

**PLATO VERSUS PROTAGORAS:
THE *STATESMAN*, THE *THEAETETUS*,
AND THE *SOPHIST***

CHRISTOPHER J. ROWE

Abstract

The Statesman is nowadays generally read either on its own, or with Republic and Laws. But more attention needs to be given to the fact that it is designed as part of a trilogy, alongside Theaetetus and Sophist. Reinstating the dialogue in this context gives a fuller perspective on its purposes. The Statesman (1) identifies existing so-called «statesmen», for whom the Protagoras of Theaetetus is chief apologist, as the greatest exemplars of sophistry as defined in Sophist: mere «imitators» and dealers in falsehood; (2) offers the Platonic alternative to the Protagorean vision of human life and organization sketched in the first part of Theaetetus; and (3), in common with Sophist, illustrates –after the apparent failures of Theaetetus– both what knowledge is and how it can be acquired. Finally, and controversially, the Statesman emerges, along with Theaetetus and Sophist, as part of one and the same project as the Republic.

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The *Statesman* has in the modern period typically been read either on its own, or in company (more usually, as contrasting) with the *Republic* and the *Laws*. This is a strange state of affairs, given that the dialogue is marked as the third in a trilogy,¹ of which the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* form the first two parts – both themselves often read in separation from the *Statesman* (and indeed from each other). This is partly because the *Statesman* tends to be of relatively little interest to the sort of philosophical readers for whom, if they have any interest in Plato at all, the reading of the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* is practically *de rigueur*; partly also because of the habit of modern readers² of lifting particular passages or arguments out of their original context. Both the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* contain ideas that appear to resonate loudly with modern philosophical concerns, and the fact that Plato is saying such things comes to matter more than (and so to drown out) the question *how* he came to be saying them. While the treatment of falsehood in the *Sophist* – following the unsuccessful treatment of the same topic in the *Theaetetus* – grows out of an extended series of attempts to give an account of the true sophist, it can easily be separated from its context, and regularly is; few modern readers are interested in the subject of the sophist, and even fewer in the

¹ Or an (unfinished) quartet, if we suppose that the beginning of the *Sophist* announces a *Philosopher* to go with the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*; I shall have nothing directly to say in the present paper about the issues involved here. That *Theaetetus* and *Sophist* were designed to be read together is suggested by the fact that *Theaetetus* ends with Socrates saying to those with him «let's meet again tomorrow», while the *Sophist* begins with one of them saying «So here we are again, as agreed yesterday»; the present paper will help confirm that suggestion – which no one, to my knowledge, has seriously questioned, even though few have made much of it beyond noticing a partial overlap in subject-matter (especially on false belief). That *Sophist* and *Statesman* form a pair is a foregone conclusion, insofar as the latter is in effect announced at the outset of the former, and explicitly refers several times back to it – or at any rate, to *a* conversation about the sophist, which may as well be the one supposedly recorded in our *Sophist*. There is some uncertainty as to whether *Sophist* and *Statesman* were actually composed in close succession to the *Theaetetus* (see further below), but clearly sequels to a work do not have to follow it immediately in time to qualify as sequels.

² Like their ancient predecessors, and for similar reasons.

methods being employed to hunt him down, or the twists and turns in their application.³ The *Statesman*, for its part, may well seem to contain little beyond a further application of the same methods to a different subject, though admittedly one of rather more obvious importance than the sophist (i.e., the statesman).

The purpose of the present paper is to consider the consequences, and display the benefits, of reading the *Statesman* in the way it was—in my view—patently designed to be read, as the third dialogue in a series of three.⁴ I shall argue firstly that the *Statesman* identifies all existing (so-called) «statesmen» as mere «imitators» and dealers in falsehood: they are «the greatest sophists among sophists», as defined in the *Sophist*, and the Protagoras of the *Theaetetus* is their chief theoretician. I shall argue, secondly, that the *Statesman* is designed, among other things, to present the Platonic alternative to the Protagorean vision of human life and organization sketched in the first and longest part of *Theaetetus*. Thirdly, I shall propose that Plato intends the *Statesman*, along with the *Sophist* to illustrate the sort of «account» that needs to be added to true belief in order to constitute knowledge, so rescuing the third account of knowledge in the *Theaetetus* from its apparent failure. Finally, and most controversially, I shall argue that the *Statesman* should properly be regarded, along with the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*, as an integral part of a single project that includes the *Republic* itself.

³ Similarly with the *Theaetetus*: certain moments in the dialogue (for example the self-refutation argument used against Protagoras, or the failure of the attempt to find the sort of account that would turn true belief into knowledge) are privileged, and in a way quite reasonably, over attempting to trace the course of the argument of the dialogue as a whole.

⁴ This is not to suggest that individual dialogues ought not or cannot be read in isolation. Indeed it will usually be sensible, even a requirement, that we should try to read any apparently self-standing dialogue on its own before reading it in the light of others; to do otherwise would be as it were to ignore the author's instructions as implied by his writing it *as* self-standing. But in the rare cases where dialogues are clearly marked as forming a series, it seems equally sensible, even required, also to read them as a series.

The statesman as sophist

One of the most striking claims made in the *Statesman* is that existing so-called *politikoi*, i.e., so-called exponents of the expertise of running a city, are no better than sophists, indeed that they are the greatest sophists of all:

So then we must also remove [from the list of true claimants to the title of *politikos*] those who participate in all these constitutions, except for the one based on knowledge, as being, not *politikoi*, but experts in faction; we must say that, as presiding over insubstantial images, on the largest scale, they are themselves of the same sort, and that as the greatest imitators and magicians they turn out to be the greatest sophists among sophists.

Statesman 303b8-c5

It is possible to play down this claim, as John Cooper does:

In fact, a central thesis of the [Eleatic] visitor [the main speaker in the *Statesman*] is that no current city is ruled by ... expert statesmen at all. And since no actual person ruling in a city possesses this knowledge, the best current government could (paradoxically) only be that directed by an imitator—a «sophist», one who as *Sophist* has explained is aware that he does not know the right thing to do, but makes it appear to others that he does; such a government would have good laws and would enforce them, under this «sophist's» direction, but the knowledge of statesmanship itself would only be weakly reflected in these laws and in the «sophist's» behavior— it would not actually reside anywhere in the community.⁵

⁵ Cooper, introducing the translation of the *Statesman* (as it happens, my own) in Cooper 1997.

There is, however, a major difficulty with this. Why, exactly, is this «sophist» supposed to come up with «good laws»? The last move that the Visitor makes in the *Sophist* before he offers the final account of the sophist is to separate off a type who, Theaetetus agrees, is to be categorized as an expert in demagoguery rather than statesmanship, differing from the sophist only insofar as he addresses numbers of people rather than one or a few in private. Now if *this* pseudo-*politikos* is supposed to come up with good imitations of the laws that the real *politikos* would design, then we should have to suppose that his close cousin the sophist will in the Visitor's view manage quite respectably too, despite his lack of knowledge; and any such conclusion would plainly run counter to the spirit of the whole context, insofar as progress towards the final account of the sophist has only been possible thanks to the demonstration of the possibility of false belief. *Falsehood* is what sophists specialize in, according to the Visitor, and their cousins the demagogues too.

Admittedly, not all so-called political experts are demagogues. But all, presumably, have to be able to talk to people in numbers, if not *en masse*; and if the Visitor really does intend to distinguish between demagogues (i.e., democratic politicians) and others, we need to ask (a) where these others will get their superiority from, and (b) why the *Statesman* describes «those who participate in all these constitutions [except the knowledge-based one]» as sophists, not just the democrats/demagogues among them. Cooper could appeal to *Statesman* 302e10-12, which describes the sort of one-man rule that sticks to the laws as best, providing that it is «yoked in good written rules (*grammata*), which we call laws». The sophist-monarch in this case will not himself be making up the rules, just sticking to the ones he has inherited (and pretending that he knows they are good?), as opposed to the tyrant, who pays no attention to established law; aristocracy and oligarchy, and two sorts of democracy, are distinguished on the same basis. The criteria being applied here, i.e., whether a constitution is *ennomos*, abides by its laws, or is *paranomos*, have been introduced in a controversial passage a couple of pages back, which includes a sentence that Cooper and many others have taken as

directly asserting that established laws are (generally speaking?) imitations of the truth: *oukoun mimêmata en an hekastôn tauta an eiê tês alêtheias, ta para tôn eidotôn eis dunamin einai gegrammena* (300c1-3). Cooper translates this as «Well, wouldn't those laws –written with the advice of people who know so far as is possible– be imitations of the truth on each subject?» «Those laws», on Cooper's interpretation, will apparently be the ones just referred to in 300b1-4, as ones «that have been established on the basis of much experiment, with some advisers or other having given advice on each subject in an attractive way, and having persuaded the majority to pass them». In this case, the answer to my question (a) above will presumably be that successful imitations of the truth have been arrived on the basis of a mixture of prior experiment, attractive-seeming advice, and an ability to get things past the relevant majority. One has a right to wonder, however, how such a combination could result even in a «weak reflection» (to adapt Cooper's phrase) of the best. Moreover, in the very same context the Visitor gives a rather different slant to «imitation»: imitating the best is not a matter of getting as close as possible to it (and after all, it remains unknown to everyone except the true, knowledgeable *politikos*), but rather of not pretending to a knowledge one doesn't have, and so not changing the laws as if one had it (300e11-301a4); any attempt to change the laws, as if one knows better than them when in fact one is ignorant will be bad imitation (300d9-e2). The only place in the context where the Visitor is concerned with direct imitation of the truth is when he says that trying to do better than the established laws on the basis of knowledge will «no longer be imitation but that is most truly what it sets out to be» (*ei d'entechnoi, touto ouk estin eti mimêma all'auto to alêthestaton ekeino*, 300e1-2).

This is consistent with a rather different interpretation of the sentence at 300c5-7 from the one offered by Cooper. As I have argued elsewhere,⁶ this sentence does not look back⁷ to c1-3, but rather represents a general

⁶ See especially Rowe 2001.

⁷ Despite the *tauta*: we might have expected *tade*, but there are examples enough in Plato of *houtos* looking forward.

statement, thus: «Well, imitations of the truth of each and every thing would be these, wouldn't they – the things issuing from those who know which have been written down so far as they can be?»⁸ These imitations of the truth – the direct imitations referred to in 300e – naturally enough are, or would be, produced by those who know; and they are «imitations» simply because, as the Visitor has previously argued at length, the insights of the truly wise person can only be captured in writing roughly and in outline (hence «written down so far as they can be»). Every other sort of so-called *politikos*, being ignorant, is limited either to pretending to knowledge («bad imitation») or to imitating a feature of the true imitator, i.e., only changing things on the basis of knowledge («good imitation», which since the imitators in this case have no knowledge will mean no change at all).

This, I propose, is the answer to question (b) above, namely why the *Statesman* describes «those who participate in *all* these constitutions [except the knowledge-based one]», as sophists, not just the democrats/demagogues who might be thought to be singled out as the direct counterpart of the sophist proper at the end of the *Sophist*. *All* are sophists because all equally lack knowledge, yet all still occupy the place that should properly be occupied by the truly expert, knowledgeable *politikos*. The distinction between «good» and «bad» imitation, i.e., in terms of *ennomia* and *paranomia*, is not relevant in this new context, which focuses exclusively on the presence or absence of knowledge; nor is the distinction between «better» and «worse» forms of rule (by one, by few, or by many), insofar as better and worse were to be judged by how easy or difficult a regime would be to live under. When it comes to the only criterion that matters, *all* existing *politikoi* are to be judged lacking: one either knows or does not know how a city is to be run, and they don't. But they all behave as if they did.

⁸ This is the translation of the sentence actually adopted in my translation in Cooper 1997; the editor adds his own alternative (as cited above) in a footnote.

Cooper claims that the sophist-politician in this context «is aware that he does not know the right thing to do, but makes it appear to others that he does», giving the *Sophist* as the authority for this. But actually the *Sophist* only claims of the sophist that he «strongly suspects and fears that the very things he's presented himself to everybody else as knowing he actually doesn't know» (268a2-4). This must be intended to fall short of «awareness», because if the sophist were to be aware of his ignorance, then according to what the Visitor has said at 229c he would actually lack «the most important and troublesome form of ignorance, ... equal in weight to all its other parts together», i.e., «not knowing something but thinking one does»,⁹ and so would turn out even, perhaps, as «wise» as Socrates (by the standard he sets in the *Apology*). The point of the phrasing in *Sophist* 268a2-4 is to steer a middle course between plain simple-mindedness and true awareness: the sophist is not a naive simpleton; rather he actually sets out to deceive people, even while being ignorant of the things he is trying to deceive them about.

In short, the sophist-politician of the *Statesman* is by no means the benign individual Cooper makes him. In fact he is the very opposite of benign, if we take the description of him as a sophist seriously—and given the repeated and explicit connection of the *Statesman* with the *Sophist*, we have no reason not to take it seriously. He is the wolf that is compared with the Socratic (guard-)dog at *Sophist* 230b-231b; nor does it matter whether he is an *ennomos* ruler—a monarch, an aristocrat or a «good» democrat—or a *paranomos* one. Of course these sophist-politicians do not quite meet the terms of the *Sophist*'s final account of the sophist, in that they do not operate as the sophist does on a one-to-one basis, but the *Sophist* confirms that this is the only difference between them.¹⁰ Even monarchs and the right kind of aristocrats or democrats, even when the

⁹ *Sophist* 229c1-5.

¹⁰ I.e., by making the division by audience (*plêthê* or individuals) at the very last moment.

laws they stick to are «good»,¹¹ are according to *Statesman* 303b-c not to be trusted any more than wolves. That may be surprising. But after all the same passage makes them, as much it does their *paranomoi* counterparts, «experts in faction», *stasiastikoi*, rather than in statesmanship (303c2) – a description they earn, presumably, by virtue of the fact that the only difference between them is whether they are ruled by one ignorant person, a few ignorant people, or many of them. Nor, in general, should it be too surprising to find Plato treating anyone that speaks about subjects on which they are ignorant as if they know about them as representing a threat – especially if that subject is the most important of all, namely about how we should live our lives. This, I suggest, is why he has the Visitor call any politicians other than the true one not just sophists, but «the *greatest* sophists among sophists».

Two visions of statesmanship: Plato and Protagoras

In short, the Visitor's (and Plato's) judgment on any actual *politikoi* is uncompromisingly negative. Compared with the true expert in statesmanship, they come nowhere. As this implies, knowledge about how to run a polis is not an impossible dream. The condition of its realization is that the star-gazers and babblers be given their head, not forcibly prevented from looking for truth, as they would be in the extreme law-governed city imagined in the *Statesman* (297d-299e); a city clearly marked out as a dystopia, in which life would become totally unlivable (299e8-10). The whole context is redolent of Socrates – the Socrates who in the *Gorgias* roundly declared himself the only true statesman alive,¹² on the basis that no one else either recognized the proper goal of

¹¹ It is not, I take it, being implied that these monarchies, aristocracies and democracies will *necessarily* have good laws (once again it would be a mystery where these would come from). The Visitor is simply adding the condition that they will be easier to live under *if* they have good laws; not to have added it would have obscured his main point, about the difference between good and bad imitation. («Living under a monarchy that sticks to existing legislation is easier than living under a tyranny.» Objection: what if the existing legislation was tyrannical?)

¹² *Gorgias* 521d-e.

politikê, or worked for it: namely, the betterment of the citizens' souls, and so of their lives.

This is the view of statesmanship that is resoundingly endorsed in the *Statesman*, which thereby constitutes the perfect foil to the Protagorean position contested in the first and longest part of the *Theaetetus*. Looked at from the perspective of the *Statesman*, Protagoras becomes the spokesman for existing politicians of all shapes and sizes, and provides the theoretical foundation for their practice. As Socrates has him say at *Theaetetus* 167a7-d2:

Nobody ever made anyone with false beliefs about anything go on to have true ones; for it's impossible for anyone to believe either things that are not, or things that go against what he is currently experiencing, which is in every case true. What I think *can* be done is to make someone who has a soul in unsound condition, and believes things akin to that condition, come to believe different and sound things with a soul in correspondingly sound condition—things, that is, appearances, that some people, out of inexperience, call true, whereas I myself don't call them in any way truer than the others, but simply better ... I claim ... that wise and good public speakers are those that make sound things seem to cities to be just in place of unsound ones. Because whatever sorts of things seem to each city to be just and fine, these I claim are so for that city, for so long as it thinks them so; but the wise person in each case makes sound things be for and seem to the citizens instead of things that are unsound. The same argument applies to the sophist too: it is his ability to educate his pupils in this way that makes him both wise and worth a great deal of money to those he has educated.

In that other dialogue, *Protagoras*, where Plato gives Protagoras a voice, he is presented as claiming to be both a sophist and a teacher of

political expertise.¹³ Here in the *Theaetetus* Protagoras is made to spell out the basis of his own expertise, namely the claim to be able to substitute «sound» (*chrêsta*) thoughts in people in place of «unsound» ones (*ponêra*). So here is a self-confessed sophist¹⁴ directly and explicitly making a claim to wisdom, in the context of a theory (his own) which will allow different cities to have differing views about what is truly just and fine. It seems he will by his own account be able to operate in any city, whatever the regime in power.

To this the Socrates of the *Theaetetus* already offers an answer: it may be claimed that

whatever a city decides on and lays down as just *is*, incontrovertibly, just for the city that has laid it down as such, and for as long as she continues to do so; but no one ... will be brave enough to go on to make the same claim in relation to what is *good*, and brazenly insist that whatever a city lays down as beneficial for herself, because it thinks it so, is actually beneficial for as long as she so lays it down. Someone might of course talk as if it were like that, and use the name «beneficial», but that, I imagine, would be just to make fun of what we're saying ... In fact whatever a city calls it, it is surely what *is* beneficial that she is aiming at when she makes her laws, and she makes every one as beneficial for herself as she can, within the limits of her thinking and of what that allows her to achieve.

Theaetetus 177d1-e7

¹³ «What I teach is sound deliberation, both in domestic matters –how best to manage one's household, and in public affairs– how to realize one's maximum potential for success in political debate and action.» «Am I following what you are saying?» I [Socrates] asked. «You appear to be talking about *politikê technê*, and to be promising to make men good citizens.» «This is exactly what I claim, Socrates.» *Protagoras* 318e-319a.

¹⁴ Though the confession is, of course, imposed on him by Plato, in both *Protagoras* and *Theaetetus*.

This is the goal cities set themselves, Socrates and Theodorus agree, and it is a goal that they will often miss. The Visitor in the *Sophist* then characterizes sophistry in a way that has particular application to the author of a work entitled *Truth* that claims to reveal the truth about absolutely everything (namely, that things are, or are not, as they appear to each person to be). The sophist, the Visitor says, is not only able to speak against on any subject whatever, he can actually *make* anything you care to name (*Sophist* 233e-234a): a description that he does not explain any further, but which fits well enough—at least from a Platonic, realist perspective—with a Protagorean approach to things that allows anyone and everyone’s perceptions of anything and everything to be true: this will mean, after all, that everything is just as Protagoras (or anyone else) sees it as being; it will have come into being in the way it is as a result of Protagoras’ seeing it. The Visitor is of course in the process of offering an account of sophistry as a whole, not just of one version of it, but insofar as he claims that the sophist as a whole kind deals in falsehoods, it is fair enough for him to use the Protagorean approach as the template, and as providing the theoretical basis for, sophistry in general.

That this is what he is doing is, I suggest, confirmed by the fact that Protagoras has been specifically named in the discussion that motivates the *Sophist* passage just discussed (233e-234a): he is one of the experts in antilogic¹⁵ who have written everything anyone needs to be said in order to contradict the experts in any field – including, significantly, «laws, and everything to do with running a city» (233d1-2). The question then is how these experts manage to do what they do, and the answer is that they do it by *making* everything, i.e., by producing homonymous verbal images, *eidôla*, of «the things that are» which dupe gullible young audiences into thinking «that true things are being said, and indeed that the person saying them is the wisest of all about all things» (234c6-7). Sophistic/Protagorean antilogic rests, then, according to the Visitor, on

¹⁵ Theaetetus: «That looks like a reference to Protagoras’ writings about wrestling and other sorts of expertise.» Visitor: «Marvellous! Protagoras’, yes, and plenty of others’ writings too» (232d10-e2).

what might be called the creation of alternative worlds – which on Protagoras' view (or at least the Protagorean view as interpreted in the *Theaetetus*) somehow exist happily side by side. But, says the Visitor, it is all a conjuring trick.

The argument of the *Theaetetus* has refuted Protagoras' «measure» theory, at least to Socrates' satisfaction: human beings are *not* each «a measure of the things that they are, that they are, [or] of the things that are not, that they are not» (Socrates citing Protagoras at 152a);¹⁶ nor is knowledge to be identified with perception, however «perception» has to be construed in order to make the «measure» thesis come out right. But what then *is* knowledge, if not perception? Socrates fails to find an answer that will stand up: there is one that looks more promising than others, namely that knowledge is true belief plus an account, but none of the ways of understanding «account» that present themselves will work. Along the way, he has also failed to find his way out of a series of puzzles about false belief – the sorts of puzzles that a sophist like Protagoras might have used to support his thesis that actually all beliefs are *true*. Thus as the *Theaetetus* ends Socrates may have the upper hand, but Protagoras is still standing, his thesis heavily damaged but not yet defeated; that is, if there is no workable rival account of knowledge on the table, nor any explanation of how belief can be false. Cue the *Sophist*, which introduces a new and more authoritative philosophical voice in the shape of the Eleatic Visitor. The question put at the beginning of the dialogue to the newcomer – whether sophist, political expert and philosopher are all one kind, or two, or three – can be seen as arising directly from the previous day's discussion (i.e., the *Theaetetus*):¹⁷ if Protagoras is right,

¹⁶ The treatment of falsehood in the *Sophist* can itself sometimes sound as if it is directly responding to the Protagorean maxim (as, e.g., at 263b: «... in which case [the true statement] says the things that are not as if they are», b10).

¹⁷ Socrates approaches the question by an independent route, bearing in mind that the Visitor did not hear the previous discussion; but Theodorus and Theaetetus, who did, have coincidentally been putting the same question to him (217b5-7). Dramatic proprieties are thus neatly preserved: the new discussion is at the same time separated from the *Theaetetus* (necessarily, from the Visitor's perspective) and connected with it (from Socrates', Theodorus', Theaetetus', and ours).

then the only expert is himself, the sophist; he has truth and wisdom sewn up, in the political as in every other sphere. The Visitor responds by offering, in succession, what to all appearance are intended as successful accounts of both sophist and *politikos*: the sophist/Protagoras is put in his place, as are those supposed *politikoi* for whom the sophist provides a theoretical front. And in giving those accounts, the Visitor illustrates the sort of account that (I propose) Socrates was looking for to add to true belief in the third, apparently failed, account of knowledge at the end of the *Theaetetus*. The essential ingredient that was missing turns out to be the method of collection and division, which also enables the Visitor to resolve the problem of false belief.¹⁸ The outcome is a pair of demonstrations, in the *Sophist* and then in the *Statesman*, of the philosopher in action, progressing towards knowledge (even if we have no fully developed account of him, of the sort we seemed to be promised), as he successfully describes first the sophist, then the true expert in statesmanship in contrast to his imitator, the sophist-politician.

What is not made explicit is the precise relationship between the philosopher and the true, knowledgeable *politikos*. But it seems hardly likely that real political expertise can come from anywhere but philosophy. Or, more precisely, from research and inquiry: the sort of inquiry that is envisaged as meriting the death penalty in that sketch of a completely law-bound constitution which caricatures the destructive best that cities can do in the absence of knowledge.¹⁹ In this respect the *Statesman* constitutes a definitive restatement of the case against Protagoras. There are such things as knowledge and wisdom, and they amount to a whole world more than any capacity the sophist claims for himself, whether to make «better» and «healthier» things to appear to an audience, or to speak against anyone on any subject. In particular, the *Statesman* wrests

¹⁸ In my view the method of collection and division has been radically misread and underestimated; it involves much, much more than collection into genera and division into species. See the introduction to Rowe forthcoming.

¹⁹ No better, in fact, than the democratic Athens of 399 – a *paranomos* constitution by the *Statesman*'s standards – managed in the case of Socrates (to which the *Statesman*'s caricature unmistakably alludes).

back from him wisdom about the city. He does no more than support the *status quo*, in whatever form it may take, when actually the *status quo* is already no more than a multiple replication of his own conjurer's art. The dialogue also, in its closing pages, reinstates education, rhetoric, judging and generalship as independent areas of knowledge, under the guidance of true, philosophical statesmanship.

The Statesman and the Republic

I have argued elsewhere²⁰ that the first part of the *Theaetetus* –and by implication the other parts of the trilogy, *Sophist* and *Statesman*, too– may have been in part a response to a new version of Protagoreanism that was making its presence felt within the Socratic circle itself; that is, among that large group of people, of widely differing persuasions, who had known and associated with Socrates. The new Protagoreanism, if there was indeed such a thing, would have been the product of the Socratic Aristippus of Cyrene,²¹ with his family and friends. This is not the place to restate my arguments for a thesis which, though relevant to the present topic, is not essential for it. It might nonetheless help explain why, having already devoted one whole dialogue to the long dead Protagoras,²² Plato should not only return to him but have Socrates engage with him in hand-to-hand combat over more than thirty Stephanus pages.

Perhaps it needs no special explanation; after all, the subjects discussed in those pages are ones that would presumably have occupied Plato at any time and in any context. Nevertheless, and even admitting that my thesis of a Protagoras *redivivus*²³ is thoroughly speculative,

²⁰ See Rowe 2015.

²¹ If Aristippus' name is not mentioned, that is consistent with Plato's practice of omitting to name those of whom he particularly disapproves (others are Antisthenes, and the atomists Democritus and Leucippus) – with the exception, in Aristippus' case, of when he wants to insult him personally: see *Phaedo* 59c. The fragments of Aristippus are newly translated into English in Boys-Stones and Rowe 2013.

²² His death is placed *circa* 420, two decades before Socrates' and not long before Plato was born.

²³ Cf. *Theaetetus* 171d, where Socrates imagines Protagoras poking his head above ground to rebuke him.

I propose now to extend the thesis, and to float the idea that the project *Theaetetus-Sophist-Statesman(-Philosopher?)* was designed to guard a flank left thoroughly exposed by the *Republic*. The *Republic* offered a vision of a city guided to happiness by philosophers, on the basis of knowledge. But what if—so I imagine Aristippus to be asking again, *more Protagoreo*—knowledge, as Plato conceives it, is a mere mirage? It is part of Plato's own pitch, after all, that the sort of knowledge he thinks is required will be hard to find, has not yet been found by anyone, and (so I would add) perhaps never will be. What if all that is ultimately available to us, even on the most important subjects, is our individual, or shared, beliefs? The trilogy *Theaetetus-Sophist-Statesman* gives Plato's answer.

The *Theaetetus*, as David Sedley notes, is in some ways difficult to place:

The *Theaetetus* ... is the first dialogue in a trilogy whose other members are the *Sophist* and *Statesman*. No one need doubt that the latter two belong to Plato's late period. The stylistic evidence is quite clear on this. And that fact has sometimes encouraged the impression that the *Theaetetus*, being part of the same trilogy, is itself more closely linked to Plato's late work than to his middle period. Yet the stylometric tests concur in locating it substantially earlier than the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, as part of a group whose other members are the *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, and *Parmenides* – that is, on the usual tripartite division of his work, towards the end of Plato's middle period.²⁴

When a dialogue is said to belong to Plato's «late» period, part of what is intended is likely to be that it lacks reference to «middle-period» metaphysics, which may loosely be defined as form-theory as criticized in the *Parmenides*; and that is not infrequently held to be true of the *Sophist* and *Statesman*. If it is true of them, then my proposal to connect

²⁴ Sedley 2004, 2-3.

them and the *Theaetetus* with the *Republic* will immediately be in trouble. That the *Theaetetus* too is typically regarded as innocent of middle period forms is less of a problem, insofar as one widely accepted view says that the *Theaetetus* deliberately excludes such forms in order to demonstrate that an account of knowledge is impossible without them.²⁵ But if by the time Plato came to complete the trilogy (if we suppose *Sophist* and *Statesman* to have been composed significantly later),²⁶ he had changed his metaphysical position, it would certainly make it hard to contend that the three works were designed, all together, to complement and support the *Republic*, to which middle-period forms, so-called, are fundamental.

My chief response to this apparent difficulty is to say that any conclusion to the effect that there are no *Republic*-style forms in *Sophist*, *Statesman* or *Theaetetus* derives from a misunderstanding of forms in the *Republic*: there are plenty of forms, *eidé* or *ideai* (terms that are used interchangeably with *genos*, «kind») in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*, some too in the *Theaetetus*, and in my view we have no reason to interpret them any differently from their counterparts in the *Republic*.²⁷ True, the *Theaetetus* contains no reference to what Platonists

²⁵ On the basis for this view (associated primarily with Cornford), or the lack of one, see below.

²⁶ There is at least one significant discontinuity between *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*: the former is presented as having been written down by one of the participants in the framing dialogue, Euclides; the *Sophist* is no longer reported dialogue – and what Euclides was supposedly reporting was a conversation between Socrates and Theaetetus, a description that no longer applies to the conversation in the *Sophist*.

²⁷ Other considerations: (1) part of the motivation for separating *Theaetetus* from *Republic* derives from the presence of *Parmenides* among the middle dialogues, along with its fundamental criticisms of the hypothesis of forms. But the *Timaeus* has generally been regarded, and with some justice, as operating with a similar version of form-theory to that criticized in the *Parmenides*; and the *Timaeus* is now, after some controversy, firmly located by the overwhelming majority among the late dialogues. Thus even if (such) forms were totally absent from *Theaetetus-Sophist-Statesman*, which I claim they are not, that would not constitute grounds for refusing a close connection between these three dialogues and the *Republic*. (2) *Theaetetus* is by common consent late-middle, while *Sophist* and *Statesman* generally appear first and second in the list of late dialogues; a sequence *Republic-Theaetetus-Sophist-Statesman* looks, from this point of view, hardly outlandish.

have through the centuries regarded as a key moment in the *Republic*, when Socrates appears to propose, in Book IV, that knowledge is exclusively of forms, belief of particulars; but it is my contention that the *Republic* itself, both within the relevant passage and outside it, demonstrates that Plato never intended any such restriction, at least to the objects of belief (and indeed that it is unclear even that the *objects* of knowledge and belief are what are at issue in the passage in the first place).²⁸ These are admittedly contentious claims, but it seems to me that the textual basis for separating off the metaphysics of *Theaetetus-Sophist-Statesman* from that of the *Republic* is at the very least considerably slimmer than is usually assumed, and insufficient to block the *rapprochement* that I propose between them.

Is there any basis for such a *rapprochement* apart from the speculations offered above (i.e., to the effect that the trilogy is designed to protect the *Republic*'s flank from Protagoreanism, whether original or revived)? I think there is. I refer especially to the end of the *Statesman*, from 304c on, where the Visitor turns –albeit briefly– to a discussion of the role of the statesman, and his directing wisdom. The statesman, he says, will not himself do the teaching or the public speaking; he will not command the military personally, or function as judge, for

What is really kingship must not itself perform practical tasks, but control those with the capacity to perform them, because it knows when it is the right time to begin and set in motion the most important things in cities, and when it is the wrong time; and the others must do what has been prescribed for them ... For this reason, then, the sorts of expertise we have just examined control neither each other nor themselves, but each is concerned with some individual practical activity of its own, and in accordance with the individual nature of the activities in question has

²⁸ See Rowe 2007, ch.6, and the introduction to Rowe forthcoming.

appropriately acquired a name that is individual to it ... Whereas the one that controls all of these, and the laws, and cares for every aspect of things in the city, weaving everything together in the most correct way – this, embracing its capacity with the appellation belonging to the whole [i.e., *politikê*, as deriving from *polis*], we would, it seems, most appropriately call statesmanship.

Statesman 305d1-e6

A constitution governed by statesmanship like this has just been compared to a god among men (it is to be separated off from other so-called constitutions *hoion theos ex anthrôpôn*: 303b4-5). The description is of the perfect application of reason to the city in all its details: the divine counterpart, as it were, of the sort of application of human reason to «things in the city» exemplified in the treatment of gender, and of the conduct of war, in *Republic* V, or indeed in the whole project for the design of the City Beautiful, Callipolis.

The situation facing the imagined perfect exponent of *politikê* in the *Statesman* is, however, quite different from that of the legislators in charge of city-building in the *Republic*. The legislators of the *Republic* are evidently envisaged as taking in all and sundry; the organization of the city into three classes is partly designed in order to keep the third, lowest and most numerous class under control. In the city of the *Statesman*, by contrast, anyone found to be unteachable, and

unable to share in a disposition that is courageous and moderate, and whatever else belongs to the sphere of virtue, but are thrust forcibly away by an evil nature into godlessness, excess and injustice, it throws out by killing them, sending them into exile, and punishing them with the most extreme forms of dishonor ... And again those who wallow in great ignorance and baseness it brings under the yoke of the class of slaves.

Statesman 308e9-309a6

The result of this policy – that of «what we have decided is by nature truly the art of statesmanship» (308d1-2) – is a citizen body composed of people who are *chrêstoi* by nature, and educable in the virtues. But the Visitor says that there are always to be two types among these, which he labels «courageous», *andreioi*, and «moderate», *sôphrones*: the first naturally spirited, quick, sharp, adventurous, prone to action, warlike; the second the opposite of all these things. The statesman's task is to weave these two opposing sets of qualities together, both by inculcating the right beliefs in individual souls and by interbreeding between the two groups.

If we compare this with the organization of Callipolis, we find that the third class of the *Republic*, that of the producers, corresponding to the appetitive part of the soul, has actually been excluded either from the city or from citizenship altogether here in the *Statesman*, while the philosopher-rulers, educated to rule within the city, have given way to an ideal statesman who is no more than the construct of an argument (that is, the argument that leads to the final account of the statesman). What remains, in effect, is the second class of the *Republic*, that of the soldiers, *epikouroi* or «auxiliaries» to the rulers; but with the difference that the *Republic* is concerned only with the need to combine the two «natures», labeled respectively as «spirited» and «philosophical», in the same person, i.e., the *epikouros*: «... our guards», Socrates says, «must have both these natures» (*Rep.* III, 410e5-6), the spirited and the *sôphrôn* (410a9), and in the course of Books II-IV the need for a combination of the two is a recurring theme.²⁹ In the hierarchy of the *Republic*, there will eventually be no room for a separate *sôphrôn* type as in the *Statesman*, moderate, gentle, quiet, considered, although in the context of Book III he is probably for the time being, at least by implication, the best available candidate for

²⁹ See II, 375b-d (*andreia* and *praotês*), III, 399a-c, IV, 416d-e (*andreia* and *sôphrosunê*); see also, e.g., VII, 536a. But III, 410a-411e remains the main passage for comparison with the closing pages of the *Statesman*; interestingly, it also begins by referring, like the *Statesman* passage, to the need to get rid of the incurably bad.

ruling;³⁰ only in Book V will he be replaced by the fully-fledged *philosophos*, the philosopher-ruler corresponding to the true *politikos* of the *Statesman*.

In short, if we allow for differences of context and of starting-point, the structure of the best city of the *Statesman* is recognizably similar to that of Callipolis.

This is an interesting outcome, not least because the *Timaeus* – now almost universally regarded as late, whether predating or post-dating *Sophist* and *Statesman* – offers us what looks for all the world like a new version of Callipolis, shorn of its philosopher-rulers, and dominated by guards with souls that possess «a nature that is simultaneously spirited and outstandingly philosophical, in order that they can be appropriately gentle and harsh [to friends and enemies]» (18a4-7). In other words, the *Timaeus* too, like the *Statesman*, seems to take us back to Book III of the *Republic*, before Socrates makes his stunning, extraordinary claim about the need for philosophical rule. But the city of the *Timaeus* – ancient Athens, the conqueror of Atlantis – was no less governed by wisdom than Callipolis or the city of the *Statesman*; in its case, a wisdom that stemmed directly from the gods.³¹

This is not to suggest that what is being described in the three cases is actually the same constitution. The presence of philosopher-rulers in the *Republic* and their absence from *Statesman*³² and *Timaeus*, not to mention the different treatment of the productive class in the *Statesman*, make any such claim excessive. What can reasonably be said is that in all three cases the same basic elements are present: most fundamentally, the rule of knowledge and wisdom (however this may be expressed); a stress on

³⁰ Socrates asks at 412b-c which of the guards – all of them exhibiting the appropriate mix of courage and *sôphrosunê* – will rule the city; to which the first answer is those who are wise (*phronimoi*) and capable (*dunatoi*) when it comes to guarding the city, and show care for it (412c13-14).

³¹ See (e.g.) *Timaeus* 24c-d.

³² Whose perfect statesman represents the impossible paradigm, by contrast with which the philosopher-rulers are the possible exemplars (if at the very limit of «the possible»).

the need to meld together the more excitable and aggressive with the quieter, more considered elements in individual souls and in society at large; and some sort of solution for those with a purely productive or service role. All three are versions of the same solution – or, to put it in the language used by the Visitor in the *Statesman*, all «chase after the traces of the truest constitution» (301d8-e4).³³ *Statesman*, *Timaieus*, *Republic*: all represent different angles on the same political vision. The philosopher-rulers of the *Republic* loom large in the modern view of Plato. For him, however, they are no more than one theoretically possible answer to the question how a city might ever become the knowledge-based institution it needs to be; an answer, moreover, that is in large part determined by the particular analogy, between city and individual, that dominates the argument of the *Republic*. The *Statesman*, by contrast, along with *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*, focuses on the principle underlying the introduction of philosopher-kings and queens in the first place, namely *that* ruling requires knowledge – real knowledge, that is, as opposed to the «belief-based ‘knowledge’»³⁴ of ordinary, so-called experts in statesmanship, or politician-sophists.

Durham University, United Kingdom

³³ See Rowe 2013, in which I use this context in the *Statesman* for a larger thesis about the relationship between all of Plato’s versions of the best city, including Magnesia in the *Laws*.

³⁴ *Doxastikê ... epistêmê*, *Sophist* 233c10.

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