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## Using Examples in Philosophical Inquiry: Plato's *Statesman* 277d1-278e2 and 285c4-286b2.

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*The rest of mankind, however, fail to be aware of what they do after they wake up just as they forget what they do while asleep*  
- Heraclitus, B1 (trans. Robinson)

The dialectical inquiries found in Plato's dialogues abound with examples meant to highlight particular features of a target of inquiry. The main interlocutor of most dialogues, Socrates, is particularly fond of illustrating a subject matter of inquiry per analogy or image. In the *Gorgias* he argues that rhetoric is to the soul what cookery is to the body (465d7-e1); in the *Theaetetus* he suggests that the faculty of memory may perhaps be likened to a block of wax (191c8-d2) or an aviary (197d5-10); and in the *Republic* he likens the sun and its relation to what is visible to the idea of the good and its relation to what is intelligible (508b12-c2). In the *Republic* he even admits to "strain after" presenting things through imagery (*glischrōs eikazō*; R. 488a1-2).<sup>1</sup>

But while argument through analogy or example seems to be a central feature of Socratic inquiry, Socrates never explicitly discusses the procedure of using examples in dialectical inquiries. Only in the *Statesman*, it appears, do we find such a discussion. Here the question what examples (*paradeigmata*)<sup>2</sup> are is explicitly raised (at 278c3-6) by the main interlocutor of the dialogue, the Eleatic visitor. He brings the use of examples in inquiries into close proximity with dialectic when he suggests that the use of examples may make us more dialectical about everything (285c8-d7) and that it is difficult to point to any of the greater matters adequately without using examples (277d12). One might therefore expect scholars to accord these passages from the *Statesman* a central position in an account of

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Shorey (1935) remarks (note ad loc.) that "γλίσχροος is untranslatable"; I here follow his suggested translation.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that Socrates himself hardly ever uses the word *paradeigma* to characterize an image or analogy he uses; nevertheless Richard Robinson (1953, 212) is surely right in claiming that the passage in the *Statesman* contains "something like a discussion of analogy" and that e.g. the "city of the *Republic* is," in the language of the *Statesman*, "an example, a case of justice used to throw light on another case of justice." For further discussion of Socrates' use of examples, see Peter Larsen's contribution to this anthology.

Platonic dialectic. But the fact is that scholars who work on Platonic dialectic in general tend to accord them little, if any, significance in Plato's account of dialectic, while those who hold that they state something important about dialectic generally see them as concerned solely with the way dialectical inquiry is understood in the *Statesman* or, perhaps, in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* together.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter I argue that the use of examples in dialectical inquiries, discussed in the *Statesman* more specifically as the use of *paradeigmata* for the purpose of leading others to what they have not yet recognized, is important to Plato's overall conception of dialectic, and that the *Statesman* explains why. For the dialogue, I argue, makes two crucial points concerning this use of examples. First, examples when used in inquiries are not pedagogical tools on a par with any others; they are tools eminently suited to train two abilities central to dialectic, namely the ability to distinguish between things that look alike and the ability to see what things that seem different have in common. Second, examples may facilitate our understanding of "greater matters" such as statesmanship and philosophy, that is, the typical subjects of dialectical inquiry, because examples, when duly recognized *as* examples, help us realize what such matters have in common with what is less significant while at the same time highlighting the radical difference between them. I finally argue that the *Statesman* indicates that the abilities to distinguish things that look alike and to see likenesses between things that differ are characteristic of human beings in general and, accordingly, that philosophers are set apart from other human beings by their mastery of these abilities, not merely by having them.

Within the discussion of examples in the *Statesman* commencing at 277d1 and ending at 287b2, two passages are particularly important for deciding what relation exists between the use of examples and the science of dialectic: 277d1-278e2 and 285c4-286b2.<sup>4</sup> In the first

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<sup>3</sup> Stenzel 1917 touches on *Statesman* 285c4-286b2 but does not contain a discussion of examples; Robinson 1953 contains a brief discussion of the passage 278a (212-4) but does not accord it a central position in Plato's supposedly differing conceptions of dialectic; in Fink 2012 only Ausland 2012, 226 discusses examples as described in the *Statesman*. Dixsaut 2001, 246-77, however, contains a prolonged discussion while El Murr 2015 addresses the question how the use of *paradeigmata* as discussed in the *Statesman* fits in "with the broader context of Platonic epistemology" (1). Several critics treating specifically of the *Statesman* have pointed to the importance of the passage for Plato's so-called later dialogues and the procedures of collection and division, see e.g. Owen 1973; Miller 1980; Kato 1995; Lane 1999; Sayre 2006. Only Lane (19-20) considers the possibility that using examples may be a feature of Platonic dialectic more generally. Jakub Jirsa (2013) argues that it is misguided to see examples as central to Platonic dialectic, understood as a method for inquiry, since their purpose is, he argues, at best didactic.

<sup>4</sup> Victor Goldschmidt (1947) includes the lines 278e2-279b in the first passage; I do not, since they treat of the specific inquiry into the expertise of the statesman, not examples in general.

part of the chapter I analyze the first passage in detail; I turn to the second passage in the second part.

### 1. Exemplifying examples – *Statesman* 277d1-278e2

The discussion of examples comes about as a result of the fact that the inquiry into the expertise of the statesman has not yet yielded the desired result: a satisfactory circumscription of his expertise that sets it clearly apart from other types of expertise with which it might be confused. The interlocutors have managed to present an external outline (*tēn exōthen perigraphēn*) that may be adequate, the visitor admits, but the details of the picture that will help bring clarity to this expertise are still missing (277b6-c3; see also 268c5-11 with 275a3-6 where a related problem is brought up).<sup>5</sup> What he indicates, presumably, is that the account of statesmanship they have presented up to this point in the inquiry is correct because it has identified essential features of it, but also that it is not sufficient because these features do not set statesmanship apart in a sufficiently clear manner from other types of expertise with which it may be confused. It is in order to address this problem that an example is called for. But what is an example? And why would it be helpful in the inquiry?

The visitor offers the following explanation in answer to the latter question: it is “difficult (*chalepon*) to point out (*endeiknusthai*) adequately any of the greater matters without using examples (*paradeigmasi*)” (277d1-2); he adds that it “seems as though each of us, knowing everything as in a dream, is then ignorant again of everything when, as it were, awake” (277d2-4).<sup>6</sup> When young Socrates asks the visitor what he means, the visitor states that he seems to have stirred up what we experience concerning knowledge (*epistēmē*) and that an example of what he means by example is called for (277d5-10). The implication is, apparently, that the visitor’s enigmatic words have made Socrates confused, an experience

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<sup>5</sup> G. E. L. Owen (1973, 351-3) makes a great deal of the fact that the visitor in the passage preceding the discussion starting at 277d1 describes their previous attempts at defining the expertise of the statesman as a painting and at 277c3-5 distinguishes the act of revealing something through a *logos* clearly from attempts to reveal something through a *graphē*. This, Owen argues, demonstrates that Plato, in the passage 285d9-286b1, “means to be understood literally” (353) when he writes that there is no *eidolon* for the greatest and most honorable things (285e4-286a1), and that a metaphysical reading of the whole 285d9-286a7 passage is, therefore, not supported by the text. But this misses the real point of the visitor’s suggestion at 277a6, that their previous discussion has arrived at a mere *schema*, and, at 277b8-c1, that their *logos* is like a sketch (*perigraphē*) of an animal; the contrast the visitor highlights in 277a3-c6 is not between pictures, in the sense of *eidola*, and arguments, *logoi*, but between imprecise (or mythical) and precise *logoi* (one may compare this with Aristotle, *EN* I.7, 1098a22-6). This has, as far as I can see, little to do with the contrast between matters for which there are bodily *eidola* and matters for which there are not discussed in 285d9-286a7. For further discussion of Owen’s reading, see Dixsaut 2001, 269-77.

<sup>6</sup> The Greek text used is the Oxford Classical Texts, edited by Duke et. al.; the translation is by Eva Brann, Peter Kalkevege, and Eric Salem (2012). The translation has been slightly modified in some places without notice.

that characterizes human beings in general when it comes to knowledge.<sup>7</sup> The example he will present in order to help Socrates understand what examples are will at the same time exemplify what it means to teach others through examples.

The verb *endeiknusthai*, to point out or indicate, is here closely linked with the word *paradeigma*, example, not simply by the fact that the visitor mentions both together but also by the fact that both words have the same root, *deik-*, “to show” or “point out.” What the visitor has in mind when talking about using examples seems to be an act where one points to one thing by placing another thing next to (*para-*) it in such a way that the second thing exhibits something characteristic of the first thing. But what are we to make of the claim that each of us potentially knows everything as if in a dream, but that we are at the same time ignorant?

The opposition between being asleep and awake, when paired with the opposition between knowledge and ignorance, resonates with a number of passages in the Platonic corpus, such as *Theaetetus* 201c6-202c6,<sup>8</sup> *Phaedrus* 277d10-e3, *Meno* 85c9-d1, and *Republic* 476c1-d3 and 520c6-d2,<sup>9</sup> passages that in various ways discuss what distinguishes knowledge from opinion. For present purposes, the most important of them is *Republic* 476c1-d3, where Socrates suggests that those who recognize that there are beautiful things, but not that there is something beautiful in itself, live life as if in a dream. For dreaming, whether one is asleep or awake, consists in “believing a likeness of something to be not a likeness, but rather the thing itself.”<sup>10</sup> The one who holds that there are both beautiful things and something beautiful in itself, by contrast, and who does not confuse the one with the other, is awake. The difference between living life as if in a dream and living fully awake thus hinges on the ability to distinguish between *eidē*<sup>11</sup> and between *eidē* and what participates in them, an ability that in

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<sup>7</sup> A further possible implication is that the fact that the example itself calls for an example tells us something about knowledge because we in an analogous manner need, in order that we may come to know something, to recur to something else that we already know, something that the thing we seek to know is grounded in; I thank Pål R. Gilbert for this suggestion.

<sup>8</sup> Jirsa (2013, 137-9) explicitly connects the passage under consideration with the dream theory developed by Socrates in the *Theaetetus*.

<sup>9</sup> Melissa Lane (1999, 64-6) connects the passage under consideration with *Meno*, as well as *Phaedo* and *Republic*, not because of the dream-motif itself, but because they all discuss the “passage from true belief to knowledge;” see also El Murr 2015, 2-3. I shall return to the question whether or not the *Statesman* passages are centered on the transition from belief to knowledge, a question that Jirsa (2013, 145) suggests should be answered in the negative.

<sup>10</sup> The Greek text used is the Oxford Classical Texts, edition edited by S. R. Slings; the translation is Bloom (1991).

<sup>11</sup> See 476a7 where Socrates explains that each form also appears with other forms and therefore may look like what it is not, a plurality; the implication is, it seems to me, that the dialectician needs to be able to distinguish correctly not just between one form and its instantiations, but also between forms. For further discussion of this matter, see Larsen 2021.

later books of the *Republic* is described as crucial to a philosopher-ruler, that is, the dialectician (520c1-d2). The ensuing discussion of examples in the *Statesman* is also concerned with the ability to distinguish correctly between things, and the parallel use of metaphor in the *Republic* passage could seem to suggest that what the visitor is about to say about examples is meant to spell out something important to dialectical inquiry as such.

This suggestion is corroborated by the visitor's claim that he has somehow stirred up what we experience about knowledge (*to peri tēs epistēmēs pathos en hēmin*)—where “we” seems to refer to human beings in general. This claim indicates that the discussion about to commence is intended to highlight something crucial about the way examples may affect all of us as regards knowledge. We may even suspect that the *pathos* the visitor will describe in certain ways resembles the *pathos* the cave-image of the *Republic* is meant to illustrate;<sup>12</sup> the lines uttered here by the visitor seem to have the same level of generality and to revolve around the same basic terms, human nature and the experience it undergoes, as the lines uttered by Socrates concerning the *pathos* of human beings in the beginning of that image (compare *R.* 514a1-2 with *Plt.* 277d6-7 and 278c8-d1).

In order to exemplify what he means by stating that an example is now called for, the visitor directs young Socrates' attention to the situation where children are just learning their letters. How we are to understand this situation is a matter of some controversy, also because we do not have “any reliable sources on grammatical education from Plato's times” (Jirsa 2013, 141).<sup>13</sup> The visitor describes the situation as one where children discern letters correctly in certain short and easy syllables but are in doubt and make mistakes when these same letters are found in “other ones” (277e2-278a3). It is not entirely clear if the visitor by “other ones” means other syllables or other words,<sup>14</sup> but not much hangs on this. Important is the fact that the syllable in which the children judge the letters correctly are characterized as “shortest” and “easiest,” which demonstrates that the syllables or words they have trouble with are longer and more difficult; and this, in fact, would seem to suggest that what the visitor has in mind are other words, not syllables, since it makes little sense to say that some syllables are longer and more difficult than others. What the children have to realize is that the letters contained in the short syllable can be found in the longer word as well.

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<sup>12</sup> Goldschmidt (1947, 53n3) connects the *pathos* described here with the *pathos* mentioned at *Phaedo* 73b3-4, arguing that what the visitor is describing in the passage from the *Statesman* is, in fact, recollection.

<sup>13</sup> For additional discussion, see El Murr 2015, in particular 6n1.

<sup>14</sup> Skemp 1952, 160n1 opts for the latter, Jirsa 2013, 139-41 for the first.

We may note that letters function as an analogy for various elements of reality in a number of Platonic dialogues (*Ti.* 57c; *Tht.* 201d8-202c6; *Phlb.* 17a8-b1, 18b6-d2; see also *R.* 368c8-e6 where the difference between reading small and big letters is used as an analogy illustrating the difference between justice in city and soul), an analogy the visitor too will bring up (at 278d1). In the central part of the *Sophist*, moreover, the visitor likens forms to letters (*grammata*; 253a1) and the science of dialectic to the art of spelling (*grammatikē*; 253a12).<sup>15</sup> These parallels suggest that the visitor's choice of an example of what he means by example is not coincidental; his discussion of children learning to become better at spelling is intended to exemplify how one becomes more dialectical.

When it comes to short syllables, the visitor explains, the children are able to say true things about the letters in them (277e7-8). But in the case where the same letters are found in other words they make mistakes (*pseudesthai*) both in speech (*logō[i]*) and judgement (*doxē[i]*; 278a3). Let us suppose that what the visitor has in mind is a situation where a child is unable to spell a more difficult word containing the letters of a known, short syllable; the child is, e.g., able to spell the word “can” but does not know that “candid” contains the same combination of letters as a part. What the visitor wishes young Socrates to grasp concerning this situation is how one may, in “the easiest and most beautiful way,” lead (*epagein*) such children toward what they have not yet recognized.

To do so, one has

to lead them back (*anagein*) first to those cases in which they were correctly judging these same letters, and, having lead them back (*anagagontas*), to set alongside (*para*) them the ones not yet recognized, and by comparing them to point out (*endeiknunai*) that there's the same similarity (*homoiotēta*) and nature (*phusin*) in both intertwinings (*sumplokais*), until the letters that are truly judged have been shown as juxtaposed with all the ones about which there's ignorance. (278a8-b4)

In this way known syllables may come to serve as examples that

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<sup>15</sup> *Stoicheion*, “letter,” in the later philosophical tradition came to mean element, a meaning that, apparently, has its origin in Plato. It seems that Plato uses *stoicheion* and *gramma* more or less as equivalents in the passages mentioned here; see, however, Ryle 1960, and Oberhammer 2016, 5-7, 10.

bring it about that each one of all the letters in all the syllables is addressed as other (*heteron*) when it is other than all the others, and as the same (*tauton*) when it is the same as itself always in accordance with the same things (278b4-c1).

Concerning this description, we may start by noting the recurrence of the verbal element *agein*, “to lead,” in the two compound verbs *epagein* and *anagein*. The point of using examples is to lead, *epagein*, the students to what they have not yet recognized by leading them back, *anagein*, to what they already know. Some scholars (see Prantl 1855, 79-80; Robinson 1953, 213; Tsouyopoulos 1974, 94; see also Ricken 2008, 142-7 where the whole situation is described in Aristotelian terms) have seen a foreshadowing of Aristotelian induction (*epagōgē*) in the passage,<sup>16</sup> the process of “moving from particulars to universals” (*Top.* 1.12, 105a13-14) that Aristotle associates with Socrates (*Metaph.* 1078b27-29); the process the visitor is describing may also be said to have a certain resemblance to the procedure of advancing from what is better known to us to what is better known by nature commonly employed in Aristotle as a method for arriving at *archai* (see e.g. *EN* 1095b2-4; *Ph.* 184a16-23; *APo* 71b33-72a5).<sup>17</sup>

But it should be emphasized that the visitor is not describing a procedure in which one infers something universal from a number of particular cases—what Aristotelian induction aims at—but one where one moves from one particular thing to another, using the first (that one knows) to exhibit something about the other that both things share for the purpose of coming to understand this other thing better. This procedure, several scholars have argued, corresponds to what Aristotle describes as employing a *paradeigma*, the rhetorical counterpart, according to him, of induction (*APr.* II, 24, 69a14; see Goldschmidt 1947, 93-7; Lane 1999, 94-5; Ricken 2008, 142-3; Ausland 2012, 226-8); the visitor’s procedure may also be compared with what Aristotle calls an argument “through similarity” (see *Top.* 156b10-17). More important, as Robinson emphasizes (1953, 212), to my mind correctly, the process the visitor describes strongly resembles the procedure of analogical reasoning in which Socrates often engages in Plato (and in Xenophon), for instance when he seeks to

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<sup>16</sup> Carl Prantl is dismissive of the passage, suggesting that it is the only—and at the same time a miserable—trace of Aristotelian *epagōgē* in Plato; Robinson (1953, 213) claims that Plato in this passage “for the first and last time uses the verb *epagein* of leading a man on to knowledge,” a claim also made by Nelly Tsouyopoulos. It may be noted, however, that we find the closely related expression *anagein epi* in the *Symposium* at 210c; I thank Pål R. Gilbert for pointing this out to me. For a general discussion of Socratic induction in Plato and Aristotle, see Ausland 2012.

<sup>17</sup> David Bronstein (2016) argues that the role of induction in Aristotle’s theory of science derives from a Platonic-Socratic problematic and is, in effect, a response to Meno’s paradox.

discover what the nature of justice is in a man by considering justice in the *polis* (*R.* 368c5-369a4) or what the nature of rhetoric and sophistry are by considering various types of flattery (*Grg.*, 464b2-466a7; for further discussion, see Robinson 1953, 212-4; Lane 1999, 19-20, 90-3; and, especially, Ausland 2012, 232-42).

The next thing to note is that the process described by the visitor contains three clearly distinguished steps.<sup>18</sup> First, the attention of the children is drawn back to what they know, the letter-combination of the easy syllable. Second, after having done this, the teacher “places” (or writes) a more difficult word next to it. Finally, by comparing the two the teacher points out (*endeiknusthai*) that the same similarity (*homoiotēs*) and nature (*phusis*) resides in both, that is, he points out the letter-combination found in both.<sup>19</sup> Thereby the easy syllable becomes an example enabling the children to judge correctly the letters in the syllable and the word, stating that those that are the same are the same and those that are other are other.

To follow our previous suggestion, we may imagine that the teacher wishes to teach the children how to write “candid.” To do so, he first draws their attention to “can,” then writes “candid” next to it, and finally compares the two. The easy syllable “can” thereby becomes an example illustrating that “can” and “candid” share a nature and similarity, the letter-combination “c-a-n,” that enables the pupils to judge correctly that the letters that are the same in both syllables are the same.

Importantly, however, the visitor also indicates that the example points out to the children how the two words compared differ from each other and helps them recognize the elements contained in the unknown word that are not contained in the simple syllable; for he claims that the example brings it about that *each* letter in *all* the syllables—that is, presumably, the syllable used as example as well as the syllables of the longer word—are addressed correctly, those that are different from the others as other, and those that are the same as the same (278b5-c1).

It seems somewhat unclear from the text how an example is meant to bring it about that the letters contained in a longer word that are not contained in the example come to be judged correctly; but perhaps the visitor merely means to suggest that using an example is an important step in learning to write a new word because it helps one to recognize that some of

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<sup>18</sup> For a different take on this passage, see El Murr 2015, 7-9.

<sup>19</sup> Lewis Campbell (1867, note ad loc.) suggests that the same nature found in both syllables or letter-combinations is a letter they have in common but proceeds to suggest that this means that “the same idea or law” can be found “in two widely different things”.



the letters are already known and that one has to concentrate on those that one does not know yet. If this suggestion is along the right lines, what the visitor is indicating is that a simple syllable, when used as an example, is helpful when learning to write a more difficult word because it highlights, first, that you already know some of the elements, as well as their combination, in the longer word, and second, that there are other elements that you do not yet know and do not know how to combine in order to arrive at the word you wish to spell correctly.

At the same time the example of children learning their letters is, it may be argued, intended to reflect the inquiry into sophist, statesman, and philosopher that the interlocutors are currently engaged in. In this inquiry the visitor explicitly employs examples in order to help Theaetetus and young Socrates come to a better understanding of sophistry and statesmanship (see e.g. *Sph.* 218d8-9, 233d3-4; *Plt.* 279a7-b1). For that reason, it is worth noting that the terms “similarity” and “nature,” signifying the letter-combination contained in the two words or syllables in the passage we are considering, resonates with the motifs of likeness and nature running through the trilogy *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman* as a whole. It is worth considering these motifs in some detail in order to appreciate the full significance of the discussion of examples in the *Statesman*.

The abstract noun “similarity” occurs at the very beginning of the *Theaetetus* when Theodorus claims that Socrates and Theaetetus resemble each other (145e1), a claim that is brought up again in the *Statesman* when Socrates suggests he is akin to young Socrates because of their name and to Theaetetus because of the nature (*phusin*) of their faces (257d1-258a3). This kinship mirrors the greater problem that sophist, statesman, and philosopher seem akin in a way that renders them difficult to distinguish. At the beginning of the *Sophist* Socrates asks whether people in Elea distinguish philosopher, sophist, and statesman as three kinds (217a7-9); for according to Socrates their respective types of expertise, real or merely apparent, look alike and are commonly confused (see 216c2-217a2).

Further, in the *Sophist*, while discussing whether or not the use of *elenchos* should be regarded as sophistry, the visitor explains that, in order to be safe, one needs to be on one’s guard the most when it comes to similarities (*tas homoiotētas*), since it is a most slippery kind (231a6-8).<sup>20</sup> In the *Statesman* he suggests that most people are not accustomed to considering things by dividing in accordance with kinds (*kat’ eidē... skopein diairoumenous*) and for that

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<sup>20</sup> For discussion of the significance of this passage for the treatment of examples in the *Statesman*, see Lane 1999, 81-2.

reason they throw things that are different together, deeming them similar, and do the opposite when it comes to other things (285a4-8). But this may be avoided, he suggests, if one, i) whenever one sees a community (*koinōnian*) of many things, does not desist until one sees all the differences that reside in forms (*tas diaphoras hoposaiper en eidesi keintai*) in this community and ii) when seeing all sorts of dissimilarity in a plurality of things, one would not possibly be ashamed to stop before one “encompasses and encloses” in one kind “all the things that belong within the confines of one similarity (*ta oikeia entos mias homoiotētos*)” (285a8-b6). In other words, in order to avoid confusing things that look alike with each other and regarding things that seem different but share a similarity as radically different, one should pursue both differences within communities of things (that is, we may assume, things that are alike) and similarities that things that seem different share. In doing so, it seems, one would be employing the procedures of collection and division described by the visitor in the *Sophist* as central to dialectic (see 253d1-e2).<sup>21</sup>

We may suggest that the children learning to write are trained in employing these same two procedures through the use of examples, albeit at a very pedestrian level—for what the examples enable them to identify correctly are the elements that the easy syllable and the more difficult word have in common and those that are unique to one of them. The use of examples, we may suggest, not only helps the children learn how to spell a new, and longer, word, it also trains two abilities that will be important for writing words correctly in general, the ability to identify likenesses and the ability to identify differences in words and syllables.

At the same time, the example of children learning to write is intended to illustrate the way human beings in general learn to parse the world. Examples, the visitor explains at 278c3-6, come about whenever “something” brings to completion one true judgement concerning two things as a pair (*peri hekateron hōs synamphō*),<sup>22</sup> something that i) is the same in something different, ii) is judged correctly, and iii) is “drawn together” (*synachthen*).<sup>23</sup> In the case of the children learning to write, this “something” is the letters that the simple syllable and the longer word have in common. At 278c8-d1, however, the visitor suggests that our soul by nature is affected in the same way with respect to the elements of all things as the children are with respect to the letters. We are therefore entitled

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<sup>21</sup> For further discussion of this passage, see the chapters by Cristina Ionescu and Pauline Sabrier in this anthology.

<sup>22</sup> The new Oxford edition reads *kai* with manuscripts B and T; I have stayed with Burnet in reading *hos* with manuscript W. See Skemp 1952, 160-1n2.

<sup>23</sup> J. B. Skemp (1952, 160n2) observes that “*περὶ ἑκατέρων* cannot be taken with *συναχθέν*”. He renders the context loosely: “has been made the basis of a parallel examination of both”; Schleiermacher translates it as “herbeigebracht” while Rowe translates it as “having been brought together”.

to infer that examples come about in general whenever one thing containing certain elements is used as a basis for judging the elements contained in another thing. The “elements” of the city relevant for understanding justice in the city, for instance, that Socrates points to in order to help his interlocutors understand justice in the soul may, when seen from this perspective, be regarded as an example.<sup>24</sup>

But if this is how examples come about, the visitor finally suggests, we should not wonder “if our soul” is at times “made stable by the truth” in one situation concerning each thing, but at others is adrift concerning everything in another situation (278d1-3). At times we judge the elements of some things correctly but then, when these same elements are “transposed back into the long and not so easy syllables” of the things we are engaged with (*pragmata*), we become ignorant (278d3-6). Human beings are in general, then, just as children learning to write: we are able to “spell out” the elements contained in certain simple matters but then, when we encounter the same elements in more complex matters, we get confused; and if examples may help us overcome this confusion, as the context clearly indicates they may, it is fair to say that the visitor’s discussion of examples addresses a concern central to Plato—how we may become more knowledgeable about the more difficult things we are engaged or concerned with.

A critical reader might balk, however, at the suggestion that the passage we have been considering so far is concerned with knowledge at all. For it could be objected that the sole concern of the visitor is how we may move from a true or correct opinion about something to a true opinion about something else and that such opinions are inferior to knowledge (Jirsa 2013, 144-9). To this objection we may reply, first, that the passage is not concerned with the contrast between having a true opinion and having knowledge of an object that we know from, for instance, *Republic V*. It is concerned with the activity of *judging* correctly the elements contained in two different things. Second, since the visitor explicitly states that the use of examples has a bearing on what we experience concerning knowledge, and since the example of schoolchildren learning to write is meant to illustrate how they may acquire the knowledge needed for writing a more difficult word, we may assume that the visitor means to suggest that the ability to make correct judgements about the elements of a thing is a necessary, if not necessarily a sufficient, condition of attaining knowledge of that thing, of what it is. Finally, the visitor suggests, at 278d8-e2, that, if we only had false beliefs, that is,

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<sup>24</sup> I am not suggesting that justice in city and soul is composed of elements in any strict sense of the word; what they have in common is rather a structural likeness or what Campbell calls “an idea or law”; see note 19 above.

if we did not make correct judgements about the elements of at least certain simple things, we would never be able to arrive at a small part of the truth and acquire wisdom (*phronēsis*). Wisdom, the aim of the philosopher, he thereby suggests, is only possible to acquire—to the extent that it is possible to acquire—, because human beings generally have some grasp of the elements of things, however shaky that grasp may be. Whether or not what the visitor argues stands in opposition to the account of opinion and knowledge in *Republic V*, the implication of his argument is that one may help human beings acquire some measure of wisdom and truth by expanding their correct judgements about simple matters through the use of examples.<sup>25</sup>

## II. Becoming more dialectical through the use of examples - *Statesman* 285c4-286b2

After having explained what he means by an example, the visitor proposes a specific example meant to help the inquiry into statesmanship, that is, the weaver (278e4-283b5). At 285c4, however, the visitor returns to his previous, general discussion of the use of examples in inquiry. The interlocutors should admit, he now suggests, “something else” (or “another argument”; *ton heteron*) about the “things sought for (*tōn zetoumenōn*)” as well as “the whole engagement (*tēs pasēs diatribēs*] in speeches of this kind (*toisde logos*)” (285c5-6).

The claim that something else must now be admitted that concerns “the whole engagement” in speeches of this kind indicates that this “something” pertains to the inquiry found in the *Sophist* as well, in so far as the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* constitute one prolonged inquiry; and since this inquiry seeks to settle a complex *ti esti* question by delivering an account (*logos*) of the subject matters inquired into, of what they are (*Sph.* 217a7-9, 218b6-c5), it seems likely that it also pertains to the types of inquiries Socrates typically engages in. The point of departure of this new matter introduced is, again, children learning their letters.

When children learn to spell a specific word, the visitor suggests, the inquiry (*tēn zētēsīn*) is not undertaken more (*mallon*) for the sake of learning that particular word than (*ē*) for the sake of becoming “more literate about all proposed words” (285c8-d3); the same situation obtains, he further suggests, in their present inquiry into statesmanship. Now, the “elements” contained in the example he has just brought up for the purpose of analyzing statesmanship—weaving—corresponds to the letters in the simple syllable; and just like no

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<sup>25</sup> The question whether or not Plato modified his conception of *doxa* in the supposedly later dialogues is notoriously controversial and I cannot enter into the discussion of it here.

one would want to present an account of a simple syllable for its own sake, “no one in his right mind would hunt down the account of weaving for its own sake” (285d9-10). One would only give an account of either for the sake of the more complex matters they are meant to point to. But even when it comes to statesmanship, the visitor adds—that is, the target of their inquiry—the inquiry (*zētēsis*) was not proposed more for its sake than for the sake of becoming more dialectical (*dialektikōterois gignesthai*) about everything (285d5-7). From this we may draw two conclusions.

First, the inquiry into statesmanship has a twofold goal, to clarify statesmanship *and* to become more dialectical about everything. It is important to notice (see Politis 2021, xx; see also Ricken 2008, 163) that the visitor is *not* suggesting that the main purpose of the inquiry is to become more dialectical about everything and that statesmanship is merely an object of exercise, as several scholars have argued (Owen 1973, 353; Miller 1980, 69-71; Sayre 2006, 14, 34). What he suggests is that the aim of becoming more dialectical is at least on a par with that of circumscribing statesmanship in the inquiry. Moreover, as Ricken observes, the goal of becoming better at writing, the stand-in for becoming better dialecticians, “can only be reached ... when the children succeed” in writing the unknown word (163, my translation). Likewise, we may suppose, one can only become a better dialectician by practicing dialectic on concrete objects of inquiry.

If we are allowed to extend the analogy between children learning to write difficult words and inquiry into greater matters further, we may also suggest that the visitor means to indicate that each of the greater matters calls for a unique inquiry. When it comes to difficult words, one has to learn how to spell them one by one, through different examples; in learning how to spell “neighbor”, for instance, one does not automatically learn how to spell “knight” or “parliament” correctly. In the same way, we may suggest, a dialectical inquiry into something will have to take into account the particular features of that which is inquired into; having learned how to “spell” sophist, for instance, does not teach one how to “spell” philosopher.<sup>26</sup> If this suggestion is along the right lines, it means that, even if dialectical inquiries have certain procedures in common, these procedures are not a method in the strong sense that they will, when correctly employed, on their own lead you to knowledge of any subject you may wish to inquire into.

Second, dialectic is, according to the visitor, not something one either does or does not possess the ability to engage in. It is rather something in which one may become more or

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<sup>26</sup> I thank Vasilis Politis for pointing out this important feature of Plato’s ideal of inquiry to me.

less proficient, as is suggested by *dialektikōterois* at 285d7, that is, it is something like an ability or competence resembling a basic capacity for reading. In contrast to a prevailing understanding of dialectic in the literature on Plato, according to which dialectic is a type of knowledge exclusive to the accomplished philosopher,<sup>27</sup> the visitor appears to argue that “being dialectical” is something that comes in degrees. Earlier he suggested that human beings, when it comes to the elements of all things, experience what young children experience concerning the letters in words. And since the ability to read that is exercised and improved through the use of examples is the *analogon* of dialectic, we seem intitled to infer that the visitor is indicating that human beings, in so far as they are able to identify the elements contained in at least certain things, are dialectical in the sense that they have some capacity for dialectic that, through proper training, may develop into the full expertise of the *dialektikos*. This, we may suggest, is the deeper meaning of the visitor’s enigmatic suggestion that each of us knows everything as if in a dream.

The point the visitor wishes to make in this particular section of the inquiry concerns the way inquiry should proceed specifically when it comes to important matters, a subject he clearly announced already at 277d2 as the reason why he found it important to discuss examples. Regarding the question what the visitor understands by the greater (*meizona*; 277d2) or greatest (*megista*; see 285e4) matters, it seems obvious from his later discussion that statesmanship is included among them (see *Plt.* 292d4-5), as many scholars also argue (e.g. Owen 1973, 358; Miller 1980, 70; Ricken 2008, 164). It is also fair to assume that matters such as being, otherness, and identity are included, since the visitor suggested that they belong to the *megista genē* at *Sophist* 254b8-c4, as well as the matters all human beings need to consider carefully if they are to live flourishing lives, since he described them as *ta megista* at *Sophist* 230e1-4 (compare with *Ap.* 22d7-8). Even Socrates’ refutative practice seems included in so far as the visitor described it as *megistē* and *kuriōtatē* among the cleansing arts at *Sophist* 230d8-9. In short, we may suppose that the list will include most, or perhaps all, subjects the visitor finds worthy of profound philosophical inquiry.

The visitor’s present argument, we may infer, concerns the way inquiry into such matters should be conducted in general. It is spelled out in further detail by means of a complex distinction that needs careful consideration. It has escaped most men, the visitor begins, that certain perceptible similarities (*aisthētai tines homoiotētes*) that are easily understood have emerged by nature (*pephukasin*) for some of the things that are. These are

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<sup>27</sup> REFS

not difficult to exhibit (*dēloun*), since they are easy to point out (*endeixasthai*) to someone asking for an account (*logos*) of them whenever one might wish to do so, since they make no trouble and require no argument (285d10-e4).<sup>28</sup> For the greatest and most honorable of the things that are, by contrast, no image (*eidōlon*) has been worked out in bodily shape for human beings that would allow one who wished to fill up a questioning soul to fill it up adequately (*hikanōs*) by showing it and adapting it to one of the senses of the questioner (285e4-286a4). It is for this reason that one “must practice being able to receive and give an account (*logon*) of each thing. For bodiless things (*ta asōmata*), being most beautiful and greatest, are pointed out clearly only in an account (*logō[i] monon... saphōs deiknutai*) and in nothing else” (286a4-7).

Here the visitor picks up the theme of similarities that he earlier identified as central to examples. His point is not, then, that some of the things that are, are perceptible while others are not, a point made in both the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, but rather that some of the *similarities* existing between things are perceptible (I here take for granted that the similarity is not a concrete thing, similar to another, but a certain something that two things have in common, as is suggested by the visitor’s description at 278a8-b4). The fact that he emphasizes the difficulty in pointing out (*deiknusthai*) the greater matters, an activity central to the previous discussion of examples, further suggests that the distinction made in this passage is meant to have a direct bearing on this previous discussion; and as we have seen, that discussion set out from the claim that it is difficult to point out any of the greater matters adequately without examples (277d1-2).

What the visitor has in mind when talking about perceptible similarities is, we may assume, cases where what two things have in common is easy for all to see or hear, such as letters, phonemes, or the snubness of the nose of Socrates and Theaetetus. Should someone ask for an account of such a likeness, one might give it simply by pointing to its perceptible manifestation. For those things the visitor calls “greatest and most honorable” (*ta megista kai timiōtata*), however, the situation is different; here “no image devised as plain as day for human beings” (*eidolon ouden pros tous eirgasmēnon enargōs*; trans. S. Benardete) can be found that one may use to satisfy someone inquiring into them (285e4-286a4).

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<sup>28</sup> It may seem a bit odd that someone should ask for a *logos* for something that needs no *logos*—I take it that *logos* is used with two different meanings at 285e2 and 285e3; at 285e2 it means the account of something the questioner asks about (“what is it?”), while it at 285e3 refers to something like an argument that one might offer concerning something for which the account in the former sense is difficult to present.

How are we to understand this caveat? If it is correct to assume that the point the visitor is making is meant to have a bearing on the way examples may help one in pointing to the greatest matters, the point cannot be that the greatest matters cannot be depicted, as Owen famously argued (1973). For to make that point, it seems superfluous to bring in the notion of perceptible similarities, at least if one presupposes that such similarities are not perceptible things, strictly speaking, but rather something that two things have in common that may or may not be perceptible. I would like to suggest that the visitor is arguing that whatever *likeness* the greater matters may have with other things cannot be perceived and that this explains why bodily images cannot be used to point to them. Put differently, his overall point is that, while examples in general may help us extend our understanding from what we already know to what we do not by highlighting the similarity connecting both, if that similarity is not perceptible, we will need to go about the examples in a peculiar manner.

Should we infer that the visitor is arguing that one, in order to point to the greatest matters, should abandon images (*eidola*) altogether and that the examples one needs to point the greatest matters out adequately (see 277d1-2) cannot be understood as images? No, for the visitor is not claiming that one cannot use images when inquiring into such matters. He is making the more subtle claim that there are no bodily images that, if fitted to one of the senses, would fill up the soul of an inquirer adequately.<sup>29</sup> This still leaves open the possibility that one might fill up the soul of an inquirer in an inadequate manner. More importantly, it also leaves open the possibility that one might fill up the soul of an inquirer adequately when using an image if one refrains from “fitting” that image to the senses. For instance, in drawing a line to illustrate the relation between what is perceptible and what is intelligible, one might insist that it is the proportion the line illustrates that is important, not the perceptible line itself. In doing so, one would highlight at one and the same time the radical difference and the important likeness between the image and what the image is meant to illustrate.

It seems to me that such a use of images characterizes the inquiries we see Socrates engaged in in Plato as well as the inquiries conducted by the Eleatic visitor. Both dialecticians employ certain activities and things as examples or images, such as angling, weaving, mythical beasts, and lumps of wax, in order to illustrate something important about something else that is difficult to understand, such as sophistry, statesmanship, the desires of

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<sup>29</sup> For a thoughtful discussion of the use of examples in inquiry as discussed in the *Statesman* and of the account of different types of images in the *Sophist*, see Ionescu 2020.



the soul, or its nature. These “things,” whether we are to think of them as bodily or not, function as images because they are used in the inquiry to help highlight a similarity that they share with something else, a greater matter, a similarity that cannot in itself be perceived. In the various attempts at giving accounts of the things that serve as images, we may suppose, the real aim is to bring this non-perceptible similarity with something else to clarity. Thereby the accounts of the rather trivial matters may help us arrive at a better account of what we do not yet understand because we cannot account for it.

This, I believe, is the point the visitor is making when he claims that we need to “practice being able to receive and give an account of each thing.” When he claims that “bodiless things, being most beautiful and greatest, are pointed out clearly only in an account and in nothing else” (286a4-7), he is not suggesting that images and examples cannot help us arrive at such an account. On the contrary, he is arguing that, if used intelligently, they are imminently suited to help us at arriving at such accounts—even if they are only one way among others to do so.

The inquiry of the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*, we may finally note, suggests that this use of examples as part of an inquiry is a flexible procedure. In both dialogues, the visitor changes his leading images in the course of the inquiry. In the *Sophist* he sets out from the image of the angler (218d8-9), but then changes the example, first to certain household activities (226c1-2), then to a painter or imitation artist (233d3-234b10). In the *Statesman*, in turn, he sets out from the image of the herdsman (see 275b3-7 where the herdsman is identified as a *paradeigma*), but then later introduces the image of the weaver (278e4-279b6). It has been a matter of controversy how we are to understand these changes, and a full discussion of this matter is beyond the scope of the present chapter. I would like to suggest, however, that the change from one example to another does not mean that the initial examples are misguided or wrong; rather, each chosen image helps bring out one aspect of sophistry or statesmanship, respectively, and stands in need of being complemented by additional examples, but may not in and of itself be wrong. As Roslyn Weiss (1995) has argued, the image of weaving presented in the *Statesman* would not, unless supplemented by the image of the herdsman, lead to an adequate understanding of statesmanship. Herding highlights the fact that the statesman is a caretaker of living beings, which weaving does not. If this suggestion is along the right lines, it also suggests that using images in an inquiry requires tact and a preliminary understanding of the subject matter inquired into.

That, however, should hardly come as a surprise to anyone who has tried to teach difficult matters to students; it is often the case that one needs several, supplementary images

to bring out features of a complex matter that students find difficult to grasp. To me it seems that such a use of images is a salient feature both of the way that Socrates and other main interlocutors perform dialectical inquiries in Plato's dialogues and of the way Plato seeks to lead his readers to insights into the greatest matters.

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