

John Sallis, Ed. 2017.
*Plato's Statesman:
 Dialectic, Myth, and
 Politics.* Albany: SUNY.
 326pp.

Romeo Domdii Cliff

Catholic University of Leuven
 romeo.domdiicliff@kuleuven.be

The collected volume *Plato's Statesman: Dialectic, Myth, and Politics* presents some of the new interesting research being conducted on the *Statesman*. The volume is edited by John Sallis, who is well known for his work in phenomenology, including writings on Jacques Derrida, Martin Heidegger, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Immanuel Kant. Sallis takes a decidedly continental approach to reading Plato, as do his selected contributors, with thirteen of the seventeen contributions coming from the continental, hermeneutic, or post-structuralist traditions.

Though the volume lacks a clear structure of its own, the contributions could be grouped under five broad headings:

(1) Contributions that discuss the myth, in particular those by Michael Naas, Sara Brill, and Walter Brogan. These authors deal with, respectively, the usage of the word “αὐτόματος,” meaning «without guidance»; the relevance of sexual reproduction in comprehending human beings; and the proper relation to the time required to form a human community. I should also mention the contribution by Shane Montgomery Ewegen, who writes on the debt owed by Socrates in the *Statesman*. Also pertinent for this group is the article by Nickolas Pappas, which deals with the appearance of philosophy in the myth.

(2) Contributions that discuss dialectic. Günter Figal focuses on the interdependence between dialectical training and the determination of the statesman. He argues that understanding the statesman demands dialectical training. Eric Sanday follows with an article investigating how a preliminary understanding can guide an inquiry while being aware of its limitations, focusing on *Politicus 277a-279a*. Finally, James Risser offers an interpretation of *Politicus 277a-278e* and, contra Figal, argues that the disclosure of the statesman should

not be understood from the dialectical art, but rather through examples.

(3) Contributions that engage with the dialogue from the broader perspective of the trilogy (*Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman*). John Sallis' short article examines whether the beginning of the dialogue starts with its opening lines or whether it lies before these lines. Mitchell Miller forges ahead with a discussion of intuition and logos in the trilogy. Noburu Notomi takes the discussion one step further, arguing that the trilogy pursues the nature of the philosopher. At the penultimate position, Drew Hyland, through a fictitious dialogue between Theaetetus, Young Socrates, and Axiothea of Phlius (one of two disguised female members of the Academy), brings to light the thoughts these three personages must have had at the closing of the trilogy. And finally, Burt Hopkins unites the trilogy into one by exploring whether the presence of many philosophers in the three dialogues entails that philosophy itself is multiple.

(4) Contributions that are more politically oriented. At the front of the pack here is Robert Metcalf, who is interested in how the critique of writing in the *Phaedrus* and the critique of law in the *Statesman* are important for Plato's political thought. Next, Robert Bartlett gives a general account of law in the dialogue. Ryan Drake concludes by arguing that the sophist has a place in the best regime, especially when gathering intelligence finds its civic limits in the *Statesman*.

(5) Finally, there is a single contribution that discusses the reception of the dialogue by the Neoplatonic commentators. Here Gary Gurtler studies Plotinus' allusions to the *Statesman* and how his usage of the text reveals his method in citing passages and claims made about them.

This review will proceed by considering three points about the collected volume. First, I will look at the new trend among scholars to read into the *Statesman* the complete rejection of the existence of an ideal statesman in our contemporary society. Second, I will discuss certain previously unexplored terrains in the dialogue to which scholars are now gravitating. And finally, I will comment on the fact that all contributors to the volume show a certain degree of sensitivity to the dramatic context of the dialogue and refrain from attributing Plato's voice to a single character. A brief remark on these points will be furnished at the end.

THE NEW SCHOLARLY TREND IN RESEARCH ON THE STATESMAN

There is a new trend among scholars to read the *Statesman*, especially through its myth of the two Ages (the Golden Age of Kronos and the present Age of Zeus) as a dialogue which forgoes the advent of the true statesman, or the possibility of such a person to ever exist in our current world. Michael Naas, for example, in *From Spontaneity to Automaticity: Polar (Opposite) Reversal at Statesman 269c-274d*, claims that the true statesman is dead. Naas focuses on the word "αὐτόματος", which is used five times throughout the dialogue – four times in the Age of Kronos and one time in the Age of Zeus – arguing that it denotes a lack of guidance. According to Naas, the term 'αὐτόματος' reveals the striking analogy between the Age of Kronos and spoken law or speech, on the one hand, and the Age of Zeus and written law, on the other. The Age of Zeus is an age when the teachings of the first lawmaker are recalled via written signs

in the absence of a living lawmaker or the now-departed god. (Naas 2017, 16)

Having already prepared the reader for the notion of a dead statesman (Naas 2017, 16) and having associated the 'original lawmaker' and speaker with the Age of Kronos, or with Kronos himself, Naas proceeds to give reasons laws are necessary and maintains that the true statesman must rely on written law, since his death is as inevitable as the end of the Age of Kronos. The Age of Kronos must end, wherefore laws are indispensable in the Age of Zeus and they mimic the speaker of the Age of Kronos. Further, the multiplicity of human beings prohibits the original lawgiver from speaking to all people at the same time or to the same people all the time. (Naas 2017, 28) With the true statesman dead or constrained to the long-gone Age of Kronos, it is futile to hope for his/her return in our present era.

Walter A. Brogan, in *The Politics of Time: On the Relationship between Life and Law in Plato's Statesman*, supports Naas' reading when he suggests that law is the personification of the statesman in the community. Concerned with whether, and in what way, the identity that defines the becoming of a people is possible and whether this identity can hold the flow of time found in political life, Brogan claims that the rule of the statesman, which is a care that has an appropriate relationship to temporality, both inaugurates and preserves the unity of a people.

Justifying his claim, Brogan starts by describing the Age of Kronos, an Age he associates with the reverse motion of the universe and a time of back and forth in which creatures are born grown from the earth and grow in reverse, only to grow again from the earth. 'In this world', Brogan argues, 'creatures become younger and eventually enter once again into the moment of birth, only to come again fully

formed into being. Life circles back into itself in a cycle of repetition and renewal. There is no need for self-preservation in the Age of Kronos' (Brogan 2017, 72). It is important to point out that this is not an innocent paraphrase of the text but already implies an interpretation, as we will show below.

The conditions in the Age of Kronos are different from those in the Age of Zeus. According to Brogan, in the Age of Zeus, a period during which God is no longer piloting the universe and time is no longer cyclical, the universe moves toward destruction, and the task of the statesman is to heal the rupture between the whole and its parts by preserving life and order in a recalcitrant universe that leans toward destruction.

Attempting to reconnect the forward and backward time found in the Age of Kronos, standing at the threshold of the end of the Age of Kronos and the beginning of the Age of Zeus, and mastering the kairological time, understood as the moment disunity first emerges in the universe following the release of the rudder by Kronos, the statesman, Brogan continues, produces laws to respond to the changing circumstances of life and to return unity in disunity, similarly to what characterizes the Age of Kronos (Brogan 2017, 77).

With the statesman's law doing the necessary work of instilling unity within the universe, attempting to redirect the destructive course of the universe, and attempting to reproduce as much as possible the forward and backward time found in the Age of Kronos, Brogan concludes with the following arguments. The place of the statesman is not within the city he rules, rather it is restricted to the moment the universe is initially released by Kronos, or the kairological time. Further, the statesman leaves the laws behind as a reminder of his presence. And finally, the statesman cannot

dwell within the community, as doing so will disrupt the independence of his subjects.

He is apart from the city in two ways. He is not within the city because he attends to the original threshold from out of which emerges life as we know it. And he stands at the threshold in another sense as himself the origin of the law of the city, that is, as himself the unity of life and law. The statesman does not belong to the city, and to dwell there other than as a stranger would be to disrupt the independent ability of those for whom he cares (Brogan 2017, 80). With the law preforming the tasks of the statesman within the city and with the statesman restricted to a place apart at the beginning of the Age of Zeus, law becomes the personification of the statesman in the community. Whether the statesman is dead as Naas has it or whether the law serves as the personification of the statesman as Brogan purports, it would behove contemporary societies, humans in the Age of Zeus, not to expect the arrival of the statesman and not to expect one to dwell among humans. Any such expectation is futile, given the ontological status of the statesman, according to both Nass and Brogan.

UNCHARTERED AREAS IN THE DIALOGUE

One of the most original and interesting articles in the book is that of Sara Brill: *Autochthony, Sexual Reproduction, and Political Life in the Statesman Myth*. Reflecting on the status of human political phenomena, on how humans come to be, and on the kind of political animal that human beings are—all within the context of the myth—Brill argues that the specific characteristic of sexual reproduction in the dialogue demands consideration of the

nature of self-rule beyond attempts at self-rule embodied in the practice of *techné*. Self-rule, she continues, must include the acknowledgment that human political life is grounded in the fact that we are born from other human beings in this Age of Zeus, instead of being sprung from the earth, as in the Age of Kronos. ‘To deny this fact’, Brill holds, ‘is to deny a fundamental dimension of human being *qua* political animal’ (Brill 2017, 34).

Substantiating this claim, Brill first establishes that the object of the dialogue, defining the statesman, is inextricably linked with understanding what constitutes a human life or how humans live, in as much as understanding what kind of living being humans are is essential to understanding the work of the statesman (Brill, 2017, 33).

Next, Brill proceeds to describe two types of reproduction, reproduction which explains why the myth is central in the examination of human beings *qua* political animals. The myth displays the contours of human political life by distinguishing it from a vision of the human collective for whom the polis is unnecessary, and the two visions are separated by their distinctive reproduction. The two types of reproduction, generation by others and generation from self, mark the different modes of life in the Age of Kronos and the Age of Zeus (Brill 2017, 34). Further, human self-rule, political community, and human life in the Age of Zeus can only be understood when considering the sexual reproduction of this Age, Brill argues.

In *Noësis and Logos in the Eleatic Trilogy, with a Focus on the Visitor's Joke at Statesman 266a-d*, Mitchell Miller discusses the relation between intuition and discourse in the dialogue. Starting with *Politicus 266a-d* and proceeding to the three definitions of the statesman, Miller argues the *Statesman* is a

provocation to, and then exegesis of, a *Noêsis* of what is essential to statesmanship, done in three jokes.¹ The first joke is a mathematical pun that appeals to geometry to distinguish between bipeds and quadrupeds. The Stranger says that the distinction will be made by determining the diagonal and then the diagonal of the diagonal. The human mode of walking is bipedal in capacity or power (*dunamis*), which has a mathematical equivalence of $\sqrt{2}$ since the Greek word *dunamis* also means 'square root' and *dipous* also means 'two-footed'. Moreover, in geometry, the diagonal of a square is the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle and, following the Pythagorean theorem, is calculated by taking the square root of the sum of the squares of the length of the other sides. So, by being two-footed in capacity or power, human beings generate a diagonal that is $\sqrt{2}$ in a square of 1×1 or the square root of two feet. Animals that are four-footed in capacity or power generate a diagonal that is $\sqrt{4}$ in a square of $\sqrt{2} \times \sqrt{2}$ or the square root of four feet, which is the diagonal ($\sqrt{4}$) of the diagonal (the square with side $\sqrt{2}$, which is also the diagonal of human beings with who are two-footed in capacity).

The second joke deals with the fact that man is paired, throughout the division of animals, with pigs. These pigs have such noble qualities as undemanding, slow and come in last. The gist of the joke lies in the irony of pairing humans with pigs as counterparts, as well as in the contradictory qualities attributed to pigs. And the third joke has to do with calling the swineherd the best of men and the most well trained for the easy way of life. He is someone the human herdsman must keep pace with in the division until the latter has to be separated from him.

Noêsis, for Miller, is the intuitive insight into the essential that is the epistemic goal

of dialectical inquiry and the basis for the discursive exegesis that inquiry requires. Further, these jokes trigger and concentrate the irony of the whole initial division. The jokes also trigger the setting aside of the example of the shepherd. And finally, the jokes trigger the introduction of both the weaving example and of the new form of division, which lays out fifteen kinds of care with which members of a city take responsibility for their material political lives.

Miller puts forth a fascinating thesis in his article, but it is a pity he spends much of the article developing his argument from elements in the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*. When he returns to the *Statesman*, the reader is left with no more than suggestive claims. Miller starts from the end of the *Theaetetus* when Socrates refutes the definition of knowledge as true judgment with an account, argues that this refutation is a provocation for further thought, and highlights the paradoxical character of the object of knowledge as both simple and complex to support that argument.

Focusing on the latter point, Socrates, Miller continues, argues that the things in the world are complexes of perceptible, simple elements and that, since knowledge requires giving an account or *logos*, and giving an account requires an object whose parts are distinguishable, only complex things are knowable. The simple elements from which they are formed are themselves unknowable. Socrates then attacks this understanding of an object via a dilemma: either the complex is the plurality of its elements such that if the complex is knowable so are its elements, or the complex is not reducible to its elements but is simple in its own right, in which case the complex would be just as unknowable as its elements. Since the second option leads to the denial of the possibility of knowledge, Socrates

finds refuge in the first option by reminding Theaetetus, his young interlocutor, of his early musical training: Theaetetus studied music by first learning the simple elements and then proceeding to the complex. But this affirmation of the knowability of the simple elements is only possible if we allow the simple elements to be somehow also complex, leading to the paradox of the object being both simple and complex, Miller argues (Miller 2017, 110).

But how are these contradictory aspects of the object compossible, Miller asks? The answer lies in Socrates' treatment of the last two senses of *logos* at *Theaetetus* 206e-210a. These show the interconnection of the two moments of knowledge with the two aspects of the object: true judgment matches with the object in its simplicity, while *logos* matches with the object in its complexity. This is how the last two senses of *logos* help to arrive at such a conclusion, according to Miller. The second sense of *logos* deals with giving an account by going through the elements or parts that the nature of a thing requires of its instantiation. The third sense of *logos* deals with identifying the differentiating features that distinguish the object from other objects. 'Thus both sorts of these *logos*', Miller argues, 'correlate with the object in its aspect of complexity, disclosing it in their distinct way as a plurality of 'elements' or features' (Miller 2018, 110).

To view the object in its simplicity requires us to start from another beginning. In disclosing the plurality of elements or features, each sort of *logos* presupposes the prior presence of the object in its simplicity, which is the correlate of true judgment. Taking the example of the wagon and *logos* in the second sense, Socrates argues the object resides in its simplicity. For as the thing which requires that whatever is to have the nature of a wagon

has a definite set of elements or parts, the whole *qua* simple stands prior to the parts and guides the *logos*' disclosure of it within the context of these parts. 'That is, as what is responsible, in the manner of a formal cause', Miller argues, 'for a wagon's having the parts that it does, it precedes the whole of these parts and orients the *logos*' disclosure of it in terms of this whole of parts' (Miller 2017, 111). Furthermore, taking the example of the face of Theaetetus, Socrates demonstrates how *logos* in the third sense reveals the object in its simplicity. The unique 'look' or *Gestalt* of the countenance stands before the plurality of its distinguishing features. The two senses of *logos* show how the two contradictory aspects of the object are compossible.

While discussing the two-way interplay of true judgment and *logos*, *en route*, viz., true judgment or intuition empowers the *logos* that seeks to explicate it, and the *logos*, in turn, responds to intuition by supporting it as genuine insight or else exposing it as false, Miller then transports these considerations from the *Theaetetus* to both the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*. 'Plato has Socrates introduce the last two senses of *logos* in the *Theaetetus*', Miller argues, 'with the proleptic intent of preparing us for the two modes of dialectic that the Eleatic Visitor introduce and practice in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*' (Miller 2017, 112). These two modes of dialectic are the 'bifurcatory [or division] process' of collecting differentiating features and the 'non-bifurcatory process' of discerning the parts that make for a harmonious whole, according to Miller (Miller 2017, 116). Miller then proceeds to associate various elements of the *Sophist* and *Statesman* with the two senses of *logos* found in the *Theaetetus* and with the two aspects of the object.

For example, tacitly drawing from two principles in Plato's unwritten doctrines² – the determinate one and the infinite dyad – and their relation to the realm of the forms, Miller associates the transcendental form 'care' and its relation to the fifteen forms of care in the community, including statecraft, with the transcendental form 'one' and its relation to the realm of forms. Specifically, Miller posits that a single form of care embraces the many forms of care in society and further posits that this relation calls to mind *logos* in the second sense, inasmuch as the many forms represent the elements that care itself requires to be instantiated (Miller 2017, 112-114). *Logos* in the third sense is made plain by the fact that the complex form 'care', which unites the fifteen subordinated forms of care, (the transcendental one also unites all the forms in the realm of forms), serves to differentiate the form, through its unity, from everything else (Miller 2017, 114-116).

However, in my view, there is no indication, in the *Statesman*, of a transcendental form 'care' which transcends and unites all other forms. Equally suspicious is the claim that the statesman's art is subordinated to the transcendental form 'care' and is on the same level as the other arts in society. When the word 'care' is introduced in the dialogue, it is within the context of understanding the statesman and the domain of statesmanship, not as a transcendental form. The textual evidence in the *Statesman* does not support Miller's claim.

One might ask, in defence of Miller: why is it so problematic to use elements of the *Theaetetus* or the *Sophist* to explain the *Statesman*? Why could one not compare the different dialogues and use elements from one to elucidate those of another, so long as the context of the dialogue is respected? However,

what is at stake here is not so much the act of comparing two dialogues. It is, rather, the act of making a claim about one dialogue based on information derived from another dialogue without materials from the principal dialogue itself to support the claim: the context of the argument transported might be different from the argument in the receiving dialogue, and each dialogue has its own unique context that cannot be overlooked.

It is precisely because of this failure of not giving enough heed to the context of the argument in each dialogue that Miller's claim regarding the two senses of *logos* in the *Statesman* is less convincing. It is much better, in terms of methodology, to base one's argument on, say, the *Statesman* and its set of elements and then to use other dialogues to support the claim. Proceeding this way will reduce the risks of overlooking the context of the *Statesman*, the dialogue which is, in this case, of primary import, and it produces a much more convincing argument.

THE SENSITIVITY TO THE DRAMATIC CONTEXT OF THE DIALOGUE

One striking feature of the essays in this volume is their sensitivity to the dramatic context of the dialogue and their reluctance to attribute Plato's voice to a single character. John Sallis justifies this approach by arguing, even more strongly, that Plato can never be assigned any part of a speech within the dialogue given that he is withdrawn from the dialogue, acting as a ventriloquist would on stage.

It is too strong to maintain, as Sallis does, that one cannot attribute any assertion to Plato, since there are ways to understand Plato's position, given that as he does construe

authoritative arguments in the dialogues. But indeed, it would be difficult for a single character to represent Plato's view in as much as such a position is inconsistent across dialogues and within dialogues: (1) characters change from dialogue to dialogue, making it difficult to identify the same character as representing Plato's view. One could object that Plato's views change along with those of his main characters. But the views of the main characters, taken together, in a given dialogue are never the same, as these characters disagree with each other. This makes it difficult to have a single view representing the main characters and to attribute that to Plato. (2) The different characters within a dialogue often start with different positions at the beginning of the dialogue, and sometimes even switch positions at the end of the dialogue, resulting in a difficulty of deciding which position to attribute to Plato; and (3) the leading character in a particular dialogue sometimes errs in the course of the dialogue and is corrected by the minor character, resulting in undermining the character's position as an authority.

In the *Politicus*, for example, the Eleatic Stranger, who is the leading character and not Socrates, errs on numerous occasions and has to retrace his steps before proceeding: in *Polit.*, 263c3-264b11, when both the Eleatic Stranger and Young Socrates, the minor character, fail to distinguish between domestic and wild herds in their discussion of the theoretical science directing the rearing of living creatures in a herd; in *Polit.*, 267c5-268d6, when the Stranger fails to distinguish the statesman from his rivals in a human society; and in *Polit.*, 274e1-275a11, when the Stranger ventures to describe a God instead of a human statesman in this era and who is present in this world, and the Stranger also fails to describe the manner of the statesman's

rule. If such a character represented Plato's view, why would Plato make such mistakes, since the author, presumably, already knows the message he wants to convey? It is more likely each of the characters are pieces in the author's dramatic setting, a literary play, and each is given a position to represent. The result of their interaction would be the message of the play and the position of the author, Plato. One could argue it is the author speaking, but it is not necessarily his views that are being stated. Rather it is his ideas about how to engage in philosophy that are revealed. But why would the author demonstrate the proper way to engage in philosophy if he did not share the outcome of the demonstration or if he did not think such an outcome was desirable or truthful? Indeed, the outcome of the demonstration is precisely the message of the play and the position of the author.

A BRIEF DISCUSSION OF THE MYTH

Since many articles in the book base their argument on the developments in the myth of the *Politicus* and, especially, on the assumption of a two-cycle revolution of the universe, it is perhaps useful to call to mind an alternative interpretation of Plato's account of the revolution of the universe, one that assumes that there are three Ages and two directions. This view has been put forward by various scholars (Rowe 1995, 191-192; Brisson 1995, 358-3363; Brisson 1974, 478-496), but I think it is important to defend it with fresh arguments, which moreover shed a new light on some of the discussions mentioned above.

It is not evident why the authors in the book should take it for granted there is a two-cycle revolution, especially since this creates

difficulties for their positions. Let us take Sara Brill's thesis, for instance, that human sexual reproduction, and being born from each other, is paramount to comprehending human self-rule. Her claim is entirely based on the two-cycles view. Arguing in binary oppositions, Brill maintains that the Age of Kronos moves in reverse and in the opposite direction to our Age of Zeus; the earth-born in the Age of Kronos are born from others, whilst humans in the Age of Zeus are born from themselves; and humans in the Age of Kronos are ruled by gods, while humans in the Age of Zeus rule themselves. In her view, being born from each other is fundamental to understanding human self-rule, because the first time it is mentioned, it is associated with self-rule (Brill 2017, 40-45).

But as soon as one examines Plato's narrative more closely, it becomes clear that the two-cycle interpretation poses some problems for her thesis. The reverse rotation of the universe, which Brill locates in the Age of Kronos (Brill 2017, 39), occurs when Kronos releases control of the universe, thus prompting the universe to move in the opposite direction (Brill 2017, 36).³ However, self-rule occurs both at a time when human beings are born from the earth, that is *in* the Age of Kronos when Kronos withdraws from the universe, and in the Age of Zeus when human beings are born from themselves. Sexual reproduction, therefore, cannot be the main cause of human self-rule. Something else must take that place. The two-cycle revolution produces an inherent contradiction in her argument and undermines her thesis. The alternative three Ages and two-directions description of the myth remedies the problem by doing away with the binary opposition between the Age of Kronos and the Age of Zeus and by giving a better account of the reverse revolution of the

universe. In the end, the reader is presented with a more refined narrative of the motions of the universe, a narrative that acts the part of a receptacle from which all the fundamental ideas concerning the myth could develop and could be understood.

The myth tells the story of the Golden Age of Kronos and our current Age of Zeus, describes the Age of the reverse motion of the universe, and its cataclysmic effects, and presages the return of Zeus to the helm of the universe, directly steering it as its captain. The First Age is the era of Kronos, when God is the ship's captain and directly steers the universe. (*Polit.*, 272b1-2). The Golden Age of Kronos continues until the revolution of the universe under God has completed its due course and has come to its destined end, when God releases his control and retires (*Polit.*, 269c8). This marks the end of the First Age and the first direction – a clockwise motion from A to B. When the universe reaches point B, God releases control and the universe's own inborn 'urge [takes] control of the world again and reverses the revolution of it' (*Polit.*, 272e4-6). Devoid of the divine intellect, the universe enters a crisis in the reverse, i.e. counter-clockwise, motion in which all modes of life are destroyed and turned upside down (*Polit.*, 273a1-6). This reverse revolution marks the Second Age and the second direction, when the old regain their youth. This reverse motion continues until the universe regains control of itself and remembers the orders of God, thus ending the Second Age and leading to the Third era, that of Zeus (*Polit.*, 273a6-b2). In this Third Age, the universe returns to its ordered course.

It would be strange to posit that the universe remembers the practices, teachings, and orders of God and follows them while still moving in the reverse Age—which is a period

of chaos and destruction, antithetical to God's orders and practices.⁴ It is much more sensible to believe that if God's ruling is clockwise from points A to B, and if the universe's reverse, chaotic motion is counter-clockwise from B to A, then when the universe regains control of, and brings order to, itself and follows God's orders it returns clockwise on the path from A to B, even though it is now of its own and can only rely on God's teachings, without his direct assistance. In the Third era, the universe moves in the same direction as the First, but one should not identify the two.

At the moment the universe regains control of itself and resumes God's teachings, the phenomena of the reverse Age also stop and mortal beings stop the process of growing 'backward, as it were, toward youth and ever greater immaturity'; (*Polit.*, 270d8-e1) the white hair of the older men stops growing 'darker again'; (*Polit.*, 270e1-2) and the bodies of young men stop losing signs of manhood and stop growing smaller every day and every night, until 'they fade into non-existence and one by one they [are] gone' (*Polit.*, 270e7-8). Instead, the return of the universe to the forward clockwise motion creates the opposite effect on its creatures. Those that were waning, start growing again; those born from the earth who were becoming smaller, now grow grey hair and ultimately die and return to the earth (*Polit.*, 273e7-274a2).

It is especially telling that Plato says that this happens 'when the most recent cosmic crisis occurred and the cosmic order now existing was established'. This means that our current era is that which is established after the reverse Age and runs in the same direction as that during the rule of Kronos. This can be seen in our lives, evolving from childhood to old age. Plato also suggests this in other passages: in *Polit.*, 270c1-d5 Plato he explicitly states that the reverse revolution is contrary to the

present revolution (*Polit.*, 270d3-5). Since the reverse motion is also counter to the revolution of Kronos, our present revolution and that of Kronos must be moving in the same direction; but given that the reverse revolution *comes after* that of Kronos, our present era cannot be identical with that of Kronos.

This reading is supported by another passage: during the reverse revolution, when mortal life is being destroyed, and human beings are returning back to the earth, a new race of human beings is born from the earth's womb.⁵ It is this new race of human beings that gives birth to our first ancestors, who are no longer conceived from the earth but from other human beings, following the new law of conception. However, Plato states that "these earliest forebears were the children of earthborn parents; they lived in a period directly following the end of the era of the earthborn, at *the close of the former period of cosmic rotation* [...]" (*Polit.*, 271a8-b2), suggesting that the reverse rotation ends when the present rotation begins. The birth of our first ancestors coincides with the moment the universe regains control of itself and remembers the teachings of God.

Many of the authors in *Plato's Statesman: Dialectic, Myth, and Politics* presuppose a two-cycle revolution, and only one of the authors, Sara Brill, explicitly informs the reader, in the footnote, of her presupposition. But this interpretation is controversial, and it could be dangerous if the authors base their argument on it. The discussion of the three Ages and two directions of the myth challenges this interpretation, and with it, the arguments of Brogan and Brill. Like Brill's interpretation, discussed above, Walter Brogan's depiction of our present age is in essentially negative terms indeed becomes problematic if the myth is no longer read in a binary way. As I have just tried

to show, Plato's account of the Age of Zeus is not entirely negative; correspondingly, the political philosophy he designs with a view to our current age is much more positive, and indeed realistic, than it appears in Brogan's contribution.

The collected volume is dense, and understanding it requires much prior knowledge of Plato in general and of the *Politicus* in particular. Of the volume's 326 pages, 11 are devoted to a consolidated bibliography (divided into the Greek texts, the English translations, and the secondary sources), a brief biography of the contributors, an English index, and a Greek index. The editor gives a brief introduction to the collected volume in which he clarifies the manner in which the contributors engage with the dialogue.

I have restricted my discussion to those contributions that best capture all the dimensions of the volume—dialectic, myth, politics, and the investigation of the trilogy. They bring out the kinds of new problems and assumptions that are most relevant to scholars working on the *Politicus* today.

Bibliography

- Brisson, L. 1974. "Le même et l'autre dans la structure ontologique du Timée de Platon," Paris, Klincksieck, 478-496.
- Brisson, L. 1995, 'Interprétation Du Mythe Du Politique' in C. Rowe (ed.), *Reading the Statesman: Proceedings of the III Symposium Platonicum*, Sank Augustin: Academia Verlag, 349-363.
- Fowler, H. 1925. Plato, *Politicus*. Translations are taken from The Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press.
- Hamilton, E., Cairns, H. Eds. Plato, *Politicus*. Translations are taken from *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, Bollingen Series LXXI, New Jersey, Princeton University Press.
- Sallis, J. Ed. 2017. *Plato's Statesman: Dialectic, Myth, and Politics*. Albany, State University of New York Press.
- Rowe, C. J. 1995. *Plato: Statesman*, Trans. Warminster, Aris and Philips Ltd.

Endnotes

- 1 The first joke, for Miller, takes place from *Politicus* 266a-b; the second joke is from *Politicus* 266c; the third joke is from *Politicus* 266c-d.
- 2 The legitimacy of the unwritten doctrines is a very controversial topic among scholars.
- 3 Brill grants that the reversal of the cosmos is caused by the release of Kronos.
- 4 Many proponents of the two-cycle revolution include the reverse motion of the universe in the era of Kronos.
- 5 Those who had long died were being resurrected, in keeping with the phenomena of reversal.

