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Law and Political Expertise in Plato's *Statesman* *

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Abstract: Remarks made by the Eleatic Visitor at *Statesman* 293a-300e are often read as implying that laws are hopelessly defective in

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comparison with expert political knowledge. Specifically, laws seem inadequate to the task of capturing the variability, mutability, and finely-grained detail of human life (294a6-b7). On the other hand, the Visitor endorses a strict form of law-abidingness for non-ideal constitutions. The tension between these positions has greatly exercised scholars. In this paper, I argue for a reading on which (1) the political expert, no less than laws, must rely on “rougher methods,” i.e. generalizations across individual cases; (2) law-making is a constitutive part of the statesman’s expertise; (3) laws are necessary for political communities and their value exceeds the merely instrumental or heuristic.

Keywords: Plato, Statesman, Laws, Legal Norms, Political Expertise, *Nomos*, Particularism

Introduction

From 257a-291c the interlocutors in Plato’s *Statesman*, the Eleatic Visitor and Young Socrates, have been engaged in the complicated task of clearly identifying the political expert (*politikos*), distinguishing political expertise from other forms of expertise, and distinguishing the genuine “kingly ruler” from false claimants to political authority. At 291c, the discussion shifts to the topic of different constitutional forms and their relative merits and deficiencies. The Visitor initially describes five basic types of constitution—kingly monarchy, tyranny, aristocracy, oligarchy, and democracy (291d). Then, at 300a-303c, the Visitor divides these types of constitutions into “good imitations” and “defective imitations.” Here the statesman’s model city is set apart from other constitutional forms (303b). Of the non-ideal types, good imitations are those which have law-abidingness as a central feature and operate somehow “according to laws” (*kata nomous*). The Visitor delineates monarchy, aristocracy, and some version of democracy as these good imitative constitutional forms (302d9-e1). In contrast, defective imitations—tyranny, oligarchy, and defective democracy—operate somehow “contrary to laws” (*paranomon*) (302e1).

Sandwiched between these considerations of political constitutions at 291c-293e and 300a-303c is a stretch of discussion where the role of law is problematized (293e-300a). The discussion centers around two main issues. First, what authority, if any, should laws have in political communities? Second, what is the proper relation between law and genuine political expertise? In this context, the Visitor makes several claims that bear further scrutiny. At 294b9, for example, the Visitor bluntly proclaims that laws operate like “a stubbornly ignorant person.” This remark appears to support a general assessment of political expertise as superior to a reliance on legal norms, but as I’ll argue in what follows, the nature of this superiority is more nuanced than has sometimes been supposed. Further, at 293a-d the Visitor intimates that adherence to legal norms is irrelevant to the goodness of the model city. The political expert, as it seems, may govern “according to laws” or “without laws,” and it is all one.

It is puzzling, then, when at 300e-301a, the Visitor makes adherence to law the standard for ranking non-ideal constitutions from better to worse. The ranking of non-ideal constitutional forms suggests, further, that the non-ideal forms imitate the correct constitution somehow in virtue of their adherence to law. Thus, the Visitor’s remarks point to “law-abidingness” as a good-making feature of non-ideal constitutions.¹ However, the connection between a constitution’s law-abidingness and its more or less faithful imitation of the model constitution is obscure. Non-ideal constitutions lack a knowledgeable political expert, so these do not ground their laws—at least not in any obvious way—in political or ethical knowledge. Without such grounding, it is unclear how adherence to laws in non-ideal poleis could contribute to the political good—i.e., the good of making political subjects more virtuous. What could prevent bad laws in non-ideal poleis? Adherence to laws, by

¹ The traditional interpretation of the *Statesman* has it that non-ideal constitutions which adhere to established laws are viable “second-best” alternatives to the model constitution (Skemp, 1952; Guthrie, 1978; Annas and Waterfield, 1995; and Samaras, 2002). Rowe mounts a powerful challenge against this interpretation. All constitutional forms other than the “correct constitution,” as Rowe has it, are hopelessly inferior and equally “*stastikes*.” These non-ideal forms are, as it were, constitutions in name only (Rowe, 2006; Rowe, 2005; Rowe, 2001; Rowe, 2000; Rowe 1994; See also Lane, 1998).

itself, is no guarantee of good laws.² And bad laws that lack a grounding in genuine ethical-political knowledge, as seems likely, will not contribute to making political subjects more virtuous. We have a striking example of bad legal practice in the Visitor's caricature of a democratic polis at 298a-300a. There, strict adherence to established laws leads to the destruction of all *technai*.

In light of these considerations, we are owed an explanation of whether and how laws have value. If laws have some intrinsic value, law-abidingness may not be as irrelevant to constitutional correctness and the goodness of the model political community as first appears. The *Statesman's* position on law emerges from a reflection on some key problems for laws- especially the indeterminacy of laws when it comes to capturing the full complexity of human life. An influential reading of this section holds that the *Statesman* endorses a broadly anti-nomian view or skeptical view of law. On this reading, political expertise is superior to legal authority because the political expert possesses a sensibility that allows for fine-grained judgments that do not rely on generalizations.³ I will raise a problem for this reading- namely, that the critique of law appears to apply equally to political expertise as it does to law. On my interpretation, political expertise must also rely on generalized judgments and cannot prescribe precisely for individuals, individually, in all cases. The political expert, like the expert trainer, must rely on "rougher methods" in governing a political community.

Political Expertise as the Standard for Constitutional Correctness (291e-293e)

Following the initial classification of constitutional forms, the Visitor declares that the only correct constitutions are those in which

² Rowe forcefully presses the "bad laws" problem. He denies that adherence to laws is a relevant good-making feature of non-ideal constitutional forms, but grants that non-ideal cities may superficially resemble the model city in maintaining stable laws (Rowe, 2000, p. 245-250).

³ For this view, see Berges, 2010, pp. 7-11, p. 17-22; Sørensen, 2018, p. 17-19, n27; Sørensen, 2022, p. 9-13; Trivigno, 2021, p. 164-171. Berges, 2010 recognizes that the expert statesman will govern with laws, but holds that (1) these are simply "shorthand" or heuristic devices (p. 16) and (2) the particularist judgments of the expert statesman are needed to supplement law with equity.

the rulers possess “the kingly *technē*,” consisting in genuine political knowledge and expertise (*basilikēs...epistemonas*) (292e8-293a2).⁴ According to this standard, the kingly expert must be sovereign over subjects and, in some sense to be further clarified, over laws. Authoritative political knowledge (*epistēmē*) thus sets the standard for constitutional forms in the *Statesman*. All other constitutional forms will be evaluated, and found wanting, against this standard (293d7-e4). The Visitor’s emphasis on genuine political knowledge as the standard for political legitimacy⁵ is not unique to the *Statesman*, of course, but is a familiar centerpiece of Plato’s political philosophy. On the Platonic view of politics, only genuine political knowledge is capable of achieving the *telos* of political life—to ethically improve political subjects—thus only the political community helmed by the knowledgeable political expert is capable of meeting the standard for full political legitimacy.

The Visitor takes pains to distinguish authoritative political knowledge from other characteristic features of political communities—for example, whether subjects are “willing or unwilling” (*hekonton* or *akonton*), whether the polis or its rulers are rich or poor, or whether rulers govern in accordance with laws (*kata nomous*) or without law (*aneu nomon*)⁶ (293c6-d3). Genuine political

⁴ In the dialogue’s earlier division, the statesman’s *technē* is characterized as both “*gnostikē*” (concerned with seeking and securing knowledge) and “*epitaktikē*” (one authorized to give orders to subordinates, and to reasonably expect that such orders will be followed) (258d1-260d2).

⁵ I’m assuming here that political legitimacy applies to political communities, and constitutional correctness applies to constitutional forms. The *Statesman* treats these features as operating in close tandem. For the purposes of this paper, it will not be necessary to carefully distinguish between these features, but see Speliotis, 2011 for a more detailed discussion of how the correct constitution is realized in a political community such that that community is a faithful “image” of the constitutional form.

⁶ Trivigno marks a distinction between (1) *meta grammaton/aneu nomon* and (2) *kata grammata/aneu grammaton*. He holds that (1) indicates the mere employment of laws, as having instrumental value; whereas (2) indicates laws as having authoritative, normative force to guide actions. Trivigno holds that the expert statesman is not subject to laws in sense (2), but will govern by using laws in sense

expertise, it is claimed, provides the requisite standard irrespective of these other features. The relative wealth of a polis, for example, does not make that polis any better or worse according to the relevant standard of political expertise. A comparatively poor polis, if it is governed by a genuine political expert meets the standard for constitutional correctness and is a proper political community. A comparatively rich polis, if not so governed, can never be.

Expert statesmen, moreover, are justified in carrying out a broad range of actions as long as those actions are recommended by their particular political expertise. The expert statesman, for example, will ensure that some subset of the city's residents acquire true and secure ethical beliefs (309c), and will further ensure that citizens with differing ethical tendencies inter-marry and interbreed (310b). The expert statesman may also use harsher measures. For example, the expert statesman may cause city residents to be executed, exiled, or deprived of political rights (293d4-e2; 308e-309a).⁷ The expert statesman may also use force to make political subjects more virtuous (296b1-c3). Perhaps here we gain some insight into what is involved in governing "unwilling" subjects. In any event, on the proposed standard, these measures are justified as long as they are recommended by the statesman's political expertise.

How does authoritative political expertise function as a standard? Throughout the discussion, the Visitor treats this standard as a criterion (*horos*) delineating necessary and sufficient conditions for constitutional correctness (292c5-8). According to this criterion, no constitution can be correct in the absence of authoritative political expertise, and authoritative political expertise is sufficient for constitutional correctness. Among the features identified as non-criterial, along with wealth/poverty and willing/unwilling subjects, is

(1) (Trivigno, 2021, p. 164-167). I take a different view of how the political expert's *techne* relates to laws.

⁷ Trivigno and Speliotis both take up the question of how the expert statesman's behavior might appear very like that of the tyrant (See Trivigno, 2021, p. 174-175; Speliotis, 2011, p. 304-307).

the contrary pair *kata nomous/aneu nomon* (with laws/without laws) (293c7-8). The suggestion, then, is that laws are neither necessary nor sufficient for constitutional correctness. What this suggestion amounts to exactly requires closer examination.

First, we should note that *kata nomous/aneu nomon* at it occurs at 293c is ambiguous between at least (a) in accordance/ not in accordance with *written* laws or legal norms; (b) in accordance/not in accordance with *established* laws or legal norms (written or unwritten); and, (c) in accordance/not in accordance with *any* laws or legal norms at all.⁸ The first and second ways of understanding the *kata nomous/aneu nomon* contrary pair ((a) and (b)) allows that the political expert may depend on the assistance of some form of legal norms (perhaps unwritten, perhaps instituted by the law-maker himself.) The third way of understanding *kata nomous/aneu nomon* broadens the scope to include legal norms very generally, and thus broadens the scope for the individual judgment of the political expert. If we take the *kata nomous/aneu nomon* formulation in this way, the implication is that the knowledgeable political expert may govern by decree, without any reliance on law.⁹

If we take the *kata nomous/aneu nomon* formulation in the broad sense of (c), it follows that a political community under the authority of the genuine political expert can instantiate a correct constitution

⁸ These three ways of understanding “with/without laws” are all present in the text. *Statesman* 293c7-8 references the *kata nomous/aneu nomon* distinction without the qualification of written/unwritten laws. *Statesman* at 293a6-7 speaks of governing according to or not according to “writings” (*grammata*), that is, with or without written laws. And at 295c7-e2, the Eleatic Visitor distinguishes between previously established (*ta archaia*) and newly instituted laws (*prostattonta*). I’ve focused on these three senses (with written/without written, according to/not according to previously established laws, and with/without laws *tout court*) in the discussion here.

⁹ I take it that Rowe would accept this implication. Trivigno disagrees but holds that the expert statesman only needs laws to the extent that he is practically unable to personally guide each individual in the polis. On Trivigno’s view, laws only have heuristic value as handy reminders (Trivigno, 2021, p. 169-170; See also Berges, 2010, p. 16).

without the help of laws. It further follows that an authoritative political expertise operating without laws (if such a thing is possible), is sufficient for constitutional correctness. As I've indicated, this reading substantially diminishes the importance and value of legal norms. Legal norms are non-criterial features of constitutions, according to this interpretation, and thus make no obvious contribution to the correctness of a constitution. Rather, legal norms are as irrelevant as the relative wealth or poverty of a polis for constitutional correctness. Taking the *kata nomous/aneu nomon* formulation in either of the narrower senses, on the other hand, leaves it open that some reliance on legal norms is at least necessary for constitutional correctness.

Before moving to a closer examination of problems the Visitor raises for laws specifically, I want to briefly suggest an alternative understanding of the constitutional correctness criteria. Based on 292c-293c, we can credit the Visitor with the view that legal norms, taken on their own, are neither necessary nor sufficient for constitutional correctness. But a possibility that requires further consideration is that laws and law-making are constitutive elements of the political expert's knowledge. If law-making is a constitutive part of the statesman's expertise, then it is authoritative political expertise in this sense that is both necessary and sufficient for constitutional correctness. I propose that this is the view of law we ultimately come to in the *Statesman*. Laws are second-order necessary for constitutional correctness since laws are constitutive parts of the political expertise which is necessary for constitutional correctness. And laws are second-order sufficient for constitutional correctness as constitutive parts of the political expertise which is sufficient for constitutional correctness.

Challenges for Law (294a-d)

Thus far, Young Socrates appears to agree with the Visitor that political expertise alone provides the relevant standard for

constitutional correctness. He is taken aback, however, by the suggestion that a government might operate without law. The suggestion, he admits, is “a hard saying” (293e8-9). There are several reasons why Socrates may draw up short at this point. Perhaps Socrates’s worry concerns the apparently unconstrained power of the expert statesman, his apparent freedom to operate outside and above any established laws; to disregard the law if it conflicts with his judgment. Will the expert statesman, in practice, be significantly different from the tyrant?¹⁰ The expert statesman’s license with harsh measures may bring this worry to the fore (293d4-e6). Or perhaps Socrates’ worry concerns the nature and scope of legal authority more generally and betrays a suspicion that the proposed standard of constitutional correctness violates a principle of equality before the law. Should the model city (and other cities) operate by some principle of rule of law, where political subjects are equally constrained by laws? Relatedly, should the model city inculcate a respect for laws and legal authority, consonant with the respect for legal authority that non-ideal poleis require? Or perhaps Socrates’ worry is concerned with whether legal norms are necessary for any political community under government. Is a government without laws even possible? And, if laws are necessary, are they necessary evils or do they contribute to the goodness of a political community? Since Socrates does not, at this juncture, explain his worry any or all of these questions could be in play.¹¹

¹⁰ Trivigno argues that the tyrant and the expert statesman may be indistinguishable in action and holds that these two types of rulers will only be “distinguished by analysis” (Trivigno, 2021, p. 163; See also, Speliotis, 2011, p. 297). I agree with Trivigno and Speliotis that the *Statesman* raises a number of “problems of recognition” when it comes to political authority—for example, epistemic questions about how the expert statesman could be recognized as such by subjects who lack the statesman’s knowledge. These epistemic questions bear on the statesman’s political authority. The statesman, it would seem, must be recognized as the genuine article by subjects if subjects are to accede to his governance and legitimate authority.

¹¹ The Visitor, at any rate, takes the main issue as concerning the “rightness” (*orthotetos*) of governance without laws (294a4). While this may lean towards some normative interpretation of Young Socrates’ worry, “rightness” here is

In response, the Visitor reaffirms that, given the proposed standard for constitutional correctness, political expertise and not laws should be authoritative. The Visitor, further, poses some significant difficulties for laws and legal authority:

It is clear, in some way, that law-making belongs to the kingly *techne*. But it is best that the laws not be powerful (*ischuein*), but that the kingly man with wisdom (*phroneseos*) be. Do you see why?...

Because the law would not ever be able to command the best by precisely grasping (*akribos...perilabon*) what is most just and most excellent for everyone at the same time: for the reason that the dissimilarities among people and actions and that nothing in human affairs (*agein ton anthroponon*) is, so to speak, ever at rest- [these] do not allow any *techne* whatsoever to declare anything simple (*haploun*) concerning all things for all time. (*Stat.* 294a7-b7)¹²

The passage offers a critique of law in light of three considerations. First, there is a great diversity among human beings. Second, there is great variability in circumstances and situations. Third, human life seems to be in constant flux. All of this variability, it is argued, thwarts any attempt to “declare anything simple” that will apply to all of these diverse people, situations, and time periods. The difficulty for law is its alleged attempt to somehow apply “what is simple” to what is decidedly never simple. This attempt seems bound to fail. As the Visitor asks at 294c7-8: “Isn’t it impossible for what is permanently simple to hold good of that which is in no way simple?” Law cannot be authoritative, the passage claims, and issue prescriptive guidance, if doing so involves the attempt to determine precisely for individuals in all cases, for all times.

similarly ambiguous and doesn’t definitively settle which questions Young Socrates is most concerned with.

¹² For the Greek text of the *Statesman*, I rely primarily on Fowler, 1925. For translations I use Fowler, with assistance from Annas and Waterfield’s and Rowe’s English translations, with some modifications of my own (Annas and Waterfield, 1995; Rowe, 1999).

We can further flesh out the critique by taking into account how each consideration might matter for law's ability to "command what is best." So, we might note that because human beings are so diverse, a given law may apply rightly to one person, but wrongly to another. In the sphere of legal punishment, for example, it might be appropriate to punish a habitual criminal with a long prison sentence, but inappropriate to punish a one-time criminal with a similar sentence. In these two cases, we might say, since the motivating reasons for the behavior are different, the punishments should also be different. However, the law that governs prison sentencing may fail to take account of the different motivations in the two different cases. The many individual differences among people pose a significant difficulty for laws which aim to impose general rules across different individuals. The worry is that failing to take account of differences among individuals will result in treating people unjustly.

Additionally, the passage suggests that laws cannot take sufficient account of the rich, finely-grained details of particular human situations. A set of laws, for example, may incorporate a coarse-grained cataloguing of criminal acts (e.g., acts of theft, impiety, assault, or homicide). But a set of such laws will not make such fine-grained distinctions as *homicide in the conservatory with a candlestick by Professor Plum* as compared with *homicide in the library by Ms. Peacock with the lead pipe*. Yet, actual human circumstances are full of such interesting details. Finally, the critique characterizes law as purporting to be universal and timeless, to apply "to everything and for all time" (294b4-7), but, in reality, societies change over time such that certain laws become outdated and irrelevant and new laws are needed.

The Visitor offers a somewhat different critique at 294b9-c4 when he claims that the law behaves "like a stubbornly ignorant person."¹³ The Visitor proposes that, like a stubbornly ignorant

¹³ The passage reads: *hosper tina antropon authade kai amathe*. I take the *kai* epexegetically, so that *authade* modifies *amathe*. I think that this renders more clearly the respect in which the person is ignorant—that they refuse to take on or even consider new evidence, for example.

person, laws are fatally inflexible. Such a person, once they've made up their mind on a point, will refuse to countenance any evidence or opinions that run counter to what they've already accepted. They will not budge from their—most likely ill-conceived and overly simplistic—view of matters. Here, I take it, the issue is not so much about the law's inability to make accurate judgments over a range of variable situations, but is more concerned with law's recognized authority and relative stability. Once a law is set, it can be a long and difficult process to change it. Moreover, this kind of stability contributes to law's authority, perhaps to what makes laws, laws, in the first place. For laws to be invested with authority, those who follow and enforce them must be able to reliably predict what the law will demand and how the law will respond. So, for laws to be authoritative, they should not be too easily modified or abandoned. A system of laws, we may say, has an inherent conservative bias, a bias towards established legal norms and precedents.¹⁴

Here the Visitor poses the laws' inherent conservative bias as a problem. The intelligent person will be open to changing their beliefs in the light of new information. They will not cling desperately to old beliefs that have been seriously called into question or shown to be false. Established laws, however, do not exhibit this kind of sensitivity to new evidence. Once in place, laws will tend to stay in place. Such stability may be further reinforced by the kinds of restrictions that the Visitor imagines at 300b9-c3, restrictions that would make it exceedingly difficult to change or challenge established laws. These restrictions appear to operate as second-order legal norms, ones that enforce a particularly demanding legal authority.¹⁵ If the laws are like the stubbornly ignorant person, then,

¹⁴ See, e.g., Raz, 2009.

¹⁵ The Visitor suggests a justification for these ultra-stable laws at 300b1-7. These laws are likely to be well-formed, as the justification goes, because they are the result of "long experience," are crafted by representatives (*zumboulon*) who have considered them in a careful way, and have received public assent. But, as Rowe has pointed out, without the expert guidance of the statesman, it is difficult to see how such laws could be anything other than products of ignorance. Their being ultra-stable and demanding, then, hardly seems to recommend them. This passage,

the alternative of the wise and flexible statesman seems clearly preferable.

Additionally, the passage notes that the law does not allow any questions (*med' eperotan medena*) and disallows any changes to existing laws, even when someone comes up with something new that is better (294c3-4). The suggestion here is that those administering existing laws are unable to give a satisfactory explanation of why the laws prescribe as they do, why following these laws is better than any relevant alternative. If we ask the stubbornly ignorant person why they act as they do, they might well respond with a shrug and say: "that's just what I do." Inexpert administrators of received laws might respond similarly—if asked why one should follow a given law, the response is likely to be: "that's just the law." Here too, it seems, we are meant to see a contrast with the political expert. The political expert is, in principle, capable of explaining why their policies should govern action in terms of how these policies contribute to the good of the political community.

In sum, then, at 294a7-b7 the Visitor poses some thorny difficulties for laws and their authority. First, it is alleged that laws injudiciously attempt to apply "simples" to what is not simple. Second, the conservative bias of established laws is a problem if it renders them insufficiently sensitive to new evidence and changing circumstances. Third, on their face, laws fail to provide an adequate justification or explanation for legal obedience. These problems are raised in the context of responding to Socrates' worry about the prospect of government without laws. Initially, these problems seem designed to explain why laws should not be "powerful," as compared with political expertise. So, we might expect that the problems raised for law in this section are meant to mark significant dimensions on which political expertise is superior to law, and thus to support the claim that "it is best that the laws not be powerful, but that the kingly man with wisdom be."

then, raises the question of whether the Visitor is being entirely serious in proposing that non-ideal cities adopt such ultra-stable laws.

The Visitor, however, does not proceed to show that political expertise is superior to a strict reliance on laws on all three points. The discussion that follows 294d-297b, instead, brings out both important similarities and differences between a strict reliance on laws and the political expert's own practice. What becomes clear is that, if an inability to make precise, exceptionless determinations about individual cases is a problem for laws, it is equally a problem for the political expert.

The Expert Trainer and the Returning Expert (294d-297b)

Should we conclude, based on the critique of law 294a-d, that the political expert's judgment is a fully adequate substitute for legal norms? And should we further conclude that the model community can simply dispense with legal norms? Do the problems posed by the Visitor show that laws have no normative force in political communities? I want to suggest that it would be hasty to think that these questions receive an affirmative answer based on the critique of law at 294a-d.

The first indication that the problems thus far raised are not fatal for laws comes with the Visitor's question at 294c10-d1: "Why then is it ever necessary to make laws, given that law is not entirely correct (*orthotaton*)? We must find out the explanation (*aitian*) for this."¹⁶ One might attempt to read this as a merely rhetorical question meant insincerely or ironically. That is, one might take the question to imply that laws are *not* necessary. However, the Visitor's demand for an

¹⁶ I follow Rowe's 1999 translation of this passage, but Rowe renders *aitian* as "cause." *Aitian* could be translated as any of: 'cause,' 'reason,' or 'explanation.' The key idea is that an *aition* is a "responsible factor." Annas and Waterfield, 1995 render 294c10-d1 as: "So why *do we feel* compelled to make laws, since they can never be entirely successful?" (my emphasis). The Greek, however, does not qualify the question in this way: "*dia ti de pot' oun agankaion nomothetein, epeideper ouk orthotaton ho nomos; aneureteon toutou ten aitian.*" The issue here concerns why law-making is necessary, not why or whether we take it to be necessary.

explanation militates against this reading, as does the example of the expert trainer which we'll discuss below. If the question is meant sincerely, then the Visitor does not suppose that the discussion should continue on the assumption that laws are not necessary, but rather on the assumption that laws and law-making, though imperfect, *are* necessary, either for the model city or for political life in general. The Visitor's question is an invitation to investigate the nature of law's necessity, for whom laws are necessary, and for what purpose laws are necessary.

Two models for the expert statesman are introduced—the expert trainer at 294d-295b and the returning expert at 295b-297b. Each of these, I hold, responds to the critique of law at 294a-d. The expert trainer is offered as a response to the critique of law as inclined to inexpertly apply “simples” to what is “never simple.” The model of the returning expert responds to the critique of law based on its apparent resemblance to the “stubbornly ignorant person” unwilling to adjust their beliefs in the face of new evidence or to give satisfactory explanations for their actions.

The Visitor calls to mind the example of expert trainers (*ton technē gumnazonton*, 294d5-7). The expert trainer does not provide precise guidance which responds to each individual athlete individually. Rather:

They do not believe that they can provide fine-grained instructions for each individually, by commanding what is appropriate for each one's body, but they suppose they must use rougher methods (*paschuteron*) and set down what is beneficial for most bodies, most of the time (294d7-e7).

When expert trainers design and administer athletic programs, they rely on “rougher,” rather than exact methods. These rougher methods crucially involve two kinds of generalizations- the expert trainer makes generalized judgments about what is best for most athletes, most of the time; and the expert trainer issues generalized instructions for a group of athletes (294e5-8). In the above passage, the Visitor does not make plain why it is that the expert trainer must

rely on such rougher methods, and specifically whether this is merely a matter of practical necessity or something stronger. The passage, for example, leaves as an open question whether the expert trainer could in principle provide fine-grained guidance to each individual athlete. The passage does make clear, however, that insofar as the expert trainer is responsible for athletes in groups, exact and individualized methods are inapplicable.

In the example at 295b10-c5, the Visitor presents the trainer or doctor who has responsibility for a group of athletes or patients, but will be away for some unspecified amount of time. Since the expert will not be available to provide direct guidance to those in her care (*therapeuomenon*),¹⁷ she will provide written instructions as reminders for them (*prostachthenta...hupomnemata graphein*). However, on return, the expert does not view these written instructions as iron-clad constraints on her practice. If circumstances have changed in her absence, the returning expert can override the established guidance and can issue different instructions, as long as these instructions reflect what is best for the patients or athletes in her care (295c-e2). Further, the returning expert will be capable of explaining why new and different instructions are in order. The returning expert, that is, will not act like the “stubbornly ignorant” person who sticks to established opinions in the face of countervailing evidence. It would be, the Visitor notes, absurd for the returning expert to thwart her own expertise by acting so inflexibly (295e1-2).

The examples of the expert trainer and returning expert illustrate some important dimensions of the statesman’s expertise. First, like the expert trainer, the political expert who administers justice in a political community “is never able by setting instructions for the group, to provide precisely (*akribos*) what is fitting for each [individual]” (*Stat.* 295e10-295a3).¹⁸ The political expert is

¹⁷ The use of this term echoes the characterization of the statesman as one who “cares for” people in groups (275e, also: *epimeleia*, 276b)

¹⁸ The passage at 294e8-295a2 reads: “*kai ton nomotheten toinun hegometha, ton taisin angelais episteatesonta tou dikaïou peri kai ton pros allenlous sumbolaiwon,*

incapable of legislating for individuals, individually. Rather, as with the expert trainer, the legislating political expert will rely on “rougher methods” (*pachoteros*), generalizations that apply to the majority of people and cases, and general instructions for the group (295d9-e3). Secondly, the political expert will not be absolutely constrained by established laws, even those he has previously set down himself. As with the returning expert, it is acceptable for the “technical law-maker” (*nomothetes anti...meta technes*) to legislate contrary to established laws and to craft new laws (295e5-296a5). To expect the political expert to simply cling to established laws would be an absurd and undue constraint on his expertise.

Indeterminacy and Expertise

With the expert trainer and returning expert in the background, we can revisit the discussion of law at 294a-d. Some take the passage at 294a7-b7 as endorsing a particularist understanding of the statesman's expertise.¹⁹ We should say a bit about particularism. Particularism is most familiar as a family of theories in recent and contemporary meta-ethics.²⁰ Particularists argue against principle-based moral theories, chiefly deontological and utilitarian moral theories. Against these theories, particularists hold that morality does not consist in true and coherent sets of moral principles, and take

me poth' ikanon genesstahi pasin athrpoois prostatettonvta akribos heni ekasto to prosekon apodidonai.” We should note how closely in its language and framing this passage recalls the passage about law at 294a12-b7: “*hoti nomos ouk an pote dunaito to te ariston kai to dikaiotaton akribos pasin hama perilabon to beltiston epitattein.*” My emphases.

¹⁹ See Trivigno, 2021, pp. 164-167. Berges holds that the *Statesman* is friendly to a virtue theoretic view of law. On this view, laws should be supplemented by the expert statesman's *phronesis*, understood as a particularist capacity which does not rely on laws or general moral rules (Berges, 2010, p. 7-10, p. 17-21). Rowe, 2005 argues for the exclusive superiority of the insight-based government of the expert statesman (the “personalist principle”). Laws have negligible value, on Rowe's interpretation, since constitutional correctness does not depend on any laws or institutions. Horn holds that Rowe's personalism commits him to a particularist reading of the *Statesman* (Horn 2021a, pp. 92-94).

²⁰ See, e.g., McDowell 1979 and Dancy 2004.

issue both with moral theories that rely on “absolute” principles (such as the Categorical Imperative or Greatest Happiness Principle) and moral theories such as Ross’ which posit open sets of pro tanto principles. It is more difficult to determine what unifies particularist views. McDowell relies on a general Wittgensteinian skepticism about rule-following. Dancy emphasizes “reason holism” and argues that moral reasons are highly-context sensitive, such that what counts as a moral reason in favor of an action in one context, could count as a moral reason against an action in another context. As a consequence, Dancy denies that moral properties have stable valences across contexts, and denies the existence of nomic regularities connecting moral and non-moral properties.²¹

On a particularist reading of the *Statesman*, the critique at 294a-d is meant to highlight the ways in which law is insufficiently flexible and fine-grained, and thus is fundamentally incapable of rendering just commands. As Trivigno has it, the critique points out how laws, or any general rules, are “uncodifiable,” thus inherently deficient. The passage, on this reading, draws a sharp (if implicit) contrast between the deficiency of law, its inability to make determinate judgments across a range of cases, and political expertise which is “flexible and not rule-bound,” depending on the statesman’s particularist skill to make precise and fine-grained determinations for individuals, individually, in all cases.²² As the particularist reading has it, this contrast provides the explanation for why the political expert ought to be authoritative. Political expertise is free of the deficiency identified for laws. And, because the political expert is able to capture precisely “what is finest and most just” in all cases, the political expert, and not laws, ought to be authoritative. On this reading, laws are necessary in an extremely weak sense; they are only instrumentally or heuristically necessary. The expert statesman uses

²¹ Dancy 2004. I am indebted to Jonathan Dancy’s useful overview of particularist ethical theories in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, rev. Sept. 22, 2017 (plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-particularism).

²² Trivigno 2021, p. 166-167. Trivigno summarizes: “the law could not, *in principle*, get every case right, whereas the phronesis of the statesman could, *in principle*, get every case right.”

laws as rough guides and as reminders in governing groups of political subjects.

If we read 294a7-b7 together with 294d-297b, however, the particularist reading becomes less persuasive.²³ First, the passage at 294a7-b7 flags a general issue for all *technai*. The inescapable diversity of individuals and situations, and the fact that human life is never at rest, places a constraint on legislation, as with all human expertise. No *technē* can apply absolutely simple and universal generalizations that will apply precisely to individuals, individually; that is, to different individuals, conditions, and cases in all their variety and complexity. If this is indeed a problem, then the expert statesman's *technē* is equally liable to this problem.

The analogy between the statesman and the expert trainer, however, shows that a reliance on "rougher methods" is not an insurmountable problem for human knowledge and expertise. This reliance has two aspects: a theoretical-epistemic aspect concerned with the making of judgments, and a practical aspect concerned with prescriptive guidance.²⁴ Human expertise, in Plato's view, crucially involves a recognition of unity in multiplicity, and an imposition of unity on multiplicity. All *technai* are reliant on epistemic generalizations that apply across a domain of multiple, diverse, and changeable objects, and all must contend with variable situations. Expert medical doctors, for example, will make determinations about a patient based on generalizations about that patient as a human being, and based on that patient's similarities to other patients (e.g.,

²³ I am in agreement with Christoph Horn, who also resists a particularist interpretation of 294a12-b7. Horn bases his generalist interpretation of the *Statesman* on the Theory of the Forms (Horn 2021a, p. 92-95). While I agree that there is a generalist moral and political theory at work in the *Statesman*, I am more hesitant to think that the *Statesman* is straightforwardly committed to the Theory of the Forms. My view also diverges with Horn's in that I would underscore the political expert's ability to mold changeable, multiplicitous reality to an objective standard.

²⁴ We may think of rules or norms in terms of each of these aspects. On the one hand, there are epistemic rules, generalized judgments that apply over a range of individuals, conditions, and cases. On the other hand, there are prescriptive rules, generalized action-guiding principles, commands, or recommendations.

in age, fitness, weight, pre-existing medical conditions). The expert medical doctor will also make determinations about particular cases based on similarities and generalizations across cases (e.g., this case of smallpox is relevantly similar to this other case of smallpox, and cases of smallpox generally behave like this). Finally, the expert medical doctor relies on some generalizations that apply “to everything and for all time” (e.g., that all human beings are mortal, that certain natural laws govern physical bodies). Such generalizations, it seems, are unavoidable.

Additionally, those *technai* that manage human beings in groups—as both the expert trainer and the political expert do—operate by issuing generalized prescriptions. The expert trainer, as we’ve seen, need not take account of each and every physical difference for the athletes in her care, and need not give detailed instructions for each. It is sufficient if the expert trainer relies on generalizations about what will benefit most athletes and issues generalized instructions on this basis. This method seems to work—at any rate, the text gives no indication that the trainer is unsuccessful. The trainer, then, seems to provide an example of “simples” successfully applied to a group in which there is individual variety. The imprecision of the trainer’s judgments and prescriptions are not insurmountable obstacles for the goal of increasing the fitness of the athletes in her care. The fault, we may say, lies in the changeable and multiplicitous domain of material objects and events, not in the trainer’s expertise. Yet, the trainer’s expertise (as well as the statesman’s) enables her to modify people, objects, and events in order to improve them.²⁵

The expert statesman, also, does not attempt to dictate with perfect accuracy what is fitting for every individual, individually. The statesman’s *technē*, rather, depends on both a theoretical ability to

²⁵ This is an important aspect of the statesman’s expertise which I do not have space to fully discuss here. The technical expert’s judgment ranges over a domain that admits of more and less. In addition, the expert is able to bring objects in that domain into conformity with some objectively good standard (*to metrion*). See, e.g., 284e10-a9. My thanks to the editors for bringing this point to my attention.

make accurate generalizations and a practical ability to govern individuals in a group. First, like the expert trainer, the statesman's *technē* depends on the ability to apply generalizations across individual people and cases. For example, the expert statesman makes generalized judgements about the natural ethical capacities in "interweaving" elite citizens in the model city (310a1-6). These judgements crucially depend on identifying relevant similarities and differences among citizens.²⁶

Secondly, governance of a collective imposes limits on the kinds of laws or policies which can be adopted. Thus, the political expert makes laws that are beneficial for most citizens, for the most part (295a5-8). At minimum, the expert trainer or political expert should be justified in their judgment that the rules in question do aim at what is genuinely beneficial, for most individuals, in most circumstances. But if the statesman can be as effective as the athletic trainer in ensuring what is reliably beneficial for most individuals, the skeptical worry about imperfect generalizations appears unfounded. Inexact methods may not always be successful, of course, but they will often be useful and beneficial. The expert trainer paradigm indicates that it is possible for a *technē* to recommend "simple" prescriptions to diverse individuals in a diversity of situations, with reliable success.

It is in this vein that the Visitor claims at 295a10-b5 that not even the political expert can provide perfectly tailored individual guidance to individuals through every situation:

Could someone be capable of this, Socrates—to sit by another through their whole life and always accurately prescribe what is appropriate (*akribeias prostattein*) for them? Since if anyone were capable of this, I suppose, and that person had kingly

²⁶ The expert statesman determines which citizens have a greater tendency towards courage and which citizens have a greater tendency towards *sophrosune*. Then, the statesman arranges marriages and appointments to administrative functions so as to combine these opposing tendencies (309a9-b8, 310e5-311a10). We should note also that in this context, the Visitor assigns a crucial role to law, see 305e2, 308e4, 309d1, 310a1-2.

knowledge, he would hardly impede himself by writing down those things we call laws (*Stat.* 295a10-b5.)

An interpretive question for this passage concerns the scope of the sort of possibility indicated by “if anyone were capable of this.” Trivigno takes the counter-factual situation to concern what is physically possible, not what is conceptually possible. As Trivigno has it, the moral-political expert could, in principle, dictate accurately for individuals in every conceivable situation. Nothing inherent to the statesman’s *techne*, on Trivigno’s view, bars the conceptual possibility of the omnipresent and all-helpful expert.²⁷ Yet, since physical laws prevent the political expert from multiply locating and being present to every individual at every time, Trivigno concludes that the statesman is obliged to make use of laws as handy reminders or heuristic devices.

But, in my view, the passage has a different emphasis. It seems unlikely in the context of the discussion of law that the ability of the expert statesman to multiply locate is a serious concern.²⁸ As it happens, the kingly expert will formulate laws because, qua technical expert, the statesman cannot issue the kind of perfect guidance imagined in the counter-factual situation. The kingly expert does not govern for individuals, individually, but rather governs for individuals in groups and collectively. Like the expert trainer, the expert statesman need not provide fine-grained guidance to individuals in every conceivable situation. The statesman, rather, aims to ensure what is beneficial for individuals collectively, even in

²⁷ Trivigno 2021 p. 168. Speliotis 2011 agrees with Trivigno in reading the passage as highlighting what is possible only for “an omniscient and omnipresent god,” but differs with him about what the passage entails for the status of law (pp. 302-303). On Speliotis’ view, the law is a “vague approximation” that is better suited to human nature (p. 305).

²⁸ Similarly, I doubt that the absent and returning expert is meant to literally represent a situation where the political expert is physically absent from the city. Rather, I hold that the analogy is intended to illustrate a theoretical point about the relation between political expertise and law.

the absence of the fine-tuned, perfect guidance imagined (contra-possibly) at 295a10-b5.

If all this is correct, we should understand the “with laws/without laws” (*kata nomous/aneu nomon*) contrary pair as having wide scope when the Visitor considers laws as they are related to constitutional correctness (293a-294a). The issue here, that is, is not whether the statesman can simply rule by decree, without any reliance on legal norms. On the view on offer, he can't. Rather, the issue is the revisability of laws and whether the political expert's authority should be strictly constrained by pre-existing, written laws. The political expert must rely on legal norms of some kind, but this reliance on laws should not prevent the statesman from revising or introducing new laws, where circumstances warrant.

Statesman 294a7-b7, then, does not identify a special problem for laws or law-making. The need to “apply simples to what is not simple” is a constitutive feature of all human knowledge and expertise.²⁹ Laws cannot accurately determine what holds for all cases, for all people, for all times, since there are always fine-grained differences, exceptions, and changeable human circumstances. But neither can any expertise determine and command what is best in this way, political expertise included. Laws *can* command what is best by doing what skillful experts do, by relying on what is best for most people, for the most part, in most cases. For these reasons, we should not take the target passage as arguing that the political expert is superior to law in virtue of some distinctive particularist sensibility or non-cognitive recognitional capacity that frees him from a reliance on generalizations.³⁰ The passage makes no explicit reference to such

²⁹ At least for all human knowledge and expertise that deal with the real-world conditions of mutability and variability. Thanks to George Rudebusch for pointing this out to me.

³⁰ Plato's moral theory is importantly distinct from the principle-based moral theories that modern particularists reject. I follow Horn in thinking that Plato subscribes to a generalist moral theory, not a particularist one (Horn 2021a and Horn 2021b). That this is Plato's general leaning suggests that he would be reluctant to endorse skeptical arguments against rule-following (McDowell) or to insist on reason-holism (Dancy 2004). Moreover, a Platonic generalist moral theory

a capacity, and the analogy with the expert trainer shows, rather, that the political expert must rely on generalized judgments and generalized commands.

Furthermore, as the myth of Cronos illustrates, in the current cosmic epoch, humans living in political communities must be capable of “directing their own lives and caring for themselves” (274d1-e1). Legal norms provide critical guidance and regulate social behavior. Laws then, are necessary for political expertise and political communities, even if they are not perfectly accurate, and their necessity goes beyond the merely instrumental or heuristic.

The Relation between Political Expertise and Laws

Laws are not uniquely deficient in their inability to capture precisely what is “finest and most just in all cases.” Rather, the constraints that apply in the case of laws apply also in the case of the political expert. The political expert thus operates similarly to the expert trainer who relies not on precise, but “rougher,” methods. On the other hand, the Visitor highlights the political expert’s ability to revise and put aside laws when these are not adequate to changing circumstances, as well as the political expert’s ability to provide rationally-grounded explanations for existing rules. In these respects, political expertise is superior to a strict reliance on established laws. The critique of laws at 294a-d, then, is not a wholesale rejection of legal norms in favor of political expertise. Rather, the critique is offered to bring into sharper focus the manner in which laws are necessary for political communities, and to clarify the relationship between genuine political expertise and laws.

What sense, then, should we make of the Visitor’s claim that laws should not be “powerful,” as compared with political expertise? The clue, I suggest, lies in the Visitor’s assertion that “law-making

may avoid the specific problems that particularists raise for principle-based theories. See also: Irwin, 2000.

belongs to the kingly *technē*" (294a7-8). In the earlier division of types of expertise, the Visitor characterizes political expertise as a *technē* that makes determinate judgments and exercises authority over other *technai* (259c-261a). The Visitor returns to this characterization of the political expert as a "master-technician" at 303d4-305e10). There the Visitor identifies three *technai* that are distinct, yet are closely allied with, statesmanship—military generalship, true political rhetoric, and judicial expertise. In its genuine form, statesmanship exercises proper control and supervision over each of these elite specialties (304b10-d9). So, for example, the political expert determines when the polis will go to war and when it will engage in peace-making. Such large-scale actions properly fall under statesmanship's purview, and the political expert will dictate to the military expert accordingly.³¹ Military experts, on the other hand, are entrusted with the *how* of war—they are responsible for mobilizing the troops, building fortifications, and fighting battles (304e4-305a2).

The statesman also exercises authoritative control over the judiciary and the model city's "righteous judges," whose role is to:

take over everything in relation to contracts which they have received as lawful (*nomima*) by the kingly law-giver, and to judge these, according to this [the lawful], considering whether these are just or unjust. And they will show their particular virtue by not being willing to rule contrary to the law-giver's arrangements, for one against another, and not being influenced by gifts, or fears, nor pity, nor any hatred or friendship (*Stat.* 305b4-c3).

The passage clarifies the status of law and its relation to statesmanship in the model city. The political expert makes law—determines what is lawful—as a proper part of his expertise. Seemingly, these legal arrangements are in the form of general legal

³¹ In particular, statesmanship determines the proper time (*kairos*) for such large-scale actions (See Lane, 1998). Perhaps this is because only the political expert is able to understand the affairs of the city within the larger cosmic frame.

norms, for example: that voluntary contracts which are free of fraud or force should be upheld; or that when an agreement is not honored, the parties to the contract have a right to a hearing before a fair judge.³² These lawful determinations have prescriptive force and are action-guiding. Judges are bound to follow these determinations since their expertise is under the proper control of statesmanship. They are “guardians of the laws” but not law-makers (305c6-8). Judges consult the political expert’s determinations about what is lawful in making their own decisions about what is to be done in particular cases. The lawful determinations also appear to have normative force, because they are backed by the statesman’s ethical knowledge. When judges decide cases in accordance with these lawful determinations, they track what is really just.

Law-making, then, “belongs to” statesmanship as a constitutive element, as one of the essential functions involved in governing a political community. The political expert exercises authoritative control over both subordinate *technai* and laws. This does not imply that the political expert typically rules by decree. Nor does it imply that laws have merely instrumental or heuristic value. Rather, law-making is an indispensable component of political expertise. As a human *techne* and area of knowledge, political expertise must determine what is generally just and beneficial for humans living collectively in human communities.³³ This requires general legal norms and law-making.

Legal norms of some kind are an essential feature of political life under human governance. Socrates’ qualms about the possibility and desirability of a government without laws are borne out by the

³² I have in mind something like the distinction that Ronald Dworkin draws between laws as rules and legal principles which normatively guide legal reasoning (Dworkin 1978).

³³ The right kind of education, as described in the *Statesman* and the *Sophist*, seems to provide something closer to fine-grained guidance that takes closer account of individual differences among human beings. This kind of education is personal, and one-to-one. It seems likely to me that such education provides necessary preparation for political subjects to respond appropriately to laws. However, since Platonic education is a *techne*, it must also somehow depend on generalizations.

discussion at *Statesman* 294a-297b. This discussion, I've argued, goes some way towards explaining how it is that laws, even if they are not "entirely correct," are "necessary." First, law-making is a constitutive part of the statesman's authoritative knowledge and expertise. The political expert determines what is generally lawful and just in the dealings that political subjects have with one another. To do this, the statesman relies on "rougher methods," generalizations about what is true for human beings living collectively, and generalized, and revisable, instructions applying to most individuals, for the most part. The statesman's determinations take the form either of specific laws or general legal principles that guide further law-making, and provide prescriptive guidance to the subordinate *technē* of rendering judgments in specific cases.

In addition to illustrating the role of law in the model city, 305b4-d5 alludes more generally to a certain theory of legal authority. On this theory, laws or legal principles have normative force just in case they are grounded in ethical knowledge. This also offers a response to the critique passage at 294a7-b7. We may grant that laws or legal principles cannot, on their own, accurately comprehend what is finest and most just. But laws and legal principles grounded in ethical knowledge, as we find in the *Statesman*, are adequate to the task of "commanding what is best." So, laws with the backing of ethical knowledge may be properly authoritative.

While I've argued that the political expert must rely on the kind of generalized guidance laws provide, we should recall the analogy with the returning expert. The returning expert provides a contrast case to the stubbornly ignorant person. Unlike the stubbornly ignorant person, the returning expert remains open to changing conditions and, while they may respect the *prima facie* force of their previous instructions, they are not completely hamstrung by these. So, the returning expert can revise her judgments and commands in the face of new evidence. She is further able to explain the rational grounding for her new judgments and commands. The political expert is similarly open to changing conditions and may revise existing laws. The political expert's reliance on law, that is, does not

entail brute legalism. There is room for the statesman to exercise their expert, considered judgment.³⁴ What is important to note here, in my view, is that in revising laws or legal principles the political expert does not rely on any particularist sensibility, but uses the same “rougher methods” as he does in his general practice.³⁵

We may even be able to make more room for the statesman’s expert judgment, consistent with the view I’ve been advancing. I suggest that, while laws have the surface form of absolute, exceptionless commands, from the standpoint of the *Statesman’s* political expert, laws are more akin to *ceteris paribus* generalizations.³⁶ The political expert, that is, formulates laws which hold as generalized prescriptions, for the most part, over a normal range of cases. If laws are *ceteris paribus* generalizations they admit of reasonable exceptions. I further suggest that it is only the political expert who has the requisite grounding ethical and political knowledge, who can reliably and correctly identify the legitimate exceptional cases. When the ignorant attempt to carve out exceptions,

³⁴ A common criticism against generalist ethics runs like this: Generalist ethics entail that ethical actions are applications of universal rules to particular situations. However, “rules alone” cannot determine ethical outcomes, in the absence of judgment. This criticism is based on a misunderstanding of generalist ethics. The generalist need not think that ethical judgment is simply a matter of using ethical principles like algorithms with variables to mechanically generate outcomes. Similarly, we need not think that the political expert’s reliance on generalizations consists in a mechanical application of rules to cases.

³⁵ Sørensen helpfully distinguishes between “legal improvement” and “extra-legal judgment” as two distinct challenges to strict legalism (Sørensen 2022, p. 9). On the first, laws may be modified and improved to promote justice and virtue. The second challenge fits more closely the particularist claim that laws are fatally deficient, and that some specialized insight is required. I read the returning expert analogy as endorsing the first, not the second, characterization of political expertise.

³⁶ I’m grateful to Susan Suave Meyer for pressing me on this point. I agree that laws are usually expressed as categorical, exceptionless commands. But I suggest that this is the laws’ “surface grammar.” The real semantic value of laws is revealed by the expert statesman’s standpoint where laws have the force of *ceteris paribus* generalizations.

the result is trouble for the city.³⁷ While I can do no more than briefly sketch this view here, I note that this view retains the statesman's reliance on legal norms, but helps to explain the role the statesman's judgment plays. The view, then, may capture enough sensitivity to particulars and exceptional cases to satisfy the particularist.

We are left with the question of what value laws have for non-ideal poleis, according to the *Statesman*. The political expert's knowledge provides a grounding for laws and law-making in the model city, and I've proposed that this grounding underwrites the law's normative authority. Without this grounding in ethical and political knowledge, however, it is difficult to say what authority laws could have in non-ideal cities. The questions for further investigation will be whether non-ideal poleis are political communities in any sense, and the extent to which politicians in non-ideal city approximate a political *techne*. Perhaps, like the righteous judges of the model city, non-ideal cities are able to track true beliefs about justice by sticking to long-established laws. Perhaps, by some yet rougher method, non-ideal cities are able to prescribe what is good (if not best) for most people, for the most part, in most cases. Or perhaps demanding law-abidingness from political subjects ultimately serves the political end of promoting virtue, even if in a less reliable way than in the model city.³⁸ What is clear from the foregoing is this: If non-ideal cities are indeed political communities, they will need the help of laws. And, if those who govern in non-ideal cities can be credited with any manner of technical ability, they must employ generalized judgments and generalized prescriptions, as laws do. Rather than being hostile to law, the *Statesman* assigns a

³⁷ This may be, in part, the moral of the Visitor's portrayal of the revolt against expertise and the satirized democratic city at 298a-300b.

³⁸ See Hitz 2009 for an excellent discussion of obedience to law as virtue-promoting in Plato's *Laws* (pp. 373-375). Jeremy Reid, further, provides insightful discussion of how non-ideal rulers could plausibly imitate the political expert's technical skill (Reid 2017, pp. 27-40).

significant role for law in both the model city and in its inferior cousins.³⁹

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³⁹ I am grateful for prepared comments by Rupert Sparling at the 2023 West Coast Plato Workshop and for very helpful discussion with Joseph Bjelde, Emily Hulme, John Proios, Keith McPartland, Jeremy Reid, Thomas Slabon, Pauline Sabrier, Evanthis Speliotis, and Susan Suavé Meyer. My deep gratitude is owed to George Rudebusch and Julie Piering for their generous hospitality and valuable editorial feedback.

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