Myth, Metaphysics and Dialectic in Plato's *Statesman*

David A. White

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Preface

Plato's late dialogue, the *Statesman*, has enjoyed a Renaissance of recent scholarship. Several new translations, with commentary, as well as a number of book-length interpretations—with widely diverse conclusions—have added to understanding this seemingly eccentric yet intriguing work. The present study approaches the *Statesman* based on the conviction that its imaginative myth of the reversed cosmos is indispensable to the teaching of the dialogue and that this teaching is primarily aporetic—intentionally leading its students into realizing the need for further reflection rather than presenting substantive doctrine. To analyze such a complex work from this direction suggests a Preface devoted to preliminary remarks orienting the reader for what follows.

The primary interpretive assumption is that the dialogue stands as a unified narrative whole. This may seem too self-evident to mention; however, if Plato organized the dialogue to make a point or series of points, then the structure of the dialogue, distinctive in its narrative twists and turns, should be in full view as a prerequisite for appreciating the lessons thus taught. In sum, the dialogue should be assumed to display a unity such that all its elements, however disjoint they may appear when juxtaposed with one another, also constitute a narrative and philosophical unity.

The Introduction to this work previews the approach taken toward the dialogue as a unified whole by describing its primary structural features. Attention is directed toward the inchoate status of philosophy as depicted in the *Statesman* in conjunction with the fact that the dialogue explicitly registers a comprehensive account of reality and incorporates this perspective in various ways throughout the dialectical discussion. The dialogue, constituted entirely by exchanges between an Eleatic Stranger and a youthful namesake of Socrates, is also marked by circular structure in terms of dialectical results with, it is argued, significant consequences for understanding the purpose of the dialogue. The Stranger's decidedly checkered progress as a philosopher is sketched and implications from this dramatic detail are noted in conjunction with the implied directive, voiced in general terms by young Socrates, to continue inquiring into the nature of statecraft beyond the letter of that account finally established in the dialogue proper.

Although the Platonic dialogues contain many examples of sustained discussion justifying the conviction that Plato is a rationalist, a number of the most powerful and far-seeing dialogues also include myths—*Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, and *Statesman*. The Introduction discusses the location of the myth within the narrative structure of the *Statesman* as well as the myth's concern to articulate aspects of the cosmos, an articulation with explicit and implied consequences for the systematic grasp of the full range of reality. The understated but essential function of the Good is sketched in its relation to knowledge and also with respect to a series of

anticipations detailing the importance of the Good in art, psychology and education. The Introduction concludes by reviewing several strategies of interpretation for analyzing such a complex work.

The Introduction prepares a setting for developing the structure of reality so that the subsequent Chapters (1–5), reviewing the dialogue as narrated, can be appreciated from this interpretive dimension. The purpose of this commentary is twofold: (a) to emphasize the subtle yet sustained concern for what, in contemporary terminology perhaps alien to the spirit of the Platonic dialogues, would be classified as metaphysical considerations; (b) to indicate numerous moments when the dialogue involves itself in situations, both dramatic and dialectical, culminating in a series of fundamentally aporetic positions. Chapter 6 establishes an essential transitional analysis by demonstrating the close affinity between the aporetic character of the *Statesman* and the complex and diversified account of the Good in the *Philebus*. Chapter 7 then develops dominant themes of the *Philebus* sketched in Chapter 6—highlighted by the quest to identify or at least approximate the Good—in order to detail the aporetic range of the *Statesman*. As a result, the *Statesman* may be understood as primarily an aporetic exercise, drawing on lines of thought concerning fundamental concepts and questions in metaphysics which originated in the *Phaedrus* and *Parmenides* and extended themes fundamental to the *Phaedo* and *Republic*. The aporetic character of the dialogue is such that the interpretation presented here does not comment on possible implications for Plato's later political theory derived from the position on that subject explored by the Stranger. However, an Epilogue reviews the main lines of argument in the *Laws*, Plato's final dialogue on political matters, consolidating methodological and metaphysical elements developed in that epic work which reinforce the aporetic character of political positions evinced in the *Statesman*.

If the argument in this study is given a hearing, the *Statesman* emerges as a seminal document in a reoriented approach toward crucial metaphysical issues—the status of Forms, the relation between Forms and particulars, and, most vitally, the need for an articulated yet necessarily provisional account of the Good as underlying and animating the philosophical concerns of the later Plato.

The more study afforded the *Statesman*, the more evident becomes the remarkable tightness and rigor with which the dialogue was constructed. One also discerns, although not without concerted effort, the profundity of the work from the standpoint of metaphysical insight and the inherent link to methods requisite for voicing that insight. The *Statesman* has been dismissed by some students as dull and diffuse in design and execution. I have another view entirely. My hope is that this commentary will not only explain and justify the admiration and respect which should be accorded the work in these regards, but also, and more importantly, offer a glimpse into the dialogue's remarkable metaphysical vision.

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The translation of texts from the *Statesman* is based on H. N. Fowler's Loeb Edition, although the more recent translations by Robin Waterfield and Christopher Rowe have been consulted. I have modified existing translations when necessary. Also reviewed was D. Robinson's discussion of the new Oxford Text of the *Statesman* (a discussion appearing in the anthology *Reading the Statesman*).

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Introduction

The *Statesman* and Metaphysics

The Question of Structure

No special insight into the later Platonic corpus is won by asserting that the *Statesman* is a perplexing dialogue. In this regard, two facts about its structure stand out: first, Socrates speaks, as he does in the *Sophist*, but only in a cameo appearance; the dramatic and argumentative action is directed by another character, an Eleatic Stranger—devoted to philosophy—who converses with a youthful namesake of Socrates. Second, some steps in the activity of dialectic are flawed, but flaws introduced by intent since the dialogue explicitly seeks to rectify earlier missteps made by the Stranger and his respondent. If, however, other errors or discrepancies remain seemingly unremedied, then either the dialogue is inherently flawed or these features are, presumably, integral to its structure. These structural characteristics may then be aporetic, intentionally producing blockages in thinking and therefore inviting members of the Academy as well as modern readers to investigate statecraft in more philosophically appropriate directions. A third fact should also be noted—an extended exercise in dialectic at the beginning of the dialogue occurs immediately prior to an equivalently extensive myth. This complex narrative depicts the origin and structure of the cosmos defined by counter-rotating cycles and a reversal of the aging process during one of those cycles. The Stranger announces to young Socrates that this myth will afford them "entertainment," a description which could mean that some, perhaps all, of the myth has not been seriously tendered with respect to the substantive philosophical issues arising elsewhere in the dialogue. If so, however, then why is the myth there at all? But this description could also mean that each and every element in the myth is indeed relevant to these issues, yet only to a limited degree. In other words, the myth will direct attention to problematic areas and elicit or "entertain" responses to these problems, but only in an imagistic or indirect way and thus without the precision and dialectical rigor that could be expected from a more technically discursive account.

The significance of the myth in the *Statesman* becomes evident if the structure of the dialogue is arranged as follows: the initial problem is defining the statesman—(a) a dialectical account of what the myth later reveals as a form of divine rule is used, erroneously as it turns out, to define by the method of division the nature of the statesman; (b) the myth is told as the fundamental principle grounding subsequent discussion concerning the nature of the statesman, including all divisions describing that nature; (c) a definition of the statesman is eventually produced which young Socrates proclaims to be complete. According to this schematic, the myth becomes the pivot of the entire dialogue—the divisions leading to it are faulty, the divisions following it are secure, or at least more secure than those occurring prior to the myth.

If therefore the myth is central to the soundness of the applied methodology of the dialogue, it should be possible to indicate, even only in outline, how the myth has been so deployed.

If Plato constructed the *Statesman* with the same attention to internal unity and coherence marking the great middle period dialogues, then any interpretation doing justice to the full complexity of the *Statesman* must address these three facts and show, to use an apt image, how they are woven into one dramatic and philosophical whole. However, such a task is even more daunting given that the manifest concern for dialectical method in the dialogue is mirrored by a comprehensive, if intermittently developed, interlacing of metaphysical elements marked by considerable generality. This dimension of generality may be situated thus: the *Sophist* concerns the definition of the sophist; the *Statesman* essays the definition of the statesman. But the two dialogues also force attention on the method requisite for securing these definitions. Furthermore, the chief protagonist of both dialogues is not Socrates, schooled in and (presumably) sympathetic to Platonic modes of thought, but an unnamed Eleatic visitor, a Stranger who also happens to be a philosopher. This Stranger, it may be assumed, is imbued with Eleatic principles; as such, he may or may not be sympathetic to a purely Platonic position. However, as both Eleatic and philosopher, he has had considerable practice with terms of wide generality—he is educated, in modern parlance, in the lofty subtlety of metaphysical discourse.

The Quest for Philosophy

The myth in the *Statesman* asserts that philosophy is essential for human happiness (272c–d). However, nowhere in the myth—nor, indeed, anywhere in the dialogue—is philosophy clearly defined or even characterized. An interpretation of the *Statesman* should therefore, if possible, at least sketch from the dialogue itself what the pursuit of philosophy entails. For until the nature of philosophy—its method (if any) and function—is specified or even merely approximated, it is not possible to determine whether the dialogue's promise of human happiness resulting from philosophy can be realized.

At 285d, the Stranger asks young Socrates whether their investigation of statecraft has been undertaken just for the sake of this subject or to make them "better dialecticians" concerning all things. Young Socrates responds that clearly this investigation is being pursued for the sake of all such issues. This exchange suggests that however important defining the statesman may be, it is even more important to be certain about procedures employed in securing this definition in order to be capable of applying these procedures to matters of equivalent, perhaps even greater, import. These procedures should also be used, presumably, in defining the philosopher, since securing this definition was posed at the beginning of the dialogue as a problem waiting to be addressed (257a). However, an intriguing version of the paradox of inquiry appears to emerge for this object of investigation—how can one define the philosopher without already knowing what philosophy itself is? For if definitions of sophist (specified in the dialogue preceding the *Statesman*) and statesman (about to be addressed) are philosophically correct, then it is surely idle to

define the philosopher, since naming and defining realities other than the philosopher would display, through the very process of securing those definitions, precisely what the philosopher is and does.

Furthermore, what standards could measure a definition of the philosopher? For whatever processes controlled deriving this definition must surely be identical to the processes indicated in the definition proper—a quixotic instance of self-reference on the move, as it were. Thus, it would seem inconsistent to define the philosopher as, for example, "seeker after truth using the method of collection and division," without using that very method to produce this definition. In short, if philosophy requires a method, then consistency entails that this very method be used in defining philosophy itself. For if this method were not used, there would be no reason to believe that the conclusion, if offered as a definition of philosophy, had been secured with due philosophical correctness. As a result, the *Statesman* poses a problem in definition which, given the comprehensive scope of the method for securing that definition, requires that philosophy itself be examined as a prerequisite for determining and evaluating the definitions of activities—for example, statecraft—other than philosophy. Thus interpreting the *Statesman* entails reflecting on the nature of philosophy[1] while concurrently attempting to analyze the nature of the statesman by at least plausibly effective philosophical means.

The Range of Reality in the *Statesman*

The question of structure and the problematic nature of philosophy must also be considered in relation to the types of reality animating the dialogue. A brief representation of the expansive content of the *Statesman* will indicate, in broad measure, the boundaries of these metaphysical concerns:

Forms

The dialogue refers to realities characterized by immutability, eternity, and incorporeality (269d). It appears that these realities are Forms, although the Stranger never explicitly names them *as* Forms. The Stranger is not reticent, however, to introduce language typically denoting Forms—εἶδος, ἰδέα, γένος. In one case, however, an *idean* is said to have been produced (308c), but the eternity of Forms entails that no Form can have an origin. Also, the realities referred to by these terms are divisible into parts (262b), but whether Forms, canonically understood, possess a type of unity which admits of parts is not clear. Furthermore, some of these realities are spoken of as if they were merely heuristic (262b–c). Finally, the realities are deployed (in discussions concerning paradigms) in ways strongly suggesting that they differ from one another by degree (277d; 278e). Thus, in the hands of the Stranger, the Forms—if, indeed, he intends Platonic Forms—appear to behave quite differently than they typically do when Socrates employs them.[2]

Gods

The gods play a critical role in the *Statesman*, although most of what is said about them occurs in the myth. A kind of demiurge, divine in nature, establishes order in the cosmos (273b–d). Then, once the cosmos is ordered, the gods exercise various supervisory and dispensatory functions with respect to other forms of life (271d–e).

Two metaphysical characterizations of deity should be noted. First, a hierarchy exists among the gods, with some deities more powerful and influential than others (271d). Second, the cosmos is so ordered that one of its cycles of rotation runs counter to that given to it by the demiurge (269c–d), implying that forces exist in the universe superceding those fashioned by divine station.

Cosmos

The cosmos, understood as an ordered unity, displays beauty and goodness bestowed by a divine creator, or more literally, by a producer of harmony (273b–d). Furthermore, the cosmos is alive (269d), in continuous motion (270a), constituted in part by a corporeal principle (273b), and subject to "destiny" in its manner of rotation and in the consequences of this destined variation (272e). These assertions concerning the cosmos must cohere with the metaphysics explicitly developed in the dialogue.

Natures

Cognition of entities in the world depends, in part, on the structure of these entities. The Stranger frequently appeals to "natures" (for example, 259d, 260c7, 265b) of entities, presumably a sort of whole of parts. To affirm that a thing has a nature presupposes the relevance and importance of unity, since a whole of parts will not cohere as a whole unless unity underlies that configuration. How then to determine the relation between natures and Forms? Furthermore, if individual entities are defined by exemplifying natures, then the order of the cosmos understood as the sum total of individuals is, in effect, an ensemble of natures formally intertwining with one another as natures.

Particulars

The dialogue primarily concerns definition, and therefore types rather than individual particulars. But there is concerted if subtle interest in appearances and also resemblances (286a–b). These resemblances are relations between particulars, not between realities of which particulars are instances. Also, one of the Stranger's divisions is justified on the grounds that it produces distributive equality, that is, an equal number of individuals of two distinct types (262e). Finally, the Stranger argues against the relevance of law because it cannot attend to the goodness of individual persons, since their lives undergo incessant change (294b). The concern for particulars is evident, but in contexts including both plurality and the unity inherent in individual natures.

Matter

Matter, referring to that type of being proper to bodies (typically the material element of living bodies), appears in the myth as an essential element in forming the cosmos. Matter is connected with change (269e) and is also the source of disorder, if not impending chaos (273b).

Measure

Measure is characterized as the mean between extremes (284e), as a woven cloak embodies the mean between extremes of the cloth's warp and woof from which that cloak is woven. Furthermore, measure is a necessary condition for the existence of anything produced by art, τέχνη (283d). Since statecraft is an art (258e, 259b and *passim*), measure becomes crucial as underlying a possible definition of statecraft. In this regard, measure must be examined in relation to Forms.

As noted, this array of metaphysical elements and terminology is remarkable for its breadth and diversity. Since this concern pervades the dialogue, a sustained inquiry into the metaphysical doctrines and positions introduced and developed in the *Statesman* is at least warranted, if not required, in order to clarify the relation between metaphysics and the adventure of philosophy itself.[3] Furthermore, the myth in the *Statesman* plays an essential role in all phases of this study.

The Circular Structure of the *Statesman*

The point of the *Statesman* seems obvious—to define the subject of its title, the statesman. This goal is stated at the beginning of the dialogue and the discussants, the Stranger and young Socrates, relentlessly if not courageously pursue this definition throughout the work. Once the definition has finally been secured, the dialogue abruptly concludes. These structural facts, although evident and readily stated, conceal the internal philosophical drama of the dialogue. The *Statesman* has been perceived as structurally amorphous, thus lacking the formal fineness of its middle period predecessors. However, adopting a certain interpretive perspective reveals an organizational strategy in the dialogue which exhibits a remarkable blend of philosophical imagination, narrative rigor and theoretical expansiveness.

The myth in the *Statesman* describes a cosmos eternally rotating through alternately opposed cycles. The movement of dialectic within the dialogue mirrors this circular motion. The initial exercise of dialectic concludes, unwittingly and apparently mistakenly, with an account of a statesman who is, as attested to by the myth, in fact a god (275a). However, at 275c, the Stranger alerts young Socrates to the possibility that the exponent of statecraft they have been seeking may just as much resemble the "divine shepherd" as a strictly human protagonist. Consequently, the Stranger insists that the *schema* of the statesman must be examined in order to determine whether the nature exhibited through that *schema* somehow shares in those properties ascribed to the divine ruler during the initial process of division. The Stranger introduces this possibility immediately after he indicates to young

Socrates why they have embarked on the myth and just before he begins the revised account of the statesman. Much later, at 305d, and after considerable dialectical exercise, the Stranger concludes that the "true" statesman "ought not to act itself," but rather should rule over arts that have the power of action. It turns out therefore that in these and other respects, the true statesman characterized at the conclusion of the dialogue closely resembles the divine ruler described in the initial division of the dialogue—both are intellectual (258d–e), directive (260b), and originary (260e). Thus the final version of statecraft appears to run full circle back to the beginning of inquiry into the nature of statecraft. How then has the Stranger advanced in his philosophical quest?[4]

The parallel between the divine shepherd at the beginning of dialectical proceedings and the true statesman at dialogue's end has been filtered through the teachings of the myth. Circular dialectic in the *Statesman* thus reflects the circularity characterizing the movement of the cosmos within which occur all exercises in dialectic. And it is the myth, the narration of the cosmic drama, which effectively differentiates the final definition of statecraft from the initial attempt; indeed, the Stranger explicitly asserts that the myth will clarify the nature of the king (269c). The myth thus serves as a pivot around which rotates the analysis of the statesman, an analysis which is circular in its seemingly errant introduction of but ultimate return to divinity as the locus of statecraft.

Another narrative parallel is relevant to the dialogue's structure. The final account of the true statesman (306a–311c) reverses the direction of analysis characterizing the myth—the former, the account driven by dialectic, proceeds *from* separated and unlike elements and various settings of fragmented multiplicity and opposed personalities *to* how the statesman weaves these elements so that they all harmoniously coexist. By contrast, the myth begins by depicting the harmonious interplay of natures within the cosmos but then shifts to its gradual disintegration, the cosmos dissolving from unity to the verge of chaotic difference with the degenerative process halted only by demiurgic intervention. The myth goes from unity to diversity; dialectic moves from diversity to unity. The reversed directions of these juxtaposed narratives thus mirror the two reversed directions of cosmic rotation described in the myth. Dialectic and myth are moving in opposite directions but ultimately toward the same goal—exhibiting the nature of the highest type of statesman available to the style of philosophical inquiry employed by the Stranger and young Socrates. Furthermore, these counter-rotating narrative cycles suggest an important conclusion about the movement of dialectic and myth working in sequence to define the statesman.

Upon careful scrutiny, it becomes evident that the true statesman imitates in practicing statecraft what the demiurge has achieved within the cosmos as a whole by blending opposites with respect to humanity as the primary resident of the cosmos. However, the demiurge effects a blended cosmos only by a stopgap measure. In the *Timaeus*, the Demiurge knows its powers and effectively executes them—as a result, the cosmos is fully and completely formed. If we then question why the Stranger's myth has the divine counterpart to the Demiurge complete only a partially unified cosmos, it may be suggested that either the demiurge's knowledge or power was in some sense lacking. Furthermore, if the activities of the true statesman are modeled after those of the mythic demiurge, then the true statesman's governance is commensurately incomplete, reflecting

the incompleteness with which the demiurge fashioned the cosmos. These structural considerations suggest that the point of the *Statesman* is to show that its account of the "true" statesman is in fact not complete and that this incompleteness depends on what the myth exhibits about the parallel activity of the demiurge. On this interpretation, the myth becomes just as central to the overall point of the dialogue, including the seemingly secure nature of statecraft, as are all its overtly dialectical sections.[5]

The Stranger as Philosopher

The Stranger develops a method of dialectic and the Stranger narrates the myth. Although the Stranger lays out a route toward the nature of the true statesman, he cannot define that nature in its completeness. The reason for this deficiency is that the Stranger remains essentially cut off from the requisite knowledge to discern and develop such an account. This concerted incompleteness is betokened by the overall philosophical performance of the Stranger, as the following survey demonstrates. The limits of the Stranger as a philosopher must be set in relief so that it becomes possible to move beyond the far-reaching but ultimately circular thinking displayed throughout the *Statesman*.

The leading philosophical protagonist in the *Statesman*, as in the *Sophist*, is a Stranger from Elea. After Socrates makes a brief introductory appearance and then retreats from the dialectical scene, the Stranger pursues the definition of the statesman through various discursive and narrative approaches. What was Plato trying to show by having Socrates appear at the beginning of the *Statesman* and promise to reappear (although, as it happens, not in the *Statesman* itself), then allowing a Stranger to develop every substantive philosophical position in the dialogue? Why has this "Stranger" advanced the principal positions in both *Sophist* and *Statesman*?

It is instructive to trace the path of the Stranger through the complex issues arising in this dialogue. How discriminating and rigorous is the Stranger when practicing dialectic? On balance, the Stranger's philosophical performance is checkered, and one does not know whether to be more impressed with his successes or concerned with his failures. At the beginning of the *Sophist*, the Stranger is described as "divine" (216b–c) in his pursuit of philosophy. However, if this epithet is double-edged, both honorific and descriptive as well as marking a limit of sorts, then although the Stranger has been set off from the many with respect to philosophical insight, he should not be taken as endowed with an unalloyed vision of the truth.

Here are the Stranger's apparent successes:

a. by continuing the approach initiated in the *Sophist*, he discerns the need for method in order to secure truth;
b. he recognizes the need for a correct methodological start when the method turns to the practice of division;
c. he appreciates the need to ground this correct start in an account—a mythical account, but perhaps mythic by necessity—concerned with the structure of the cosmos;
d. he realizes, gradually and with perhaps a measure of hesitance, the need to shift from division solely by dichotomy to division according to a thing's natural elements.

Consider also, however, the Stranger's philosophical misadventures:

e. his initial divisions are, by his own admission, erroneous—for example, he confuses a divine ruler for a human one—and incomplete, lacking in sufficient detail to be persuasive;
f. again by his own admission, he is uncertain how to formulate dialectical method;
i. precision in the differentiation division produces is lacking;
    ii. exhaustive division is stated as an ideal but without effective procedure for securing it,
    iii. the distinction between class and part, a distinction crucial to the accuracy of division, cannot be clarified,
    iv. paradigms, required to exhibit the nature of the most important realities, result in "true opinion"—not knowledge;
g. these methodological gaps are reflected in the underlying structure of the myth. Although the myth compels us to think about gods, the "most divine" realities (presumably Forms), natures and a principle of materiality, all these elements from a cosmic perspective, the myth as a whole lacks a principle of order unifying this complex diversity. In the terminology of the *Phaedrus* on rhetoric, the myth requires a cosmological and metaphysical "head" (264c). The *Statesman* myth lacks a fully informed vision of reality, a lack which affects not only what is said in the myth but also, more broadly, the entire methodology circumscribing the Stranger's attempt to define the statesman. In view of this decidedly uneven performance, it would be premature, perhaps even naive, to assume that the Eleatic Stranger is merely a Socratic mouthpiece or covert Platonist.

One potentially fruitful way to take the Stranger's divagations is to read them as if Plato wanted to speak through a Stranger because things which had been relatively clear to the Socrates of the middle period dialogues were clear no longer—that is, the philosophically familiar had become "strange", at least to a certain extent. Thus a Stranger, a philosopher explicitly identified as such who nonetheless remains unnamed throughout two protracted and complex dialogues, is introduced in order to initiate inquiries pointing toward destinations which glimmer in importance but are currently unattainable through a directly stated discursive format. In short, the *Statesman* is exploratory and provisional rather than a vehicle delivering straightforward Platonic doctrine.[6]

Art and the Necessity of Inquiry

At 299e–300a, young Socrates insists that if a law prohibited investigation of the arts, then the arts would be ruined and life, "which is hard enough now, would then become absolutely unendurable." This perceptive and fertile claim belies the youthful Socrates' philosophical inexperience.[7] If this claim is correct, then art will atrophy and ultimately wither away completely—without the possibility of being resurrected

by hopeful and needy humans—unless the arts are and, importantly, continue to be reinvigorated by continuous investigation of their fundamental principles. It also follows that the art of statecraft, however its structure has been determined in the *Statesman*, must be reexamined as well.

There are, in fact, additional reasons embedded in the argument of the *Statesman* entailing the need for such continued analysis. First, the definition of the art of statecraft and the account of what the true statesman does in virtue of this art are both explicitly based on paradigms. But paradigms deliver only "true opinion." If therefore knowledge is higher and more reliable than true opinion, then there is ample reason to reinvestigate what has been said about statecraft simply because its substance has not been rendered secure. Even if young Socrates had not asserted the continuous reexamination of art, the art of statecraft should be reexamined since its nature has been determined according to what, in canonic Platonic epistemology, is only a derivative degree of cognition. Second, the Stranger indicates that further inquiry into the structure of dialectic is required. These problematic aspects of method suggest, if not imply, that results obtained when applying an incompletely defined method may be equivalently incomplete. Thus even if the method of dialectic is not an art in the sense statecraft is, this method must also be subjected to additional inquiry in order to guarantee the reliability of the various collections and divisions producing the definition of statecraft. Furthermore, if dialectic is indeed an art, it follows that unless investigation of this art continues, then dialectic itself would wither and die, just as all other arts would if they were stringently and exclusively regulated by whatever present rules and practices dictated. In sum, there may be more, possibly much more, to learn about dialectic both as far as method itself is concerned and with respect to the objects of dialectic, including statecraft.

Myth and Totality

The implication for dialectic as formulated and practiced in the *Statesman* is that investigation into its principles must continue, regardless whether dialectic is directed at statecraft or any other reality. The most obvious source for additional study is the pivotal function of true opinion, that is, determining what must be done in order to achieve and solidify knowledge as an inherently superior type of cognition. The myth of the cosmos, in terms of content and placement in the dramatic structure of the *Statesman*, serves as the structural locus for formulating an approach toward realizing knowledge.

The fact that the Stranger delivers the myth without uttering a word concerning its origin or the source of its inspiration suggests that he alone is responsible for its content. If so, then it is important to realize that the myth is *cosmic* in scope. This spontaneous narration testifies to the depths of the Stranger's awareness of the fundamental importance of totality when the philosopher seeks definitions. It has somehow become clear to the Stranger that in order for dialectic to reorient itself concerning the definition of statecraft—a single definition, although admittedly of a crucial type of reality—it is essential not only to traverse an account affecting the substance of the entire cosmos but also to devise an explanation for the origin and

career of all living things as members of that totality, an explanation encompassing a diverse pantheon performing a variety of functions.

Realities which appear to be Forms are first mentioned in the myth. But why does the Stranger introduce the Forms in a myth, and in a fragmented and incomplete way? Recall the myth in the *Phaedrus.* That narrative depicts souls resting on the circular rim of the cosmos, looking "out" in order to experience *ta onta*, the realities—Forms—which guide knowledge and conduct of both mortals and deities (247d). The parallel emerging when the *Phaedrus* myth is juxtaposed with its counterpart in the *Statesman* is that the same kind of vision allowing the Stranger to account for the formation of the cosmos is essential so that the lover of wisdom "sees" those realities which must be beheld in order to produce knowledge. In other words, in order to define a reality as important as statecraft—and, by extension, any reality of equivalent or greater importance—the setting of the myth teaches that an appropriately fundamental perspective on that reality must be adopted. Thus a sense of totality must be in hand before any one dimension of or element in that totality can be approached epistemologically and properly described in its nature.

Plato inserts the myth where he does in the cycle of dialectical divisions to emphasize the need for such vision, with subsequent discussion bringing out more readily the implied presence of these realities. We may infer that if dialectic is pursued without the guidance of an appropriately fundamental level of reality, the results of dialectic will be circular and fail to achieve anything higher than true opinion. As things stand in the cosmos circumscribed by the narrative of the *Statesman*, no hope of breaking out of this circle is available, since according to the myth the two types of cosmic motion are eternal. The transition from true opinion to knowledge therefore requires some sort of fundamental transition, a leap outside the circularity of cosmic motion detailed in the myth and reflected in the dialogue's dialectical movement. This is not a philosophical leap which the Stranger ever feels confident to essay.

Knowledge and the Good

Stipulating, as the Stranger does, that true opinion is the highest degree of cognition that dialectic in conjunction with paradigms can achieve has crucial consequences for interpreting the metaphysics of the *Statesman.* The extent of these consequences—and a direction for future inquiry—may be derived by reviewing passages on related issues in other dialogues. These passages concern the connection between true opinion and knowledge.

Consider, for example, Socrates' assertion to Adimantus in *Republic* VI: "Have you not observed that opinions divorced from knowledge are ugly things? The best of them are blind. Or do you think that those who hold some true opinion without intelligence differ appreciably from blind men who go the right way?" Adimantus replies: "They do not differ at all" (506c). The *Timaeus* clarifies the connection between true belief and knowledge:

> If intelligence [νοῦς] and true belief [δόξα ἀληθής] are two different kinds, then these things—Forms that we cannot perceive but only think of—certainly exist in themselves; but if, as some hold, true belief in no way differs from intelligence, then all the things

> we perceive through the bodily senses must be taken as the most certain reality. Now we must affirm that they are two different things, for they are distinct in origin and unlike in nature. The one is produced in us by instruction, the other by persuasion; the one can always give a true account of itself, the other can give none; the one cannot be shaken by persuasion, whereas the other can be won over; and true belief, we must allow, is shared by all mankind, intelligence only by the gods and a small number of men (51d-e).

The *Republic* asserts that true opinion without intelligence is equivalent to the blind reaching their destination by dint of good fortune. True opinion is true, but it does not know why it is true and can therefore be readily dislodged. The *Timaeus* states a series of characteristics justifying this fundamental epistemological distinction—thus, immaterial Forms exist and are the proper object of intelligence. Furthermore, after Socrates compares true opinion with blindness in the *Republic*, he immediately (506d) begins his discussion of the Good, *to agathon*. This account discloses that the Good is essential not only in knowledge based on apprehending the Forms, but also in the existence of the Forms themselves (506e ff). Thus, according to *Republic* VI, the Good confers existence on the Forms (509b). In sum, true opinion is blind unless superceded by knowledge, knowledge requires Forms and Forms exist in a dependency relation on the Good.

What then must be added to objects of cognition in the *Statesman* to achieve the transition from true opinion to knowledge?[8]

Anticipations of the Good

In the *Republic* and to a lesser degree the *Phaedo*, the Good is fundamental to the existence of Forms. Since realities which appear to be Forms are only mentioned and not developed in the *Statesman*, it may seem obvious that the Good, *to agathon*, is not a part of the *Statesman*'s metaphysical framework. It is undeniable, however, that a determinate sense of the Good plays a variegated role in the *Statesman*. Describing these senses indicates the range the Good occupies in the *Statesman*. This dimension of the Good, cosmic in scope, remains incompletely characterized, although, as will become evident, such incompleteness is doubtless by design.

Art

At 293a, the Stranger refers to statecraft as an art, a *technē*. In this case, the art of statecraft blends certain types of human beings who possess true opinions concerning the good and the beautiful. More is said about these true opinions below (Chapter 7). However, the connection between art as such—any art—and the Good is even more intimate than this passage suggests. (Two different dimensions of the good are employed in this study, distinguished by upper-case and lower-case orthography. The Good, upper-case, represents the reality aporetically present to the argument of the *Statesman*, that is, a reality of singular metaphysical importance but requiring development—see Chapters 6 and 7 for additional analysis. The good, lower case, will be employed where "the good" appears in the dialogue without a palpable sense

that it is a privileged reality. Context, in addition to this orthographic device, will clarify which dimension is intended.)

In analyzing the two types of measurement identified in the dialogue—quantitative and mean (or "due" measure)—the Stranger insists that whenever arts preserve the standard of the mean, "all their works are good and beautiful." Unless establishing the standard of the mean is achieved, "neither the statesman nor any other man who has knowledge of practical affairs can be said without any doubt to exist" (284c). Therefore the art of statecraft requires the standard of the mean. It is also clear that if this or any art uses the standard of the mean, "good and beautiful" works of art result. If the philosopher, as statesman, has knowledge of practical affairs—for example, ethical conduct—then the philosopher also requires the standard of the mean. In fact, according to 284c, the existence of the philosopher depends on the existence of the standard of the mean. But this implication seems to presuppose the Forms as fully defined, since, at least according to the *Republic*, philosophers have Forms as the only proper object in their quest for knowledge. The juxtaposition of *Republic* and *Statesman* suggests an intimate relation between the standard of the mean and Forms.

That art is essentially directed at the good and the beautiful receives additional reinforcement later, and in a context bringing out another aspect of the importance of the Good. The Stranger has shown that when in the course of seeking the nature of statecraft we look for the "right kind of rule," we should do so "in one or two or very few men" (293a) because the many lack the requisite character and knowledge to fulfill this important function. When such an individual (or individuals) has been secured, he or she should exercise rule "according to some kind of art" and should do so whether those ruled are willing or unwilling to undergo the prescriptions laid down. The Stranger offers a parallel example—the physician, administering a cure whether or not patients agree to it as long as the physician "preserves them by making them better than they were" (293c). In the same way, as long as rulers through knowledge preserve the state "by making it better than it was" (293d), this, says the Stranger, is the only right form of government. In sum, the ultimate goal of these arts is making things better than they were—to approximate whatever is good for the subject of these arts. To affirm that the cosmos and each living thing in it are good and beautiful is not to say that a dimension of the Good exists equivalent in metaphysical stature to *to agathon* as developed in the *Republic*. Nor would improving an existing type of government necessarily entail that the Good underlies this improvement. However, the fact that goodness pervades the cosmos is *prima facie* reason to determine, if possible, whether other elements of the Good emerge in the *Statesman*.

Psychology

Toward the conclusion of the *Statesman*, the Stranger describes how the statesman emulates the weaver in composing the most appropriate type of citizen. First, he says, the statesman "binds the eternal part of their souls with a divine bond, to which that part is akin, and after the divine it binds the animal part of them with human bonds" (309c). A clear distinction exists between the eternal part of soul and parts of soul bound to it—the divine and, in due course, the human. The highest reality

explicitly mentioned in the *Statesman* is named "most divine" (269d), a type of reality characterized by immutability and immateriality. These properties pertain typically to Forms. But the Stranger has just asserted that the divine bond is "akin" to the immortal part, implying that the immortal part of soul remains distinct, although related to, the divine part. He then says that the divine is "true opinion" with respect to beauty, justice, good, and their opposites (309c).

The kinship between the divine and the eternal implies difference between them as well as a sameness or similarity. But if the divine part of soul circumscribes true opinion, then the eternal part of soul can be—perhaps must be—the receptacle of something cognitively higher than what is accessible to soul through its divine corridor. If therefore only knowledge is higher than true opinion, then the distinction between eternal and divine advanced in a psychological context points toward the possibility that soul has the capacity to know in the most complete sense. It also follows that the statesman does not function with this knowledge in hand since the direction provided by the only available type of statecraft is based on true opinion—not knowledge. But it should be possible to bind soul's eternal part to its divine and human parts by displaying that eternality instead of merely reflecting it through binding which represents a derivative degree of knowledge. This contrast between eternal and divine in a psychological context thus raises the possibility of investigating the relation between soul and knowledge, of which true opinion is only a reflection.

The Stranger has asserted that the divine includes true opinion concerning justice, beauty, goodness—and "their opposites." The Good, *to agathon* of the *Republic*, is apparently unique, that is, it lacks, and necessarily lacks, an opposite. Therefore this good is not equivalent to *to agathon*, since not only is it accessible through true opinion but it also has an opposite. In fact, no distinction in kind appears to obtain between the good and either beauty or justice—all are on a par metaphysically in that all exemplify the divine, that is, true opinion. Therefore if the eternal part of soul is "akin" to true opinion, then its proper objects must be akin to—but higher than—those "divine" objects grounding true opinion. At this level, justice, beauty and the good become Forms, along with the possibility that this Good—if equivalent to or even approximating *to agathon*—would in some way transcend in metaphysical importance the Forms justice and beauty.

Education

Again toward the conclusion of the *Statesman*, the Stranger discusses how the highest available type of statesman will rule and he enunciates the following principle: "really true and assured opinion about honor, justice, the good and their opposites is divine, and when it arises in men's souls, it arises in a godlike race" (309c). This principle is coupled with the claim that "those whose natures are capable, if they get education, of being made into something fine and noble and of uniting with each other as art requires" (309b) will constitute the primary population receiving the statesman's guidance and control. Once this sharing of a common nature and education occurs, then the members can be blended into a political unity producing the highest degree of happiness for all. Shortly thereafter, the Stranger concludes

(310e) that the statesman's "one" work is weaving together a citizenry from opposite characteristics, and that such bonds will not be difficult to create "provided that both classes have one and the same opinion about the beautiful and the good."

The having of opinions referred to in this passage could mean that the statesman will not even begin to weave a unified citizenry until human beings are available all of whom have indicated in some way that they possess appropriate opinions concerning the beautiful and the good. But it could also mean that the statesman himself will educate those under his purview with these opinions; then, once they have been properly schooled, he will begin blending their diverse personalities into a unified state. The first interpretation implies that someone other than the statesman will educate people to become candidates for citizenry; the second points to such education as an essential responsibility of the statesman *qua* statesman.

Upon consideration, however, this difference presupposes a basic identity. For in either case, such fundamental education rests on a different basis than the education employed by the statesman in properly forming the polity. According to the *Republic*, inquiry into the Good is a distinctive concern of philosophy. Thus if this education rests on or is equivalent to philosophy itself, then on the first interpretation, the educators would be philosophers separate from but under the control of the statesman, while on the second interpretation, the statesman simply *is* the philosopher, as the *Republic* proclaims in a celebrated passage (473d–e). Either way, having opinions concerning the good and the beautiful points toward a type of inquiry and reflection essential for producing such opinions which is more fundamental than the cognitive dimensions of statecraft coming into play when the statesman plans and executes diverse practical affairs of state.

However this procedural matter is resolved, successful government requires that individuals under the statesman's control necessarily be aware of, and share the same true opinions about, the good and the beautiful. It will then be crucial for the ruler of such government to oversee a comprehensive understanding of goodness and beauty, otherwise regardless how well-born and receptive to education the populace may be, the statesman will be unable to control and direct their education in ways essential for active cooperating as members of the polity. This good is, however, only one among a series of such fundamental realities—honor, justice, beauty (and, significantly, their opposites)—included in the reservoir of true opinion essential for citizenry. From this perspective, having opinions about the unjust is no less important as having opinions about the just. As a result, this series of passages does not assert that goodness is somehow metaphysically privileged; the good is merely one of a set of crucial realities which must be part of the cognitive experience of prospective citizens in a well-run state producing happiness for its citizens.

References to the good and the beautiful occur in each of the above analyses of art, education and psychology. This pattern suggests that the Good, in some fundamental sense, pervades these activities as well as their proper objects. However, determining the connection between the Good in its universal but currently inchoate state and the structure of dialectic in the *Statesman* is complex and requires additional discussion. To adopt the most congenial interpretive approach is a significant element of this complexity, as the following preliminary review shows.

Strategies of Interpretation

On one end of the interpretative spectrum, A. E. Taylor reads the *Statesman* as straightforward Platonic justification of "certain fundamental points of constitutional theory"[9] while on the other end, Stanley Rosen speaks of Plato's "sense of humor," which gives "a baroque costume to his usual irony" (p. 66), adding that although it "may seem frivolous to suggest that the *Statesman* is an elaborate Platonic joke," the joke will be on those interpreters "who lack the wit to appreciate Plato's elegance or the playful seriousness that is required to penetrate the initially tedious details of the *Statesman* in order to enter the presence of its enigmatic author" (p. 8). For Julia Annas and Robin Waterfield, the *Statesman* "is in some ways a record of complication and even confusion," although the authors grant that the dialogue "is a record of the entanglements that only a very great and original thinker, defending and qualifying his boldest work at the same time, could get into" (p. xxii). In sum, Plato is either maintaining serious dogma, involving the appropriately astute reader in an elaborate philosophical joke, or recording his own confusion for posterity's sake.

The aporetic character of the *Statesman*—the approach employed in this study—multiplies the possible interpretive approaches toward eliciting and describing its metaphysical dimension. Thus it may be argued that this metaphysics, if viewed as a unified whole, is (A) aporetic in all respects; (B) aporetic in some respects and substantive in others; (C) substantive in all respects.

Consider alternative (C) first. One reason to suspect its inappropriateness is that the proponent of this metaphysics is Eleatic, his exact identity left in anonymity. After all, since Socrates participates in the *Statesman*, why doesn't he develop substantive Platonic doctrine, if such is the dialogue's goal? Because, it might be argued, Plato is revising a previous position or exploring alternatives to that position and he wants a new representative to introduce these changes. But if so, why is Socrates even present at such an enterprise, much less as a spectator who, although primarily a passive witness to the exchanges between the Stranger and young Socrates, actively states his intention to return to the argumentative fray once the Stranger concludes his portion of the inquiry (258a)? For if Plato broached significantly new notions under guise of an Eleatic Stranger, it would surely have given greater weight to such a change to drop Socrates from the proceedings altogether. If Socrates is absent, there would be no reason to suspect that he might even hear about anything said by the Stranger; but if Socrates is present, then it is hardly an imaginative stretch to envision him desiring to ask the Stranger, or someone taught by the Stranger, just "one or two small questions." An additional reason against alternative (C): a namesake of Socrates, the Stranger's respondent in the *Statesman*, is young, tractable, and all things considered, inexperienced philosophically. The fact that he is so unversed suggests that ready acceptance of the Stranger's positions as straightforward Platonic teaching is ill-advised on the part of the dialogue's students, lest they be justifiably assessed as no less inexperienced in these matters than young Socrates himself.[10]

These reasons collectively suggest that alternative (C) will not provide a fruitful reading of the *Statesman*.

Interpretive approaches (A) and (B) appear more viable alternatives. Consider (A), that the dialectic is completely aporetic.

From this perspective, the *Statesman* contains no positive doctrine whatsoever (except, perhaps, incidentally); its purpose is to present a series of serious philosophical positions, more or less soundly argued, *all* of which must be subjected to further critical scrutiny. If, for example, dialectical method in the *Statesman* is to a certain extent botched both in theory and practice (as seems evident), then questions worth further reflection based on this incomplete statement and development of method can still be formulated, especially in view of explicitly maintained positions on related subjects in dialogues both earlier and later than the *Statesman*.

Approach (A) has merit, but can readily be carried to self-destructive extremes. Thus from excessive weight on the fact that the central protagonist of the *Statesman* is an Eleatic philosopher, it is possible to argue that *any* apparent assertion of philosophical substance is, and is intended to be understood as, ironic or, as the Stranger says of the myth, merely a dialectical *jeu d'esprit*. Consider, for example, the passage at 285d, when the Stranger presents what is usually read as an exposition of the method of collection and division. Does Plato want us to dismiss this statement of method, and then to infer the irrelevance of method in philosophy? This consequence is surely self-destructive to the overall sense of the dialogue; thus the interpretive assumption giving rise to it must be rejected.[11] Less drastically, does he want us to recognize flaws in this method insofar as these flaws are paraded as apparent dogma in the *Statesman*—but then substitute another method in its stead? Or does he want us to think through this method more accurately than the Stranger has and then retain that method with appropriate modifications?

This final alternative leads directly to approach (B), in my belief the most justified and potentially fruitful alternative. The interpretation developed in this study is based on assuming that the dialogue is aporetic in only some respects. It is therefore all the more reasonable to study the *Statesman* as a document in metaphysics—or more accurately, in *implied* metaphysics—since such a study must distinguish between positions carrying authority and those which are only provisional and require additional investigation.

From this perspective, the Stranger develops a distinctively Platonic position only in part; he is also, however, exploring aspects of this position with complementary relevance to Platonic concerns in order to force attention on principles requiring additional reflection. Furthermore, these principles are at a level of generality such that an Eleatic philosopher—conversant with abstract concepts and lines of argument—would serve as an appropriate agent of inquiry. The Stranger would then develop doctrine both Platonic in overall scope and in its main configuration congruent with an Eleatic approach to reality, but lacking a dimension or dimensions which a distinctively Platonic position would identify and integrate within an already existing philosophical schematic.

This study will describe these dimensions in the course of interpreting the dialogue as a whole, in the process outlining areas requiring additional thought before an "official" Platonic metaphysics can be stated: the nature of a Form (given that in the *Statesman* a Form can be divided into classes and parts); distinguishing between greater and lesser realities; the relation between Forms and particulars; a principle for determining value. Furthermore, the interplay between these issues and a series of problematic senses of unity will depend on the Good, *to agathon*, as a

metaphysical horizon receiving only hints, but highly suggestive hints (noted above), in the *Statesman*. We shall demonstrate that the omission of *to agathon* as an element in the Stranger's reflections, occurring as it does within a systematic metaphysical whole, has an equivalently detrimental affect on both the method and application of dialectic throughout the *Statesman*.

The *Sophist* strongly suggests that defining the sophist is part of an intended trilogy, with definitions of statesman and philosopher comprising the other two components. One can readily imagine the *Philosopher*—the unwritten *Philosopher*—as a discussion involving Socrates, his younger namesake and perhaps the Stranger as well, in which it is shown that a fully articulated definition of sophist and statesman presupposes philosophy, that is, philosophy rightly understood and explained, and that to define the philosopher is to show *what* the philosopher thinks about and *how* the philosopher goes about such thinking. It is also possible that during the course of this discussion, whatever appeared to pass for dogma in both *Sophist* and *Statesman* would be analyzed—and exposed to appropriate philosophical, that is, Socratic, criticism.[12]

We do not have the *Philosopher*, but we do have the *Philebus*. In the *Statesman*, the Stranger leads the discussion and admits that the method of dialectic has not yet been adequately stated (262c; also 263a); in the *Philebus*, however, Socrates leads the discussion and presents a method he knows full well but cannot apply adequately as required in specific cases (16c). If these two methods are equivalent in purpose and principle, then it will be relevant to understanding the *Statesman* to determine what the *Philebus* adds to the structure of this method which has been omitted in the *Statesman*.[13] When the *Statesman* is approached from this perspective, the myth of the reversed cosmos assumes decisive importance. Its cosmological setting, treatment of certain immutable realities, derivative status of the divine, subtle but unmistakable application of "due measure"—all contribute to establishing, or more accurately, *pointing to*, the need for a fundamental metaphysical principle on the order of the Good. Also recall that at a crucial point in the *Philebus*, Socrates identifies and develops apparently the closest approximation of the Good that he can put into words (65a). An additional contrast: in *Republic*, a dialogue defining the true statesman as the philosopher-king, Socrates offers, after some hesitation, highly speculative yet seminal claims on the status and effects of the Good; in *Statesman*, the Stranger is silent on this fundamental sense of the Good. This study will show how the Good is relevant to the myth and how, by appealing to the Good developed in the *Philebus*, the absence of the Good is crucial to understanding both the incomplete method of dialectic and the equally incomplete results of that method as propounded in the *Statesman*.

The *Statesman* will now be analyzed in detail from this interpretive point of view.

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