



# The true, the good, and the beautiful in Plato's *Statesman*

Evanthia Speliotis

The hallmark and defining criterion of the statesman's knowledge in the *Statesman* is knowledge of the measure of the mean (*to metrion*, *Pol* 283e). The mean, in the *Statesman's* discussion is what is needed if the arts are to produce things that are both good and beautiful (*Pol* 284b). Though it is not named "the good" in the *Statesman* account, both the description of the measure of the mean and the role it plays relative to the other knowledges and arts echo Socrates' description of the good in the *Republic*. For example, Socrates says of the idea of the good that it is "the greatest study, and it is by availing oneself of it along with just things and the rest that they become useful and beneficial" (*Rep* 505a). And in the *Statesman*, the Stranger says that it is only "by preserving the mean that the arts produce everything good and beautiful" (*Pol* 284b). Beautiful and good actions and productions need the guidance of knowledge. What the nature of this knowledge is and how it must be presented in order to guide and effect these beautiful and good actions and productions are two of the central questions in the dialogue.

At first glance, the discussion of the measure of the mean appears to be a digression. The chief focus of the *Statesman* is to define the statesman (*ton politikon andra*, *Pol* 257b) as a certain kind of knower (*epistêmon*). The knowledge of the statesman, however, is knowledge of the measure of the mean. Because of his knowledge of the measure of the mean, the statesman is said to be the architectonic ruler over all the sciences and arts in the city. As the measure of the mean must rule all actions if those actions are to be truly artful and beneficial, so too statesmanship must rule all the arts and sciences in the city if the city is to flourish and excel. Statesmanship, therefore, is presented as the paradigmatic instantiation

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of the measure of the mean.

The suggested confluence of the search for the statesman and the measure of the mean raises the question of why Plato chooses to approach the measure of the mean through an investigation into the statesman in particular. As we delve into the discussion, it becomes clear that the kind of knowledge that statesmanship requires and the kind of the knowledge that is the measure of the mean are both a knowledge about species (*Pol* 285a-b). The knowledge of the statesman, however, appears to be only a subset of the knowledge of species in general, for the particular object of the statesman's knowledge is human being. Following from this, the practical application and *telos* of pursuing the knowledge of species in general appears to be different from the practical application and *telos* of the statesman's knowledge of human being. As the Stranger puts it, the purpose for pursuing knowledge of species in general is "to become more dialectical about everything" (*Pol* 285c-d). And, if one has achieved this knowledge for oneself and wishes to put it into practice, the Stranger says he must present this knowledge beautifully (*Pol* 285d-286a), "fitting" one's knowledge to one of the senses of the inquirer, but one must also (and first) present one's knowledge in such a way that the inquirer will become more capable of dialectic (286d-287a). The goal of becoming more capable of dialectic and making others more capable of it as well seems to belong to philosophy, however, not to statesmanship. The focus of statesmanship seems rather to be to actualize the measure of the mean in the city: statesmanship must "rule those who have the capacity to act, in its cognizance of the beginning and initial impulse of the greatest things in cities in regard to timeliness and untimeliness, and all the rest must do what is ordered" (*Pol* 305d).

The Stranger's procedure in the *Statesman* is to arrive at the measure of the mean through the search for the statesman. The statesman's knowledge is an example of knowledge of the mean. By approaching the measure of the mean through this particular example, Plato invites us to consider what the connection or relation between the general and the particular, the knowledge of the mean applied to the individual and to the city, might be.



## I. *Gnôsis*: Dividing correctly by species

The Stranger presents the measure of the mean as one of two species of the art of measurement (*metretikê*):

... many of the clever, believing that they are expressing something wise, say on occasion that indeed there is an art of measurement about all of the things that come-to-be. And this happens to be the very thing stated now. For indeed everything that is artful participates in measure in some manner. But because they are not accustomed to examine and divide according to species (*eidê*), they straight off combine into the same, believing them to be similar, these things that are so very different. And again in turn they do the opposite of this, not dividing other things by parts. Rather, they should (*deon*), whenever they first perceive the commonality among many things, not stand apart before they have seen all the differences amidst this commonality, as many as lie in species. And, on the other hand, whenever they see in turn the multiplicity of dissimilarities in some multitude, they should not let themselves be discountenanced and stop, before they have captured all the family kin within one similarity and comprehended it with the being of one *genos* (*Pol* 284e-285b).<sup>1</sup>

The division into kinds that the Stranger has in mind is a division of two measures. The measure of the mean looks to “the necessary being of becoming” (*kata tên tês geneseôs anagkaion ousian*, *Pol* 283d) and determines what is fitting, needful, or timely (*prepon, deon, kairon*, *Pol* 284e);<sup>2</sup> the other measure looks to “the community of greatness and smallness relative to each other” (*tên pros allêla megethous kai smikrotêtous koinônian*, *Pol* 283d). The mean is a measure of quality, value (*timê*), and judgment; the relative measure is quantitative. The mean looks to ends and fulfillment; the relative measure is descriptive and factual. To achieve knowledge of the measure of the mean one must “examine and divide according to species” (*Pol* 285a). The problem is that many believe they are dividing by species, but are mistaken.

A key aspect to discovering and attaining genuine knowledge—rather than a false opinion—about something is “standing in the right place”: having the correct perspective.<sup>3</sup> In order to attain knowledge of and discover the being of the statesman, the Stranger and his interlocutor have to discover the proper place to stand to observe the *eidōs* of the



statesman. This is particularly challenging since no human being is born wise: all human knowledge is a discovery and, of necessity, begins from ignorance.<sup>4</sup>

The Stranger first approaches the statesman from the standpoint of pure theory (*monon gnôstikê*). Claiming that the true statesman is “more at home with the gnostic rather than with the manual and practical art in general” (*Pol* 259c-d), the Stranger first identifies the statesman purely as a knower (*epistêmon*). He describes the “purely theoretical” knowledges as “stripped of actions” (*monon gnôstikê ... psilai tôn praxeôn*) and offers mathematics (*arithmetikê*) as paradigmatic of this class (*Pol* 258d). Such a knower (theoretician), if and when he acts, simply asserts or imposes his knowledge on the world. By contrast, there are the practical sciences, which contain their knowledge naturally in their actions (*emphuton en tais praxessin*). He describes these as “handicrafts that bring into being bodies that were not before,” and names carpentry as an example of this class (*Pol* 258e). Although the Stranger calls both classes “knowledges,” the division looks more like a division *between* sciences and arts.

This initial division, whether we understand it as a division between theory and practice, or as a division between the sciences and the arts, turns out to be a mistake. At least when the object of investigation is human being, the standpoint of “*monon gnôstikê*” is mistaken because it stands “too far away” from human being to be able to see it clearly or correctly. Human being is a particular kind of being-in-becoming, and it is this being-in-becoming that *monon gnôstikê* is unable to see. From the standpoint of “*monon gnôstikê*,” human being is a kind of herd animal, and the statesman, a kind of herder. In the myth he constructs to illustrate this mistake, the Stranger assigns this view of human being to the age when a god rules the universe, which he calls the age of Cronus, an image that echoes a passage in the *Theaetetus*. There, Socrates, speaking of “those whom [Theodorus] calls philosophers” (*Theaet* 175e, see 173c-e), describes them as standing high above the city. From this standpoint, says Socrates, cities look like herds, human beings like a particular kind of herd animal, and rulers like divine shepherds (*Theaet* 174d-e). Given that “*monon gnôstikê*” is exemplified by mathematics, Plato appears to be suggesting



that human being as herd animal and statesman as herder is mathematics' view of human and political things. Of course the mathematician or pure theoretician does not literally stand far away from human being and city. Rather, it is the theoretical categories and hypotheses—the measure—employed by pure theoreticians that serve to place them metaphorically at a great distance from the objects of their theorizing. If one approaches beings in the world, including, or perhaps especially, human beings, statesmen, and cities, from a theoretical standpoint akin to mathematics, which recognizes and measures only “number, lengths, depths, widths, and speeds relative to their contraries” (*Pol* 284e), one may describe these beings’ “mutually relative sharing in bigness and smallness” (*Pol* 283d), but one will not be able to recognize “the necessary being of becoming” (*ibid.*).<sup>5</sup> As made clear both by the passage from the *Theaetetus* and by the Stranger’s description of the relative measure of more and less in the *Statesman*, it is the perspective and theory that measures by quantities and numbers that sees human being as just another herd animal, distinguished from the others by footed or not footed, number of feet, horned or not horned, living alone or living with others (*Pol* 261d-267c). Such a perspective cannot account for learning, remembering, or forgetting (*Pol* 271e-272a; see also *Theaet* 188a); it cannot comprehend becoming (*Pol* 271a), and it neither recognizes nor looks to the good.<sup>6</sup> Regarding the search for statesmanship, this means that a purely theoretical perspective is not able to recognize what is unique and distinct about political rule. In the end, according to the *Statesman*, it is not the loftiness or pureness of the theorizing that makes it true, but whether and how the theory and perspective is borne out by and “fits” the reality of the world. To see the real world clearly and correctly, the mathematical and other quantitatively based theoretical sciences need the corrective of the measure of the mean.<sup>7</sup> To understand the inadequacies of one’s theorizing and begin to make one’s way toward the measure of the mean, one must bring one’s theory “down to earth” and test it against the world. The corrective and touchstone for theory, according to the Stranger, is experience.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, one must take care not to go too far to the other extreme, and get too mired in the constant flow of motion, change, and becoming.



In the *Theaetetus*, this is the view that Plato ascribes particularly to the sophists, and even more particularly to Protagoras. There, beginning with the proposal that “knowledge is perception” (*Theaet* 151e), Socrates connects this claim with Protagoras’ “human being is the measure of all things.” This means that “each of us is the measure of the things which are and are not”: what appears to each is what is for each and what is true for each (*Theaet* 166d). What is and how it is, therefore, comes-to-be from moment to moment, privately and particularly for each individual. In such a world, there is nothing fixed, no being; rather, all is constantly becoming (*Theaet* 157b: “*tini aei gignesthai*”). In the *Sophist*, as the Stranger continues the *elenchus* of this view through his tracking of the sophist, he shows how, even in the midst of becoming there must be some being—an argument he specifically mentions twice during the discussion of the measure of the mean (*Pol* 284b-c, 286b).

While being skeptical, or even outright relativist, about knowledge and truth, the sophists nevertheless claim as their area of expertise and wisdom the good. Thus, Protagoras denies there are false opinions, but speaks instead of sick opiners and claims: “as the doctor effects a change by drugs, the sophist effects a change by speeches” (*Theaet* 162a).<sup>9</sup> The sophists, who are “wise and good public speakers,” claim to apply their speeches wisely and artfully, just as a doctor applies his prescriptions, exercising their wisdom and art of persuasion in particular instances for particular individuals who are “sick” and influencing and helping change individuals’ perceptions (*Theaet* 167c). The name the sophists give to their special wisdom is *to kairon* (the timely), which is one of the terms the Stranger assigns to the measure of the mean (*Pol* 284e). As the *Statesman* challenges the theoreticians’ understanding of knowledge, so too it challenges the sophists’ understanding of the *kairon*, the fitting, and the good.<sup>10</sup>

The difficulty with the sophists’ position is that they claim to have a certain wisdom while denying that there is any truth. In light of this, the “good” is either whatever the sophist presents it as being, created whole cloth from his purported wisdom, or it is simply what is in keeping with the city’s opinions, as laid down in the laws and customs of that city.<sup>11</sup> And



yet, as little as the health of body can be dictated by fiat or the codification of opinions in laws or writings (cf. *Pol* 298a-e), so little can the good and advantage of a city. Just as it is in virtue of *his knowledge* about health that a doctor is able to make sick bodies healthy, so too it would seem that only in virtue of his knowledge about the good of human being and city would someone be able to make human beings and cities “healthy” and in good condition.<sup>12</sup> Far from the realm of truth and knowledge and the realm of the good being divided, when the object in question is human being and the human things, whoever has knowledge, whether it be about health or about the good, that individual, because of his knowledge, must be the one who is wise and is the measure (see *Theaet* 179a-b).

For knowledge of health or of the good to even be possible, however, it is necessary that there be some fixed, stable being in the midst of the flow of becoming.<sup>13</sup> The sophists, standing firmly in this world, amidst the beings in becoming, deny that there is any such being. But their claims regarding sickness and health, good and bad, presuppose just such being. The difficulty they have is that, in contradistinction to the pure theoreticians, who stand “too far away” from the beings in the world, the sophists stand “too close.” Claiming that all that is, is becoming, steeped in the constant flow of becoming, they too fail to see that what they perceive is a being that is coming-to-be. While the theoreticians reduce things too much to the same, recognizing only quantitative differences like number and size, the sophists cannot see past the differences to underlying kinds. For the mathematicians, “living being” is all one kind; for the sophists, Athenian, Spartan, Lydian, Phrygian, man, woman, child, slave, all are different. Neither perspective is adequate to see “human being,” a being in becoming, which has partially actualized its being, but which is still coming-to-be toward the full perfection and completion of which it is capable. To truly and correctly see the genus and species of human being, one needs a middle ground: a perspective that can recognize both sameness and difference. Only from this standpoint can one see the being in becoming, and understand that the being that one perceives is a being that is coming-to-be toward some completion, perfection, and end.

This “in between” standpoint must be “close enough” to the world



to see becoming, but far enough away to be able to notice samenesses, species, and being. It is a middle standpoint, "away from the extremes" (*Pol* 284e). In response to the mathematicians and others "at the very top" (*Theaet* 173c), on the one hand, and in response to the sophists and others who are mired in the city and the constant press of business and the practical, on the other, this middle standpoint must recognize the coming-into-being of being, and the (partial) being of becoming.

The world of becoming is available to us through experience and the senses. Our claims about the world are articulated in speech (*logos*).<sup>14</sup> Until tested and confirmed against experience, this speech is merely an opinion and a theory. Only when we have shown that the *logos* we formulated "fits" the thing of which it is the *logos* can we be sure that the *logos* is true and that we truly know.<sup>15</sup> Since the object of the statesman's knowledge is human being, and since human being is an actual being in the world, the way to test any speech or claim about human beings is to compare the speech with the actual being, which is available to us through experience. To correct the mistake of conceiving of human being as one of many herd animals and of the statesman as a herder, the Stranger lays down an image of the account of herder/herd beside an image of human life as we know it from our own experience (*Pol* 272b), and calls the entire composition a "myth." As if to emphasize how completely the presuppositions that lead to the view of human being as herd animal miss the "necessary being of becoming" of human being, in his myth the Stranger situates the human-as-herd-animal in an age where there is no becoming (*Pol* 271a-c). The Stranger appears to exaggerate to make a point: if one understands human being purely in terms of physical, quantifiable criteria, one fails to understand the kind of becoming that is unique to human beings and that sets them apart from all other beings. Therefore, in the myth, only the age that portrays "life as we know it" is rooted in becoming. At the same time, the myth reveals the mistake of *monon gnôstikê* and points the way toward the truth the Stranger and his interlocutor are seeking.

The becoming that is manifest in this world has a determinate structure and order, both on the level of the whole (*kosmos*) and for the beings found within the *kosmos*. Within this world, human beings are born, grow up,



learn, develop arts, build cities and families, and die. Their being or nature within this world is a mixture of necessities and possibilities. Some of their characteristics they have in common with all living things; some of their characteristics, however, are unique and set them apart as a distinct kind of being. For example, all the beings in the world (plants, animals, and humans) participate in bodily becoming: birth, growth, reproduction, death, in an ongoing, self-perpetuating cycle. Human beings, however, exhibit another kind of becoming, a non-bodily becoming that is exhibited through their capacity for speech, their invention and employment of arts, their managing of their own way of life, their establishment of cities, and their self-governance. This non-bodily (soul or mind) becoming and capacity (*dunamis*) is manifest if one looks to experience, to actual human beings acting in the world.

Experience alone, however, while an essential safeguard against and touchstone for, theory, is not sufficient. If one stands too close to experience, to immediate, particular, actions, one might understand these capacities simply as powers-to-affect or make.<sup>16</sup> But this is to fail to think abstractly enough. What is first is not human beings making and doing; what is first is some need and a desire to overcome or fulfill that need.<sup>17</sup> It is true that the power (*dunamis*: capacity) must also be present for the arts to be able to develop, but the "beginning impulse" (*hormên*, *Pol* 305d) is teleological, aimed from the start at an end. According to the myth, the very coming-into-being of the arts is connected with a purpose or end, suggesting from the start the importance and necessity of the measure of the mean ("the fitting, the timely, the needful").<sup>18</sup>

Reminding us that any claim about the world must be tested against the world it purports to explain, correcting lofty theories with a version of child's play (*Pol* 268d-e), the Stranger's myth is humbling. It is also revolutionary for readers of Plato, finding and situating being as it does in this world, in nature, and in the beings-in-becoming that inhabit it. At the same time, the myth is only a beginning, not an end (see *Pol* 268d, 274e). The being that is to be found in this world is a being that is more in potentiality than actuality. The myth makes clear what is the correct species of human being and statesman: that both human being and





statesman are beings in becoming, that this becoming is both bodily and non-bodily (soul), and that they by nature have certain needs, as well as the capacities to fulfill those needs. The myth, therefore, has helped achieve the first step necessary for the measure of the mean: it has correctly identified the nature of the statesman's subjects and, therefore, of the statesman's knowledge. Ruling over human beings in becoming, with certain needs and certain potentials (*dunameis*), the statesman's science is the knowledge of what will satisfy the needs and complete the potentials. The exercise of this knowledge will in turn allow the tools that human beings have developed to respond to these needs—namely, speech and arts—to fulfill their function and achieve the good for which they were developed in the first place.

## II. Praxis and the good

It is because the statesman's subjects are beings in becoming that need guidance if they are to fulfill their needs and perfect their capacities that the statesman's job is not complete simply by coming to know; he must put his knowledge into action.<sup>19</sup> Statesmanship is both a science (knowledge) and an art (beautiful *praxis*). As a way to understand the *praxis* of statesmanship, the Stranger offers as paradigm the art of weaving, especially, the art of weaving robes out of wool (*Pol* 279a-b).<sup>20</sup>

The Stranger introduces the art of weaving by situating it among the totality of all the arts, which, applying the lesson of the myth, he describes in terms of purpose/end: "of all the things we have that we craft or acquire, some are *for the sake of* affecting (making) something, and some are repellents *for the sake of* not being affected" (*Pol* 279c).<sup>21</sup> What the final weaving will be, and what sort it will be (tightly or loosely woven, of flax or of wool, a cloak or a blanket, large or small), depends on and is derivative of the purpose to be served, the need to be met. The discussion of weaving illustrates how the purpose for the sake of which the artful action is undertaken determines what the final product will be, how one will proceed, and what materials one will employ (see *Pol* 279c-280a, 280b-e).

If we consider weaving independently of a particular purpose or goal, it





is simply the action (*praxis*) of plaiting warp and woof and, for a moment, the Stranger suggests that this is all it is (*Pol* 283a). This is the perspective or standpoint one might have if one were considering the woven product purely in itself. To be sure, for a woven product even to be, there must be a plaiting of warp and woof. The warp threads are the “solid” (*stereon*) threads (*Pol* 282e). They provide the strength and the underlying structure of the woven garment. The woof threads are “fluffy” and “soft” (*Pol* 282e). They are the threads that give the weaving some suppleness and adaptability. When the Stranger applies the analogy of weaving to the city, he speaks of binding together moderate and courageous characters into “the single and whole work of royal weaving” (*Pol* 310e). In this “royal weaving” the “warp” is the courageous individuals, who are quick, and manly, at times stiff (*Pol* 306e–307c), while the moderate characters, who “mind their own business” and seek peace, not war (*Pol* 307c), constitute the “woof.” To bring the woven robe into being, one must interweave the soft, pliable woof with the stiff, rigid warp. If one tried to bind together only warp threads, the elements would not “fit” and the result would be a stiff, unyielding mass. If one combined only woof threads, the product would be too soft, without enough “backbone” to stand on its own. Only when the two kinds are interwoven together—whether for a woolen robe or for a city—will the whole truly have the kind of structure *and* adaptability that it needs to be called a well woven product.

And yet, if the woven product is produced without reference to or guided by an end (the mean), then it will be useless, or possibly even harmful. However beautiful it may *look*, it will in truth be ugly.<sup>22</sup> Thus, for example, however beautiful and rich looking a robe spun of silk and gold thread might be when considered in itself, if you give it to a ditch digger to warm himself on cold nights, it will not only be inadequate (hence “not-fitting”), it will actually be an affront, and therefore ugly. For a *praxis* to be truly beautiful, it must be ruled by and have as its goal and guide the good. Only when one considers the activity of weaving within the structure and context of a goal to be achieved (or a need to be met) does one realize the complex network of activities of which it is a part, the totality and synergy of which constitute a complete art. The Stranger’s



presentation of the account (*logos*) of the art of weaving, therefore, is an image of why both the measure of the mean and the relative measure of more and less are needed and how they must work together if one is to produce anything beautiful and good (*Pol* 284b).

The statesman's *praxis* is to rule and direct all the arts and *praxeis* in the city: having the science or knowledge of the good, *politikê* must "rule those who have the capacity to act, in its cognizance of the beginning and initial impulse of the greatest things in cities in regard to timeliness and untimeliness, and all the rest must do what is ordered" (305d). To do this, the statesman must articulate his knowledge and commands in speech (*logos*). But speech too is described by Plato as a weaving. For example, in the *Theaetetus*, Plato describes the composition of both words and speeches as "plaitings" (*peplêktai*, *sumplokên*): "just as the things that are then composed out of these things [words out of letters] are composed by their plaiting, so too the names, once they are plaited together, become a speech. For the plaiting together of names is the being of a speech (*ousian logou*)" (*Theaet* 202b). And in the *Sophist*, having established that words name species (*eidê*), the Stranger says, "it is on account of the weaving together (*sumplokên*) of the species with one another that the speech has come-to-be for us" (*Soph* 259e).<sup>23</sup> Given that the statesman, properly speaking, rules (through speeches) but does not himself act, there is a double aspect to the statesman's "weaving": primarily and directly, he weaves a speech; secondarily and less directly, by following the prescriptions and commands in his speech, the statesman's subjects bring into being "the royal weaving" (*Pol* 310e). As much as the technical or productive arts must be guided by the measure of the mean, so too must the crafting of the speeches. But speeches in particular, insofar as they are addressed to human beings, must fulfill one more criterion. They must not only express what is true and be guided by the good, they must also be beautiful for those to whom they are addressed.

### III. A beautiful *praxis*

Because human beings *are* the end (*telos*) of the statesman's—indeed, of the entire city's—*praxeis*, because they contain a *telos* in themselves, having



by nature not only certain needs but also certain potentials, when the statesman speaks to his subjects, when he issues commands to the artisans, and, perhaps most especially, when he directs the “weaving together” of courageous and moderate individuals into the whole cloth of the city, he must include this in his determination of the best *praxis*. The truly correct and complete determination of the measure of the timely, the needful, and the fitting requires consideration not only of the goal to be achieved, but also of the capacities and potentials of the human beings who are both tools and ends at each step of the process. For, whereas inert materials like wool are completely under the control of the carder, comber, fuller, spinner, and, finally, weaver (see 282a-e), human beings are neither so passive (see *Theaet* 156a-b, *Soph* 247a-e) nor so inert. Though lacking the statesman’s perspective and knowledge, they have some capacity for mind, art, and self-direction, and therefore some perception and perspective of the statesman’s *praxis*. Thus the *beautiful and good* communication of the truth about justice must include both an understanding of the need that justice fulfills as well as an acknowledgement that the human being to whom this understanding is being communicated has some capacity for understanding. Because human beings have mind and therefore have a perspective, the statesman must take into account both what is true and what will appear beautiful to them.

In the ideal case—that is, if the statesman’s subjects stood in the same “place” as he did and had the same level of understanding, the statesman could communicate and represent his knowledge directly or, as the Stranger calls it in the *Sophist*, “*eikastically*.” An *eikastic* speech is a speech that is “in conformity with the proportions” of the speaker’s knowledge (*Soph* 235d)—an exact copy, if you will.<sup>24</sup> “It is more fitting (*prepei*) to make plain by means of speaking and speech every animal—to those capable of following it—than by painting (*graphês*) and every kind of handicraft,” says the Stranger in the *Statesman* (*Pol* 277c). The doctor, speaking *eikastically*, would employ the language of the science of medicine to his patients (see *Pol* 293a-e); the philosopher who speaks *eikastically* would, “beginning from hypothesis, and without images ... make its search (*methodon*) by means of forms by themselves, through forms” (*Rep* 510b). The problem is





that the many (human beings), for the most part, lack knowledge about the greatest things (species and ends) and therefore do not stand in a beautiful position (*Soph* 236a-b).<sup>25</sup> If the doctor cut his patients or purged them without explaining what he was doing in layman's terms, and without persuading them that this was necessary and good, the patients might well believe that he was harming them (*Pol* 298a-b). And, while he might be prescribing with a view to what is needful for the patients' bodies (*Pol* 296b-c), he would not be prescribing with a view to their capacities for mind. The problem with patients or citizens believing that they are being harmed by the doctor or the statesman is that they might revolt. Writing in the context of democratic Athens, Plato describes this revolt as happening through the Assembly (*ekklésian*: *Pol* 298c-e).<sup>26</sup>

To give human beings their due and to prescribe in such a way as to maximize the possibilities of achieving the good toward which he is aiming (i.e., by minimizing the likelihood of a revolt), the statesman must present his knowledge and rule "*phantastically*" (*Soph* 236b-c). That is to say, he must tailor what he knows (the "original") to "fit" the standpoint, but also the capacities, of his subjects: "... but to all the rest who are incapable [of following a speech], to do it through handcrafted works" (*Pol* 277c). A *phantastic* speech tells stories, offers examples, in short, uses images. It distorts in order to better convey the truth. As the Stranger says in the *Sophist*, to introduce the need for *phantastics*: "should those who mold or paint any of the big works give back the simply true proportions of the beautiful things (i.e., an *eikastic* representation), the upper segments would appear smaller than they should and the lower bigger, because the former are seen by us from far away and the latter near at hand" (*Soph* 235e-236a). Phidias' statue of Athena, which appears to be the reference of the *Sophist* passage, standing approximately 35 feet tall, would appear ugly to a 5 or 6 foot tall human being if the head, torso, and feet faithfully copied the dimensions of an actual human being. To appear beautiful and truly convey the beauty befitting a goddess, the head would have to be disproportionately large, and the feet, disproportionately small. Similarly, in the case of the Parthenon, if the architects had stuck to strict geometric lines, the colossal temple would have appeared to sag in the





middle. Instead, the Parthenon was built irregularly—with the midpoint of the long sides standing several inches higher than the corners—so that it would *appear* geometrically regular, hence beautiful, to the human beings observing it.<sup>27</sup> Both the myth and the weaving paradigm in the *Statesman* are examples of a *phantastic* speech.<sup>28</sup> The reason the Stranger presents the myth is to help young Socrates understand what he was incapable of understanding with the more abstract *logos* that preceded it: namely, that herder/herd animal was an essentially mistaken view of the statesman and his subjects.<sup>29</sup>

Of course, it is possible to present something that looks beautiful but is in fact insubstantial or even positively harmful: something that is in truth “ugly” because of “*ammetria*” (lack of measure), such as the silk and gold robe mentioned above (see *Soph* 228c). Key to the *Statesman's* argument is the insistence that the truly beautiful: what *is* rather than what merely *seems* beautiful is essentially linked to the good. The statesman’s “weavings,” to be truly beautiful, must be ruled and guided by the right end. That end, as the myth made clear, lies in the needs as well as the capacities of human beings themselves. Good statesmanship, while seeking to fulfill the needs of human beings (weaving a “cloak” that will serve as an adequate defense against nature: *Pol* 280e) must at the same time recognize that human beings have some capacity for understanding and dialectic.

Statesmanship itself, however, is not responsible for the perfection and fulfillment of human beings’ capacity for understanding and dialectic. This is the ultimate, highest end and fulfillment of the human being and it belongs properly to philosophy. The particular focus of statesmanship is more immediate and basic: it is to attend to the human need for defense (*Pol* 274b-d, 279c-280e). Only if human needs are met are human beings free to pursue perfection and fulfillment.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, as the statesman is attending to human beings’ needs, he must recognize their capacities and potentials—their highest ends—for they dictate both how he should rule and what his rule must allow for and make possible. Thus the statesman, having knowledge of the nature of human beings, cognizes “the beginning and initial impulse of the greatest things in cities” (*Pol* 305d), rules with these always in view, but does not himself act to achieve all of



them. He sees and supervises the whole, but that means he must leave it to others—including philosophers working with individuals on virtue and dialectic, as well as generals working with individuals on becoming good soldiers—to work specifically with the constitutive parts of the whole. As the art of weaving must begin with an architectonic plan that is guided by the goal to be achieved, which in turn determines the materials and preparations that are needed, so too statesmanship must begin with an architectonic plan for the city. This plan must precede the day to day business of supervision (over what the Stranger calls the “causes and cocauses” of the final weaving [Pol 281e]), and serve as its structure and guide. Both the architectonic plan and the day to day supervisory prescriptions must be beautiful and good *phantastic* speeches.

#### IV. Statesmanship's beautiful and good *phantastikê*

The statesman's architectonic plan and *logos* is articulated in the (constitutional) rule of law.<sup>31</sup> If we look at the reasons why this *logos* must be in the form of law and not be offered in the form of particular prescriptions, individual by individual, we see how the statesman's *praxis* reflects and instantiates the true, the good, and the beautiful discussed above.

Law admittedly is general: it is “for the many and for the most part” (Pol 295a). It is addressed to the many, not to individuals, and it forms the outline and guideline for a community as a whole, not for individuals one by one. A community of individuals (i.e., a city) is necessary because human beings are not self-sufficient by nature (*Rep* 369b; *Pol* 274c-d). General prescriptions are necessary because no human being is sufficient (*hikanos*) “to be sitting by each individual throughout his life, ordering with precision the suitable (*to prosêkon*)” (Pol 295a-b). General, rather than precise, prescriptions, however, if beautifully formed (Pol 297c), are also good. Offering as it does a general representation and imitation of the statesman's knowledge (Pol 293e, 295b-c, 297c, 302e), law therefore serves as an outline (see *Pol* 277a-c) for the regime as a whole. Since this outline addresses what is beautiful, just, and good (see *Pol* 309c), it serves as a model and a guide (target) for the statesman's subjects to follow as



they act, a prescription for their character and actions. Holding human beings to the authority of the law is necessary because they lack the knowledge of species and of the mean that the statesman has. Allowing human beings the opportunity to consent to the laws that govern them (see *Pol* 276e, 300b), as well as the “space” to apply the law to their own actions<sup>32</sup> acknowledges and “fits” the capacity human beings have for mind and self-rule.

If individuals only developed their capacities to the extent of patterning their beliefs about virtue and justice after the law, they would at least achieve some facsimile (a true opinion) about these matters. But in recognition of and to truly “fit” the full potential of human beings, the law must also allow for investigation, discussion, and learning. Since not even the statesman is fully wise, this last point is especially pressing if the city itself is to have any hope of becoming truly excellent.<sup>33</sup> The statesman, therefore, at least on the architectonic level, must be more like a group (gymnastics) trainer than a doctor, contrary to the claim of the sophists that we saw above.<sup>34</sup>

Of course, within the ethos and constitution of the whole community, there must be room both for individual attention (e.g., personal trainers) and for doctors. There must also be attention to the present, the actual being-in-becoming, the possibilities, and the needs that constitute the daily life of the city. That is why, after crafting the “cloak” of the law (architectonic statesmanship), the statesman must address the ever changing demands and situations presented daily by nature and the world of becoming. This requires employing the *kairon*: directing the arts as particular situations arise.<sup>35</sup> For example, the statesman, knowing when war is necessary (good) and feasible (winnable) will command the generals to deploy their knowledge about strategy (305a). If diplomacy should be more fitting in a given instance, he might deploy the rhetoricians instead of the generals. On a more day-to-day basis, the statesman might command that the production and storage of certain kinds of grain be increased, in anticipation of climactic or demographic changes, or he might promote the development of certain technologies in response to changing times and needs. Always, however, the “plan” (law) must serve



as the guide and rule, unless and until the community is persuaded to amend it (*Pol* 300b).

Because the statesman's knowledge and rule encompasses the whole cloth of the city, it applies from the literal beginning, the regime structure or architectonic plan of the city, through all of the parts and stages—carding, combing, fulling—to the final weaving together of the warp and woof of the city. And this is what it seems the Stranger means when he says that the science or knowledge of the good—*politikê*—must “rule those who have the capacity to act, in its cognizance of the beginning and initial impulse of the greatest things in cities in regard to timeliness and untimeliness, and all the rest must do what is ordered” (305d).

Both on the synoptic level of writing the constitution and on the more particular level of overseeing the particular tasks that contribute to the whole cloth of the city: from carding, combing, and fulling, to the final weaving together of the warp and the woof, the statesman must remember and apply the true art of *phantastics*—seeking always in his pronouncements, whether written or spoken, to hit the mean by combining in the best way possible the true, the good, and the beautiful. He must make room for philosophy in the city,<sup>36</sup> both as an end in itself, for developing the dialectical capacity of human beings, and because he knows that the best “product” can only be made out of good “materials” (*Pol* 308d). He must allow for exploration and experimentation in the arts, for only through those will the arts develop and grow to their full potential. And he must allow within the city and among the citizenry discussion about “the biggest things.” But always, he must be guided by the measure of the mean, which is rooted in the nature and potential of human beings. For only by looking to and preserving the mean “can [the arts] produce everything good and beautiful” (*Pol* 284b).

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## Notes

- 1 Cf. *Soph* 253d-e.
- 2 Other judgment words, such as what is sufficient (*hikanon*), advantageous (*sumpheron*), suitable (*prosekon*), would also seem to belong to the measure of the mean. When one starts looking at the Platonic corpus, one finds the language of the measure of the mean in abundance.
- 3 See *Soph* 236b: "That which appears to resemble the beautiful because the sighting of it is not from a beautiful position ..." At first, the Stranger seems to suggest that this is merely an apparition (*phantasma*). By the end of the dialogue, however, even apparitions have some share in being, and even the most precise articulation of truth has an apparitional component.
- 4 See *Pol* 301d-e: "... there does not come-to-be in cities ... a king, like those that naturally grow in hives..." Even those who would be statesmen or kings, therefore, must begin from a "not beautiful" position (*Soph* 236b).
- 5 See also *Pol* 259b-c, where the Stranger first promotes the idea that the statesman is defined purely by his knowledge and not at all by his action. Claiming that king, statesman, slavemaster, and household manager have essentially the same science (*epistēmē*), the Stranger says, "The figure of a large household (*megalēs schēma oikeseōs*), or in turn the bulk of a small city (*smikras ... poleōs onḡkos*)—the pair of them won't differ at all with regard to rule, will they?" (*Pol* 259b). "*Schēma*," "*megalēs*," "*smikras*," and "*onḡkos*" are all terms employed by mathematics and other arts that look to the relative measure of more and less (see *Pol* 284e). In light of the later discussion of the two measures, Plato may be suggesting that only someone who employs the relative measure would make such a claim.
- 6 See, e.g., *Soph* 227a-b. There, the Stranger, talking about the bifurcatory method he has been employing, which looks quasi-mathematical, says, "the pursuit (*methodos*) of these speeches does not care any more or less for the art of bath-sponging than for the drinking of drugs, nor whether

- the purification they do benefits us a lot a little. For the pursuit for the sake of the acquisition of mind tries to understand the kinship and the lack of kinship of all arts, and honors all of them on an equal basis." See also *Pol* 262a-b, 263d.
- 7 For a discussion of the two measures, mathematics, and dialectics, see Rodier, 1969: 37-48. As Yvon Lafrance comments, Rodier understands the relative measure to correspond with "vulgar mathematics," which measures things in the world, while the measure of the mean corresponds with "philosophical mathematics" (Lafrance's term) or dialectic, which is concerned with coming-to-know the Ideas (Lafrance, 1995: 89-101). Rather, as Lafrance notes, and as this paper is trying to show, the measure of the mean is about the coming-to-be of the good in the world and as such it is essentially a measure of actions and productions (Lafrance, 96-97).
  - 8 In the *Sophist*, the Stranger says of a certain art of speeches that, "by means of speeches, through the ears, one is able to enchant the youth who stand at an even greater distance from the truth of things, showing them spoken images (*eidôla legomena*) about all things" (*Soph* 234c). This enchantment and unquestioning belief is undermined when the youth come closer to and "get their hands on" the things in the world (*Soph* 234d).
  - 9 See, e.g., *Soph* 222c-d.
  - 10 For an excellent survey and discussion of the rhetoricians' and sophists' understanding and use of the *kairon*, see Sipiora and Baumlin, 2002.
  - 11 As Plato presents Protagoras' position in the *Theaetetus*, the sophists' self-understanding and self-presentation emphasizes the latter possibility, namely, that the laws and opinions in each city about the just and the beautiful (noble: *kalon*) are what seems and *is* just and beautiful for that city, "Since no matter what sorts of things these are that are just and beautiful in the opinion of each city, these also are for it as long as it holds them to be so" (*Theaet* 167c).
  - 12 Thus, in the *Theaetetus*, Plato has Socrates argue that even Protagoras "would scarcely dare assert that whatever a city lays down for itself in the belief they're to its advantage, that it's as certain as can be that these things will be to its advantage" (*Theaet* 172a-b).
  - 13 Kenneth Dorter, speaking about the *Sophist*, says, "we conceive of forms in relation to the realm of change. Forms and changing things are not two radically distinct worlds.... Forms are the timeless aspect of changing things, the being of becoming" (Dorter, p. 144).
  - 14 The long ontological argument at the heart of the *Sophist* (236d-258e) is addressed directly to the sophist, who wishes to claim for himself an art of speeches while denying that there is any being, a claim that is in line with and follows Plato's presentation of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*. Describing speech as a "weaving together of the species with one another" (*Soph* 259e), the Stranger goes on to spell out how, for anyone to speak in any way meaningfully (i.e., to say something about something), requires the employment of species, at least in the sense of general classes or terms.
  - 15 See *Soph* 218b-c.
  - 16 See *Theaet* 156a-b, together with 167b; cf. *Soph* 219b-c, *Pol* 279c.
  - 17 "... human beings were without devices and without arts in those first times, because the spontaneous nurture had given out. And they did not yet know how to supply it for themselves on account of the fact that no need had previously compelled them" (*Pol* 274c).
  - 18 Cf. *Rep* 369b, where Socrates also gives a genetic account, in his case, of the coming-into-being of the city. There, as in the *Statesman*, the city is said to come-to-be because of some need.
  - 19 See note 7.
  - 20 For a description of how a paradigm helps us take what is known and come to understand what is unknown, see *Pol* 277d-278e. As the myth showed, paradigms can point out differences as well as similarities.
  - 21 At the beginning of the *Sophist*, the Stranger divides all the arts into making versus acquisition (*Soph* 219a-c). Here, he speaks of "all the things we have that we craft (*démourgein*) and acquire,"

- which, if we recall the beginning of the *Sophist*, means all the arts.
- 22 See *Soph* 228c: "Everything that has a share in motion, once it has set for itself some target and tries to hit it, and yet on each impulse strays off the target and misses it—shall we say that it is affected by ... lack of measure (*ammetrias*)?" ; see also *Theaet* 172a-b.
  - 23 What it means to call a speech a weaving is a question that deserves a discussion of its own, and lies beyond the focus of this paper. To begin to consider this question, one might look at *Soph* 261e-262e. There, the Stranger describes a speech as "put[ting] a limit on something by weaving together the verbs with the names" (*Soph* 262d). Picking up on this theme, Heidegger, in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, has an extensive discussion on speech and the "grammar of being," in which he says that actions (represented by verbs), allow a thing (represented by a noun/name) to come-to-presence by "taking a stand" (Heidegger, 2000: [42-54]).
  - 24 In actuality, no speech can truly be eikastic, because speech itself employs symbols that are other than the things that speech discusses and seeks to portray.
  - 25 In light of the *Statesman's* discussion, one wonders whether, with the image (semblance: *eikona*) of the cave, Plato, in the *Republic*, is offering a critique of what kind of city might be produced if one forgets that the "materials" of the city are human beings (*Rep* 514a ff.). At the least, the *Statesman* seems to be arguing that to create a city that reduces human beings either to prisoners in a cave or to herd animals is to mistake, essentially and fundamentally, the nature of human being and the measure of the mean.
  - 26 Within a different age and a different context, Homer in the *Iliad* shows Hera, Athena, and Poseidon conspiring behind Zeus' back to aid the Achaeans after his stern prohibition of this action. Why? We may surmise it is because Zeus did not bother to explain his thinking or this plan, and all the gods could see was the immediate, apparent harm to the Achaeans.
  - 27 Seth Benardete's introduction to *The Being of the Beautiful* was what first drew my attention to the significance of the Stranger's comment at *Soph* 235e-236a (Benardete, 1984).
  - 28 The Stranger makes this clear when he likens the myth to a statue: "just as statue makers on occasion in their untimely haste dash in more and bigger things than they should ... so now we too, in the belief that it was fitting to make up for the king great paradigms, raised up an amazing bulk of the myth" (*Pol* 277a-b). Then, he speaks of how human beings learn: they begin from small, short, and easy combinations, discover the truth about them, and then use that knowledge to help them understand bigger and more complex things (*Pol* 277e-278b).
  - 29 To be sure, the full meaning of a species or abstract idea cannot be captured completely through a *phantastic* tale or image, this can only be done through species and intellect. But to develop the capacity to know species takes time, dialogue, and examination (*elenchos*). To even begin on the path toward knowledge and developing mind, one (everyone) needs the aid of *phantastics*: both the philosopher, who wishes to help his interlocutor become more dialectical (*Pol* 285c-287a), and the statesman, who wishes to help his subjects become as virtuous as possible (see *Pol* 308d).
  - 30 Aristotle makes this explicit in Book 1 of his *Politics*.
  - 31 There is considerable debate of this point in the literature. See Christopher Gill (Gill, 1995: 292-305) for a thoughtful defense and discussion of the view that good statesmanship includes what he calls "constitutionalism."
  - 32 A necessity, insofar as the law is general, whereas circumstances are particular *and* it is not within the capacity of any human being to be everywhere, always, commanding the suitable (*Pol* 295b).
  - 33 I take this to be what the Stranger means when he says, "since there is no king that comes to be in the cities, who is of the sort that naturally arises in hives—one who is right from the start exceptional in his body and his soul—they must, it seems, once they've come together, write up writings while they run after the traces of the truest regime" (*Pol* 301d-e).
  - 34 The particular image the Stranger offers for the legislator is the gymnastics trainer. In the *Sophist*, *gymnastike* was the name the Stranger used for helping individuals aim for the correct target in



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their actions, which he also describes as having the proper measure: "Everything that has a share in motion, once it has set for itself some target and tries to hit, and yet with each impulse it strays off the target and misses it," is affected by "lack of measure (*ammetrias*)" (*Soph* 228c). The name for this lack of measure is ugliness (*Soph* 228a).

- 35 See Lane, 1998: part III, for an excellent discussion of the statesman's employment of the "*kairon*." As Lane's discussion makes clear, the "*kairon*" combines the universal human good with the "framework of temporal flux" (p.146).
- 36 Socrates' trial and death are imminent and form a backdrop for the discussion of the *Statesman*.

