

# Plato's Eleatic and Athenian Sciences of Politics

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Plato's *Statesman* and *Laws* are usually linked together as "Plato's later political theory." Yet these dialogues offer contradictory descriptions of the relation between law and reason and thus between political science and philosophy. In particular, the Eleatic Stranger of the *Statesman* presents an account of the "second-best" regime that differs from that of the Athenian Stranger in the *Laws*. The Eleatic Stranger's account of the second-best is wrong; his error follows from his view that politics is insignificant for genuinely human purposes. By comparing human statesmanship to animal herding and explicating its nature through the paradigm of weaving, the Eleatic Stranger contends that the true philosopher is too concerned with individual human natures to care for human collectivities. From his perspective, Socratic or Athenian political philosophy is but sophistry.

When Vladimir Nabokov first became famous as a writer, he was still working as assistant curator of butterflies at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology. Someone suggested that comparative literature should give him a position instead, but the great linguist Roman Jakobson destroyed Nabokov's chances with a one-liner: "An elephant is a very fine animal, but he should not be confused with a professor of Zoology."

We political scientists doubtless all agree that a citizen is a very fine animal, and a politician no less fine. What is our relationship, as "political scientists" to these "political animals"? Do we have some specialized knowledge that can help those whose ways of life we study to flourish and prosper? Or do we just have a more articulate understanding of their behavior, even as the zoologist has a more articulate understanding of elephant behavior but cannot advise (or become) an elephant? Is the drive for understanding, even as applied to political things, largely or completely unrelated to our political practice and the human needs that require it?

I aim to explore the relation between political science, politics, and philosophical understanding through a reading of Plato's great statement on political science or technique, the *Statesman*. The *Statesman* is a dialogue, but not a "Socratic" dialogue, for according to the received text, Socrates says nothing after the first

Stephanus page.<sup>1</sup> Plato's principal speaker is instead a stranger or foreigner from Elea, an heir to the Eleatic tradition in philosophy founded by Parmenides. The Eleatic Stranger conducts a search in speech for the genuine possessor of the political science or art with an Athenian youth, also named Socrates.

To read the *Statesman* is no light task, and innumerable readers have complained that this dialogue is, to put it bluntly, boring. It contains many passages "that on first reading strike us as boring and weird."<sup>2</sup> The divisions of the arts repeatedly fail, and appear "meaningless, arbitrary, accidental, and tastelessly prolonged."<sup>3</sup> Repeatedly the Eleatic Stranger errs, and admits his error.<sup>4</sup> Every reader is tempted to agree with the Eleatic Stranger when he confesses that he and Young Socrates hurried at too great length (277a3–b7). All in all, the *Statesman* seems "to demand a special effort on our part not to grow tired."<sup>5</sup> A few scholars have noted

1. Recent editors such as Rowe and Robinson have assigned the last statement to the elder rather than the younger Socrates. Monique Dixsaut gives an interesting argument for assigning this speech to young Socrates in "Une politique vraiment conforme à la nature," in *Reading the Statesman: Proceedings of the III Symposium Platonicum*, ed. Christopher J. Rowe (Sankt Augustin, Germany: Academia Verlag, 1955), pp. 254–56 and n. 14.

2. Julia Annas, "Introduction," in *Plato: Statesman*, ed. Julia Annas and trans. Robin Waterfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. x.

3. Lewis Campbell, "General Introduction," in *The Sophistes and Politicus of Plato* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1867), p. xlv.

4. *Statesman* 263e6, 274e, 275d4, 276c3–4, 276e. References to all Platonic dialogues except the *Laws* are to the text of John Burnet (*Platonis Opera*, 5 vols. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1900–1902]), except as noted, though I have checked the readings of the new Oxford text of the *Statesman* (in E. A. Duke, W. F. Hicken, W. S. M. Nicoll, D. B. Robinson, and J. C. G. Strachan, eds., *Platonis Opera*, vol. I [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995]) with the help of David Robinson, "The New Oxford Text of Plato's *Statesman*: Editor's Comments," in *Reading the Statesman*. References to the *Laws* are to the Greek text of the Budé edition: Édouard Des Places, ed. and trans., *Les Lois Livres I–VI*, in *Platon: Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. XI, pts. 1–2 (Paris: Société D'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1951); and A. Diès, ed. and trans., *Les Lois Livres VII–XII*, in *Platon: Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. XII, pts. 1–2 (Paris: Société D'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1956). All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.

5. Seth Benardete, *The Being of the Beautiful* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 3: 73. On the failure of the conversation in the *Statesman* to become a real dialogue between the Eleatic Stranger and Young Socrates see Christopher Rowe, "The *Politicus*: Structure and Form," in *Form and Argument in Late Plato*, ed. Christopher Gill and Mary Margaret McCabe (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

that the dialogue seems to be deliberately boring, in that, for example, the divisions of herding appear to fail intentionally.<sup>6</sup> If the two discussions of the statesman's art, the myth, and the many apparent digressions on method make up a coherent whole, the intention of this whole, of the *Statesman* as a product of Plato's art, is concealed by these apparently pointless meanderings. If their pointlessness is only apparent, it is the interpreter's task to reveal the intention behind them.

### Approaches to the *Statesman*

Until recently the *Statesman* was rarely read and discussed.<sup>7</sup> Because of its very unfamiliarity, when scholars do discuss the *Statesman*, its peculiarities generally are rendered invisible by overhasty comparison with the more familiar doctrines put forward by the principal interlocutors of other Platonic dialogues. In treating the political discussions in the *Statesman*, scholars too frequently either minimize the differences between the views put forward there and those expressed by the principal interlocutors of other dialogues, or satisfy themselves merely by ascribing those differences to the alleged development of Plato's thought, as

1996). Yet, as Rowe does not discuss, the Eleatic Stranger only reluctantly engages in dialogue at all, and only on the guarantee that his discussants will prove young and tractable (*Sophist* 217d). It would appear from this passage that the failure of the Eleatic Stranger to engage his young interlocutors in genuine dialogue is an intentional feature of Plato's art in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*.

6. See W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. V, *The Later Plato and the Academy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962–81), p. 168; and Melissa Lane, *Method and Politics in Plato's "Statesman"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 20.

7. The new wave of work on the *Statesman* includes the collection of papers edited by Christopher Rowe, *Reading the Statesman*, henceforth RS; Rowe's text, with translation and commentary, *Plato: Statesman* (Warminster, England: Aris and Phillips, 1995); *Plato: Statesman*, ed. Annas and trans. Waterfield; Stanley Rosen, *Plato's "Statesman": The Web of Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); and Joseph Cropsey, *Plato's World: Man's Place in the Cosmos* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Much of this literature is surveyed in Mary Margaret McCabe, "Chaos and Control: Reading Plato's *Politicus*," *Phronesis* 42 (1997): 94–117. Melissa Lane's recent *Method and Politics* presents novel understandings of temporality and method in the *Statesman*; I have discussed her key results elsewhere (*Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 9 [1998]).

though such an account could substitute for a substantive evaluation of the supposed differences. George Klosko, for example, concludes his brief discussion of the *Statesman* with the claim that "the *Statesman* stands midway between the worlds of Plato's two major political dialogues."<sup>8</sup> The trouble with this formulation is that it implies, as do the developmental approaches to the *Statesman* in general, that the most interesting aspects of the political teachings of the *Statesman* are those in which it can somehow be placed on a line drawn between the views that Socrates expresses in the *Republic* and those which the Athenian Stranger expresses in the *Laws*. We thus are pulled away from the places where the Eleatic Stranger's views contrast with elements common, or similar, in the views of Plato's Athenian interlocutors, Socrates and the Athenian Stranger.<sup>9</sup> In the work of scholars who take a unitarian rather than developmental approach to Plato's thought, either the *Statesman* fails to emerge with a political teaching of its own, or its deviations from the Socratic or Athenian political teachings of the *Republic* and *Laws* are regarded as mere Eleatic errors.<sup>10</sup>

8. Klosko, *The Development of Plato's Political Theory* (New York and London: Methuen, 1986), p. 197. Versions of this linear approach are taken by Trevor Saunders, "Plato's Later Political Thought," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Annas "Introduction"; Irving M. Zeitlin, *Plato's Vision: The Classical Origins of Social and Political Thought* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1993), p. 145; and Thanassis Samaras, "When did Plato Abandon the Hope that Ideal Rulers Might Appear among Human Beings?" *History of Political Thought* 17 (1996): 109–113. Rowe, *Plato: Statesman*, pp. 17–18, and Lane, *Method and Politics*, raise appropriate doubts.

9. Some general points in comparing the *Statesman* with the *Republic* and the *Laws* are made well in Christopher Gill, "Rethinking Constitutionalism in *Statesman* 291–303," in RS, pp. 301–304.

10. For Harvey Scodel, *Diaeresis and Myth in Plato's "Statesman," Hypomnemata* 85 (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1987), Plato intends the Eleatic Stranger's differences with Socrates as departures not merely from Socrates, but from the truth. Scodel contrasts the Eleatic Stranger with "Plato/Socrates." Yet Scodel's "Plato/Socrates" must either be a reading of Socrates' statements as Plato's views, or must be a sophisticated interpretive construct built on Plato's Socratic works, a construct that Scodel does not develop. Paul Stern presents a more complex account wherein the Eleatic Stranger ascends to Socratism through the dialogue in "The Rule of Wisdom and the Rule of Law in Plato's *Statesman*," *American Political Science Review* 91 (1997): 264–76. Yet as we shall see, the Eleatic Stranger's views, even at the end of the *Statesman*, differ radically from those of Plato's Socrates and Athenian Stranger.

None of these approaches ask why Plato chose to put the views expressed in the *Statesman* into the mouth of an Eleatic Stranger. To understand the significance of the Stranger's Eleatism we must set the *Statesman* in its proper dramatic context within the Platonic corpus. In the first place, the *Statesman* and the *Sophist* are the only two dialogues in which the Eleatic Stranger serves as the principal interlocutor. In these dialogues the Eleatic Stranger responds to Socrates' challenge to distinguish sophist, statesman, and philosopher according to the Eleatic teaching (*Sophist* 216c–217a, *Statesman* 257a–c). Second, the *Statesman* is the third of three dialogues in the trilogy *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*.<sup>11</sup> Third, we must consider the *Statesman*'s dramatic date, on the day after Socrates has gone to the king-archon to respond to the indictment of Meletus (cf. *Theaetetus* 210d with *Sophist* 216a1). This places the *Statesman* within what Joseph Cropsey has called "Plato's World," the group of eight works (*Theaetetus*, *Euthyphro*, *Cratylus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Apology of Socrates*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*) that dramatically surround Socrates' trial.<sup>12</sup>

In his analysis, Cropsey aims to bring out the role of the philosopher as the one who genuinely cares for human beings. The true statesman of the *Statesman*, Cropsey argues, is the philosopher, who cares for human beings both individually and collectively. I will contend, against Cropsey, that the Eleatic Stranger intends to distinguish between political and philosophical caring. The Eleatic Stranger shows that only the philosopher cares for human beings as such, precisely because the philosopher, unlike the statesman, disengages from the human collectivities that the true statesman oversees.

Stanley Rosen has recently argued that Plato cannot seriously intend the *Statesman*'s teaching on politics because it presents an implausible account of the statesman as the master of an art or

11. The Eleatic Stranger in the *Statesman* occasionally echoes Socrates in the *Theaetetus*, though he was not present to hear Socrates speak. Compare *Theaetetus* 174d with *Statesman* 262d ff; and, as Campbell notes ("General Introduction," p. xxiii) compare also *Sophist* 253c with *Theaetetus* 172d.

12. Cropsey, *Plato's World*. I will discuss the other dialogues of the "world" only insofar as they illuminate the intentions of the Eleatic Stranger and of Plato himself in the *Statesman*. Jacob Howland, *The Paradox of Political Philosophy: Socrates' Philosophic Trial* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), is a recent treatment of these two tetralogies that is helpful on many points.

technique (*technē*).<sup>13</sup> Rosen sees the error in a technical account of politics by comparing it with a nontechnical account of virtue in which *phronēsis*, which he understands, after Aristotle's account, as "prudence" or "practical wisdom," plays a key role.<sup>14</sup> Yet precisely on our issue, which in Aristotelian terms one could rephrase as the relation between philosophical understanding of the role of *phronēsis* and its actual exercise in the city, Aristotle's view poses difficult questions that Rosen does not resolve or even address. As Richard Bodeüs writes: "Even if Aristotelian prudence infallibly contains a knowledge of the end, this in no way coincides with the knowledge obtained by a theoretical or discursive study like that contained in Aristotle's texts."<sup>15</sup> The relation between these two kinds of knowledge becomes a central (if not the central) question for the student of Aristotle's ethical and political writings.

Aristotle states in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that we engage in ethical or political inquiry not merely to know, but to become good (1095a, 1103b). By book ten of the *Ethics* the reader discovers that inquiry can improve the proper education and habituation in virtue that it explores in only one clear sense: it teaches the inquirer to pursue philosophic inquiry instead of or, at minimum, in addi-

13. Rosen, *Plato's "Statesman,"* pp. 170–71, and *passim*. The Eleatic Stranger understands politics as an art of grasping the proper moment or *kairos* (*Statesman* 305d3–4; see Melissa Lane, "A New Angle on Utopia: The Political Theory of the *Statesman*," in RS; and now also Lane, *Method and Politics*). In this understanding the Eleatic Stranger appears to agree with the view Socrates expresses in the *Republic* that no artisan can practice more than one art because each artful activity has its proper moment, and one who is engaged in one art will necessarily miss the proper moment of another (*Republic* 370ab). The philosopher-rulers of the *Republic* must themselves artfully grasp the proper moment for the begetting of children of the highest class, applying their knowledge of the nuptial number (546a–d). If the notion of the technique of politics is an Eleatic error, it is equally a Socratic error. If the passage about the nuptial number suggests that Socrates espouses a technical account of true politics only ironically, we ought to be open (*pace* Rosen) to a similar irony by the Eleatic Stranger.

14. Rosen claims to distinguish between the views he attributes to the *Statesman* and those of Aristotle (*Plato's "Statesman,"* p. ix). Yet that distinction is overshadowed by his invocation of the peculiarly Aristotelian understanding of *phronēsis* in explicating both the Eleatic Stranger's speeches and the lessons that, on Rosen's view, Plato intends us to learn from them.

15. Bodeüs, *The Political Dimensions of Aristotle's Ethics*, trans. Jan Edward Garrett (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), p. 36.

tion to the goods that the ethical virtues promise or constitute!<sup>16</sup> Rosen does not explain the place of ethical or political inquiry in Aristotle's account of political life.<sup>17</sup> Nor does Rosen ever justify the importation of the Aristotelian distinction between the prudent man's knowledge of ends and the technical knowledge of means into Platonic discussions of *phronēsis*. In Plato's writings what we could call practical and theoretical wisdom, following Aristotle, are not distinguished: In the *Republic*, for example, Socrates mandates that the future philosopher-kings must be educated in mathematics and mathematical astronomy to prepare their soul to grasp the disembodied idea of the Good and thus become truly *phronimos* (526d–528c).

The safest method for reading the *Statesman* holds open the possibility that we might learn something about politics from reading the *Statesman*, and not just an ironical defense of truths we have already somehow learned from Aristotle, such as Rosen's distinction between prudence and technique, or from Plato's Socratic dialogues. Simultaneously, we must constantly remain open to the fundamental features of the dialogue form. We should recognize that the relationship between Plato's views and the statements of his Eleatic Stranger is liable to partake of precisely

16. Two suggestive treatments of the relation between Aristotle's inquiry into political life and political life itself are Bodeüs, *ibid.*; and Michael Davis, *The Politics of Philosophy: A Commentary on Aristotle's "Politics"* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996). Bodeüs argues that Aristotle's inquiry into politics is intended to aid the legislator rather than the statesman or citizen simply (pp. 54–68, 75). He does not explain what precisely the legislator can learn from Aristotle's political science apart from the value of the theoretical life (p. 125). Davis is emphatic that "the city needs political philosophy," but he seems to understand to be impossible or impolitic to expound that need openly or clearly (see pp. 31, 56). These questions about Aristotle require more exploration than I can give them here. I mention them only to point out that Rosen explains the obscurities of the *Statesman* by reference to a teaching about the relation of political practice to political philosophy that is, despite appearances, quite obscure in itself.

17. Rosen's exegesis of the *Statesman* in some respects continues and in some respects revises the projects of his *Nihilism: A Philosophical Essay* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969) and *The Limits of Analysis* (New York: Basic Books, 1980). The most important revision would appear to be Rosen's current claim that in the *Statesman* Plato explores the "problem of constructivism," so that the "Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns" cannot be understood merely as a division between those who claim that we know what we see and those who claim that we know what we make (*Plato's "Statesman,"* pp. 15–16).

the same complexity as the relationship between his views and those of his Socrates or Athenian Stranger. Following this method, we remain open to the possibility of a coherent Eleatic account of political things, including the supposed science or art of political rule. We allow the differences to appear between the Eleatic Stranger's account of politics and those of Plato's Socrates or Athenian Stranger, and we attempt to explain these differences substantively and not fall too quickly to the null hypothesis of Plato's biographical development. We thus set the Eleatic Stranger's Eleatism as a problem, as a potentially significant device whose purpose we attempt to understand.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Eleatic and Athenian Accounts of Law as a Second-Best**

Plato's Eleatic and Athenian Strangers both describe the fundamental political problem as the choice of the best regime in the best possible human situation. Both attempt to understand our actual political problem, the choice of the best regime possible in our current situation, in the light of their solutions to this fundamental problem. Yet they have very different accounts of how the best regime now possible relates to the best regime for human beings simply.

If we conceive of the political situation as a choice among regimes graded on a uniform scale, then the political situation becomes a maximization problem. We can then describe the choice of regime or policy as the choice of the best alternative available

18. In posing the question of the Stranger's Eleatism, I am engaged in an investigation anticipated by Gerald Mara, "Constitutions, Virtue, and Philosophy in Plato's *Statesman* and *Republic*," *Polity* 13 (1981): 355–82. This article differs from Mara's in that, first, I compare the *Statesman* not only to the *Republic* but also to the *Laws*. Second, my comparison is founded in novel interpretations of the Eleatic accounts of the rule of law and the role of speech in political life. Third, I explicate formal features of the dialogue, the paradigm of weaving through which the Eleatic Stranger explicates his political teaching, the dialogue's dramatic date and context, and its frequent apparent changes of subject and tone. Christopher Rowe's work brings fresh and interesting thought to bear on many details of the *Statesman*, but while he poses the question of the Stranger's Eleatism in the introduction to his translation and commentary (*Plato: Statesman*, p. 10), he makes no sustained effort to explore it there or elsewhere.



under the circumstances. When the optimal policy is unattainable, the second-best policy will almost certainly not be the policy that best resembles the unattainable optimum not in the actions it mandates, but only in the results that we can expect from it.<sup>19</sup> In application this is a principle familiar to anyone who is planning a menu. Suppose I decide that beef burgundy would make the best dinner for tonight, but then discover that I do not have any beef, only lamb chops and soy steak. I will almost certainly enjoy a better dinner if I make lamb chops with the lamb I have on hand, rather than try to substitute soy protein for beef and go on with the beef burgundy.

The Eleatic Stranger, to the surprise of his interlocutor, Young Socrates, describes the rule of law over governors and governed alike as a second-best arrangement. It is a second sailing irrelevant for those who seek the one right regime (*Statesman* 300c2, 302e4–5). Although legislation is part of the technique of kingship, “the best thing is not for the laws to hold sway but the kingly man with *phronēsis*” (294a7–8). The rule of law can only be a second-best, the Eleatic Stranger claims, because it attempts to promulgate a simple rule for varied circumstances. “Law could not ever comprehend accurately the best and most just for all at the same time, and then order the best thing” (294a10–b2; translated after Rowe). The law is fixed but human affairs never have rest, and it is impossible for that which is never simple to be adequate for that which is always simple (294c7–8). In attempting to grasp the proper moment for any action, the law will either take the moment to be broader than it is or fail to see an opportunity for action at all.<sup>20</sup> The Stranger thus compares the authority of the law to a man deaf and ignorant, who consults with no one and allows none to act contrary to his own order, “even if something new would result better for someone than his *logos* that he ordered” (294bc). The law has a *logos*, an account of what is best for those who are subject to it, but this *logos* is false when generalized as the law

19. The first formalization of the theory of the second-best is R. G. Lipsey and Kelvin Lancaster, “The General Theory of Second Best,” *Review of Economic Studies* 24 (1957): 11–32.

20. See 295a2; Charles Griswold, “*Politik*→*Epistēmē*→in Plato’s *Statesman*,” in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, ed. J. Anton and A. Preus (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 157.

demands. Law's account must remain fixed while "what is best" varies, so law's account is now true and now false, true for some and not for others (294a–b).

Yet even the true ruler over any generality, whether the statesman ruling a body of citizens, or a trainer ruling over an exercise class, cannot stand by and give orders to each of those that that ruler rules. Since the trainer or the statesman cannot sit himself down beside each individual always, he must always be absent, at least temporarily, from somebody.<sup>21</sup> To give orders to those from whom he is absent, the statesman must use laws.

Since politics is the art of commanding a generality, general laws in some form are absolutely necessary for political life. The true statesman "will lay down the law for the majority and for the most part, somehow thickly (*pachuter(s)*) for each, giving over written laws and also unwritten, when he legislates by ancestral customs" (295a). The ruler cannot give orders to all collectively and at the same time prescribe exactly that which is proper for each individual (294d–295a). The true statesman can but give orders to those who teach, nurture, and correct future citizens according to the laws (305bc, 308e5, cf. 310a2). These written laws must rule the citizens absolutely when the true statesman is absent, but when the statesman returns, he would not hesitate to change his laws if circumstances have changed (295b–d).

The best regime, then, has written laws, though it is not ruled by laws but ruled through them by the possessor of the true political or kingly art.<sup>22</sup> Cities without true statesmen can achieve a

21. *Statesman* 295ab; Glen R. Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City: A Historical Interpretation of the Laws* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960; reprinted with a new foreword by Charles H. Kahn, 1993), p. 586; Leo Strauss, "Plato," in *History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 75; cf. Daniel Dombrowski *Plato's Philosophy of History* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1981), pp. 139–40. Paul Stern argues that laws must be general because they aim at the general good, not the particular good of any individual covered by them ("Rule of Wisdom and the Rule of Law," p. 269). Yet ideally, even to achieve a collective goal the ruler with full knowledge would adjust his orders to the task and situation of each individual subject.

22. See *Statesman* 294a, 300c–e. As Lane writes in "A New Angle on Utopia," p. 287: "There is nothing antithetical in practice between law and art, only in the claim to ultimate authority." For an extensive treatment of this point see Jonathan Cohen, "Rex Aut Lex," *Aperion* 29 (1996): 145–61; and also Christopher Gill, "Plato

second-best status only by taking over, with inflexible application, the written laws of the best city. The Eleatic Stranger prescribes thus: "You know that it is necessary for the other regimes to preserve themselves by using the written laws of this regime" (297d5–6).<sup>23</sup> In this sense the inferior regimes must always hunt after the track of the best regime, and never veer from it, as best they can (301e3–4, 297de).

Such a literal and thorough application of the laws of the best city by other cities ignores the crucial differences in the laws of the best and the second-best cities. In the best city the true statesman is always present to revise the laws as needed, whereas the second-best city must follow its laws strictly as written (295e, 297de). In the best city law is a tool used by the ruler to communicate his judgments for general application, while in the second-best city law rules the rulers, holding their particular orders to account in its general terms. Changes in the written code of laws could mitigate these differences. An inferior city will almost certainly not be the best it can be under a simple codification of

and Politics: The *Critias* and the *Politicus*," *Phronesis* 2 (1979): 148–67, p. 150 and n. 7. This point has, I think, been more controversial than the text warrants. A good city completely without laws in any sense could not contain a plurality of individual, separate, human beings, since it would presume that the statesman was never separated from any other person among the ruled. While critics since Aristotle have accused Plato of denying that the citizens must be a many (see *Politics* 1261a), we should not privilege even the most authoritative critiques over the evidence of Plato's text itself. Rosen distinguishes between the rule of *phronesis* which is beyond laws and the "epistemic city" which is ruled by laws crafted according to the supposed *technē* of the statesman (*Plato's "Statesman,"* p. 167). Yet he provides no evidence that cannot be more simply explained by the distinction between the (second-best) rule of sovereign laws and the (ideal) rule of sovereign wisdom through laws, a distinction noted by numerous scholars including Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City*, pp. 586–89; and Strauss, "Plato," p. 75.

23. The principal difficulty with the interpretation adopted here is that the Eleatic Stranger does not explain how inferior cities learn the laws of the best city, as Rowe notes (*Plato: Statesman*, pp. 230–31, in the commentary to 300c4–6). Rowe instead contends that "imitating the best constitution well means simply sticking to established laws, which is just what the best city itself will do under the situation which always obtains in the inferior ones—namely when there is no knowledgeable person present to show what changes should be made" (*ibid.*, p. 17). Yet if we adopt Rowe's interpretation, the whole discussion of the written orders of absent doctors and trainers would lack a political analogue. Formally or literally speaking this is a more serious problem than the one he raises.

the laws of the best city, since the scientific legislator framed the laws of the best city for their peculiar function under its peculiar circumstances. The true statesman *qua* legislator would prescribe other laws for cities that are never again to know his presence. For inferior cities, he would prescribe laws that took account of their different circumstances, and, in particular, the very quality that makes them second-best, the permanent absence from them of any sovereign possessor of the statesman's science or technique. Contradicting the Eleatic Stranger, the theory of the second-best teaches that the legislator ought to adjust his laws to circumstances.

The Athenian Stranger describes the relationship between the best city and the second-best very differently in the *Laws*. According to the Athenian, the best regime would be a regime of perfect communism and equal treatment of men and women, a regime ruled not by law, but by mind or intelligence embodied in a human being (*Laws* 739c–e, 875a–d). When he turns to the elaboration of what he himself described as a second-best regime, he describes a law-governed regime that licenses private property and families (739c–e). The regime for which the Athenian Stranger legislates does not simply attempt to imitate what the Athenian Stranger himself calls the best regime. According to the Athenian Stranger, the best regime furnishes the second-best regime with a model for examination, not an image for duplication as far as possible.<sup>24</sup>

The *Laws* and *Statesman* thus present very different implicit accounts of the meaning of the second best. For the Athenian Stranger in the *Laws*, the second-best regime best attains the ends of politics when the best regime cannot be realized. For the Eleatic Stranger in the *Statesman*, the second-best regime applies the written laws of the best regime, despite the absence of the true statesman, who gave these laws for a regime where he would be around to modify them when necessary.<sup>25</sup> The modern theory of

24. I cannot agree with Rowe that the laws that the Athenian Stranger describes are "the laws which the expert ruler of [the *Statesman*] would write down if he had to" ("Introduction," in *RS*, pp. 27–28, n. 98). The expert rule of the *Statesman* has one prescription for all cities, while the legislator of the *Laws* has a best and a second best regime that differ in numerous fundamentals.

25. Note that whereas the *Laws* present an ethical argument based on our inability to resist doing wrong when not liable to account for our behavior, the *Statesman* presents a cognitive argument for the rule of law, based on our ignorance

the second-best, a mathematical theory of impeccable certainty, vindicates the Athenian account at the expense of the Eleatic.<sup>26</sup>

Plato's principal interlocutor conforms to the theory of second-best in the *Laws*, but fails to do so in the *Statesman*. This contrast suggests that the Eleatic Stranger's error in the *Statesman* is an intentional device of Plato's, since we see that Plato could and did apply the logic of second-best correctly elsewhere. In the remainder of this article I argue that the Eleatic Stranger's error is a reasonable one for him to make in light of his views and expressions elsewhere in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*. Though the Eleatic Stranger's account may be in error, I will argue that this error bears an essential relationship to the Eleatic Stranger's account of the significance of politics for those who pursue what he sees as the only fully human way of life. The Eleatic Stranger's error is not, on his own view of what is most important for human beings, an error that bulks large.

### Caring for Human Herds

The Eleatic Stranger indicates the relative unimportance of the political when he says that they are engaged in the search for the statesman not for its own sake, but for the sake of making themselves more dialectical concerning everything (285d4–6). Not the least important aspect of becoming more dialectical is to recognize that the method of speeches pays no attention to the more reverent (266d, cf. 263; *Parmenides* 130e). Generalship, says the

of the true art of politics. See Gregory Vlastos, "Socratic Knowledge and Platonic Pessimism," *Philosophical Review* 66 (1957): 226–38, p. 235, n. 25, collected in *Platonic Studies*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); and also my "The Unity of the Virtues and the Limitations of Magnesia," *History of Political Thought* 19 (1998): 125–41.

26. Charles Kahn, "The Place of the *Statesman* in Plato's Later Work," in RS, claims that Plato presents the same "ideal theory" in the *Statesman*, *Republic*, and *Laws* (p. 54). As we have seen, however, the Eleatic Stranger in the *Statesman* and the Athenian Stranger in the *Laws* have completely different theories of the application of ideal theory to non-ideal situations. The Eleatic Stranger thus contradicts Timothy Shiell's variability thesis, that the best regime in a given situation varies, depending on the circumstances (see his "The Unity of Plato's Political Thought," *History of Political Thought* 12 [1991]: 377–90). Shiell's method for reconciling the very different regimes of the *Republic* and the *Laws* into a unified Platonic political theory thus breaks down completely if applied to the *Statesman*.

Eleatic Stranger, is of no more and no less dialectical significance than louse-catching (*Sophist* 227ab). To become more dialectical is to cease to revere what our regime (*h*→*politeia*) commands us to revere, namely, the political things themselves. The purpose of such exercises as our present inquiries, the Eleatic Stranger says, is to make us more able inquirers into the things that do not have bodies (*Statesman* 285d4–286b2). Statesmanship would not appear to belong among these bodiless things: the king, after all, has a body (259c6–8, 301de), and devotes his concern largely to his subjects' bodies.

The Eleatic Stranger's thin account of the second-best regime is matched by the thinness of his political science more generally. He speaks interchangeably of the kingly and political, disregarding the distinction that all ordinary Greek opinion saw between monarchical and free governance. Others distinguish regimes by willing and unwilling obedience on the part of the ruled, by wealth or poverty, or by law or lawlessness (291de, cf. 292c). The Eleatic Stranger drops the criteria of wealth or poverty, and the criteria of willingness or unwillingness. Possession of the statesman's technique or science distinguishes the best city from all others, but that city is removed from our cities as a god is from human beings (303b3–5). Among what one might call human-ruled regimes, the only relevant distinctions are the number of the rulers and their submission or superiority to the city's laws (302de).

One gap in Eleatic political science strikes the reader of other Platonic dialogues the hardest: in distinguishing the types of regimes, the Eleatic Stranger makes no mention of differing ends.<sup>27</sup> Collective survival appears to be the only aim of all cities whether correctly or incorrectly ruled (310e ff.).<sup>28</sup> By contrast, in Socrates' account of the transformation of regimes in *Republic*, book eight, it is the ends, and not their success in attaining some single end, that distinguish the regimes (548c5–7, 550e4–551a5, 562b3–c6). In the *Republic*, to rank regimes is to rank them by the resemblance of their ends to the true end, the Good. For the Eleatic Stranger, regimes are ranked according to their success at achieving the

27. See *Statesman* 291e ff.; Frederick J. Crosson, "Plato's *Statesman*: Unity and Pluralism," *New Scholasticism* 37 (1963): 28–43, 30.

28. See Benardete, *Being of the Beautiful*, 3:84; also Griswold, "*Politik*→*Epist*→*m*→" p. 153; Teruo Mishima, "Courage and Moderation in the *Statesman*," in *RS*, p. 310, n. 11.

single end of all regimes, stability.<sup>29</sup> Even inferior regimes are thus imitations of the single best regime, "which [regimes] we say are 'well-governed (eunomous)' imitate for the better, but the rest imitate for the worse" (293e4–6).<sup>30</sup> In that sense, survival is indeed the Eleatic "test of truth" for a regime.<sup>31</sup>

The Eleatic Stranger reflects his estrangement from political life not only in his teaching, but in his person. Unlike Socrates, who refuses to leave Athens except under compulsion of the city's laws and lawful orders, the Eleatic Stranger, like Zeus, the god of strangers, wanders from city to city "looking upon the outrageous and lawful deeds of human beings," as Socrates describes him in Homer's words (*Sophist* 216ab). For the Eleatic Stranger, the only purpose for the whole inquiry into the statesman, apart from its value as an exercise, is to discover which type of actual regime it is easiest to live under (*Statesman* 285cd, 302b). The question of the best regime is not, apparently, of great personal salience. While Socrates in the second book of the *Republic* and the Athenian Stranger in the *Laws* tell myths to describe the origin of the city, the Eleatic Stranger tells a myth of the cosmos as a whole in which the origin of the city is left mysterious.<sup>32</sup>

The life of any particular city makes little impression on the Stranger from Elea. Unlike Socrates or even the Athenian Stranger, the Eleatic Stranger mentions no individual kings or politicians.<sup>33</sup> Of the Athenian king-archon he knows only that this is a solemn magistracy having charge of the most reverend sacrifices (290e7–8). He does not know (or at least, does not mention), that the king-archon has charge of indictments such as the one that Socrates has to answer (see *Theaetetus* 210d1–4). Nor, apparently does he know that this is only a ceremonial magistracy, since the king-archon's powerlessness vitiates his use of this office as an example of priestly pretensions.

29. Rowe is thus incorrect to claim that the laws of the best city could not be suitable for adoption by inferior cities because the best city and inferior cities have different aims (*Plato: Statesman*, Commentary to 297d5–8).

30. Translated from the new Oxford text after Rowe, *Plato: Statesman*.

31. Pace Ernest Barker, *Greek Political Theory: Plato and his Predecessors*, 6th ed. (London: Methuen, 1960), p. 333.

32. See *Statesman* 271e8–272a1; Michel Narcy, "La critique de Socrate par l'Etranger dans le *Politique*," in *RS*, p. 231.

33. Campbell, "General Introduction," p. ii.

In his thorough disengagement from the details of actual political life, the Eleatic Stranger contrasts quite sharply with Plato's Socrates. Unlike the philosophers Socrates describes in the *Theaetetus*, he himself is familiar with the details of court procedure and even with the gossip that circulates about prominent families.<sup>34</sup> Socrates knows details of political institutions even in foreign cities: when he suggests to the Athenians that they would not have condemned him to death had they deliberated for an extra day, he cites the procedures used by "other human beings," the Spartans (*Apology* 37a7–b1). Socrates refuses an active political career, but he pays the closest attention to the political acts of his fellow Athenians.

The Athenian Stranger, too, betrays a much fuller and thicker engagement with politics than the Eleatic Stranger allows, not least in the extent and detail of the code of laws he proposes for his second-best city (see e.g., *Laws* 844e–845d). In addition, he is thoroughly familiar with the institutions of the Dorian cities of Sparta and Crete, and with history both Greek and Barbarian (especially in the archaeology of *Laws* III).<sup>35</sup> Plato shows the Athenian Stranger of the *Laws* as Athenian in his loyalties, upbringing, habits, sophistication, and familiarity with matters Athenian.<sup>36</sup> The Eleatic Stranger, by contrast, is characterized as Eleatic only by his philosophical views, which are Eleatic because they are a kind of heretical Parmenideanism.<sup>37</sup> Eleatism, as Plato intends it, is a philosophic approach, not a political culture.

The Eleatic Stranger's account of the political therefore reflects a kind of disengagement, an apparently philosophical detachment, from the details of politics and of human affairs generally. In the dialogue's initial diaereses and the myth of the age of Cronus, the Eleatic Stranger portrays this disengagement as a disengagement of human philosophy from animal politics.<sup>38</sup> As Christopher Gill

34. *Theaetetus* 172d9–e4, 144c5–9; Cropsey, *Plato's World*, p. 32.

35. On the wealth of historical and legal detail in the *Laws* see Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City*.

36. See, e.g., *Laws* 626d, 642b–64a, 693d, 753a, 886c.

37. *Sophist* 216a, 237ab, 241d–242d, 258c–e.

38. Stanley Rosen writes that "the demystification of politics renders nugatory the difference between humans and other animals" (*Plato's "Statesman,"* p. 87). Yet the Eleatic Stranger's demystification of politics denies only the distinction



writes, this bestialization of cities as "herds of free bipeds" is an attempt to "defamiliarize the discourse of political theory, with a view to obtaining a closer approximation to objective definition."<sup>39</sup> Yet "objective" here means an objective and detached account of the human condition, an inhuman account of human politics. Long ago Lewis Campbell described the *Statesman* as "this attempt to descend into the complexity of life without losing hold of metaphysical conceptions."<sup>40</sup> I would say instead that the *Statesman* gives a simplified account of human life as it appears to one whose fundamental concern is with bodiless things or in modern usage "metaphysical beings."

Within the dramatic context of Socrates' trial, the problematic of the *Statesman* turns on whether the Eleatic Stranger's simplified account of statesmanship refutes Socrates' posture of engagement with the details of political life, or is refuted by its own simplicity. If, according to the Eleatic Stranger, statesmanship appears as a kind of herding, does that discredit those who claim that statesmanship requires a philosophic understanding, or those who would reduce all of human affairs to matters of culling, breeding, and milking? We must not prejudge this question before we examine the Eleatic Stranger's grounds for belittling caring for human collectives as a kind of caring for herds.

Man, in his pride, divides himself from all other animals by his power of speech (*Statesman* 262a). Yet we differ from other animals not only in speech, but in more corporeal ways: in our appearance, our diet, our physical features, our mode of locomotion, and so on. If the political art is some part of the art of caring for humans (see, e.g., 261e, 276e) we might hope that this art would comprehend both our logical and somatic particularities.

At 262a the Eleatic Stranger asks young Socrates to divide the art of herding (or of taking care of animals in common) into two. Young Socrates replies "I think one kind is the care of human beings, the other that of beasts." The Stranger compliments the youth on his courage, his willing and quick answer, but he describes

between human and animal *politics*. On the Eleatic view, it is in virtue of their ability to abstain from politics to converse about higher things that humans are more than simply bestial.

39. Gills, "Rethinking Constitutionalism," in *RS*, p. 304.

40. Campbell, "General Introduction," p. ii.

this answer as an error, for young Socrates has failed to divide the art of herding according to ideas. We might think that we are set apart from all other animals in possessing speech, but that is not necessarily true: cranes, for example, also appear to think and give names (263d). To combine all inhuman animals is to combine that which have no peculiar positive similarity; it is to make a part that is not an idea (262de).

Given the importance of speech to humans (and to talking cranes) we would expect that the Stranger would divide the art of herding into the art of herding speaking animals and the art of herding dumb animals, accepting the principle of young Socrates' attempt at diaeresis. Instead the Stranger proceeds to divide the art of tending animals in common first according to their habitat (aqueous or terrestrial) and then according to their mode of locomotion (flyers or walkers, 264b–e). The Stranger then asks: "And isn't statesmanship to be sought in connection with walking animals? Any fool, so to speak, would believe that, don't you think?" (264e8–10)<sup>41</sup> Any fool, that is, who ignores the possibility of talking, reasoning, "logical" cranes! If cranes are intelligent (*phronimos*), should they not be said to have kings and regimes?<sup>42</sup> If there are inhuman animals possessing speech and reason, surely the art of tending them shares something very important with the art of tending human beings—yet this the Stranger denies.<sup>43</sup>

The Stranger emphasizes that the political art focuses on man's corporeal particularity by violating his own principle for inquiries in speech, his *logical* canon of dividing only according to ideas. Along the longer path to the art of tending humans in common (which he alleges is "more in accord with what we said a while ago about the need of making the division as nearly in the middle as we can") the Stranger first divides tame walking herds into two *parts*: horned in genesis and hornless in genesis (265b)—but hornlessness is not an *idea*! The property of "not mixing the breed,"

41. I translate here following the new Oxford text.

42. In Aristotle's *Historia Animalium*, the crane, by virtue of its intelligence, is a political animal ruled by a monarch (488a12, 614b19).

43. Charles Griswold thus blames Young Socrates unfairly for the outcome of this diaeresis ("*Politik*→*Epist*→*m*→," p. 144). It is the Eleatic Stranger, not young Socrates, who insists on submerging the rule over humans in the variegated forms of animal herding.

which the Stranger next uses, is also not a true idea but instead a mere part of the hornless part of tame walking herds (265e). Nor is the Stranger's shorter way to the art of tending humans in common (266e) free of the error of division by parts rather than ideas, for featherlessness is only a part within the idea of bipeds.

The Stranger violates his dictum, "divide only by ideas," to emphasize that the art of tending men in common, whether divine or human, takes no essential regard of the human power of speech, for it is in speech that humans divide the beings according to ideas. To display the irremediable opposition of the political art and philosophy the Stranger violates the canons of philosophy in defining the political art.

The Eleatic Stranger relates the myth of the age of Cronus to show us a recognizably human condition in which human statesmen and their political science or technique were unnecessary. He thus makes clear what, in the age of Zeus, this political science or technique must provide.<sup>44</sup> In the age of Cronus human beings and all other living things were ruled by the god with the aid of obedient daimons (271e1–272b1).<sup>45</sup> Yet although the age of Cronus is supposed to describe *human* life, it is a life in which speech, and thus philosophy, have no fundamental role. As the Eleatic Stranger states gently and euphemistically, we cannot tell if the human beings of that age engaged in philosophy (272b8–d2).

The statesman must care for our bodies in the way that the daimonic ruler of the age of Cronus once cared for them, under the supervision of the god who piloted the whole. Neither god, nor daimons, and thus neither the human king nor statesman, take any responsibility for humans as animals possessed of speech. Politics is the art of governing hornless two-footed creatures who do not mix the breed, or of governing featherless bipeds (266). Statesmanship is not, according to the Eleatic account, the art of governing speaking beings.

44. Cf. Benardete, *Being of the Beautiful*, 3:96.

45. In the myth of the age of Cronus told in the *Laws*, human beings are ruled in *cities* by daimonic kings and magistrates (713c–714a), while here in the *Statesman* they live without cities or regimes, governed by the daimons in *herds* (271e). For the Athenian Stranger, even divinely rational rule is still somehow political, while for the Eleatic Stranger the political is an insignificant aspect of actual, all-too-human governance.

If humans as political animals are not speaking animals, philosophy is not itself a political matter. Without speech, without *logos*, there can be no philosophy.<sup>46</sup> Yet even for the Eleatic Stranger, law has a speech, or account (*logos*). The law gives a (flawed) account of human needs and desires, of what is beneficial for human beings (see pp. 65–66 above). One thus has to state the issue more carefully: although politics and law have *logoi*, these *logoi* are not fundamentally about speech and the soul that makes speech possible. The *logoi* of politics and law are about the needs of the body, and they touch on soul and speech only in order to fulfill the needs of the body. The statesman's task, it appears, is to defend human bodily nature and its necessary material equipment from external destruction, to weave a political cloak against the storms of the age of Cronus.<sup>47</sup> The statesman must provide a political defense for a hornless species, one that by nature lacks defenses, devices and arts or techniques (265b–d, 274b8–c4).

Soul is the organ that the philosophers postulate to explain speech and judgement (*Theaetetus* 185e). Yet in political life as represented in the *Statesman*, the ends of politics are apart from soul, even as the definition of the statesman in the initial diaereses was apart from speech. Soul, as a substantive (*psuchē*→), is used ten times in the whole of the *Statesman*, but only twice do we hear of the souls of those whom the statesman rules, and only at the very end of the dialogue (309c2, 310d10). The divine bond of the kingly weaver, the Eleatic Stranger says, binds to the eternal part of the soul (309c2). Even here, the statesman treats soul as a body, as material for construction of the city as an artifact.<sup>48</sup> If by means of the divine bond the kingly weaver cares for soul for the sake of body, his human bond treats psychic conditions as outgrowths of somatic conditions, qualities of quickness and slowness that do not presume cognition or speech.<sup>49</sup> If “a soul overfull of shame and unmixed with daring manliness is the result of too much inbreeding and neglect of the human bond” (310d10), then the excessively moderate condition of such a soul reflects bodily generation. The divine bond binds souls together, not to cultivate

46. *Sophist* 260a; Jacob Klein, *Plato's Trilogy: Theaetetus, the Sophist, and the Statesman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 64.

47. See Griswold, “*Politik*→*Epistēmē*→” pp. 152, 160.

48. Rosen, *Plato's “Statesman,”* pp. 68, 137.

49. See Mara, “Constitutions, Virtue, and Philosophy,” p. 363.

excellence in soul, but to unite the city (310e ff.). It is true that the kingly art acts through divine bonds that hold fast the immortal part of the soul, and that the legislator issues a *logos*, an account or speech. Yet these speeches are not for the sake of the soul, but for the sake of the body, for the sake of defending the body. The kingly art is found in the art of command of ensouled creatures (see 261bc), but it commands these ensouled creatures for bodily ends. The city aims only at its own survival, not at fostering human or philosophic excellence in those whose lives and educations it directs.<sup>50</sup>

The art of the king is the art of producing the concord among arts, or among citizens of manly and moderate habits, that is "always to be admired for those doing something in common" (260b, 308e ff.). It is the art of producing this concord in cities, not among any smaller groups or collections of individuals. Such concord is always admirable if we abstract from the enterprise that those whose concurrence is in question are engaged in. It can be agreement on the genuinely desirable character and way of life, or the justice needed among thieves (cf. *Republic* 351c7–10). The kingly art of the *Statesman*, however, aims only to preserve concord of opinions through time.<sup>51</sup> The king aims at the happiness of the city as far as it is possible for a city to be happy (311c5–6); unlike the true ruler as described by (the elder) Socrates, he does not aim at making the citizens wise and good, or at producing among his citizens the best possible men and women.<sup>52</sup>

### Weaving Thin from Thick

The Eleatic Stranger shows the unimportance of political life "geometrically" by contrasting the flatness of political life and

50. See pp. 70–71 above.

51. The statesman attempts to achieve this concord by implanting a true opinion (*al*→*th*→*doxa*) about "the beautiful and the just and the good things" in the citizens (309c5–6). Yet even this true and hopefully steadfast opinion is to be implanted only as a means to achieve concord; this opinion in souls is merely the divine bond that holds together the embodied web of the regime.

52. Compare *Euthydemus* 292c, *Republic* 456e6–7. Roslyn Weiss argues that "the weaver-paradigm is in essence Socratic" ("Statesman as *Epist*→*mn*: Caretaker, Physician, and Weaver," in *RS*, p. 222), but this ignores the distinction between the Socratic (or Athenian) concern for virtue as an end and the Eleatic concern with virtue as a means to a corporeal end.

the depth or bulk of philosophy and philosophers.<sup>53</sup> Even a small city does not have much bulk or weight to it, even a small city, as seen from the philosophic "above," is nearly flat. "The form (*sch→ma*) of a great house and the bulk (*onkos*) of a small city," the Eleatic Stranger states, do not differ at all in regard to rule.<sup>54</sup> Flatness is not a property of any particular regime: the Eleatic Stranger speaks repeatedly of the "royal form" (*basilikon sch→ma*), but he also states in giving his political typology that "The rule of the multitude is the third *sch→ma* of a regime."<sup>55</sup> One wonders if it is the flatness of the political that permits a single science of all rule, or if the science only appears single because, to the philosophers, all ruled collectives appear flat.<sup>56</sup>

The two-dimensionality of the Eleatic Stranger's conception of politics, its lack of depth, excuses his apparently careless teaching on the content of law in the second-best regime. If it is philosophy that gives life its depth, it is almost surely only by some measure of participation in philosophic inquiry that an individual human being can find the genuinely best existence. It is virtually certain that the highest human possibilities are not to be found in political life.

The Eleatic Stranger supplies us with the image of weaving as a "paradigm" for statesmanship.<sup>57</sup> Weaving is the art of making (nearly) two-dimensional cloth out of three-dimensional wool, while the statesman weaves possibly thick "human material" into

53. Socrates uses the image of philosophy as "deep" in the *Theaetetus*. Parmenides, Socrates says, was a man of great depth (*Theaetetus* 184a1), while those whose "mental wax" lacks depth (*bathos*) receive indistinct impressions and so are poor learners. In the *Republic* and the *Laws*, the science of depth, stereometry, serves as the final mathematical propaedeutic for philosophy. (*Republic* 528a–d; *Laws* 818a ff., 961c; cf. *Statesman* 299e).

54. 259b9–10; Benardete, *Being of the Beautiful*, 3:77.

55. 291d6–7, cf. 268c6, 274c1, 297e12–13.

56. Compare Mishima on "the lack of depth and precision" in the Eleatic Stranger's account of the virtues ("Courage and Moderation," in RS, p. 311).

57. On the literary and mythical context of the Eleatic Stranger's paradigm of weaving as the art of compromise needed to unite factions and preserve the "social fabric" see John Scheid and Jesper Svenbro, *The Craft of Zeus: Myths of Weaving and Fabric*, trans. Carol Volk (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996). They explore the ubiquitous connection in Greek and Roman myth and ritual between weaving and marriage, a connection that the Stranger invokes in his account of the divine and human bonds of kingly weaving.

a two-dimensional cover (308de). The statesman aspires to make a smooth well-woven web out of the differing "thicknesses" of the moderate and the manly; the thickness is an obstacle he must overcome or "smooth over" (310e11–311a1). Yet as we have seen, even the true statesman, since he rules over a human generality, must legislate thickly (*pachuterfs*, 294e1, 295a5). The statesman aspires to weave something flat, and smooth, a two-dimensional *sch→ma* of a regime, but the city has bulk in spite of him. Political weaving, in striving to give protection to all, cannot finally overcome the thickness of each individual.

In attempting to care for all "smoothly," the political "thickly" overlooks the natures and needs of a few. The Eleatic Stranger claims that to be forced to do or suffer the juster and nobler thing is no injustice, because the art is the thing, not whether its possessor acts legally or extra-legally, by persuasion or by force (296b–297b). The Stranger admits, however, that this excuse is valid only when the art is applied with a view to "the better," to improvement of those individuals whose coercion is in question. We have seen that law, through which even the true statesman must rule, does not necessarily command the good for each individual in each case. Yet the use of force is only justified if the forcibly applied treatment or rule is better for the subject as an individual, not merely correct for the generality to which he or she belongs but from which he or she may differ in relevant qualities. Political weaving fails to darn closed the hole between the general providence (*epimeleia*) that is the only thing possible for the ruler of a human collectivity, and the particular providence that would be necessary to justify his rule over every action of every individual. The ineradicable thickness of the cloak he weaves means that those he rules, as individuals, are not wholly comprehended within the two-dimensionality of political life.

The Eleatic Stranger compares the political situation to the situation of a patient who believes that his doctors are not interested in healing but are malevolently disposed (298a ff.) This image of malevolent healers would appear to be a paranoid fantasy. Yet for the citizen confronted by a harsh, unfeeling, and perhaps unjust demand made by the law, this sense of the law's malevolence or at best its indifference to his individual well-being may be justified, since the law—including the alterable law that is used by the true possessor of the statesman's art—seeks the good of all

the citizens and the whole political community, not the good of any individual within that community. It is all very well to say, as the Eleatic Stranger says (293a6–c3), that a physician is a physician whether he persuades or uses force. Yet a physician must be certain that the patient's resistance is unjustified, that it does not indicate his misdiagnosis of the patient's particular case. Law, even the best law, can never claim such certainty in its application to each individual subject.

If the best *individual* human life can be cultivated, it can only be through another kind of engagement or caring than the caring for human herds that the true statesman manifests.<sup>58</sup> Kingship can care only "thickly," or collectively for human beings (295ab). The political art is to be found in herd nurture, not private nurture: the statesman is a herdsman, not a groom. The uniquely human caring requires engagement with individuals, not with collectives or herds.<sup>59</sup> Socrates in the *Apology* will describe himself as caring for the Athenians—the whole city—as if it were a single animal, a noble but lazy horse. Socrates will claim to care for the city as a whole by sitting himself beside each man, or each type of man, within the city (*Apology* 30). The Eleatic Stranger, as if in anticipation, points out that it is simply impossible even for the ideal statesman to care for the whole city in this way (*Statesman* 295a2). On the Eleatic Stranger's account, Socrates must either neglect the peculiarities of some in service to the good of the whole, or corrupt the whole by his attention to the peculiarities of some.<sup>60</sup>

Despite his personal and theoretical disengagement from the details of political life, the Eleatic Stranger is nonetheless concerned with caring for human beings. The Eleatic Stranger does not care for human herds, nor for bodies, but for the soul. He too is among those concerned to bring Theaetetus as near as possible to the

58. The point I make by singling out the disjunction between herd and individual nurture, present in both the *Statesman* and the *Laws*, Rosen makes more speculatively in commenting on the disjunction between wild and tame animals at 261d3 and following: "I regard it as not impossible that Plato wishes us to think about human beings who live in herds but are nonetheless wild in the sense that they cannot be genuinely governed through commands of the statesman" (*Plato's "Statesman,"* p. 26).

59. Cf. 261d3–9 with *Laws* 666e.

60. Socrates' conversations with Alcibiades might seem to partake of both these failings.



beings without causing the young mathematician to suffer.<sup>61</sup> There are certain salutary beliefs that the philosopher ought to inculcate in the young inquirer, if only with extreme diffidence. The Eleatic Stranger will ensure that Theaetetus accepts the divinity of the whole just as Socrates ensured that the same young mathematician accepted the existence of the soul (*Sophist* 265de, *Theaetetus* 185e). Socrates claims to concern himself with his interlocutor's opinions about virtue, whereas the Eleatic Stranger professes to care about his fitness to investigate the bodiless beings.<sup>62</sup>

The Eleatic Stranger's account of caring for human beings presents us with two very different carers, the true king or statesman who cares for an entire political community, and the philosopher who cares for a dialogic community. For himself, the Eleatic Stranger seeks a different, nonpolitical, community (*koinōnia*), founded to make a common inquiry.<sup>63</sup> Only the community of inquirers is in essence a community of different and particular individual natures; only the leader of this community can interact with the particular nature of each (262c).<sup>64</sup> In leading us from political caring to philosophic caring, the Eleatic Stranger wishes us to think about and thus come to care for those human beings who are too singular to live in the statesman's herds.

Unlike the philosopher-rulers of the *Republic*, or the Athenian Stranger in the *Laws*, the true statesman need not be forced to take part in ruling a city, to turn from philosophy to politics.<sup>65</sup> For the Eleatic Stranger, the true statesman rules voluntarily, since the political art or technique is "the willing herd-tending of willing bipeds" (276e10–12).<sup>66</sup> The true statesman rules voluntarily because *qua* statesman, he is not open to anything higher, he cannot join a more particular, dialogic community. Not only is the

61. *Sophist* 234d–235a; Klein, *Plato's Trilogy*, p. 30.

62. Cf. *Apology* 29d–30b with *Statesman* 286a.

63. *Statesman* 258cd; cf. Klein, *Plato's Trilogy*, p. 148.

64. On the Eleatic Stranger's concern with good of private, philosophic communion as opposed to public or political communion see Mara, "Constitutions, Virtue, and Philosophy."

65. *Republic* 345e–347e, 519c–520d; *Laws* 753a, 969cd; Leo Strauss, *The Argument and the Action of Plato's Laws* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), pp. 83, 186.

66. With Benardete and Rowe (and *pace* Stephen R. L. Clark, "Herds of Free Bipeds," in *RS*, p. 239), I understand the "willing tending" to be voluntarily performed.

statesman no philosopher, but his willingness to rule shows that he cannot even be open to philosophy.

For the Eleatic Stranger there can thus be no political philosophy,<sup>67</sup> only a problem for the philosopher as a citizen, in relation to the political life of human animals. As the Eleatic Stranger illustrates by personal example, the Eleatic teaching on politics claims that exile best resolves the conflict between philosophy and politics, by enabling the exile to choose among actual regimes that under which it is easiest to live (see 302b).

Parmenides, the father of the Eleatic philosophy, notoriously asks why there should not exist forms of mud, hair, and dirt any less than, according to the view of his interlocutor, (a younger) Socrates, there exists a form of justice (*Parmenides* 130cd). The determination to show the human things below in their true, minuscule, proportion in importance to the bodiless things distinguishes the philosopher from the sophist, in the Eleatic account (see *Statesman* 266d). On this understanding of politics, the very kind or species "philosopher-king" is as oxymoronic, as undialectical, as a philosopher-sophist.<sup>68</sup> If the philosopher refuses to grant dignity to human affairs, how can Socrates, the inquirer into the rational basis of human rankings, be a genuine philosopher? This is the Eleatic Stranger's indictment of Socrates.

But why is this indictment so obliquely laid down? Why does what is after all a deliberately and disparagingly unnuanced portrayal of political life require so many false starts to explicate?

67. See Stanley Rosen, *Plato's "Sophist": The Drama of Original and Image* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 111.

68. Many scholars have contended that the true statesman of the *Statesman* is, in fact, a philosopher-ruler. The only argument for this contention I have found is due to Klein, who claims that the true statesman must have knowledge of "the precise itself" (*Plato's Trilogy*, p. 177; cf. *Statesman* 284d1–2), and that this knowledge is tantamount to knowledge of the good. Yet the Eleatic Stranger says that "the precise itself" is needed for *demonstrating* the existence of the mean (284b–d), that is to say, for philosophic inquiry. He does not say that it is relevant to the practice of statesmanship, any more than it is relevant to the practice of weaving. Both weaving and statesmanship presume the existence of the mean, so to understand their existence philosophically, the existence of the mean must be demonstrated. Yet we have perfectly adequate cloaks without philosopher-weavers, so the successful practice of the arts does not depend on the inquiry into the mean. In Socrates' account in the *Republic*, by contrast, the justice of the philosopher-rulers' actions and commands depends on their knowledge of the idea of the good.

Let us turn, now, to one of the points of least interest in our dialogue. After a boring discussion of weaving,<sup>69</sup> the Eleatic Stranger continues with an even more boring discussion of what makes something excessive or appropriate (283b6 ff.). Though the joke is heavy-handed, there can be little doubt the Eleatic Stranger is finally making an issue of the tedium of his own speeches.<sup>70</sup> Weaving, the Eleatic Stranger admits, could easily have been described in a few words, yet he goes on to lengthen the apparently excessive length of his description of weaving with a defense of its excessive length.<sup>71</sup>

The Eleatic Stranger's discussion of the appropriate length of speeches is hard to take seriously, despite its reference to being serious (283d4–5). It is a very lengthy and seemingly unnecessary discussion of the proper length of speeches. Finally, and none too soon, the Eleatic Stranger gives out and says that the discussion of excess and deficiency is sufficient (285b6–8)—that is to say, the discussion of the mean itself hits the mean. Such a self-reference can only imply that something funny is going on, especially since the Eleatic Stranger never justifies explicitly the appropriateness either of the speech about the mean or of the original, lengthy, definition of weaving.

The Eleatic Stranger resorts to a boring discussion of the mean only because the discussion of weaving fails to bore Young Socrates: "None of the things said seemed to me to be said in vain," the young man states (283b4–5). The discussion of the mean finally achieves its purpose at 286c, when Young Socrates finally admits boredom: "it will be as you say; just go on to the next thing." Yet apparently Young Socrates (and Theaetetus in the search for the sophist) ought to have been bored long ago (286b). The stranger speaks of the vexation "we showed," though his young interlocutors never showed any sign of boredom before.

69. *Statesman* 283b; see G. E. L. Owen, "Plato on the Undepictable," in *Exegesis and Argument: Studies in Greek Philosophy Presented to Gregory Vlastos*, ed. E. N. Lee, A. P. D. Mourelatos, R. M. Rorty (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1973), p. 351; cited by Eve Browning Cole, "Weaving and Practical Politics in Plato's *Statesman*," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 29 (1991): 195–208, p. 206, n. 3.

70. Cf. Lane, "A New Angle," p. 290.

71. *Statesman* 283ab; Klein, *Plato's Trilogy*, p. 165; Benardete, *Being of the Beautiful*, III:73; cf. J. B. Skemp, *Plato's Statesman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), p. 78.

To ensure that Young Socrates is thoroughly bored, the Eleatic Stranger continues his discussion of the appropriate length of speeches until 287b, then finally gives it up.

The discussion of the mean, and the discussion of weaving that preceded it, are appropriate in length because they are themselves appropriately excessive in length, appropriately boring. These discussions are boring enough to teach us that politics is ultimately not a very interesting topic for philosophic investigation. To teach his young interlocutor that politics is, in the end, uninteresting for the philosopher, the Eleatic Stranger delivers an uninteresting account of the political art.<sup>72</sup> This, one must say, is the Eleatic teaching on the division between the sophist, the statesman, and the philosopher, that the Stranger has heard and remembers well (*Sophist* 217ab).<sup>73</sup> The Eleatic Stranger takes a conversation partner to show, by example, how Eleatic philosophers purge their young pupils of political passions. The false starts, the intentionally boring digressions, are essential to this teaching as an act of caring for young, potential philosophers.<sup>74</sup>

72. Compare the long and repetitive Buddhist sutra about detachment from human suffering whose purpose is to detach us from suffering such as it describes, as expounded by Walter Kaufmann in *Critique of Religion and Philosophy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), pp. 396–405.

73. The passage from the *Sophist* referred to in the text is the “clear indication” that Rowe misses, to prove that the Eleatic Stranger is putting forward only a charade of discovery in “*The Politicus: Structure and Form*,” p. 176. My remarks in this final paragraph were motivated in part by the “Afterthought” of Rowe’s paper; and by Rosen, *Plato’s “Sophist”* p. 185, and *Plato’s “Statesman,”* p. 99.

74. An earlier version of this article was presented at a panel on “Citizens and Statesmen: Ancient and Modern” at the 1996 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, where the discussant, Romand Coles, and members of the audience gave useful comments. Clifford Orwin helped and encouraged me in revising, and the anonymous referees contributed numerous valuable suggestions. Aline Linden read Dixsaut’s and Narcy’s articles with me. During the period of this research I received financial support from a National Science Foundation Graduate Fellowship, a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Postdoctoral Fellowship, and a Metcalf Fellowship from Victoria College of the University of Toronto.