Plato" not merely accepted, but condoned the killing of Socrates by Athens. To minimize the conflict between law and philosophy he translates 300a1-7 to mandate obedience only to the laws set down by the true statesman. Even these laws would become inappropriate over time in changing circumstances, however. There is no way out of the division the Stranger has stressed between the rule of knowledge and law. I am arguing that it is not "Plato" but his Eleatic Stranger who is speaking. "Plato" presents Socrates' defense of himself from this and other charges in the dialogues that dramatically follow the *Statesman*. By juxtaposing them, Plato dramatizes the problematic relation between philosophy and politics for his readers. Rowe is on firmer ground when he observes that lawless regimes can last as well as law-abiding ones, and contra Griswold and Roochnik that the Stranger explicitly says that the best of the lesser regimes is a law-abiding monarch, not democracy.

³⁵ Many commentators believe that the *Apology* was written early, the *Sophist* and *Statesman* late. As noted above, this "chronology of composition" has been seriously questioned of late. But, whenever Plato wrote the dialogues, by setting the conversations with the Eleatic right before Socrates' trial, Plato suggested that his readers should imagine the *Sophist* and *Statesman* as having occurred right before Socrates presented his defense in the *Apology*.

³⁶ Cf. *Symposium* 177e; *Phaedrus* 257a.