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Dennis J. Schmidt, *editor*

**Plato's *Statesman***  
DIALECTIC, MYTH, AND POLITICS



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P R E S S

## Adrift on the Boundless Sea of Unlikeness

*Sophistry and Law in the Statesman*



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Life in the Age of Zeus, as the Eleatic Stranger tells it, is hard. Separated from the divine pilot, who oversees the automatic age—the Age of Cronos, wherein provisions for all creatures come about “of themselves”—humans are forced to make their own way in a parallax cosmos, marked by ever-increasing self-differentiation and its host of attendant hardships and evils.<sup>1</sup> “And don’t we know,” he states, “that the nature of animals endures with difficulty [χάλερός] when changes great and many and various bear down on it?” (*Stat.* 270c)<sup>2</sup> At a second remove from the best condition of all, that of self-sameness,<sup>3</sup> Zeusian denizens are forced to labor in order to survive, and such self-care participates in the cosmos’ fragile orderliness primarily through the development and practice of *téxvau*. Yet, equally as hard, the Stranger implies, is the task of understanding and sorting out these *téxvau* in language in such a way that the order they compose with respect to each other, and as well the very political order that they sustain, can become clear to the denizens themselves.<sup>4</sup> For it is not simply that the parallax cosmos inclines toward otherness and unlikeness to a greater degree than its alternate, but that such otherness is frequently and doggedly obscured by the appearance of sameness, all the more as one attempts to catch hold of those arts that have a share in political rule. Surprisingly, the Stranger suggests that attaining clarity—about human life as well as the distinctions of nature itself—through overcoming the appearance of sameness would be decisive in making Zeus’ children superior in happiness to those partaking of the easy life in the age of automaticity. For if the latter content themselves, he states, merely with pleasant myths and not with the “gathering of intelligence”

(συναυρηθὸν φρονήσεως) characteristic of philosophy (272b-c): then the more valuable form of life is more likely to be found in the age of toiling self-care.<sup>5</sup> Yet as he and young Socrates advance closer to an identification of the true πολιτικός in their investigation, the Stranger declares that the just and happy city of technicians will be forced to engage in precisely that which would disqualify the children of Cronos in their contention to be the happier era, namely the practice of mythmaking (304c-d). The remarkability of this claim is compounded by the fact that the end of civic unity via persuasion aimed at by means of myth seems to turn their entire investigation back in the direction of the paradigm of the herdsman, on the one hand, insofar as it appears to call into question the distinction between forcible and voluntary rule essential to the happy city that humans are capable of realizing.<sup>6</sup> On the other, it is immediately after they appear to have succeeded in the “awfully difficult” (παραγάλεινον) task of separating off that “very large mob” (πᾶντοῦτον ὄχλον) (291a) which “of all the sophists is the greatest wizard and the one most experienced in this τέχνη [of sophistry]” (291c) from the statesmanly kind, that he designates the rhetor as the one who will serve the king through such mythopoetic persuasion, despite the famous association of sophistry with rhetoric.<sup>7</sup> The present study asks after the fate of sophistry in the Stranger’s investigation of the best of the six regimes governed by law, and therefore sets its sights on outlining as far as possible the role of the rhetor under the supervision of the true statesman, as well as the function and effects of myth on the citizens of the best regime under law. In short, I will argue that Socrates’ competitors do, in a qualified manner, still have a place in such a polis precisely where the philosophical work of gathering intelligence finds its civic limit.

### Sophistic Enchantment and Political Division

It is, to begin with, the myth referred to above that occasions the difficult turn in the collective search by the Stranger and young Socrates for the true statesman. For there we find that on the basis of the current rotation of the cosmos, in which the absence of the divine caregiver and the orderly harmony of existence that accompanies him give way to a progressive condition of cosmic forgetfulness and disorder, humans are forced to provide for themselves in the face of a “great mixture of opposites” where the world “reaches the point of risking destruction both of itself and of the things within it” (273d). As a characterization of the present era, the Stranger’s myth serves as the primary indication that theirs is not to be a utopian discourse;<sup>8</sup> the harsh conditions that shape what is possible in the present will not improve, but instead the increasingly sick (νοσήσαντα) and slack (αυθέρτα) nature of things—as well as the nature of human capaci-

ties—move ever closer to their chaotic end: a “boundless sea of unlikeness” (ἀνομοίωτος ἕναιρον ὄντα πόντον) (273d-e) from which the god must one day rescue them by retaking the cosmic helm.<sup>9</sup> This characterization of a disharmonious and diseased state of affairs not only anticipates the later analogy between the ideal statesman and the physician, but it also signals that the self-preservation of the political order, its capacity to endure, will be a priority of the first order for the ruler of the best regime. As such, the concern of the herdsman—the initial paradigm of the ruler in their investigation—with the natural or bodily well-being of his flock, namely that they receive adequate nourishment (τροφή), is not discarded along with the new paradigm, but implicitly accompanies the criteria of their revised search. That this revised inquiry must now take into account the manner of human rule under the heading of care (ἐπιμέλεια) (276b-e) reflects the more fitting need of the statesman to reckon with the way in which his subjects understand their own role and participation in being ruled. Hence, the physical preservation of the statesman’s subjects must now accommodate, in addition, not simply concerns of justice and injustice, but as well their many different appearances among those who are ruled. In order to carry out what is fitting for the regime, the statesman must also see to it that his commands appear fitting,<sup>10</sup> lest his polis devolve into stasis and disintegration.

It is this distinction between shaping public perception, on the one hand, and the pursuit or use of knowledge, on the other, that the Stranger’s myth of alternate turnings brings to our attention. Within the context of their discussion, the Stranger uses this myth in order to help young Socrates better understand the nature of πολιτική as part of the larger task of allowing him to become more dialectical in general (285d). The myth is therefore presented for the sake of enhancing one’s capacity for philosophical analysis and is thus directed at the acquisition of knowledge, the move from mere appearance to a revelation of being. This move beyond appearances within the course of the *Statesman* faces its greatest difficulty when they approach that class of civil servants, composed of “every which [πᾶντοῦτόν] tribe,” whose appearances are so many and varied that “many of the men are like lions and centaurs and other such creatures, and a great many like satyrs and weak beasts of many wiles [τρολιτρότοις—literally, “many-turned”], and they quickly exchange both their looks and power [ἰδέεαι καὶ τὴν δύναμιν] with one another” (291a-b). Whether the Stranger means to apply this designation to all sophists as such or only the “chorus” of them that “of all the sophists is the greatest wizard [γῶντα]” (291c), is not immediately clear, nor is the issue of who among those considered to be sophists by the many (including Socrates) are actually deserving of the name in the eyes of the Eleatic Visitor.<sup>11</sup> What is clear, however, is the distinction between the work of the teacher and that of the enchanter (γῶης) upon which the sorting of

this strange rite is carried out. For perhaps more so than anywhere else in the Platonic dialogues, the Stranger's story itself serves as a paradigm for myth telling as a means of didactic education, in contrast to the comparatively obscure purposes of protracted mythologizing that Socrates offers as a coda to his dialectical exchanges, those found, for example, at the end of the *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Gorgias*.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast, those who are known to make use of myths for purposes of persuasion, or for the sake of ideological inculcation more broadly, are precisely the multitude of sophists whom the Stranger refers to via mythological images of satyrs, centaurs, and other clever beasts. Ostensibly, these sophists together compose a body of shifting centers or foci of authority, depending on which of them at a given moment proves to appear more capable of leading than his competitors. Without a measure for true political *τέχνη*, the public is left at the mercy of the latest victor in a public dialogical battle or the most recent charismatic personality to win its confidence. As the public's enthusiasm and tastes whimsically shift allegiances, so too does one or another sophist appear to the many to be a suitable statesman; as each takes on the εἶδος of political competence for the ignorant through his mode of speaking, so too does political *δυναμικὴ* shift along with such crafting of appearance, given that the title to leadership resides in large part with the confidence of the governed. Sophists on the whole, then, the Stranger suggests, are not just a varied but a protean lot, difficult to pin down and constantly on the move, each possessed of his particular set of rhetorical resources—mysterious and potentially mystical to the ears of the layperson—for impersonating that which he is not, as had been established in their earlier search for precisely this elusive practitioner.<sup>13</sup> As Mitchell Miller notes, "What the politicians lack, seen from the philosopher's point of view, is invisible to the nonphilosopher. . . . To understand the difference between the real and merely apparent statesman requires understanding *epistēmē*. And this, in turn, requires education into philosophy and *epistēmē* itself of the forms."<sup>14</sup> In this sense, following the Stranger's reasoning, sophists—and especially those seeking to appear as statesmen—not only depend on the ignorance of the ruled in order to seem to possess *πολιτικὴν*, but insofar as they withhold education while seeming to provide it, they find it a necessary part of their own practice to perpetuate this same ignorance on the part of the public.

As an exemplar of such mystical and enchanting mythological figures, we need look no further than the portrait of Protagoras in Plato's eponymous dialogue. There our first glimpse of the sophist associates him with alternating motion, as he walks back and forth in Callias' courtyard while lecturing amongst a number of aspiring students, and furthermore casts him in an explicitly mythological light. Socrates notes that a handful of

strangers following in the back were "brought by the great Protagoras from the several cities which he traverses, enchanting [*κρηλῶν*] them with his voice like Orpheus, while they follow where the voice sounds, enchanted [*κρηλημένους*]" (*Prot.* 315a-b). In fact, Socrates confesses, at the conclusion of the sophist's "Great Speech," that he remained "under [Protagoras] spell [*κρηλημένους*]" for a long time, caught up in desire to hear the man speak further until he could gather himself together (*συναγείρας*) with much struggle (328d). If we recall within the Stranger's myth the gathering (*συναγυρισμόν*) of intelligence as contrasted with the pleasant telling of myths, we uncover the implication that sophistry and pleasant (*non*didactic) mythologizing effect a dis-integration of the soul's work of understanding and thought, a dispersion of one's ability to command or lead oneself in accordance with *νόος*.<sup>15</sup> From this vantage, the unfettered sophist represents in the eyes of the Stranger a real possibility for being set adrift on a sea of unlikeliness in another sense, wherein the distinctions necessary to understanding what is said in sophistic discourse are obscured by the train of pleasant words and images that provide the experience of enchantment. As well, the association with Orpheus—and indeed with the sophist's voice operating in place of the enchanting lyre—points to the work of *ψυχαγωγία*, or the leading of souls into the underworld, that Socrates explicitly identifies with the practice of rhetoric in the *Phaedrus*.<sup>16</sup> Isocrates refers to *ψυχαγωγία* in a similar attitude, aligning it with the sort of public discourse for orators that "abounds in myth" (*μυθωδότηρατος*) so as to "command the attention [*ψυχαγωγεῖν*] of their hearers," saying "the kinds of things which they see are most pleasing to the crowd."<sup>17</sup> As each of these thinkers finds it, rhetorical *ψυχαγωγία* under the guise of pleasant mental oblivion is either to be avoided (Isocrates) or rehabilitated in line with philosophical knowledge and directed not to crowds, but to individuals (Socrates, *Phr.* 271c ff.).<sup>18</sup> Yet by means of enchantment in speech, a preponderance of those experts in demagogic rhetoric to which the Stranger refers actually do hold the position of the statesman in the regimes of the day,<sup>19</sup> and the many, about whom the Stranger and young Socrates repeatedly agree are not capable of possessing any such art as that of politics (292c, 297b-c, 300e, 303a), appear to be liable to the "many wiles" of their sophistic leaders. Indeed, Socrates seems to have just such sophist-politicians in mind when, in the *Republic*, he likens the many to a "great, strong beast" whose desires are learned by heart so that it can be held under the sway of sophists, who must be familiar with "how it should be approached and how taken hold of, when—and as a result of what—it becomes difficult or most gentle, and particularly, under what conditions it is accustomed to utter its several sounds and, in turn, what sorts of sounds uttered by another make it tame and angry" (493a-b).<sup>20</sup> So skilled can these leaders be in their art of rhetoric that by means

of it they can predict and calculate which speeches elicit which effects at a given moment on the part of the many, and direct the many accordingly.<sup>21</sup> Whereas mere sophists are regarded as using their enchantment to make their listeners believe in falsehoods, the sophistic politicians, in prescribing this or that set of actions, additionally make the many believe that their civic participation is undertaken freely, in accordance with their own independent thinking.

Yet by such powers these men show themselves to the Stranger to be not harmonizers or unifiers with respect to the many, but instead "faction makers" (στρασιαστικόν) and, in furthermore being the "greatest imitators and wizards" (μεγίστου δὲ δῦρα μιμητὰς καὶ γόητα) are "overseers of the greatest idols [εἰδωλόν]" (303c). The force of this characterization lies both in the illustration of the sophist as an imitator in the Stranger's earlier conversation with Theaetetus and with the lengthy digression on law and types of regime immediately preceding this verdict on contemporary politicians (291d–303b). To begin with, just as painters and sculptors must, as the Stranger says, distort images that are great in magnitude in order to preserve an appearance of beauty relative to the perceptive capacities of the viewer, so too does the sophist practice the making of appearances that utilize elements of unlikeness or falsity for the sake of a likeness: a practice that, for the purposes of the inquiry, earns their art the name not of εἰκαστικὴν but ποικιλτικὴν (*Soph.* 236a–c). By fashioning a parallax view of the greatest things that suit the tastes, sensibilities, and desires of his listeners—justice, for example, rarely appears the same to the lower economic strata as it does to a thriving merchant class, and it may appear less exigent as a civic value to the more cynical members of a city's traditional elite or to the ambitious power seekers than it would to the anonymous many—the sophist takes part in a false variety of mimesis in speech, one that flatters whichever group to which his words are directed, and in so doing creates a counterfeit (εἰδωλόν) rather than a true likeness.<sup>22</sup>

This distorted and thus partial approach to civic virtue is at the same time a function of party politics within the constitutional democracy of the day. Politics in fifth- and fourth-century Athens was increasingly competitive and adversarial,<sup>23</sup> with a host of newly wealthy players representing this or that set of interests (to the detriment of others) within the polis, and as interest groups differ, so was it necessary to find a language measured to this or that group. What compounds this partiality is the ever-present possibility of corruption, most notably in consideration of the individual who claims to rule simply by τέχνη but proves through an incorrect distribution of justice and piety (whether due to the fulfillment of favors or the pursuit of one's own advantage<sup>24</sup>) to be a tyrant (301c–d),<sup>25</sup> and it is precisely that anxiety on the part of the governed that makes the idea of government without laws,

as young Socrates puts it, "harder to hear" (χαλεπίτερον ἀκούειν) (293e).<sup>26</sup> The true statesman, in contrast, the Stranger explains, "rules both all [who have a particular civic function] and the laws, exercising care for all things throughout a city and weaving them all together most correctly" (305e).<sup>27</sup> From this vantage point especially, there is a double emphasis in the *Statesman* on the status of sophist-rhetorician-politicians as figures of dispersion, not merely in the realm of political interests and allegiances but as well in the mental dispersion that their oratorical performances engendered within their hearers.

In light of the reasons we have gathered in their association with magical enchantment and dissembling, then, along with their identification as divisive forces within the city, those going under the name of sophist, as well as those who fit this description but who call themselves statesmen, are rightfully separated out from the true ruler guided by πᾶντιν. Yet distinguishing them in this way does not thereby entail that they are to be wholly excluded from the best kind of regime. As I argue below, while their liability as faction-makers is to be overcome by their specific placement within the best regime under the provenance of the statesman, their powers of enchantment and their ties with mythology are to be preserved in the best of constitutions constrained to operate under laws.

#### Sophistry as Civic Service

In line with their rehabilitated method of division following the observance of measure and the mean, the Stranger and young Socrates had first come across the sophist within the class of those servants to the king who, along with the priestly class, "contend for the statesman's art" (290b). That they happen upon the sophist in this category is noteworthy, given the varied political roles that sophists—especially as they are portrayed with the dialogues—were known to occupy. In *Hippias Major*, for example, the sophist is on official business as an ambassador for his Elean government (281a–b), and Gorgias, as Hippias shortly thereafter mentions, visited Athens from Sicily in a similar official capacity (282b).<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Pericles' sons are among those singled out as attendees at Protagoras' side in the *Protagoras*, and, moreover, Heracles of Pontus reports that the sophist had a hand in writing the laws for Pericles' Panhellenic settlement at Thurii.<sup>29</sup> Taken together, these points support the notion that those known for their psychagogical powers of speech were in some cases on familiar terms with the leaders of their regimes, and furthermore that their expertise in speaking proved to fulfill a beneficial role in matters of diplomacy. In short, there is evidence—and Plato seems quite aware of this—of a felicitous relation between the representatives of the sophistic enlightenment and political

participation, if only of an ancillary nature. These considerations should give us pause before concluding that one ought to lump such sophists as Protagoras, Gorgias, Prodicus, and Hippias in with those party politicians of the day whom the Stranger calls the “greatest sophists among the sophists” (303c). That is, if sophistry—taken not simply as the skill of rhetoric, but also seen in light of the manifold techniques of enchantment and *φανταστικὴν*—is withdrawn from the class of those servants contending for the appearance of the statesman, might it nonetheless become an instrument of justice within not merely a theoretical regime, but a regime that humans are capable of realizing? The Stranger’s answer to this question, I maintain, is yes. And if this is the case, then we might be in a position to see what it is about the practice of sophistry that is neither “foreign” nor “unfriendly” to the science of statesmanship, as the Stranger puts it (303e). Moreover, as we approach the true statesman, it appears that the sophist’s rhetorical power appears necessary for the survival not just of that, but of virtually any regime.

Once that divisive “chorus concerned with the affairs of cities” (291b-c) has been finally set aside, the Stranger turns to consider, as he says, “another group still more difficult [*γαλενώτερον*] than this in being both more akin, and nearer, to the kingly kind, as well as more resistant to thorough understanding [*δυσκατααθηρότερον*]” (303d). Unlike the mingled and mixed mob of pretenders, however, this class of close kinship is clearly divided into three at the outset: generalship (*στρατηγία*), judging (*δικαστική*), and “such rhetoric as shares in the kingly art [*ὄση βασιλικῆ κοινωνοῦσα πηροπειδί*], which, by persuading about what’s just, helps pilot the practices within the cities” (303e–304a). The rhetorician, then, proves to be as valuable an aid to the true statesman in carrying out his work as any other individual in the city, alongside the expert in matters of war and the critical powers of the judge. The Stranger goes on to qualify the crucial activity of the kingly rhetor in an abbreviated manner, noting only that his science of rhetoric provides the ability to “persuade a multitude and mob through storytelling [*μυθολογία*] but not through teaching [*μη̄ διὰ διδασίης*]” and that its activation is subject to the science of ruling possessed by the statesman (304b-d). Along with their concession to the necessity of law in the best of regimes, this characterization of rhetoric under the true statesman accentuates the non-utopian tenor of their inquiry.

To begin with, law was regarded as imperfect because, given the “dissimilarities of both human beings and actions, and the never being at rest, so to speak, of any single thing among human things” (294b), it could never render what is appropriate<sup>30</sup> to each individual in virtue of its fixed and simple nature. The dream of exemplifying perfect, fitting justice for all within the city dies with the inability of the *πολιτικός* to “prescribe what’s

appropriate with precision, always sitting by each person’s side throughout life” (295a-b). For such superhuman hopes, one must turn back to the divine herdsman and away from the conditions of the present age. Not only is law unable to accommodate every human within the sea of unlikeness, but in addition, we are not to expect that each individual can attain the level of the enlightened, well-educated citizen; there will still be the *καλοὶ κἀγαθοὶ* in opposition to the undistinguished many, as the Stranger’s language reflects when speaking of those upon whom the kingly rhetorician must practice his craft, namely, a multitude and mob (*πληθὺς τε καὶ ὄχλου*). The latter term in particular holds the negative connotation of something troublesome or capable of causing a disturbance.<sup>31</sup> In short, the many are still regarded as something of a problem for the true statesman, and need to be managed accordingly. Such management that is to be provided by the rhetorician in this scheme proceeds, as we have noted, not by way of teaching, but through the public recitation of myths. The Stranger appears to have come up against a limit not with respect to the powers of the kingly ruler, but with regard to the educational capabilities of the many. While they may understand their *τέχναι* sufficiently to be of service to their polis, the prospect of their adequately understanding the nature of human virtue appears to be too much to demand.

The kingly rhetorician’s part within the best regime of laws must be, then, to utilize *logos* through images as its means of persuasion in the city. We are reminded of the Stranger’s earlier analogy between their account of statesmanship and zoography, where for those “capable of following, it’s more fitting to make every animal plain in language and argument [*λέξει καὶ λόγῳ*], rather than through painting and handicraft in general; but for the others, through handicrafts” (277c).<sup>32</sup> Persuasion through myth seems, as with the statesman’s reliance on law, a second-best strategy for governing the happy city, given that adequate justice cannot extend to each and all, nor is each and every soul liable to be adequately educated so as to grasp intellectually the reasons for those laws and kingly dictates to which they are subject. The dream implied by the move from herdsman in the Age of Cronos to statesman in the Age of Zeus, namely, the dream of a political order characterized by a rationality transparent to all, must be cast aside. The best regime is therefore constrained to make use of political propaganda in order to achieve its ends, not unlike the *Republic*’s “noble lie” of the myth of the metals instituted for the sake of maintaining the genetic order in the *καλλίτρολος* (*Rep.* 412b–415d). The rhetorician’s primary target, it follows, would then be the production of pleasure through and in association with these images, as with the supposed leisure-time activities of myth telling among humans and animals in the Cronian era, which take place, as the Stranger says, when they are “filled up with a surfeit of food



and drink" (272c). The associations here between mythical entertainment and gastronomic fullness within the myth point to a general state of near-narcosis, a pleasant drowsiness and passivity in which one's critical faculties are held in abeyance.<sup>33</sup> In short, the rhetorician's activity leads us back into considerations of sophistic *ψυχωγωγία*, and hence, back into the sphere of enchantment that had earlier been distinguished from true statesmanship.

As distinct from the above-mentioned involvement of sophists in official political matters—both within Plato's texts and in the surviving historical documents—the kingly rhetoric of the best regime is not directed to its interaction with other *poles*, but appears to have a wholly domestic application. The rhetorician in this case is something of a Hermes, delivering coded dictates of belief and behavior from ruler to citizens. Yet by making use of psychological resources in line with the production of myth, the supposed appeal to human freedom that distinguishes the true statesman from the herdsman (276c-e) appears to be at least partly undermined: there remains the need for a certain compulsion or violence in *logos* practiced upon the citizenry, insofar as the latter are by and large unable to adequately understand by their own power the reasons for the civic order of which they are a part, and are thus unable to act with purpose (*ἐκωοτοῖς*). Moreover, it is clear that the kingly rhetoric is not to be confused with the rehabilitated art of rhetoric that Socrates alludes to in the *Phaedrus*, in which, in order to "guide the soul [*ψυχωγωγία*]" one must not only know "what forms the soul possesses" (271d) but also "the truth about each of the things he speaks or writes about and . . . to define everything according to itself and, having defined it, knows how to cut it up again according to its forms until it has come to the state where it can be cut up no more" (277b). Nor would it be the "correct" rhetoric that he identifies in the *Gorgias*, which requires that the rhetor "be a just person who has knowledge of just things" (508c). For in each case, the rhetorician is converted into the philosopher vested with insight into the forms of that about which he speaks, and the philosopher, moreover, holds a dialogue with individuals, rather than the many. No such characterization is given to the kingly rhetorician here. In fact, his distance from the philosopher—to the extent that the sophistic-rhetorician neither takes part in teaching nor leads anyone to knowledge—dictates much more that his practice is already adequately defined as that which we observe in the *Gorgias*, namely as "a craftsman of a believing persuasion and not of a teaching persuasion about the just and the unjust" (455a), where "it is not necessary for rhetoric to know anything . . . [but only] to have found some mechanism of persuasion so that it may appear to those who do not know more than those who do know" (459b-c).<sup>34</sup> The mere appearance of authority that Socrates so often seeks to unmask in his sparring with sophists will not only be retained, it seems, in the best of cities, but it will be

invaluable to the kingly rhetor and thus to the statesman as well, insofar as the latter's ability to rule depends on his rhetor's effective persuasion.

Serving as the primary mediator between ruler and subjects, the rhetor's role is a function of the limitations of the statesman noted above. Were the statesman able to achieve the superhuman ideal and, again, "sitting by each person's side throughout life," thus persuade each individual about the just and unjust through myth or otherwise, there would be as little need for rhetoricians as there would be for written laws. The self-reliance of humanity in the Age of Zeus entails only "coarse" (295a) justice through law and likewise for the ruled a coarse grasp of the principles that subtend such law and direct its application. Failure to grasp adequately the human good is both what allows for the average citizen to occupy himself with the appearance of goodness through pleasure in its many attendant forms and what allows sophists, as they are generally portrayed in the dialogues, to ply their trade of casting distorted appearances through speech. In fact, if we consider arguably the most notable of sophistic performances, Protagoras' "great speech" within the *Protagoras*, we find an example of rhetorical mythologizing that illustrates the sort of civic persuasion that roughly fits the description of rhetorical practice in the best regime.<sup>35</sup> For while his myth of Prometheus and the *logos* that follows upon it are geared to proving that *πολιτική* can be transmitted throughout the populace through teaching, its wider scope includes the justification of several Athenian laws and conventions—among them capital and corporal punishment (323d–324b, 325b-c, 326d-e), praising and blaming (323d), selective truth telling (323a-b), civic education (325c–326c), and even law-abidngness itself (326c-e)—such that his listeners are to be convinced of the wisdom and justice of the city as it exists. For those more critically minded in their gathering, like Socrates, the *logos* and ensuing discussion are necessary. But for a wider audience of citizenry, or to recall the Stranger's terminology, a "multitude and mob," the mythic component alone of Protagoras' performance would likely be sufficient in that it fashions a vision through which citizens can view the *voynoi* of Athens, providing both a divine and a natural basis for the civic legal and practical structure.<sup>36</sup>

While we observe that sophistic propagandizing runs in line with the activity of the kingly rhetor, there is also a hint that Plato may well be thinking of specific sophist-rhetoricians as potential models. For if we recall that the Stranger introduces the three offices of general, judge, and rhetor sharing a kinship with the true statesman as *διοκραταφθρότροπον*, his use of this uncommon term points to the writer who was, in the extant literature, most fond of it: the famous rhetorician and student of both Gorgias and Prodicus, Isocrates. In addition to Isocrates' employment of the word in his *Antidosis* (265) and *Panathenaius* (246),<sup>37</sup> he writes in his *Helen* of

that which, in opposition to the eristic sort who claim to possess *πολιτικὴ*, is most valuable in public discourses, namely “those that are trustworthy and all of similar nature [which] are devised and expressed through the medium of a variety of forms and occasions whose opportune use [*καίρων*] is hard to learn [*δυσκαταμάθητον*]” (11). And in his famous *To Nicodemus*, Isocrates cautions the young ruler to make use of a difficult rhetorical principle mentioned above, yet in relation to governance:

Keep watch always on your words and actions, that you may fall into as few mistakes as possible. For while it is best to grasp your opportunities at exactly the right moment [*καίρων*], yet, since they are difficult to discern [*δυσκαταμάθητος*], choose to fall short rather than to overreach them; for the happy mean [*μέτριότης*] is to be found in defect rather than excess. (33)

What is truly “difficult to discern” in each of these cases—whether with regard to the delivery of speeches or seizing political opportunities—according to Isocrates is the *καίρος*, the proper moment for speaking or acting. As with the Stranger’s counsel to young Socrates not to move too quickly or slowly in their analysis (286b ff.),<sup>38</sup> a similar principle in Isocrates, and in contemporary sophistic practice more broadly, is highlighted here by Plato. In her analysis of this aspect of the dialogue, Melissa Lane points out that “in general, the Sophists link their temporal use of *kairos* to rhetorical performance. The *kairos* is rather the criterion of a good speech than part of its proper subject.”<sup>39</sup> As is clear from the concluding sections of the *Statesman*, it is the true statesman who can recognize the *καίρος* in giving his commands,<sup>40</sup> and whose further task it is to weave the virtues of courage and self-restraint together in the souls of his citizens such that the right combination of these qualities will likewise allow for proper action in relation to the opportune moment (305e–311e). Thus, Plato not only adapts this originally rhetorical principle from sophistry, but he makes it the centerpiece of the Stranger’s conception of the statesman’s true work.<sup>41</sup>

With respect to its intellectual association with Isocrates and the sophistic tradition, then, the political theory of the *Statesman* implies that particular elements of sophistry—including their psychological resources—can, if rightly incorporated into a scientific scheme, prove beneficial to that civic order. Moreover, sophists, given their containment within specific defined limits, have a crucial role to play. For just as the Stranger calls attention to the fact that speeches are not to be made with a view to pleasure, except as a proximate or subordinate end (*πάροργον*) (286d), those who make use of pleasurable mythologizing in order to persuade the many are themselves to be strictly subordinated to the true statesman. For it is the

latter who decides, beyond the content of just beliefs, “whether one must do anything whatever to someone, by persuasion or also by force, or even whether to keep entirely quiet” (304d). Provided that the sophist is maintained within a role subservient to the statesman, then, the dangers of political faction and general discord are mitigated, precisely because in carrying out the demands of his superior, the sophist directs the many—through his presentation of myth—to considerations of justice that are suitable to the whole of the city as far as possible.<sup>42</sup> In this way, the sophist-rhetorician’s observance of the *καίρος* in his practice is enfolded within the more comprehensive attainment to the *καίρος*, and to the *μέτρον* as such, emblematic of the true statesman.

The primary danger of sophistry as it is often discussed within the dialogues has to do with the power of persuasion used by individuals who are ultimately blind to any authority outside of themselves or outside of the democratic opinions to which they ostensibly cater. Adequately tethered to the dictates of the kingly statesman, on the other hand, neither the sophist’s lack of knowledge, nor his carefully concealed thinking and intentions, nor his disregard of actual dialectical teaching appear to be significant issues for carrying out his charge. His ability to guide souls under the supervision of the ruler instead allows him to participate in constructing those divine bonds of “genuinely true and also steadfast opinion about beautiful and just and good things and the things opposed to these” (309c) within the souls of the many. In distinction from Socrates’ above-mentioned approach to proper rhetoric in the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*, then, rhetoric in the eyes of the Stranger need not be converted into philosophy and led by certain knowledge of the forms in order to serve the happiness and preservation of the city as a whole. For commentators who claim that the fundamental difference between philosophy and sophistry resides not in rhetorical technique nor method but in the psychological (and thus ethical) orientation of the one in opposition to the other,<sup>43</sup> it would seem that sophistry would indeed be supplanted by more philosophical types in the *Statesman* when the Stranger goes on to declare that those who, in the eyes of the city’s educators within the best regime of law, aren’t capable of “sharing in a courageous and moderate character, and everything else that tends to virtue, but are violently driven off course by a bad nature into godlessness and arrogance and injustice” will be “cast out by punishing them with death penalties and exiles and the greatest dishonors” (308e–309a). Yet such measures imply on the part of educators, whom the Stranger introduces rather late in the dialogue and about whom quite oddly says very little, something very much like the knowledge necessary for philosophical rhetoric that we have previously identified, knowledge of justice as well as of the soul. If such forms of knowledge were indeed shared among the statesman and the civic educators alike—which would perhaps



be the most difficult thing of all—to ensure that these are transmitted to each, and thus to ensure that only the virtuous compose the citizenry, then it appears that the Stranger's dream of the best regime according to law would in fact have very little need of law whatsoever. Indeed, it would be a true utopia, whose *πολιτικὴ* would by proxy quite nearly approximate that impossible hope for the divine king who distributes justice, "sitting by each person's side throughout life." In the parallax cosmos, on the other hand, the best option is to seek to constrain the practice of sophistry and put it to use for somewhat more measured ends.

### Notes

1. In the *Timaeus* as well, the term "parallaxis" is used with reference to periodic geological upheavals, denoting a sudden shift away from the earth's perceived orderliness (22c).
2. Unless otherwise noted, my translations of the *Statesman* follow that of Brann, Kalkavage, and Salem (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2012).
3. Though more orderly than its successor, the Age of Cronos is yet an imitation of the best condition, only to be achieved in absence of bodily existence and the necessary change that such existence necessarily involves (Star. 269d-e).
4. As the *Statesman* proceeds through its latter stages the Stranger comments more frequently on the difficulty of their task of separating out subservient technicians from the one who rules. Cf. 287b, 287d, 291c, 303d, 306a.
5. Arlene Saxtonhouse remarks on the dubious prospect of pursuing philosophy in the Age of Cronos, whereby politics and speech are first implicitly reflected as marking off the human in their search. "Most likely, men did not take advantage of the ability to discourse with the animals in order to philosophize. Possessing all, existing in a state of completion, they would not have been driven to question and pursue the unknown. In a linguistic equality with animals they become animals. The initial proposal that men might philosophize with animals is a curious one. It reduces the activity of philosophy to a bestial activity rather than being a divine one." *Fear of Diversity: The Birth of Political Science in Ancient Greek Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 127–28.
6. Given that the ideal statesman, who rules purely according to his science and who therefore makes no use of law, is found to exceed what one can expect of humans, their search for the true statesman is relegated to the best possible regime among the six imitations of the ideal.
7. This association is, of course, most explicit in *Gorgias*, where Gorgias and his disciples identify themselves as rhetors (449a ff.).
8. This is not to deny that their discussion pursues the best form of regime, but only reflects the fact that once law reveals itself as a necessity to any regime that can be hoped for, they must content themselves with looking at imperfect imitations of the ideal regime. Melissa Lane argues that a modified notion of utopia can be glimpsed in the dialogue, insofar as the ideal regime operates as the fixed point of orientation to the best of the imperfect regimes. See her "A New Angle on Utopia:

The Political Theory of the *Statesman*," in *Reading the Statesman. Proceedings of the III Symposium Platonicum*, ed. C. Rowe (St. Augustin: Academia Verlag, 1995), 276–91. V. Tejera offers a kindred view, distinguishing the "existential" regime from the "utopian," insofar as the latter is "mythopoetic or speculative and perfectionist" ("The Politics of a Sophistic Rhetorician," *Quaderni Urbani di Cultura Classica*, Vol. 41 [2], 115).

9. As the myth makes clear (270b-d), this "rescue" nonetheless entails a great shift in which the order of things is destroyed, along with most creatures cleaving to this order, before being reconfigured.

10. While the language of measure and the mean developed in their shift to the new paradigm informs much of the Stranger's perspective on the true statesman late in the dialogue, the connection between what is fitting and what is just—based on an orderliness within the soul—is also strongly emphasized in the *Gorgias* (506d–507b).

11. Stanley Rosen points to the significance of *πολιτικός* and its obvious association with *Odysseus* in order to point out that Socrates, too, may well be implicated in this mythical designation as the Stranger uses it. "It is worth noting that Socrates was said to resemble a satyr and that he frequently identifies himself with *Odysseus* in the dialogues by means of quotations from the *Odyssey*. As if to elicit this recollection in us, Plato has the Stranger refer to his young interlocutor by name at precisely this point: 'O Socrates I have just now identified the men.'" *Plato's Statesman: The Web of Politics* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2009), 148.

12. This is not to say that Socrates' concluding myths—so often dealing with very detailed conditions of the soul's afterlife—are bereft of intellectual philosophical import, nor do I mean to imply that mythologizing is an inferior form of conveying wisdom, or that its role is simply, as Melissa Lane puts it, to "bolster a conviction which the analytical art has sought to establish," (*Method and Politics in Plato's Statesman* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], 115), but rather that such import is not borne on the face of these myths, as it were; Socrates does not explicitly direct his listeners' thinking to their educative purpose.

13. Cf. *Soph.* 264 ff.

14. *The Philosopher in Plato's Statesman* (Las Vegas, NV: Parmenides Publishing, 1980), 87.

15. I wish to make clear, however, that myth and philosophy here are not to be taken as essentially opposed to one another. In fact as Jean-Pierre Vernant argues, it was first a re-orientation to the effects of myth, the experience of the wondrous (*thauma*), that gave rise to philosophizing. "In myth . . . the stupor [the wondrous] provokes is the sign that the supernatural is present in it. For the Milesians, the strangeness of a phenomenon does not impose a feeling of the divine but rather presents itself to it as a problem. The strange no longer fascinates; it mobilizes the intelligence." *Myth and Thought among the Greeks*, trans. Janet Lloyd and Jeff Fort (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2006), 404–5.

16. "Isn't the art of rhetoric, taken as a whole, a certain guiding of souls through words, not only in the law courts and other places of public assembly but also in private?" (261a).

17. *To Nicocles*, trans. G. Norlin in *Isocrates* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 48–49. Elsewhere Isocrates distinguishes the proper orator from

the poet, to the extent that the latter may, simply through the rhythm and harmony of their compositions, "bewitch [ὑπογυωτοῖ] their listeners" (*Evagoras* 10, op. cit.).

18. For a more comprehensive study of ὑπογυωγία in its broader meanings in the literature of Socrates' day, see Christopher Moore, "Socrates *Psychagogos*," in *Socranta III*, ed. de Luise and Stavru (St. Augustin: Academica Verlag, 2013), 41–55.

19. Cf. Rosen, *Plato's Statesman*, 148, 179.

20. Cf. also *Gorg.* 517b–518e.

21. This way of manipulating a crowd parallels Plato's use of ὑπογυωγία in the *Timaeus*, wherein the appetitive part of the soul is kept in check, bewitched (ὑπογυωγητοῦτο) by images in the liver that both threaten and soothe it alternately (71a).

22. Here as well we find lines of connection with the Gorgias, where flattery (κολακεία), according to Socrates is found to be the essence of sophistic rhetoric (463a ff.).

23. J.K. Davies puts it starkly: "A traditional society could be governed by people whose claim on public recognition lay in their wealth, or athletic prowess, or descent from a god or hero. A complicated, Assembly-based, political society such as Athens had rapidly become needed men to run it who could compile a set of accounts and check that they were right, who had enough sense of logic to put a case persuasively, and who could cope on their feet with malicious opponents and a bloody-minded Assembly." *Democracy and Classical Greece* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 99.

24. Cf. *H. Mai.* 304a-b: "What is both beautiful and most precious is the ability to produce an eloquent and beautiful speech to a law court or a council meeting or any other official body whom you are addressing, to convince your audience, and to depart with the greatest of all prizes, your own salvation and that of your friends and property."

25. This issue is implied as well at 298b in the analogy of the physician who is open to bribery; I am indebted to Melissa Lane's thorough discussion of this point on corruption in *Method and Politics in Plato's Statesman*, 161–63.

26. It is also more than likely that Plato's readers would have the short-lived government of the Thirty Tyrants (404/403) in mind, whose unchecked power and abuses were henceforth cause for careful delineation of public offices.

27. Cf. 276b-c: "But no other art would be willing to claim to be care of the entire community more than and prior to kingship, and to be an art of rule over all humans."

28. This is corroborated by Diodorus Siculus, who mentions that Gorgias ventured to Athens on behalf of the Leontines in order to seek military aid in holding off the Syracusans, who had invaded their lands (*Bibliotheca Historica* 12.53).

29. *Fr.* 150 Wehrl. Cf. Neil O'Sullivan's "Pericles and Protagoras," *Greece and Rome*, Vol. 42 (1) (1995), 15–23, and as well G. Crane, "Creon and the 'Ode to Man' in Sophocles' *Antigone*," in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Vol. 92, ed. R.J. Tarrant (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 108–9.

30. Cf. 295a.

31. Cf., e.g., *Phaedo* 84d, where Simmias confesses to Socrates: "We wish to hear your answer, but hesitate to trouble [ἄλλο] παρέχειν] you, for fear that it might be distasteful for you in your present misfortune." Note as well that the Stranger uses this very term when speaking of the "very large mob" (πάππολον ὄχλον) of great sophists that come into view once the other contenders to rule have been separated out (291a). In the *Theaetetus* as well, Socrates points to the mass (ὄχλω) of humans who, like the Thracian maidservant, cannot see the philosopher as anything but inexperienced in the affairs of the city (174c).

32. Cf. *Rep.* 377a ff.

33. Note that this state of bodily fullness can be contrasted with the filling of the soul to be accomplished through inquiry into the being of the "greatest and most honorable things" that cannot be made clear by way of images (285e–286a).

34. As V. Tejera properly observes, "Since rhetoric serves the political power (*dunamis*, 304d8) and military science is ruled over by kingcraft (*basilikē*, 305a6), they themselves cannot be the science of politics (*politikē*, 305c6)." "The Politics of a Sophistic Rhetorician," 116.

35. In light of our emphasis on sophistic enchantment through the pleasures of his audience, it is significant as well that Protagoras offers his listeners the choice between myth and logos as the desired form of exposition, and when it is left up to him, he opts to begin with the "more agreeable" (ὑψηλότερον) way of myth (320c).

36. The question of whether the laws themselves are just in this case is a separate issue; that the sophist is able to provide a persuasive mythical basis to any reasonable set of νόμοι is what makes him valuable to the statesman in the Stranger's discussion.

37. Of the speeches in which the term is present, the darning of the *Panathenais* is the only one mentioned here that was likely composed after Plato's death. I include it in the present context as further evidence of Isocrates' inclination to the use of *δυσκαταλόγητος*. For more on the date of the *Panathenais*, see R.C. Jebb's *The Attic Orators from Amphion to Isaeus*, Vol. 2 (London: MacMillan and Co., 1893), 110.

38. Cf. also 282d-e, where the Stranger notes that a correct marking off of warp and woof in weaving could end up being "timely" (ἐγκαιρός) for young Socrates.

39. "A New Angle on Utopia," 279. Cf. Thomas Cole, *The Origins of Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 93, 122. According to Cole, *καίρος* carries the resonance not just of the proper season, but also of the speaker's "sense" or "feel for the occasion" (122), which complements Socrates' characterization of rhetoric more broadly as a "knack" (ἐμπειρία) for persuasion at *Gorg.* 462c.

40. "For the science that's genuinely kingly must not itself act, but, by recognizing both the origin and onset of the greatest things in the cities regarding what's timely [ἐγκαιρία] and also what's untimely [ἀκαιρία], must rule those that have the power to act; and the rest must do what's prescribed" (305c-d).

41. Cf. Lane: "At the time of writing of the *Statesman* . . . Plato would have been familiar with earlier discussions of the *καίρος* linked to oral performance and

rhetoric, together with roughly contemporaneous proposals of the *Kairos* as a measure for foreign policy," "A New Angle on Utopia," 279.

42. The "wholeness" of mythic perspective in this case would, of course, not produce a perfectly suitable justice to each and all, but as with the character of law, its suitability would be a comparatively coarse one as well.

43. I have in mind in particular Marina McCoy's excellent study, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Cf. p. 5: "One consistent thread in Plato's differentiation of Socrates from the sophists is how Socrates embodies moral virtues. The difference between the philosopher and the rhetorician is not to be found in distinctive technique or method, in the absence or presence of rhetoric, or in some sort of foundation of knowledge. Instead, Plato's ultimate defense of philosophy is to be found in the philosopher's person—that is, in his character and the orientation of his soul to the forms."