

**Plato's *Statesman*
Revisited.
Edited by Beatriz
Bossi and Thomas
M. Robinson. Berlin/
Boston: De Gruyter
2018. pp. 360.**

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Despite its emphasis on artfully interwoven fabric, the *Statesman* is often said to be made of threads that are no more than loosely tied together. This might explain the reason why this dialogue has been addressed only thread by thread and has not received as much attention as many other Platonic works. In recent years, however, the *Statesman* has enjoyed a renaissance of attention, which can be said to have begun with the volume edited by Rowe in 1995.¹ Beatriz Bossi's and Thomas M. Robinson's edited volume, *Plato's Statesman Revisited*, which is the twin of the previously published *Plato's Sophist Revisited*,² aims to reverse the trend and earn even more readers for the still neglected *Statesman*.

The volume encompasses nineteen contributions written in English by a range of internationally renowned scholars. As the editors point out in the Introduction, the volume is a collection of papers, the majority of which was originally presented in April 2016 at the *II International Spring Plato Seminar on the Statesman*, which was hosted in Madrid by Beatriz Bossi. The volume is divided into seven broad sections, which are meant to follow the order of the subjects tackled in the dialogue. Also included are an Introduction by the editors, an all-encompassing Bibliography, a List of Contributors, which testifies to the wide range of approaches adopted, and an Index Locorum.

The first part addresses the question of how to approach the dialogue, which scholars have variously considered “weary” (Ryle), “dull” (Grene), and “lumpy” (Blondell). It is indeed true, as Larivée writes in the opening line, that “notwithstanding the *Laws*, the *Statesman* is probably the most unloved Platonic dialogue” (p. 11). For Larivée, the frustration which the reading of the dialogue generates, and which we readers are asked to take seriously, results from four major intertwined obstacles: the elu-

sive nature of the statesman and his science, the question of his relationship with the philosopher, and the chief purpose and the target-audience of the *Statesman*. It is in these problems themselves that Larivée finds the solution she proposes: she suggests that the *Statesman* should be read first and foremost as a *protreptic* dialogue:³ specifically, a two-stage protreptic to political science addressed to philosophers. The conception of Platonic dialogues as texts that protreptically unfold by means of allusions links Larivée's contribution to that by Migliori, who takes Plato's written maieutics to be conceived as stimulation for the readers to philosophize by means of increasingly complex "games". By means of a "multifocal approach" to Plato's political philosophy, Migliori focuses on the distinction between the ideal and the empirical levels in three respects: the little trust in human intervention, the danger which the polis already goes through, and the link between politics and ethics. Since the texts protreptically unfold Plato's thought by means of allusions, Migliori begins with the *Laws*, where we find different political models. He then moves to the *Republic*, where Plato presents a model in all its perfection, yet also as a real and possible city. This leads Migliori to suggest that the main contribution of the *Statesman* concerns the nature of the model, not as an abstract operation, but rather as the true form of government to be imitated. Just as the *Republic* presents a first model and the *Laws* a second model, so does the *Statesman*, according to Migliori, explain the significance of the utopian model to be imitated, as well as the role of laws and the statesman – a topic which is further developed in the sixth section.

The second part of the volume addresses the kind of knowledge which statesmanship is supposed to be. El Murr's contribution explains the point that Plato wishes to make with the

first two cuts of the division that opens the dialogue. Through a close analysis of the logical structure of *Polit.* 258e–259d, El Murr provides an account of Plato's strategy of placing political science among theoretical (and not among practical) sciences and, in the second move, among the epitactic sciences (and not among the sciences involving the making of judgments). Platonic statesmanship cannot but be a theoretical science – and yet it is a science which necessarily involves action. Like architecture, the political science is prescriptive, and it is precisely the notion of prescription that, according to El Murr, guarantees real, even if indirect, efficiency. "If it were not a theoretical science, then the statesmanship defined here would obviously not be Platonic, but if were not prescriptive it would not be statesmanship at all" (p. 70).⁴ In the following contribution, Casertano addresses the puzzling relation between "correct" and "true" and between "belief" and "knowledge" in the *Statesman*. Through a close textual analysis of 277e–279a, Casertano shows why "correct" and "true" overlap. In the *Statesman*, the qualification of "correct" is applied to the method, but also to the good constitution. Besides being correct in order to lead to truth, the method is combined with two other hermeneutic instruments, namely the myth, by means of which the interlocutors discover that their previous result was not wrong, but only partially true, and the model, which is necessary to transform the partially true result into stable knowledge. The criterion for determining the correctness of the only right constitution is the statesman's true possession of expertise, which Casertano reads in relation to the written laws. They are insufficient for determining the correctness of a constitution and cannot be considered the only depository of the truth, since this would stop the search for the truth. After having explained that

the constitution based on written laws are the second best – if written by those who know, laws are an “imitation of the truth” (300c5-6) – Casertano turns to the relationship between political science and written laws, which are further addressed by Peixoto in the sixth section and to the problematic opposition between *doxa* and *epistêmê*. On his reconstruction, the predominance of opinion which Plato declared to have overcome is back, since the science of the true statesman is opinion.

The longest section of the volume is dedicated to the myth.⁵ In the extensive paper that opens the section, White, who has dedicated an entire monograph to the *Statesman*,⁶ defends the philosophical role of the myth which contributes “to metaphysical matters involving and related to collection and division, particularly with reference to paradigms, the complex status of Forms and the good” (p. 88). Besides providing the necessary information for the Method of Collection and Division to succeed, the myth does serious philosophical labour, especially concerning the roles of paradigm, schema, Forms, and the Good. On his view, the *Statesman* as a whole is a dialogue of comprehensive unity that informs the reader about methodology, the importance of the good in methodology, and the way to approximate the nature of statecraft. In his concise paper, Blyth compares the god we find in the myth of the *Statesman* with Aristotle’s prime mover. With respect to (i) ontological independence, (ii) explicit divinity, and (iii) causal effect in the sense of an ongoing cause of movement, the god of the *Statesman* is said to be similar to Aristotle’s prime mover. He is closer to Aristotle’s prime mover than to the demiurge of the *Timaeus* or to the cosmic soul addressed in the *Phaedrus* and in the *Laws*. According to Blyth, the god of Plato’s myth can also be interpreted, like Aristotle’s god, as

being physically unmoved and contemplating the first principles of being.

The second half of the third part deals with the legacy of the *Statesman*’s myth in the Neoplatonists’ tradition. Whereas Motta’s contribution deals with Neoplatonist exegesis of the myth, Zamora’s paper focuses on Proclus’. Zamora explores Proclus’ non-literal interpretation of the myth, according to which the “reign of Kronos”, corresponding to the reign of the intelligible, and the “reign of Zeus”, corresponding to sensible domain, co-exist. In his examination of Proclus’ allegorical interpretation where the “inverse Revolution” is said to describe the resistance of the material element of the universe, Zamora explores an array of cross-references in the commentaries in order to explore the way that Proclus, for whom Platonic writings form a coherent whole, can overcome the divergences between the *Timaeus*, on the one hand, and the myth of the *Statesman*, on the other hand. “In her paper, Motta explains that the Neoplatonists, who read the dialogues in a theological and teleological fashion, took the myth to represent the place where Plato has set the only right target (*skopos*) of the dialogue. For only in a myth can Plato offer an image of the truth that suits a physical dialogue such as the *Statesman* was considered to be (together with the *Sophist* and the *Timaeus*), as it was considered to be according to the late-antiquity canon. As the visible side of something invisible, the myth presents Plato’s cosmos as a harmonic whole, whose twofold nature corresponds to the two deities, Cronos and Zeus. The discussion of passages from the *Prolegomena*, Proclus’ *Commentary on the Timaeus* and chapter 6 of book V of the *Platonic Theology* leads Motta to conclude that Neoplatonists used the myth “to explain the interaction between different realms, as well as to describe the way in whi-

ch one is to understand the demiurgic activity pertaining to celestial phenomena” (p. 155).

The fourth part of the volume opens with a contribution by Monserrat-Molas, who has dedicated a number of studies to the *Statesman*,⁷ and who focuses here on the passage on Due Measure (*Polit.* 283a-287b). Far from being just a gloss, bridge, or appendix, Due Measure is considered as pivotal to the internal composition of the dialogue, since art, oratory, and method all share the notion of Due Measure, defined as a “new guiding principle for the *logos*” (p. 168). After having shown that the passage 286b-c is an exercise in reminiscence and an illustration of the teaching and learning process, which the dialogical process unfolds, Monserrat-Molas employs the notion of Due Measure to characterize the inquiry as an activity of a community and the need for memory to defend teaching from forgetting. Due Measure shows, for Monserrat-Molas, the shortcomings of an abstract method when applied to the political sphere. In the next paper on *Polit.* 277c-281a, Vale dos Santos argues that weaving, which is analogous to government, is also analogous to the activity of thinking, conceived as the ability to establish relations and to recognize identities and differences. Vale dos Santos shows that thinking, just like weaving, relies on the ability to interweave; the *logos* is a *symplokê*. Wool-weaving is an image that emphasizes the compositional character of thought, which is said to consist of an analogical relationship between paradigms, a movement that constantly formulates analogies. Sánchez’s contribution is also dedicated to the weaving simile in Plato’s *Statesman*. From the analysis of weaving as a metaphor for the art of ruling the polis – “a reminder of the required intertwining of different kinds of human beings and professions” (p. 194), Sánchez draws two main conclusions. Key intellectual ope-

rations belong to the art of weaving, which is a reliable paradigm that explains the kind of combing and separating required by the royal art – a sort of practical knowledge conceived as dynamic wisdom that is analogous to the *phronêsis* portrayed by women working at the loom. Just like Aristophanes in the *Lysistrata*, so Plato in the *Statesman* presents the humble and female art of weaving as an expression of *nous* entailed in well-performed art. Beyond intellectual faculties, material and technical skills – the wisdom of the artist – are necessary for running the polis. Thus, statecraft should scrutinize the intelligible features entailed in a humble art mostly performed by women. Plato’s position on the status and role of women in society is also the main topic of the contribution that closes the fourth part of the volume. By discussing the *Statesman* as well as the *Republic*, the *Timaeus*, and the *Laws*, Robinson looks at two levels at which Plato seems to operate when reflecting on how far up the ladder of rule women can rise in a more or less ideal society, what he calls Revolutionary Plato, on the one hand, and Plato the traditionalist, on the other hand. Revolutionary Plato is said to be in full stride in the *Republic*, where a small number of women of appropriate pedigree and education is considered to be as fit as a small number of men of appropriate pedigree and education to serve as philosopher-rulers. By contrast, in the *Statesman* women are no longer thought to be potential rulers. Since the paradigmatic good society depicted in the *Statesman*, rulers will be men only. In the *Laws*, Revolutionary Plato proposes an equal education for both male and female citizens (*Leg.* 805e), but Plato the Traditionalist breaks the surface again by stating that women’s nature is inferior to men’s (*Leg.* 781b2), so that they cannot be entrusted with political power. Just like the theory of Forms and the tripartition

of the souls, so is a leadership role of women dismissed in the *Statesman*.

The fifth part of the volume connects the statesman to the sophist. In her engaging paper, Palumbo explores Plato's "mimetic art of visual writing" (p. 209) – a topic to which she has dedicated articles as well as monographs – with reference to the *Statesman*. Palumbo unfolds the mimetic operations that ensure the readers' participation, such as the identification with the characters on-stage, their stances and their mistakes, and the mimetic devices such as similes, which create visualization. This is the case for the explanation of Young Socrates' mistake by means of the "visual term" *oion*; the paradigmatic instance of visual representation construed with words is the myth. In dealing with its mimetic elements, Palumbo shows their connection to the *Sophist*, where preserving the proportion of the model is said to be the key feature of faithful representation. Besides the myth, Palumbo calls attention to other paradigms that the dialogue contains and especially to the paradigm of weaving, which is full of explicit references to Plato's dramatic and mimetic writing. The paper closes on a note about the true rivals of Platonic imitation, those who counterfeit and enchant by means of words, and are therefore the greatest of all sophists (303c). It is precisely the difficulty of separating the statesman from the chorus of the sophists that Candiotta addresses in the second and last paper of the volume's fifth part. She focuses on the final definition of the statesman, where the interlocutors aim to set the true rulers apart from a number of rivals and, among them, the chorus of the sophists, who are described with features typically ascribed to Socrates. Just like their separation from the philosopher, the separation between statesmen and sophists is particularly difficult, not least because sophists are at work in poli-

tics too. Just like philosophers, then, sophists use rhetoric. For Candiotta, however, the main reasons for this difficult distinction are Socrates' and the sophists' *atopia*. Due to their diametrically opposed *atopia*, both the chorus of the sophists, which comprise a multitude of subjects of chameleon-like nature and mimetic power, and Socrates are difficult to catch and set apart from the statesman. Candiotta argues that Plato's solution to this difficulty lies in the cathartic function of separation – a catharsis "as in the definition of the noble art of sophistry in the *Sophist*" (p. 242). Just like gold needs to be purified from other elements (*Polit.* 303d), so it is necessary to purify rhetoric in order to make it subservient to statesmanship. By purifying rhetoric, Plato also purifies the image of Socrates, thus setting him apart from the sophists.

The single paper included in the sixth and last section of the volume is dedicated to the tension between law and wisdom in the *Statesman* and defends the primacy of the laws. Starting by the contrast between being and appearance, Peixoto aims to show how the primacy of wisdom over laws defended by the Stranger is established. In particular, she argues that the true rulers actually possess political science and are to be distinguished from those who merely seem to possess it. In a correct form of government, those who rule possess political science and can therefore dispense with the laws. For it is best if the foundation of the good government lies in the wisdom of the wise, rather than in the strength of the laws (*Polit.* 294a), which can hardly deal with the unstable character of human affairs. However, the recourse to laws is justified, since the acquisition of political science, which involves knowledge of *metron* and *kairos*, remains inaccessible or extraneous to the majority of people. For those who possess

political science laws are disposable, whereas for the others laws (and its obedience) are the only possible means of subsisting.

The three papers of the last part of the volume address the astonishing claim reached by the end of the dialogue, namely that political art needs to weave together two virtues that are explicitly said to be in contrast with each other (307c). Giorgini starts by pointing out that the opposition of *andreia* and *sôphrosynê* is incompatible with the Socratic conception of the unity of virtue. For Giorgini, Plato in the *Statesman* has realized that the unity of virtues is not a natural product, but something created by the ruler-educator, who is supposed to be the living example of a well-balanced human being who has knowledge of Due measure and of the art of mastering time. To create political unity and concord, which remains Plato's main concern, the statesman resorts to a divine bond, namely education, which is conceived as a transformation of the soul that leads to correct opinion with assuredness about the most important things, and to a human bond, namely a matrimonial policy aimed at coupling citizens endowed with the opposite virtues. Giorgini shows that the notion of divine and human bonds is, in spite of certain differences, already at work in the *Republic* and will also make an appearance in the *Laws*. In her contribution, Bossi addresses two *prima facie* incompatible theses: on the one hand, the thesis of the involvement of all virtues in wisdom, according to which having wisdom means to have all virtues, and, on the other hand, the thesis of the non-involvement of wisdom, according to which a person who has one virtue may lack the others. Since the latter thesis is defended in the *Statesman*, does the former then need to be abandoned? Bossi holds that the thesis of the involvement defended in the *Protagoras* (where genuine virtues are conceived to be essentially wisdom) and the *Pha-*

edo (where virtue is united with wisdom) is not abandoned in the *Statesman* and turns out to be compatible with the thesis of non-involvement. She defends this view by arguing that the true statesman has reached the level of philosophical wisdom which implies all genuine virtues, while the others, who display only an inborn disposition toward virtues, instantiate the non-involvement of wisdom. In the closing paper, Rowe begins by investigating the sort of *andreia* and *sôphrosynê* that the statesman is supposed to interweave. He argues that they refer neither to inborn traits nor to fully developed virtue, but to something in-between. Each allows for mixing with the other, but both are still incomplete and that is why the guidance of the kingly weaver is needed. To the question as to why these two types of *andreia* and *sôphrosynê* preoccupy the royal weaver, Rowe provides an answer that goes beyond the influence of the cultural context. For Rowe, the equal status of *andreia* and *sôphrosynê* signals the abandonment of the key role of *andreia*, the identifying feature of the warrior-class in the *Republic*, which now needs to be mingled with its counterpart. Even if the city of the *Statesman* looks very different from Callipolis, Rowe stresses that Plato's main political dialogues offer what is recognizably the same "truest constitution" considered from different perspectives. In this sense, he takes the *Statesman* to frame the problem of the conflict between the moderate and the courageous in terms of (p. 326).

Overall, this is a volume of great interest to anyone who wishes to unravel one or several of the many threads which constitute the fabric of the *Statesman*. Despite (or precisely because of) their different approaches, the contributions mirror the multifaceted nature of the dialogue. By taking into account other Platonic dialogues as well, the contributions build a tight net of internal cross-references, which encourage us

readers to move back and forth – just like we do in reading the dialogue itself, where the problematic relation of laws and political science goes beyond being a merely political issue, and the paradigms are much more than mere illustrations of methodological issues. However, if there is one thing that would have made an already rich volume even richer, it would be a closer consideration of the so-called Method(s) of Collection and Division employed in the search for the statesman. The topic is obviously in the background of White’s reflections as well as of El Murr’s essay about the first divisions that open the dialogue, and almost all contributions tackle the Method in a more or less indirect way. Its explicit treatment would have added yet another thread to the already strongly intertwined fabric that the volume is made of.

Endnotes

- 1 C. Rowe (ed.), *Reading the Statesman*, Proceedings of the III Symposium Platonicum, Sankt Augustin, Academia Verlag, 1995.
- 2 This volume, which was published in 2013, was also edited by B. Bossi and T. M. Robinson.
- 3 In the volume edited by Rowe in 1995, Ferber speaks of a “propädeutische Lektüre” of the *Statesman*.
- 4 Whether the non-practical status of the political science, as presented at the beginning of the dialogue, is inconsistent with its production, which is described in terms of interweaving at the end of the dialogue, is a question which El Murr addresses in his excellent monograph, which is dedicated entirely to the kind of knowledge which Plato attributes to the statesman in the eponymous dialogue. D. El Murr, *Savoir et gouverner. Essai sur la science politique platonicienne*, Vrin, Paris, 2014.
- 5 This was also the case in the volume edited by Rowe in 1995, thus confirming that the myth of the *Statesman* has not only a reception-history, but also, as Lane observed, a vast literature of its own. See M. Lane, *Method and Politics in Plato’s Statesman*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, 9.
- 6 D. White, *Myth, Metaphysics and Dialectic in Plato’s Statesman*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007.
- 7 See the vast list in the Bibliography (p. 334).

