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EDITED BY
JULIA ANNAS
University of Arizona

AND
ROBIN WATERFIELD

TRANSLATED BY
ROBIN WATERFIELD

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Preface

It is perhaps appropriate for the *Statesman* to be the first of Plato's works to come out in the Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought; it is certainly the most neglected of Plato's political works, and the one most in need of a fresh presentation. The new translation provides a more accessible version than any hitherto available in English, and the introduction attempts to locate the dialogue in Plato's political thought, taking advantage of the enormous improvements in our understanding of this that recent discussions have produced. Few of these directly concern the *Statesman* itself, and we hope that this new translation will help to bring the work more centrally into discussions of Plato's political thought, along with the more familiar *Republic* and *Laws*.

The translation and textual notes are by Robin Waterfield, and the introduction and other notes by Julia Annas. Each of us, however, has read and commented on the other's work, and the result is the product of a harmonious collaboration that has been interesting and profitable for both of us. We hope that its fruits will introduce others to this uneven, often puzzling but seminal dialogue.

Introduction

The *Statesman* (or *Politicus*) is central to any serious concern with Plato's political thought. It clarifies and modifies Plato's earlier positions, especially in the *Republic*, and illuminates the principles of his political thinking even while these are in the process of changing.

Plato (429–347 BC) is known and discussed widely as a political thinker, but usually on the basis of his best-known work, the *Republic*, and this is in many ways a pity. The *Republic* is a work in which political theory is mixed together with ethical theory and metaphysics, and the political strand (which is not a very large one) is hard to disentangle and open to many different kinds of interpretation. Further, the political ideas, though expressed with vigour, are very sketchy, and their relation to contemporary political reality is remote. Plato's later works, *Statesman* and *Laws*, are more properly seen as works of political theory than is the *Republic*, and studying them can both help us to understand the *Republic* better, and also put it into perspective, as being only part of a long development in Plato's thinking.

In the *Statesman*, for example, Plato defends the ideal of the ruler as possessor of a particular kind of expertise, namely expertise in the 'political skill (or art)' (*politikē technē*). This idea dominates the political aspect of the *Republic*: political problems are to be solved by imposing an ideal ruler, and the only interesting question is what the nature of that rule is to be. Yet we find that, in the *Statesman*, the *Republic*'s metaphysical backing for this idea has dropped away, and that a new and far more politically relevant

defence emerges. Furthermore, Plato displays a new interest in the kind of compromise that the rule of the ideal expert must make, in the real world, with laws and institutions. Likewise, while the *Statesman* does not overtly challenge the *Republic*'s view of the ideal ruler's need for both education and constraint in managing his subjects, we find that Plato has in fact considerably changed his view of the moral psychology of the citizen, and is moving towards a more egalitarian view of the relation of ruler to ruled.

Aristotle (384–322 BC), Plato's greatest pupil, responded to Plato in his own political theory as well as in other areas of philosophy. His own political views centre on the nature of political rule and what distinguishes it from other forms of authority, and it is clear from his writings that he reacts creatively to the *Statesman* both in fundamentals (for example, on the nature of political rule) and in details (for example, the framework for considering the various kinds of constitution, the 'theory of the mean'). Although Aristotle criticizes the *Republic*, in Book 2 of his *Politics*, his objections are somewhat mechanical, and it is unhelpful to compare Aristotle's work with the *Republic* rather than with the later dialogues, which Aristotle clearly found more useful as works of political thought.

However, stimulating as Plato's political ideas in the *Statesman* are, it is not surprising that the dialogue has been neglected by comparison with the *Republic* or even the *Laws*. To get to the political theory we have to go through lengthy passages which on first reading can strike us as a mixture of the boring and the weird. The *Statesman* is not only a discussion of political theory but an exercise in general philosophical method, deliberately presented as part of the same exercise as the one resulting in the theory of being and not-being in the *Sophist*. But Plato's presentation of this method has been criticized for its *longueurs*; he has abandoned the literary and attention-grabbing devices that are so plain in the *Republic*. Part of his message is now that philosophy (perhaps especially political theory) requires hard and often tedious work if we are to get it right rather than rushing (as in the *Republic*) to conclusions that may be exciting but may also be premature. Plato now stresses the need to work carefully and thoroughly through often unpromising-looking and trivial material if we are to be entitled to firm ethical conclusions. And the result has inspired far

fewer readers than has the *Republic*. But, for just the same reasons, anyone who wants to get beyond the superficial grasp of Plato's political thought that comes from reading only the *Republic* should pay careful attention to the *Statesman*, as well as the *Laws*.

The dialogue is devoted to the search for a definition of the *politikos* – the possessor of *politikē technē* or the skill of ruling and organizing a political community (something for which the English 'statesman' is a pallid but unavoidable equivalent). The reason for this is something that remains constant from the earliest dialogues: to understand what we are talking about when we use a given term, rather than relying on what we pick up from other people or books and do not fully understand, we need to be able to 'give an account', to say *what it is* that we are talking about. We need to be able to do this because only if we are armed with this kind of general grasp of the field can we articulate an explanation and defence of the judgements that we make on the matter. In the early dialogues this is often given the not very happy name of a search for 'definitions'. However, what Plato is doing has little to do with definitions in our sense, and is connected rather with the demand for expert knowledge of what one is talking about.

In the *Statesman* we notice an obvious difference from the earlier kind of search, where Socrates attacks the views of others in an *ad hominem* way and generally concludes that they have learned what courage or friendship (or whatever is the object of search) is not, rather than what it is. Now the dialogue represents not the process of search but the process of exposition: the main speaker is not Socrates (who would presumably have appeared too anachronistic in this role) but an anonymous visitor from Elea, and the young interlocutor is clearly a pupil who is learning, not a partner who is contributing, negatively or positively, to the philosophical investigation. Further, we try to establish what a statesman is by narrowing down the field in a process called 'division' of wider terms. This procedure, however, is supplemented by contributions of rather different kinds: a strange myth; a discussion of the nature of illustration, and a long paradigmatic illustration of weaving; an investigation of the relationships between expertise, measurement and the trio of excess, deficiency and the 'mean'; a discussion of the different types of political constitution; and finally an account

not of the statesman's nature but of one of his central political tasks, the 'weaving' of different types of people into one political fabric.

Even a casual reader is bound to be struck by the contrast between the officially organized and pedagogic nature of the discussion, and the bumpiness of the actual ride, with surprising digressions and methodological sidetracks, and a generally untidy and unfinished air to the conclusion. Scholars have divided: some think that Plato is here not in full literary control of the material, while others hold that the reader is being cued that the formally dominating structure of definition by division is not to be taken too seriously after all. Whatever the reader's conclusion about this, the *Statesman* is far less successfully unified than its official companion-piece, the *Sophist*; its different parts do in the end contribute to the understanding of a single issue, the nature of political rule, but they do so in rather diverse ways. Perhaps what we find is the result of Plato discovering that the problem of political rule is methodologically more complex and harder to expound than the nature of being and not-being.

The *Statesman* is, then, more taxing than the *Republic* to read and absorb. It is worthwhile, however, both for the light it sheds back on the *Republic* and for its interesting discussion of themes that interested Plato throughout his life.

The ruler's expertise

No reader of the *Republic* can fail to see the crucial importance of Plato's assumption there that ruling is a kind of expertise, a skill or *technē*. This is in one way merely a natural extension of the idea, prominent in the early Socratic dialogues, that virtue is a kind of expertise over one's life as a whole. In some of these dialogues (notably the *Euthydemus*, *Lovers* and *Alcibiades*) this idea is extended, without argument, to the idea that the virtuous agent will rule over others, making them, as well as himself, virtuous. However, it is the *Republic* which pushes the idea of ruling as an expertise furthest, in two ways.

One is that, although ruling is constantly compared to practical kinds of expertise like those of the doctor and navigator, Plato makes extreme demands on the theoretical competence that the

rulers must have. The ruling class must spend long years doing mathematical studies, which accustom the mind to non-empirical thinking, and then study philosophy, and its supreme object, the Good, in an abstract and theoretical way. Plato never doubts that the abstract studies will improve the rulers' practical abilities, but just how this is supposed to happen is never made clear. The difficulty is made worse by the claim that people who have experienced these theoretical studies will see no value in returning to practical administration, and will have to be forced to do so.

The *Statesman*, by contrast, works out patiently and fully the differences and relationships between theoretical studies and practical applications, and corrects the picture put forward in the *Republic* on two fronts. The rulers themselves are not the ones who actually put their policies into practice; much effort is spent distinguishing their role from the instrumental roles of the different kinds of functionaries who do. The rulers' own knowledge is, by contrast, a theoretical one which guides and corrects actual practice. However, it is carefully distinguished from the type of theoretical knowledge which is *not* directive of practice – and the example given of this is mathematics; quietly, the whole basis for the Guardians' long years of abstract studies has been pulled out. We are therefore not surprised to find that the whole discussion and definition of expertise in ruling proceeds as though the central books of the *Republic* had never been written. Plato no longer thinks that political expertise requires a type of thinking which is mathematical in method and structure; as often in the later dialogues, he is rejoining common sense. He does not, however, stay there; rather, we find a quite new, and very interesting, argument to support the claims of the expert to rule, one to be discussed fully below.

The *Republic* also notoriously pushes the model of ruling as expertise in another, and more sinister direction: if ruling is really like a skill, then the people who are ruled appear to be the material for the exercise of this skill; the expert ruler would not seem to be called upon to take account of their desires and expressed preferences, since these have no standing from the viewpoint of the skill. Some of the most notorious passages in the *Republic* express exactly this view: from the point of view of rational guidance, it makes no difference if you are guided by your own reason, or by the externally imposed reason of the expert, if your own reason

is not up to the task. Hence the Guardians' subjects are even called their 'slaves' (590c–d); that is, they have no autonomy over their lives where the Guardians' directives are concerned.

The *Statesman* in some passages appears to repeat and even to emphasize this aspect of the idea that ruling is an expertise (293a–b, 296b–297b): the opinions of the subjects simply do not matter, and the expert is entitled to use force to achieve his ends if necessary. The subjects may not like it, but they have no cause for rational complaint. Yet in an earlier passage (276d–e) it is explicitly made a mark of the rule of the true statesman (as opposed to the arbitrary exercise of force by a dictator) that his rule is consented to, and does not have to be imposed by constraint. The obvious internal conflict here has understandably exercised scholars. Resolution on this point is difficult, however. A relatively simple solution is to say that although the expert ruler, ruling in the interests of his subjects, would not (as opposed to the dictator who rules only for his own selfish ends) have to use constraint, this would be true only in ideal circumstances, with subjects who do not need constraint because there are no internal or external factors making it necessary. However, Plato has, since the *Republic*, developed worries about this idea too; the ideal ruler has become a problem and not just a solution to problems.

How ideal is the ideal ruler?

A large chunk of the *Statesman* is devoted to the 'myth' or story of the Age of Cronus, the traditional Golden Age when, as in the myth of Genesis, humans did not have to work or give birth and, as in other parts of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, were 'shepherded' by divine figures. Part of the point of this myth is that the expert ruler we are looking for is not the divine herdsman of the Golden Age, when the shepherd of the flock was different in kind from the flock, but rather someone whose nature is distinctively human, like the humans he rules over. In the Age of Zeus – our world – just as the world itself is now not ruled by the divine will but runs independently, by the directives of its own nature, so humans are not ruled directly by divine shepherds, but run themselves independently, by the directives of human nature, and the

way they are ruled must appeal only to the human nature which is common to ruler and subjects.

This seems to be a simple and welcome point. Plato is saying that political theory should not come up with solutions which are so idealized that they have no hope of applying in the world as it is. And this is certainly what Plato's position is in the *Laws* (874e–875d) when he says that the ideal expert ruler is an unattainable ideal, since it is not in human nature to attain to expert knowledge or to remain uncorrupted by the potential for its use on other humans. When this is Plato's firm conclusion, he ceases to devote attention to the expert ruler as a solution to political problems.

But in the *Statesman* it is harder to see exactly what Plato's position is. For despite his clear application of the myth of the Golden Age, Plato continues to develop the idea that the expert ruler is the best answer to political problems, the best way to produce a state run in the interests of all. Other types of solution are, by the end of the dialogue, firmly relegated to second-best. Further, his treatment of the Golden Age myth is itself somewhat elusive. He treats the details of the traditional material in ways that are strikingly surreal, raising unavoidably the question of how seriously he is taking the idea even as a myth. And this in turn clouds the idea of just what the circumstances are which are being excluded as too ideal for relevance to actual societies.

Matters are further complicated here by the fact that the status of the myth is cloudy, too. Plato's earlier philosophical myths, in the *Phaedo*, *Gorgias* and *Republic*, are like one another in that they are recastings of traditional mythical material to serve a philosophically defensible moral and political purpose. But the *Statesman* injects a wholly new element: Plato claims that he is rationally reconstructing a story which makes sense of folk memory and folk stories. Actual Greek myths, rather than being rejected as harmful, are now regarded as fragments and shards of a larger story which is, in its outlines, true. We see here the beginnings of a much more empirical and even historical approach to political theory, one which emerges in the immense respect that Plato shows, in the *Laws*, for traditions, long-established usages and the lessons of history. But the *Statesman* myth itself wobbles between a number of genres. Which does it most resemble – the Myth of Er in the *Republic*? – the consciously

fictional story of Atlantis in the *Timaeus-Critias*? – or the account of Greek prehistory in *Laws* III? The honest but uncomfortable answer is that it resembles all of them, and falls neatly into no category.

This unclarity, however, adds to the unclarity of the myth's point in the dialogue. After the *Republic*, Plato is now sure that he wants to reject over-idealized accounts of the expert ruler. But just how ideal is over-ideal? Plato has no clear answer to this difficult question, and so it is perhaps not surprising that he both clings to the thought that the truly ideal ruler would not need to use constraint, and also insists that the ideal ruler, in an unideal world, would be justified in using constraint. The source of the problems seems clearly to be that Plato is still, perhaps grimly, hanging on to the *Republic* idea that the best way to produce the best state is to install an ideal ruler, while at the same time he is developing positions that create trouble for this idea. One we have seen: political rule, to be applicable in the real world, should recognize a fundamental similarity of ruler and ruled. This is an idea which Plato takes to heart in the *Laws* and which is carried further by Aristotle. Another is increased respect for law and institutions. The *Statesman* is unstable because Plato has not yet thought through the degree of compromise that these new ideas demand.

Expertise, laws and institutions

The *Republic*, as is familiar, demands that expert rulers, the Guardians, be given a free hand and a clean slate. Although they are supposed to proceed by means of laws and regulations, this kind of regulation is regarded as obvious and trivial once the right system of education is in place, and laws do not stand in the way of the insight of the experts. The only defence of this is the lengthy description of the education itself, with its mathematical and metaphysical underpinnings.

Shorn of these, expertise needs a new defence, and in the original and interesting passage *Statesman* 292b–300e Plato provides it. What he now appeals to is the flexibility and improvisatory ability of the expert. Laws are compared to a stupid person who will not change his behaviour when new information is available because he refuses to take it in. Attaching importance to laws is like making

a fetish of the rule-book in areas where rule-following is obviously self-defeating. In a sarcastic and rather funny portrayal of what we would call bureaucratic procedures Plato gives us a new argument for the importance of the expert: he achieves the goal better than the rule-follower tied up in red tape.

The weakness of the analogy is, of course, that it appeals to our responses in the case of uncontroversial skills to establish something about an expertise whose results would be highly revisionary. As in the *Republic*, Plato makes the ruler out to be a kind of doctor: you may not *like* his remedies, but you know that they are for your own good. And the problem in the analogy remains the same: it is easier for the doctor and the patient to agree on what it takes for the patient to be healthy than for the ruler and ruled to agree on what measures the ruled should be subjected to.

But two rather interesting things happen at this point. One is that *this* argument for expertise quite patently falls far short of justifying constraint. The more we appeal to the intuitive idea that we would rather see the doctor than just renew his prescription, the less intuitive seems the idea that the doctor is therefore entitled to *force* his new prescription on us. This is another idea that Plato comes to accept later. In the *Laws* (720a–e, 857c–e) the analogy of the doctor appears yet again, and this time the point about constraint is explicitly recognized. It is only doctors to slaves who can impose their remedies; a free person is entitled to demand that the doctor explain the need for the remedy and persuade the patient to submit to it. In the *Laws* Plato has taken the point that citizens are not relevantly like slaves to their rulers, however expert; and expertise, however superior to the rule-book, is no longer taken to justify constraint.

The other point is that the *Statesman* argument for the superiority of expertise to law brings with it its own correction; the rule-book is not as good as the doctor's own personal judgement, but it is a lot better than nothing, or guesswork, or, worst of all, obedience to a charlatan. Laws are a second-best to the ideal expert; but if you lose interest in the ideal expert as a solution, laws do not look as irrelevant as the *Republic* made them out to be. The less interesting the prospect of an ideal ruler, the more pressing it becomes to turn one's attention to averting anarchy and tyranny; and in the section on the different types of constitutions we find Plato turning

to a more realistic and common-sense appraisal of the actually available political options in the Greece of his time.

Four points stand out from Plato's discussion of the different types of constitutional arrangement. The first is that the definitions are realistic; they converge with common sense and ordinary political discourse. In this they contrast strongly with the discussion of different types of state in Books 8 and 9 of the *Republic*, where the account of the different states is strongly driven by the analogy of soul and state, and often bears no obvious relation to contemporary reality. The most striking example of this is that of democracy, where in the *Republic* Plato is pushed by the analogy of soul and state to say very peculiar things. Given his account of the soul, the 'democratic' personality has to be a person in whom desires are dominant; and desires are directed solely at their own satisfaction, with no regard for the overall good of the whole person. The 'democratic' personality has no way of ranking his desires; hence he pursues serious and trivial concerns with equal commitment. Correspondingly, the 'democratic' state has to be one in which every member counts for as much as every other, and no 'élitist' differentiations are allowed. Plato follows this idea through in extreme ways – women are equal to men, pupils to teachers, etc. – which bear no relation to any democratic state he can have known about, certainly not Athens (562d–563d). In the *Statesman*, by contrast, Plato, unencumbered by the soul-state analogy, classifies states in a sensible and common-sense way: are the rulers one, few or many? The rule of the many, in all its forms, is democracy. All the *Republic*'s unreal problems drop away at a stroke, and Plato looks more dispassionately at the advantages and disadvantages of democracy in the real world. Not for nothing was Aristotle deeply influenced by this passage.

Secondly, Plato is freed by this newly sensible approach to give a newly sensible evaluation of democracy. Instead of berating it for occupying a low rank in his own system, he actually looks at the way it functions. The main feature he picks out is that, as a system of government, it is weak, because it parcels out authority more widely than others do. This, of course, renders it open to the accusations of comic bureaucracy that Plato is ready to make. But there is another side to this. A system that makes it difficult for

the virtuous to take control and impose their expertise is also a system that makes it difficult for the vicious and selfish to take control and impose their own views and interests. Plato, for the first time, realizes that the feature of democracy that makes it most resistant to the rule of 'true kings' in ideal circumstances is actually an advantage in the real world, since it also makes it most resistant to dictatorship, and in the real world there are more potential dictators than potential true kings.

Plato can never bring himself to be really enthusiastic about democracy, not even in the *Laws*, where his ideal state takes over huge amounts of Athenian democratic institutions. But in the *Statesman* we see him for the first time realizing the advantages of democracy from the viewpoint of a realistic assessment of how political institutions actually function.

Thirdly, it must be admitted that Plato's interest in actually functioning political factors is somewhat uneven. In the passage at 291e we find him cross-dividing the three forms of rule (one/few/many) by three criteria, namely whether the form of rule receives consent or not, whether it is by the rich or poor and whether laws are respected or not. However, in the later passage which refers back to this (302b–303b) only the third of these criteria is mentioned. Plato, on the verge of asking a number of significant questions, is sidetracked by concern with expert knowledge and its relation to law, and loses interest. We find Aristotle, in passages of the *Politics* (1279a22–1280a6, 1289a26–b26, especially 1289b5–6, which seems to be a reference to the *Statesman* passage) taking up and consciously improving on Plato's analysis here.

Finally, Plato's main interest in this passage is the one which emerges at the end, namely the importance of laws and institutions. In an imperfect world (and few have thought the actual world more imperfect than Plato) it is better to stick rigidly to one's laws than to allow tinkering. In the *Republic* (425c–427a) this kind of tinkering was ridiculed because it falls so far short of the comprehensive rational ideal. In the *Statesman* the reason is more down-to-earth: the tinkering is likely to be in partisan and selfish interests, whereas established laws are more likely to express collective wisdom. Plato is on the way to the almost Burkean reverence for tradition and established custom that we find in the *Laws*. He has come to see

law, however rigid, as expressive of what a community has agreed on, and, just as such, having some status as against the desires of particular people to alter it.

It is remarkable that a community's consensus should, just as such, have any rationally defensible status for Plato, especially when we consider the uncompromising stance in many of the early dialogues against the force of majority opinion. And once again we find a point which is accepted in the *Laws*, but which has a murkier status in the *Statesman*. For here it is not just any old consensus which has authority, but shared *true* opinion, and it is the expert ruler, not just tradition, which is charged with bringing this about. This takes us on to the issue of the *Statesman*'s view of the ordinary citizens and their attitudes.

The moral psychology of the citizen

Very little is said in the *Statesman* about the state which the ideal ruler will rule, or its citizens. However, the passage at the end about weaving the fabric of the state, though technically it is not part of the dialogue's official task of defining the statesman, is another original and seminal passage in Plato's political thought.

It seems to be assumed that the citizens subject to the ideal ruler will be subjected, as are the citizens in the *Republic*, to an overall system of education and training. (The theme of force and constraint, emphasized earlier, drops out in this passage, where the stress is all put on the effects of education.) But the extreme differences of nature between types of citizen, on which Plato lays such enormous stress in the *Republic*, are no longer apparent. Plato still thinks that the rational ability needed to produce a ruler is not one that could be widespread among people, but, in keeping with his earlier recognition of the essential similarity of ruler and ruled, he has dropped the hierarchical class-system that is such a feature of the *Republic*. Two noteworthy results of this are likely to strike the reader.

Firstly, all the citizens must, as far as possible, be unified by the 'divine bond' of true belief held securely about basic matters of right and wrong (309c). It is of course not new for Plato to hold that most people can have merely true belief whereas only the expert ruler has knowledge, but the emphasis has shifted

somewhat. No longer a second-rate means for making sure that most people do what the Guardians deem best for them, the beliefs of the citizens are, when they converge on the truth, something divine. And it matters that the citizens hold these beliefs *securely*; Plato is softening his earlier line that stability is a mark of knowledge, while beliefs are unstable. The status of true belief has shifted upwards; we are on our way to the even more revisionary position of the *Laws*, where Plato holds that we use our minds, the spark of divinity in us, in conforming ourselves to the laws, which are the product of human reasoning working in the past. In the *Statesman* he is not yet prepared to assign such an approved status to tradition.

The other surprise for the reader in these final pages is an explicit defence of the view that the virtues, in an agent, do not naturally tend towards unification, so that intervention is needed to ensure that the citizens all have the virtues in a unified form. Plato is not actually denying that the virtues, in their completed form, imply one another. But he is claiming that people naturally come in two types, each of which tends to go to undesirable extremes, and that this must be checked by the opposite character type to produce the desirable, virtuous result, which will not tend to extremes. The checking is done partly by insisting on intermarriage and partly by education.

There is much that is understated or not worked out in the passage, notably the connection of the courageous and moderate types with quickness and quietness. But it is clear enough that Plato is moving towards some version of the theory of the 'mean', raised already in the earlier passage 283c-285c, and worked out in more careful detail later by Aristotle. Roughly, the natural material for virtue in people has a tendency to develop in one of two opposed, but equally undesirable ways, and it takes rational intervention, in the form of education, to produce true virtue, which is a 'mean' between the undesirable extremes.

In Plato these ideas remain sketchy. But it is significant that he is now prepared to recognize deep differences of character among ordinary people. And the differences that interest him sound a new note, one that will again find larger development in the *Laws*. Plato, aware of a long and depressing history of Greek states waging aggressive wars against other Greek states, is intensely concerned

that citizens of his ideal state be able to defend themselves – and that means, he recognizes, being soldiers as excellent as any fourth-century mercenaries: they must be thoroughly trained in courage, endurance and the soldierly excellences. On the other hand, he regards it as disastrous for a state to foster only aggressive and militaristic virtues in its citizens. The many bitter criticisms of Sparta in the *Laws*, echoed by Aristotle, show that he was aware of the dangers in creating a soldierly society. In the *Republic* he tries to meet this problem by ensuring that the psychology of the Guardians will be both courageous and restrained. In the *Laws*, faced by the problem in the case of all the citizens, he tries hard to have it both ways, to create a society of trained warriors who are unmilitaristic, whose main citizenly virtue is the traditionally feminine one of *sōphrosunē*, sobriety and self-control. The *Statesman* does no more than start this idea going, and it notably fails to meet any of the associated problems, such as the role of women.

The self-imposed framework of the *Statesman* does not permit these issues to be developed. However, it did not prevent Plato earlier turning aside to myths, weaving and other matters; so the truncated nature of the discussion cannot be explained by the form of the dialogue alone. Perhaps – this is no more than a suggestion – Plato felt that he would not be in a position to develop these ideas until he had given a satisfactory account of the nature of political rule in its new context, without a supporting metaphysical background. And, as we have seen, his attempt to do that turns out to lead him into new and fruitful thoughts – thoughts, however, which cast more and more doubt on the viability of the *Statesman*'s central retention of the importance of political expertise.

The *Statesman* is in some ways a record of complication and even confusion. But not only does it help us to see how we get from the *Republic* to the *Laws*, it is a record of the entanglements that only a very great and original thinker, defending and qualifying his boldest work at the same time, could get into.

The dialogue form

All Plato's works are in the form of dialogues in which he is not a speaker. One obvious reason for this way of writing (as startling to Plato's contemporaries as to us as a way of writing philosophy)

is to detach Plato, the writer, from the arguments presented, and, in particular, from the conclusions reached. Plato never presents his own position; he just shows us people arguing. The arguments, the discovery of their premises and the evaluation of them and of their conclusions, are for us to develop. (And this is what generations of Plato scholars have always done.)

The matter is complicated, of course, by the fact that in the Socratic and middle-period dialogues the main speaker is Socrates, who is clearly presented as an exemplary philosophical figure, in contrast to the stupid, mediocre or malign people who argue with him. However, even Socrates usually argues *ad hominem* in the early dialogues; he argues against the positions of others, never directly to support claims of his own. And the character Socrates argues for such a variety of positions in different dialogues, and in such different ways, that the relation of the Platonic Socrates to Plato remains deeply disputed.

The later dialogues in a way simplify matters; for Socrates, though often present in the company which gathers at the start of a dialogue, retires as the main interlocutor in favour of the nameless visitor from Elea, or Timaeus or Critias. In the *Laws* he is not even present. But it would, I think, be a mistake to think that whereas the earlier Socrates is opaque, these figures are nothing but mouthpieces for Plato's own views. Even when there is no interesting characterization, Plato uses these figures always to distance himself formally from the argument. The argument is, by means of these figures, presented to the reader, as in the earlier dialogues. Readers, however, almost inevitably feel that in these later dialogues the distancing has somewhat lessened, especially in view of the overt pedagogical form of a dialogue like the *Statesman*. The dialogue form seems less appropriate, not only because these dialogues are less entertaining but because Plato's need to distance himself from the main line of argument and its conclusions has also shrunk. We get the point that the argument is presented to us as an argument for us to engage with, and not just as Plato's view; but this point is easily taken, and we can be left somewhat wearied by the continuation of the convention of conversation.

However, there is a further point: the convenience of the dialogue form, given the numerous occasions when the thread of discussion is interrupted or obscured by material that one would not hitherto

have taken to be relevant – a myth or a definition of weaving. The dialogue form retains the convenience of pragmatic flexibility: a prose treatise on the subject of the *Statesman* could not have displayed so handily its many shifts of concern and insertion of different kinds of material. Retaining the distancing effect of the dialogue form enables Plato to develop the dialogue as he wants, rather than settling for a genre like the prose treatise which brings its own rules and expectations with it. To the end, Plato values technical means which both give him maximum control over the way he writes, and leave the reader a task of working things out. It is still true in the *Statesman* that this task is not limited to filling in the blanks in a pre-set pattern, but takes up the demand to continue the argument, following it where it leads.

Translator's note

In preparing this translation, the Oxford Classical Text (E.A. Duke, W.F. Hicken, W.S.M. Nicoll, D.B. Duke and J.C.G. Strachan, eds., *Platonis Opera*, vol. I, Oxford University Press, 1994) has been followed, except in the few places indicated in the notes. We are extremely grateful to David Robinson for letting us see a copy of the text of *Statesman* in advance of publication.

The canonical essay on Plato's style of writing in his later dialogues remains the General Introduction by Lewis Campbell to his 1867 edition of *Sophist* and *Statesman* combined (see the bibliography on pp. xxviii–xxix). Here I need only point out to the reader that the Greek of *Statesman* is occasionally difficult and dense, and that it rarely rises to the conversational fluency and brilliance of Plato's early and middle-period dialogues. At the same time, he sometimes experiments – for no very good reason that I can see – with artificial alliteration, word order and rhythm. It is in the nature of translating from one language to another that these rhetorical devices are likely to be lost: they certainly have been in the following translation. Otherwise, my intention has been to keep as close to the Greek as a reasonable degree of fluency allows, without losing the occasionally dry and laborious tone of the original. Apart from this tone, however, there is little in the way the dialogue has been written to deter a potential reader, and (as always in Plato) enough thought-provoking material to make a reading worthwhile. If this translation revitalizes the dialogue for new generations of readers, it will have done its job.

Chronology of principal events

469	Socrates born
429	Plato born
399	Socrates executed
384	Aristotle born
380–370s	At some point, Plato begins to hold formal instruction in the Academy gymnasium; this develops into the Academy as a philosophical school, about whose institutional structure we know almost nothing.
367	Aristotle joins the Academy
347	Plato dies

Other events in Plato's life mentioned in the ancient biographies are of doubtful chronology, and often doubtful historicity.

The chronology of Plato's dialogues is very uncertain, but on stylistic and other grounds there is general agreement that the *Statesman* belongs with the latest group of dialogues, written at a time when Plato was teaching in the Academy.

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Biographical note

SOCRATES of Athens, 469–399. Philosopher who wrote nothing, and devoted his life to philosophical discussion; executed on a religious charge. He inspired Plato, Xenophon, Aeschines, Antisthenes and others to make him the protagonist in philosophical dialogues. He appears in all of Plato's dialogues except the *Laws*, but in the later dialogues retires as the main interlocutor.

YOUNG SOCRATES of Athens. Member of the Academy.

THEODORUS of Cyrene, born 460. Pupil of Protagoras; well-known mathematician. Young Socrates and Theaetetus are presented as his pupils in the *Theaetetus*.

THEAETETUS of Athens, 414–369. Mathematician and philosopher, pupil of Theodorus and member of the Academy. He takes no part in the dialogue of the *Statesman*, but is presumably present as a silent listener, having played the role of answerer to the Visitor from Elea (the role taken here by Young Socrates) in the companion dialogue *Sophist*.

VISITOR FROM ELEA. Generally regarded as an invention of Plato's. Elea was the home-town of the philosophers Parmenides and Zeno; this is more relevant to the theme of the companion dialogue *Sophist* than it is to the theme of the *Statesman*.