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 Edited by Julia Annas and Robin Waterfield  
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## Statesman

SOCRATES: I'm really very grateful to you, Theodorus, for introducing me to Theaetetus. And thanks for the introduction to our visitor as well.<sup>1</sup> 257a

THEODORUS: You'll probably be three times as grateful, though, Socrates, when they've completed their portraits of the statesman and the philosopher as well.

SOCRATES: All right – *if* this is what you want us to report as the view of our foremost arithmetician and geometer, Theodorus.

THEODORUS: What, Socrates? b

SOCRATES: That he counted each of the men as equivalent, when their relative values progress by leaps that are too great for you mathematicians with your ratios.

THEODORUS: That's a good point, Socrates. I call on Ammon, the god of my race,<sup>2</sup> to witness that I admit it. You're quite right

<sup>1</sup> The characters are Socrates, Theodorus of Cyrene (a well-known mathematician), an unnamed visitor from Elea, and Young Socrates, a member of Plato's Academy. The opening conversation links the dialogue to (i) the *Theaetetus*, where Socrates meets the young Theaetetus and Young Socrates, pupils of Theodorus, and has a long discussion with Theaetetus about knowledge, (ii) the *Sophist*, where Theodorus introduces to Socrates the visitor from Elea, who in dialogue with Theaetetus presents a solution to the Eleatic (deriving from Parmenides of Elea) problem of being and not-being. In the *Statesman* Socrates again meets Theodorus and the Eleatic visitor, who this time takes Young Socrates as his partner. The formal framework linking the three dialogues is very artificial, since the *Theaetetus* is methodologically very different from the other two. This opening passage indicates that Plato intended to write a fourth dialogue, in which the Eleatic visitor would give a definition of the philosopher, to follow those of the sophist and statesman. No such dialogue has come down, and it seems that Plato abandoned the project (as he abandoned the project of following the *Timaeus* with two other dialogues).

<sup>2</sup> Theodorus, from the Greek city of Cyrene in North Africa, is identifying the local god Ammon with the Greek god Zeus.

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to tell me off for my mathematical mistake.<sup>3</sup> Thanks for the reminder. I'll get my own back on you another time, but for now I'd like to ask our visitor to continue his kindness and next to pick either the statesman or the philosopher, whichever he likes, and give us an account of him.

VISITOR: Yes, I'd better, Theodorus. I mean, once we've undertaken a project, we oughtn't to give up until we've reached the end. But what should I do about Theaetetus here?

THEODORUS: What do you mean?

VISITOR: Shall we give him a break and instead get Socrates here to join us in our exertions? What do you suggest?

THEODORUS: Yes, I agree with you: get Socrates involved instead. When you're young, as these two are, all you need is a break and then you can easily cope with all kinds of hard work.

d SOCRAATES: And that's not all. There's a sense in which they both might be said to be related to me. At any rate, you all say that one of them looks like me;<sup>4</sup> and the other is my namesake –  
 258a our names bring us into some kind of relationship. Now, relatives like us should always be happy to use conversation to get to know one another. The discussion I myself had with Theaetetus yesterday brought us together, and I've also listened to him answering you just now. On the other hand, I haven't seen Socrates in either role. I ought to see what he's made of as well, though, so I think you should put your questions to him now, and I can do so later.

<sup>3</sup> Socrates has pedantically taken up Theodorus' casual assertion that he will be 'three times as grateful' for the definitions of sophist, statesman and philosopher as he would be for only one of them. He criticizes this for the assumption that all three are equal in value, whereas the value of the philosopher is so much greater than that of the statesman (and that of the statesman than the sophist) that they cannot be put into a mathematical ratio at all. Why is Socrates, of all people, criticizing a leading mathematician? Perhaps the point is that a philosopher, even if not a mathematician, is competent to criticize the assumptions that a mathematician makes.

The object of the current investigation is the 'statesman', *politikos*, the person taken to have knowledge of and competence in political matters (literally, the affairs of the city-state or *polis*). It is assumed, and never discussed, that the possessor of such knowledge will be a ruler, i.e. someone whose knowledge is expressed in organizing the political life of others. We can see from the *Republic* that for Plato the nature of ideal political rule is the central issue in political theory, and the *Statesman's* starting-point makes best sense as directed to an audience already familiar with the *Republic*.

<sup>4</sup> Theaetetus; cf. *Theaetetus* 143e.

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VISITOR: All right. So, Socrates, do you hear what Socrates is suggesting?

YOUNG SOCRATES: Yes.

VISITOR: And do you agree with him?

YOUNG SOCRATES: Yes, I do.

VISITOR: It doesn't look as though *you're* going to put any b obstacles in our way, and it would presumably be even less appropriate for *me* to. Anyway, I think we ought to investigate the statesman next, now that we've finished with the sophist. Tell me: do you think we should or should not count him as another one of those people who are in possession of a branch of knowledge?<sup>5</sup>

YOUNG SOCRATES: I think we should.

VISITOR: So we'd better make distinctions between the various branches of knowledge, as we did before when we were looking into the sophist.

YOUNG SOCRATES: I imagine so.

VISITOR: But I don't think it'll take the same division as before, Socrates.<sup>6</sup>

YOUNG SOCRATES: No?

VISITOR: No, it'll take a different one. c

YOUNG VISITOR: I suppose so.

VISITOR: Where will we find the path that leads to the statesman, then? I mean, that's what we have to do. We have to track statesmanship down, differentiate it from all other branches of knowledge by assigning it to a single identificatory category, and count all the rest as belonging to some other single category. Then we can get our minds to think of all branches of knowledge as falling into two categories.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Note the unargued assumption, right at the start, that the statesman or *politikos* is the possessor of knowledge. *Episte. ē*, the Greek word for knowledge, has a plural which is difficult to render in English; we are forced to use 'branches of knowledge' and the like. Plato assumes that we can use *epistēmē* interchangeably with *technē*, skill or expertise; he refers to the opening of the *Sophist*, which divides *technai*.

<sup>6</sup> *Sophist* 219a ff. begins by dividing kinds of expertise into acquisitive and productive (later a third, separative, is added).

<sup>7</sup> It is assumed without discussion that the right way to characterize the statesman and to say what he is, is to employ a method of 'cuts' or 'division', in which, starting from more general characterizations, one homes in on (metaphors from hunting and tracking down are frequent here) the desired notion by cutting off irrelevant parts of the concept at hand. At *Phaedrus* 265c–266b Socrates says that one must first 'collect' widely scattered notions that belong under a single wider

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YOUNG SOCRATES: I'm already pretty sure that I'm not up to the task. You'll have to do it.

d VISITOR: Yes, but as things become clear to us, Socrates, you must join in as well.

YOUNG SOCRATES: That's fair.

VISITOR: All right, then. Would you say that mathematics and similar disciplines have nothing to do with action? That *all* they provide us with is knowledge?

YOUNG SOCRATES: Yes.

e VISITOR: Whereas the kind of knowledge which is involved in building and manual work in general is more or less essentially involved with action and assists these disciplines in their realization of physical entities which formerly did not exist.

YOUNG SOCRATES: Of course.

VISITOR: So this gives you a criterion for differentiating between branches of knowledge in general. You can distinguish knowledge which is practical from knowledge which is purely theoretical.

YOUNG SOCRATES: All right. I agree to your distinction of these two categories within the single field of knowledge.

term, and only then 'divide' to reach a satisfactory characterization, in a way that is like dividing a carcass into its natural joints instead of merely hacking bits off. In the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, however, we start by dividing; presumably 'collecting' is the preliminary work which is not relevant to displaying the finished product. Division results in establishing a single 'class' or 'category' of what is sought; the words here translate *eidōs* and *idea*, often translated 'form'; and the process of division clearly takes on, in a more low-key way, many of the issues earlier discussed in more metaphysically loaded contexts. The present search for forms or categories continues to assume that there are objective natural forms or kinds, which we discover and whose existence does not depend on our conventions; and that we discover these through the philosophical use of reasoning. In this respect there is a continuity between the *Statesman* and the Socratic 'dialogues of definition'. Aristotle regards the process of 'division' into two parts at each stage as a crude kind of definition by genus and differentia, and criticizes a version of it in chapters 2 and 3 of the first book of *The Parts of Animals*. Plato's own practice is loose and variable; in the *Sophist*, for example, several definitions by division of the sophist are produced. In the *Statesman*, although the attempt to produce a definition by division of the statesman formally provides the framework of the dialogue, many other different kinds of contribution to our understanding are made which have nothing to do with division. 'Division' in Plato's later dialogues functions rather like 'analysis' in some modern discussions: it can suggest more precision than is actually employed, but it clearly refers to a characteristic mode of doing philosophical discussion.

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VISITOR: Now, do you think the statesman, the king, the slave-master, and the estate-manager too all belong to a single category, or do you think there are as many areas of expertise here as there are names?<sup>8</sup> Perhaps it would be better if you were to consider the matter from the following point of view.

YOUNG SOCRATES: What?

VISITOR: Imagine a person who, despite holding no official position, is qualified to act as an adviser to one of the state physicians. Wouldn't we have to use the same professional title in referring to him as we would when referring to the person whose adviser he is? 259a

YOUNG SOCRATES: Yes.

VISITOR: What about a person who, again despite holding no official position himself, is qualified to advise the king of some country or other? Won't we say that he has the knowledge which, by all rights, the king himself ought to have?

YOUNG SOCRATES: Yes.

VISITOR: Now, the knowledge a true king has is kingship. b

YOUNG SOCRATES: Yes.

VISITOR: And whether a person with this knowledge is in fact a ruler or an ordinary citizen, it will be perfectly correct – as long as we're thinking about just his expertise, anyway – to say that he has what it takes to be a king.

YOUNG SOCRATES: Yes, that would be fair.

<sup>8</sup> Here is an initial emphatic commitment on Plato's part to the idea that the areas named are merely different areas of application of what is itself one single expertise. Aristotle's denial of this forms a fundamental point of disagreement in political theory; he denies exactly this assertion at *Politics* 1252a7–23, clearly with the present passage in mind. For Aristotle there is a basic difference between exercise of authority over inferiors, and political rule, which is distinguished by being exercised over those who are 'equal and similar' to oneself; hence it is appropriate in a political community to 'rule and be ruled' in turns. Here Plato rejects such a difference in kind (though he regards ruler and ruled as far less different than they are in the *Republic*). Note also that here Plato introduces an equivalence between the statesman and the king. (This also happens abruptly at *Euthydemus* 291b.) In view of the normal Greek association of kingship with foreign and arbitrary rule ('the king' normally meaning the king of Persia) this is an indication that familiarity with the *Republic* is presupposed, 'king' standing in for ideal rulers like the Guardians. (Plato connects the two uses shortly.)

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VISITOR: If we put statesmanship and kingship and their respective practitioners into the same category, then, we do so on the grounds that they're all the same, don't we?

YOUNG SOCRATES: Obviously.

VISITOR: And there's no difference between an estate-manager and a slave-master.

YOUNG SOCRATES: No, of course not.

VISITOR: Well, as far as their government is concerned, is there any difference between a large estate with its pretensions and a small state with its pomp?

YOUNG SOCRATES: None at all.

- c VISITOR: So the answer to our present question is obvious: all these cases involve a single branch of knowledge, which could be called 'kingship' or 'statesmanship' or 'estate-management'. We won't mind in the slightest which of these titles is used.

YOUNG SOCRATES: Of course not.

VISITOR: Another obvious point is that what any king can contribute towards the maintenance of his authority manually and by physical means in general is very little compared to what he can do with intelligence and strength of mind.

YOUNG SOCRATES: Yes, that's clear.

- d VISITOR: So shall we say that a king's affinities lie more with theoretical knowledge than with the kind which is manual and basically practical?

YOUNG SOCRATES: I'm sure we should.

VISITOR: What if we go on to make distinctions within theoretical knowledge? Would that be the next thing for us to do?

YOUNG SOCRATES: Yes.

VISITOR: Now, if you look carefully, you might be able to spot a natural joint within theoretical knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

YOUNG SOCRATES: Where?

- e VISITOR: I'll tell you. You know the branch of knowledge we call arithmetic.

YOUNG SOCRATES: Yes.

VISITOR: It's undoubtedly a branch of theoretical knowledge, surely.

<sup>9</sup> The image is of dividing up a carcass into joints; cf. *Phaedrus* 265e. The visitor returns to the question of natural divisions at 262c ff.

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YOUNG SOCRATES: It certainly is.

VISITOR: Now, when an arithmetician notices a difference between certain quantities, we expect him to evaluate the difference, but we don't expect his function to go beyond that, do we?

YOUNG SOCRATES: Of course not.

VISITOR: And then there's the master builder. No master builder is an actual workman; he's an overseer of workmen.

YOUNG SOCRATES: Yes.

VISITOR: What he provides is not manual labour, but knowledge.

YOUNG SOCRATES: Exactly.

VISITOR: It would be right, then, to say that he possesses theoretical knowledge. 260a

YOUNG SOCRATES: Yes.

VISITOR: But in his case, I think, it would be inappropriate for him just to evaluate, and then stop and leave it at that, as our arithmetician did. He has to tell each of the workmen what to do and see that they carry out his instructions.

YOUNG SOCRATES: That's right.

VISITOR: So although it and all similar branches of knowledge are theoretical, and although all the disciplines which depend on arithmetic are as well, nevertheless there's a difference between these two categories in the sense that one evaluates and the other issues instructions. b Yes?

YOUNG SOCRATES: I think so.

VISITOR: So suppose we break theoretical knowledge as a whole down into two parts, and call them 'instructional' and 'evaluative'. Would that be a reasonable distinction to make?

YOUNG SOCRATES: I'm sure it would.

VISITOR: Well, it's always nice for partners to agree.

YOUNG SOCRATES: Of course.

VISITOR: And as long as we're partners in our current venture, we won't bother with others' opinions.

YOUNG SOCRATES: Why should we?

VISITOR: Now then, in which of these two areas of expertise c should we locate kingship? Is a king a spectator of some kind, in which case we should place him in the evaluative category? Or would it be better for us to count him as knowing how to issue instructions, since he does after all exercise authority?

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YOUNG SOCRATES: It would definitely be better for us to do that.<sup>10</sup>

VISITOR: We'd better take a look next at expertise in issuing instructions, then, and find a way to break it down. I think I can see how. I think we can distinguish between kings and heralds in exactly the same way as we do between retailers and producer-sellers, who sell their own produce.

YOUNG SOCRATES: What do you mean?

VISITOR: What retailers do is take over other people's produce and re-sell it, when it's already been sold once.

YOUNG SOCRATES: Yes.

VISITOR: And what heralds do as well is take over other people's ideas, which they've received in the form of instructions, and deliver exactly the instructions they were given all over again to a different set of people.

YOUNG SOCRATES: You're quite right.

VISITOR: Well, should we bracket what kings do with what a large number of other people do – translators, bosuns, diviners and heralds, for instance? After all, they all issue instructions. Or shall we follow the analogy we came up with a moment ago and make up an equivalent name, since there isn't really an accepted name, in fact, for people who issue their own instructions?<sup>11</sup> Then we can divide the group in question along these lines, and put kings into a 'producer-instructional' class. As for all the rest, we can ignore them and leave it to someone else to find a different name for them, because the purpose of our enquiry is to track down the ruler and we aren't interested in any non-rulers.

YOUNG SOCRATES: I agree.

<sup>10</sup> Note that arithmetic is put into the evaluative, purely theoretical part of theoretical knowledge, separately from kingship, which is theoretical knowledge that has implications for practice. This is one striking sign that Plato has abandoned the *Republic's* assumption that years of training in abstract mathematics is needed for the ruler's expertise. Plato returns to the relationship of directive theoretical knowledge to practice at the end of the dialogue (303e–305e).

<sup>11</sup> Here Plato makes a virtue of indifference to actual usage; even though we are working through low-key examples, we are not concerned to map common sense, but to produce a rationally defensible account of what we are seeking. At 261e he makes the point that philosophers should not quibble over words (cf. *Republic* 454a, *Theaetetus* 177d–e, *Sophist* 218c).



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VISITOR: Now that we've adequately separated these two groups, by distinguishing between what comes from others and what originates with oneself, the next task is to subdivide the producer-instructional class, isn't it? I mean, we have to see if it contains a crack that we can open up.

YOUNG SOCRATES: Yes.

VISITOR: And I think it does, but you should join me in opening it up.

YOUNG SOCRATES: Where?

VISITOR: Won't we find that the reason that any ruler – any conceivable kind of ruler – issues instructions is to produce results? b

YOUNG SOCRATES: Definitely.

VISITOR: Now, it's hardly difficult to divide things in general into two distinct classes.

YOUNG SOCRATES: How?

VISITOR: Some things are inanimate, and some are alive.

YOUNG SOCRATES: True.

VISITOR: Well, this distinction will help us in our attempts to divide the instructional aspect of theoretical knowledge.

YOUNG SOCRATES: How?

VISITOR: We can assign to one part the work of producing results in the inanimate sphere, and to the other part the work of producing results in the sphere of living creatures. That will immediately give c  
us an exhaustive division of the class as a whole.

YOUNG SOCRATES: It certainly will.

VISITOR: Now, one of these parts needn't concern us, but we should take the other and treat it as a whole to be divided into two.

YOUNG SOCRATES: Which of the two parts do you think we should take?

VISITOR: The one which issues instructions in the sphere of living creatures, of course. I mean, a king can hardly be said to exercise his authority over inanimate objects, as a master builder does. No, he has a higher role: he works with living creatures and functions d  
exclusively in that domain.

YOUNG SOCRATES: You're right.

VISITOR: Now, there are two aspects to producing results and looking after things in the sphere of living creatures. You find

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people either taking care of single creatures, or being responsible for them collectively in herds.<sup>12</sup>

YOUNG SOCRATES: Right.

VISITOR: But we're surely not going to find statesmen maintaining individual creatures, as drovers or grooms do; stock-farmers of horses and cattle are a closer analogy.

YOUNG SOCRATES: I'm sure you're right, now that I hear it said.

e VISITOR: So what shall we call the collective maintenance of a number of living creatures at once? Shall we call it 'herd-maintenance' or 'collective maintenance'?

YOUNG SOCRATES: Whichever of these names crops up as we talk.

VISITOR: Well said, Socrates. If you can retain this relaxed attitude towards terminology, your stock of wisdom will increase as you get older. For the time being, however, let's do as you suggest. But can you find a way to show that herd-maintenance is divisible? That would enable us to concentrate our search on half the ground

262a in future, instead of trying, as we are now, to locate our quarry in an area which is double the size it might be.

YOUNG SOCRATES: I'll do my best. I think there's a difference between the maintenance of human beings and the maintenance of beasts.<sup>13</sup>

VISITOR: That was a very decisive and courageous effort at division. But we mustn't let this happen to us again, if we can help it.

YOUNG SOCRATES: We mustn't let what happen again?

VISITOR: We must beware of singling out just one small part and contrasting it with a number of large parts, and of doing so without

b any reference to classes. Any part we distinguish must also constitute a class. If one's quarry can legitimately be distinguished from

<sup>12</sup> The characterization of political communities as 'herds' may bring to mind some of the more alarming talk of herds and breeding in the *Republic*. (Even apart from this, it is a demeaning characterization; members of religious congregations have sometimes resisted the authoritarian implications of the idea that they form a 'flock'.) Here, however, it is just an implication of the idea that the ruler is a kind of herdsman or shepherd; as this idea is modified so is the idea that citizens are a kind of herd.

<sup>13</sup> The idea that humans are not merely a flock is not rejected, but the visitor refuses to take this as an obvious step. It has to emerge from further definition and the interpretation of the myth; otherwise we could not be sure that we had found a real form, rather than the result of an artificial distinction.