

**THE REAL NAME OF THE STRANGER**  
**THE MEANING OF PLATO'S STATESMAN**

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American Political Science Association Convention 2013

Eric Voegelin Society

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## THE REAL NAME OF THE STRANGER

### THE MEANING OF PLATO'S STATESMAN

As a political scientist, I am interested in understanding Plato's Statesman and in learning whether it teaches us anything noble and useful about politics. To this end, I shall state a few of my assumptions about how Plato should be read. None of these axioms are original with me but the ways in which I apply them might be novel. For economy's sake, I shall reserve an extended explanation and defense of these suggested rules for another time and place.

(1) In the Seventh Letter, which I take to be genuine rather than forged, Plato declares that he never has written and never will write anything about which he is serious. Plato scholars tend to ignore this warning. They generally analyze Plato's dialogues with a view toward learning his "doctrine of \_\_\_\_." For example, Theaetetus, Sophist, and Statesman are viewed as "Plato's theory of knowledge," "Plato's late ontology," and "Plato's revised political theory." I think that this procedure errs and that the warning should be heeded. Instead of mining the dialogues for doctrines, we must inquire what Plato hopes to accomplish with his writing. Doing so ultimately should inspire meditation on the nature of philosophy, a topic that I shall only touch upon.

(2) The fact that Plato offers no positive doctrines does not mean that his dialogues are pointless. All of them are aporetic, even those like Republic, Symposium, Phaedrus, and Laws that tentatively present inspiring positive insights while expressing doubts and others like Sophist

and Statesman that seem to teach with certainty. That is, these works intend to elaborate the best arguments about various subjects from given premises that human reason can achieve, show the limits of these logical efforts, and thus cause perplexity. Such aporia is meant to propel souls toward wordless visions of the Good and Beauty that afford glimmers of insight into the right order of our lives. Accordingly, the arguments of Plato's characters must be analyzed minutely for full understanding of the extents to which they are right and of the ways in which they fall short, perplexing us. Of course, to avoid the accusation of a priori exegesis, this exercise must remain open to the possibility that my assumptions are wrong and that the arguments are not aporetic at all but, rather, obvious attempts to formulate and demonstrate doctrines.

(3) Competent interpreters of Plato – in our time including Leo Strauss and his students such as Stanley Rosen, Seth Benardete, and Catherine Zuckert – have recognized that Plato has a pedagogical purpose for everything he does in his writing. As Strauss noted, the form of Plato's work is as essential to its meaning as the content of its reasoning. Plato wrote dialogues. These documents are dramas, not treatises. The actions of the plays and the motives and characters of the dramatis personae affect the meanings of their arguments as much as or more than their logic does. Hence, interpretations of the reasoning must be squared with the actions of the dramas and the motives and characters of the actors. Of course, to avoid the charge of a priori exegesis, such reading must remain open to the possibility that my premises are wrong and that Plato's dialogue form is mere arty decoration that has no consequences for the reasoning at all.

If my assumptions are correct, students of Plato have five tasks. They must get the logic of the arguments right. They must determine how the reasoning is valid and invalid. They must get the action of the dramas and the characters of their personae right. They must interpret the logic in the light of these factors. They must let Plato perplex them, thus opening themselves to the visions that Plato expects to result in good souls, at which point they might become conscious of having learned something noble and useful. This paper is restricted to the third of these tasks: it tries to get the action of Statesman and the characters of its personae right.

Statesman – Politikos in Greek – is part of a trilogy: Theaetetus, Sophist, Statesman. The first two dialogues in the trilogy bear upon the meaning of the third, so the three plays must be treated as a single dramatic unit. This observation is incomplete. Politikos actually belongs to a cluster of seven plays centered on the trial and death of Socrates. The series moves in a dramatic chronological circle that both begins and ends with Theaetetus. This dialogue has a main section set in 399 B.C., on the morning of Socrates' arraignment on charges of impiety and corrupting the young, which begins the circle, and a prologue fictitiously set soon after Athenian troops lost a historical battle near Corinth, possibly that of 390 but probably that of 369, in which Theaetetus was fatally wounded, which closes it. The other plays have the following dramatic order and dates: Euthyphro (later on the day of the arraignment); Sophist (the next morning); Statesman (immediately after Sophist); Apology of Socrates (the day of Socrates' trial); Crito (three days before Socrates' execution), and Phaedo (principal part: the day that Socrates dies; prologue: a few months or years after Socrates' death). The circle closes when the prologue of Theaetetus moves from lamentations about the impending death of Theaetetus to memories of

the fateful morning in 399. To understand any dialogue in the array fully, it would be best to analyze all seven together. However, this would be too much to attempt and it still is legitimate to give Theaetetus, Sophist, and Statesman separate attention because Plato presents them as elements of the same subplot, thus distinguishing them as a unified section, a trilogy, within the seven.<sup>1</sup>

Although I shall concentrate on Theaetetus, Sophist, and Politikos, it would be a serious error to miss the relevance that the scheme of the whole series has for the meaning of the trilogy. To get at this, I shall start with a bare bones summary of each story. I shall also note the structure and mode of each work. With respect to structure, two of the plays, Theaetetus and Phaedo, have anamnestic prologues in which the characters recall Socrates' ordeal. The others lack prologues. With regard to mode, in the terminology of Leo Strauss, some of Plato's dramas are "narrated," with a storyteller recalling deeds and discussions that took place in the past, using expressions such as "I went down," "I said," and "he agreed." Others are "performed," meaning that they are composed as if to be acted like stage plays. In these dialogues, designated characters imitate live conversations, such that the texts read, for example: "Theo: According to yesterday's agreement, Socrates, we have come ourselves . . . ." All the dramas under consideration here are performed but Theaetetus and Phaedo have traces of narration that are not found in the others. It probably is significant that the plays that mark the beginning and end of Socrates' agony have anamnestic prologues and traces of narration while those in between do not. Here are my summaries:

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<sup>1</sup>I shall explain below why I do not include an eighth dialogue, Cratylus, in the series.

Theaetetus (anamnestic prologue, performed, with a trace of narration). A short time after the Athenian defeat near Corinth, Eucleides and Terpsion, disciples of Socrates who were present at his death, meet in their native city of Megara. Eucleides reports that he has been with Theaetetus, who is dying of battle wounds and dysentery and is being carried back to Athens. The two observe that Theaetetus has been praised for his courage, bewail his plight, and recall that Socrates had foretold celebrity for him. Terpsion asks Eucleides about his transcription of Socrates' account of a conversation that he had with Theaetetus a little before his death. They enter the home of Eucleides and have a slave read the text. Eucleides remarks that he wrote up the discussion not as Socrates related it but as if Socrates were speaking with others, omitting annoying expressions such as "I said" and "He agreed." He transformed a dialogue narrated by Socrates into a performed one, which is why I argue that Theaetetus has traces of narration even though it is performed. In the book, Socrates visits the school of Theodorus, inquiring whether the illustrious geometer has any Athenian students who show promise in geometry or some other branch of philosophy. Theodorus recommends Theaetetus. Socrates tests the boy by asking him what epistēmē (science or knowledge) is. After a confused start, after interpreting the query as analogous to a geometry problem that he solved with his friend young Socrates, who is standing by, and after eliciting Socrates' claim to be a midwife, the lad defines epistēmē as perception. Socrates ties this account to a doctrine of the sophist Protagoras and criticizes it. Theodorus is dragooned into helping Theaetetus defend Protagoras. In the middle of the dialogue, Socrates engages Theodorus in a discussion about philosophers' troubles in law courts, the differences between philosophers and legal orators, and divine and atheistic patterns of life.

His remarks in this ostensible digression call Protagorean political theory into question.

Socrates then resumes his test of Theaetetus. All told, three definitions of epistēmē are drawn out of Theaetetus and fail to pass muster. The nature of knowledge remains a mystery, partially because Socrates affects to worry that false speech is impossible. At the end of the play, Socrates reports that he now must go to the porch of the king to respond to a lawsuit brought by Meletus. He requests that they all meet again the next morning.

Euthyphro (performed). Socrates happens upon Euthyphro at the porch of the king. Euthyphro is astonished to see Socrates there. Socrates explains that Meletus has indicted him for corrupting the young, creating new gods, and not believing in the old gods. Euthyphro guesses that Socrates' talk about his daimon must have inspired the charge. He complains that he has troubles too. The Athenians ridicule him because he prophesies and voices innovative religious views in the assembly and because he now is zealously prosecuting his father. The father had negligently killed a servant whom he was punishing for murder. Socrates is scandalized. He inquires whether Euthyphro does not fear that prosecuting his father for such a deed is unholy. Euthyphro scoffs that this question betrays ignorance about what the gods hold regarding holiness and unholiness. Socrates proposes to become Euthyphro's pupil in order to learn the truth about piety and impiety. He feigns hope that such re-education will enable him to persuade Meletus to withdraw his suit, on the grounds that better information ensures better behavior. He asks Euthyphro what holiness is. Euthyphro answers that it is what he is doing now, for he is emulating an act of Zeus, who bound his father for devouring his children. Socrates retorts that he is being prosecuted because he does not believe such stories. He pushes

Euthyphro to define holiness essentially. Euthyphro asserts that holiness is what is dear to the gods. However, it is easily established that Homer's deities disagree about what is dear. This difficulty proves insurmountable. For the rest of the dialogue, Euthyphro reasons in circles. When he is shown this, he accuses Socrates of being a Daedalus who sets his words in motion. He begins to depart. Socrates ironically cries that he has not learned doctrines that will save him from Meletus.

If Cratylus belonged to the series that I am considering, it would come next. Catherine Zuckert includes this dialogue in the array because Socrates reports that earlier in the day he spent a long time with Euthyphro and because Cratylus is "linked thematically" to Theaetetus and Sophist.<sup>2</sup> Although the issue might not be terribly important, I disagree with her reasoning. Socrates says at 396d6 that he met Euthyphro eōthen, a word that Liddell and Scott translate as "from morn, at earliest dawn, at break of day." For Zuckert's time line to work, Socrates' talk with Theodorus and Theaetetus would have had to occur in the middle of the night. This would have been a most unlikely time for Theodorus to be holding school. I infer that Cratylus must take place on a date prior to that of Euthyphro and that Socrates is referring to a conversation that he had with Euthyphro at dawn on that other day. I do agree that Plato wishes to link Cratylus thematically with Theaetetus and Sophist. However, I think that Plato intends his use of eōthen to indicate that, while these dialogues are linked thematically, Cratylus is not part of the story of Socrates' trial and execution.

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<sup>2</sup>Catherine H. Zuckert, Plato's Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues, 650-652.



Sophist (performed). Socrates, Theodorus, Theaetetus, and young Socrates meet on the next morning. Theodorus has brought a stranger from Elea whom he introduces as quite a manly philosopher or quite a philosophic man, a follower of Parmenides and Zeno. Socrates asks if the stranger is some god, for Homer says that the gods, especially the god of strangers, go with the reverent and just, observing the hybriatic and lawful deeds of men. Perhaps the stranger is a god come to refute them because they are worthless in logos. Theodorus denies that the stranger is either a god or contentious but he maintains that the stranger is divine qua philosopher. Socrates answers that philosophers are as hard to recognize as gods. He explains that real philosophers, as opposed to pretended ones, phantazomenoi dia tēn allōn agnoian epistrōphōsi polēas. Fowler, in the Loeb edition, translates this as “appear disguised in all sorts of shapes thanks to the ignorance of the rest of mankind.” Cornford, in the Hamilton-Cairns collection, has “appear, owing to the world’s blindness, to wear all sorts of shapes.” Nicholas White, in the Cooper anthology, writes “take on all sorts of different appearances just because of other people’s ignorance.” I think that Fowler’s translation is wrong and that it must yield to one of the others. Although the middle participle suggests that the philosophers as engaging in reflexive action, disguising themselves, Plato’s use of dia plus the accusative agnoian suggests that the participle is passive, making the ignorance of others the active agent of the appearing. As Mitchell Miller explains, the sense of the passage is that the ignorant many project appearances onto the real philosophers.<sup>3</sup> In a tale about Socrates, who presumably is a real philosopher, it clearly makes a tremendous difference whether the real philosophers react to the ignorance of the many by disguising themselves or the many ignorantly perceive them in certain

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<sup>3</sup>Mitchell H. Miller Jr., The Philosopher in Plato’s Statesman, 9.

ways and project those appearances onto them. I think that we get Socrates' story right by hearing him make the latter claim, not the former.

Socrates continues by noting that the real philosophers appear in their various shapes to be visiting cities beholding from on high the lives of those below. Sometimes they appear as politikoi (the plural of politikos) and at other times as sophists or as completely mad. We have another translation problem here, one regarding politikoi. Fowler, together with many others, has the genuine philosophers appearing (disguised) as “statesmen.” This is a possible translation of politikoi, depending on the context in which the word appears. In the dialogue Politikos, the title of which traditionally is translated as Statesman, the Eleatic stranger clearly intends politikos to convey what modern Americans understand by “statesman” – someone wholly admirable. When the stranger uses the word, it definitely should be translated as “statesman.” However, in Plato, politikos is not always such an honorific. A glance at Brandwood's concordance<sup>4</sup> reveals some twenty occasions on which politikos means “politician” in one pejorative sense or another.<sup>5</sup> (To cite just one case, at Republic 489c4 Socrates applies politikoi to the present archons of Athens, likening them to the seditious sailors in his image of the ship who are not helmsmen in any true sense.) This makes it necessary to justify translating politikoi as “statesmen” in the

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<sup>4</sup>Leonard Brandwood, A Word Index to Plato.

<sup>5</sup>Examples are Gorgias 473e6, 484e1, 452e4, 513b8, 519b4, 519e2; Phaedrus 248d5, 257c5, 257e2, 258e1; Republic 426d5, 489c4, Meno 99d2, 100a1, Apology 21c4, 22a8, 22c8, 241a1; Euthyphro 2c8; Laws 693a6

comment by Socrates that is under consideration. No one ever undertakes a defense of this common practice.

I think that an examination of the context shows that the practice is indefensible and that Fowler's translation is wrong. The business about philosophers judging ordinary people from on high is a reference to Aristophanes' portrait of Socrates as a sophist in Clouds. That is, Socrates means that the ignorant many perceive real philosophers as snobs who look down their noses on the lives of ordinary men. It is another case of the ignorant many projecting that perception of Socrates onto him, a picture that he abjures in Apology. Given that the projection of negative perceptions is the subject of the passage up to here, it seems to follow that Socrates' next words mean that the philosophers are seen by the ignorant many as "(unsavory) politicians, sophists, and madmen," with three consistent pejoratives instead of an unintelligible mixture of a positive with negatives. Translating Socrates' remark this way also appears to be justified by the fact that it would not make sense for philosophers worried about the ignorant many to disguise themselves either as statesmen or as politicians, let alone as sophists and madmen, all of whom are regular targets of popular hatred, whereas ignorant perceptions of the philosophers presumably would be uniformly negative. There is the further point that Socrates could not "disguise" himself as a statesman, for real philosophers are statesmen in his understanding of the terms. Therefore, I believe that to get our story right we must acknowledge that Socrates has said that owing to the ignorance of others, the real philosophers appear [are perceived] as presumptuous snobs and also variously as (unsavory) politicians, sophists, and madmen. Sometimes, he adds, the people who appear in those ways are valued highly (one thinks of Protagoras, the darling of the aristocrats) but at other times they are viewed as worthless (one

thinks of Aristophanes' ridicule of Socrates). Socrates concludes by declaring that he would like to ask the stranger about sophist, politikos, philosopher. Do the names denote one kind (genos), two, or three?

The stranger agrees to discuss the matter and asserts that the names refer to three different types. Theodorus is struck by the coincidence that he and his party happen to have been putting a similar question to the stranger on their way to the meeting. The stranger gave no reply but said that he has heard the topic analyzed thoroughly and has not forgotten what he heard. Socrates renews his request. He asks whether the stranger wishes to proceed by means of long speeches or dialogue. The stranger prefers long speeches but opts for dialogue if he can have a respondent who gives no trouble. Theaetetus is drafted as interlocutor. The stranger evidently has found him acceptably tractable. The boy's docility is not necessarily an intellectual virtue.

The stranger decides to begin with the sophist. He says that he and Theaetetus must search and clarify by argument (logō) "what sort he is" (ti pot' esti, 218b7-c1). The stranger stresses that they are starting with the name "sophist" and that they must come to agreement about the thing itself dia logōn (by argument). He warns that the sophists are a hard tribe to catch and asserts that they must be hunted. To teach Theaetetus how the hunt must be conducted, he proposes an example, that of the angler. This fisherman will be hunted by means of diairesis (division of classes into two parts or halves by cutting through middles, followed by a summing collection that is not declared a part of the method, 234e). Surprisingly, the hunt begins with a definition of the angler, as if the stranger already knows what he is supposed to be

seeking. The angler is defined as a technitēn, a man who possesses and practices a technē. He is also defined as a man who acquires prey by secret hunting (and, hence, as a relative of the stranger). The definition is fleshed out by dividing technē into two parts of itself, by cutting one of the resulting classes again, by dividing one of the resulting classes again, and so on. The process posits several distinctions between angling and other types of artisan practicing-acquiring-hunting, adding “not this but that” qualifications to its definition. It continues until the angler has been hemmed in by the categories from which he has been excluded and confined with his list of phenomenal differences to a set that he occupies alone. The stranger likens this exercise to snaring the prey in a net of word devices (235b).

Having given his illustration, the stranger says that he has been surprised by an insight. The sophist, like the angler (and himself) is a hunter who has a characteristic technē. Now the hunters are hunting a hunter, striving to throw nets of verbal categories over him and his art. The stranger leads Theaetetus through some divisions, the number of which is unclear: these cuts occur too vaguely to be countable. Six seemingly diverse definitions of the sophist are adduced. The stranger arbitrarily chooses one of them as the best: the sophist is a disputatious image maker who paints word pictures of things that are not. A major obstacle to accepting this conclusion is Socrates’ ostensible doubt in Theaetetus that false speech is possible, a problem that seems to involve the being of non-being. This paradox is investigated so extensively that Sophist is often interpreted as Plato’s ultimate metaphysics. The being of nonbeing is affirmed by a logical consideration of being, motion, rest, sameness, and otherness, an argument that eschews diairesis while defining being as dynamis (power) and/or a divine whole and nonbeing

as otherness. Having concluded that we can speak intelligibly about the being of non-being, the stranger resumes his dividing. He ultimately classifies the sophist as a contentious maker of images of things that are not. He proclaims his own account most true. Socrates has been silent during the proceedings. As a trafficker in refutations who seems to hide behind doubts about the possibility of falsehood and who has other sophistical traits defined by the stranger, he has been made to look like a sophist. (This is a point noticed by many others. I shall have to demonstrate it fully in a subsequent analysis of the arguments.) Theaetetus accepts the analysis.

Statesman (performed). Socrates thanks Theodorus for having introduced him to Theaetetus and the stranger. Theodorus answers that Socrates will be three times as grateful when the politikos and philosopher have been defined too. Socrates rejoins that this reckoning cannot be right because it values sophist, politikos, and philosopher equally. The chagrined Theodorus confesses the mistake. He vows to get even with Socrates later and he implores the stranger to continue. The stranger suggests that Theaetetus should be relieved as interlocutor by young Socrates. Socrates agrees, for Theaetetus looks like him, young Socrates has the same name, and he ought to get to know both of his “kin.” Here, it is pertinent to notice that, in Gorgias (521d), Socrates claims to be the only Athenian of his day who practices “the true technē of politics” (alēthōs politikē technē). If he is right, this means that a boy who bears the name of Socrates (young Socrates) and a lad who is the image of Socrates (Theaetetus) are being used by a man who, as it were, incarnates logos to distinguish the sophist from the genuine statesman. Personified name, image, and logos are striving for understanding of both the sophist and the real politikos present in their midst. If we heed Plato’s warnings in the Seventh Letter that name, image, logos, and their science are naturally defective, and that the weakness of logos prevents it

from grasping essence, we might anticipate that Sophist and Statesman will misapprehend the natures of the sophist and the true politikos. The attribution of sophistry to Socrates in Sophist seems to begin to realize this expectation.

The stranger asks young Socrates whether the politikos should be ranked among those who have an epistēmē. The answer is yes, so this figure will have to be described in terms of the nature of his science. The stranger inquires whether the sciences should be cut in the same way as when they were examining the sophist. Young Socrates is unsure. The stranger unexpectedly replies that there must be a different division and that they must compel the soul to conceive of all sciences as falling into two classes. However, bifurcation soon gives way to several new methods that we shall have to mark: poiēsis (myth making), paradigm construction, identification of means between excess and defect, and diairesis that divides by joints, trying to cut as close to two parts as possible.

Beginning by dividing the sciences into the theoretical (gnōstikēn) and practical (praktikēn), the stranger appears to use the old diairesis to lead young Socrates to a view of the politikos as a keeper of herds of piggish, featherless bipeds. Then he worries that many who are not true politikoi claim to be tenders of the herd, contesting the real king's authority. Diairesis as practiced so far cannot settle the issue so the stranger elects to explain the real statesman with a great myth, a tale that he now will tell for the first time. He creates the myth by combining and altering parts of previously existing stories about the changing of the sun's course by Zeus, the golden age of Cronos, and the birth of human beings from the earth.

In the stranger's myth, the cosmos oscillates between times of opposite kinds of governance and motion, eras of Cronos and Zeus. The transitions are periods of massive destruction. During the ages of Cronos, the whole is ruled by the god. The course of life runs opposite to that now: the counterparts of present-day people are born old from the earth and become progressively younger and smaller, finally vanishing. There are no wild animals, carnivores, families, cities, rulers, or wars, for the god takes care of all. Conditions are paradisiacal insofar as the necessities of life are naturally supplied. However, it is not entirely clear that these eras are happily golden in a human way. At the natural conclusions of these times, the god relinquishes control of the cosmos and withdraws together with his subordinate deities. Then come ages of Zeus, during which life follows the course familiar to us. In these eras, there is no divine rule. At first the whole, a living, intelligent being, moves backwards of its own volition, ordering itself by remembering the teachings of its demiurge and father. People initially are helped to survive by gifts left by the absconding gods. However, the cosmos eventually forgets its lessons and the bodily nature of human beings fills them with injustice. The whole falls gradually into disorder. To prevent total catastrophe, the god ultimately resumes his rule. Finishing his story, the stranger does not give the anticipated explanation of the genuine statesman. Instead, he remarks that the myth reveals an error made in the original diairesis, namely, that it described the god of the age of Cronos rather than the statesman of the age of Zeus. The politikos of our era must be understood in terms of his manner of governance.

The stranger returns to diairesis to rectify his mistake but only momentarily. After a few



cuts, he complains that he made his myth too long and used too much of its material, like a bad sculptor. To get proper coloring and explain great things it is necessary to employ paradigm, thus overcoming the problem that our knowledge seems to be dreamlike. The move to paradigm requires a paradigm of paradigm, for which the stranger adduces the example of letters. The preparation accomplished, the stranger introduces weaving as the right paradigm of the politikos and launches upon a diairesis of weaving. Then he frets that young Socrates will think that they have been rambling on at too great a length so he turns to analysis of excess and defect. This leads to identification of the mean between excess and defect as a measure of proper length and of all the arts. Next, ability to discern the mean is declared essential to statesmanship. After announcing that his whole exercise has aimed at making better dialecticians rather than defining the politikos, the stranger returns to the effort to understand this statesman. He switches from diairesis that cuts classes in two to that which divides limb by limb. This leads to the conclusion that statesmanship requires an epistēmē. This criterion is used to crowd out all of the pretenders to the statesman's throne and classify all present politikoi as "the greatest sophists." These non-scientists are denounced as sophists and seditionists. As a political meddler who confesses that he knows nothing, Socrates must fall into this category: the stranger has implied that he is one of the "greatest sophists."<sup>6</sup> This point must be confirmed by later analysis of the arguments.

The statesman finally is defined as a scientific weaver of the brave and the moderate into a friendly unity. His science differs greatly from Socrates' alēthōs politikē technē. "Socrates" praises this. There is a longstanding debate about which Socrates speaks here. I think that it is

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<sup>6</sup>I am not the only one to draw this conclusion. Cf. Zuckert, Plato's Philosophers, 797.

the young Socrates. I offer three reasons for this assumption. Plato probably would have marked a shift from the younger to the elder Socrates if he had intended one, just as he earlier made it clear that young Socrates now was speaking. I also think that keeping young Socrates as the final speaker preserves dramatic symmetry, with boys concluding both Sophist and Statesman. Above all, I doubt that the elder Socrates would praise logic that classed him with the greatest sophists while devising a politikē technē that trivialized his own life's work and a logic that purported to replace the necessarily ever searching love of wisdom with knowledge.

Apology of Socrates (performed). Socrates is on trial for capital offenses. Meletus, Anytus, and Lyco have presented the prosecution's case. We were not there to hear their statements. We arrive on the scene when Socrates begins his defense speech. This apologia includes a cross-examination of Meletus, who is easily rebutted, to no avail. We come to a gap in the proceedings. Then we listen to Socrates' response to the verdict, in which he is expected to propose his penalty. After another lacuna, we hear Socrates' reaction to his death sentence.

Socrates defends himself by replying to two sets of accusers, the longstanding ones and the recent ones, the former being Aristophanes and the masses whom he has influenced and the latter being his present prosecutors. The first attackers have been slandering him for years with charges that he investigates things under the earth and in the heavens and that he also teaches others how to make the weaker argument the stronger, which implies that he is a sophist. These detractors have raised a prejudice against him that he does not believe he can overcome during his short time in the dock. The current prosecutors allege that he corrupts the young, does not believe in the gods of the polis, and makes new gods. Answering both groups, Socrates explains

that, in response to a question from Chaerophon, the Pythia at Delphi proclaimed Socrates the wisest of men. Socrates knew that he was not wise so he was at a loss to understand the oracle. He set out to learn what the god meant. He went to see politikoi, poets, and artisans, expecting to find thinkers wiser than himself. He discovered that these men thought that they knew what they did not know. This revealed that they were less wise than he, for he at least knew that he knew nothing. He concluded that the oracle intended to say that human wisdom, such as it is, is worthless. Meanwhile, he had been required to show his interlocutors that they did not know what they thought they knew, so that they were not wise. This had embarrassed and enraged them. Now Aristophanes' calumnies and the interlocutors' resentments have led to his prosecution on charges of which he is innocent. This misfortune was unavoidable, for he has been demonstrating the vanity of human wisdom to Athenians in obedience to the god's command and his daimon has not stopped him. He is not ashamed that his activities have endangered him, for the only question that a man of merit should consider is whether a contemplated deed is right or wrong. Like Achilles, who knew that he must die if he avenged Patroclus, he accepts his death. If the jury offers to acquit him on the condition that he leave off philosophizing, he will reply that he will never stop. He must obey the deity rather than human beings. This goads the jury into a furious uproar. Socrates says much more that I have omitted. My abbreviated summary will do for now.

When Socrates is convicted, Athenian law expects him to propose a punishment that befits his offense. He suggests that, inasmuch as he only benefitted his fellow citizens by forcing them to examine their lives and strive for wisdom and virtue, he should be awarded

maintenance for life in the prytaneum. This alienates more jurors. When Socrates is informed of his sentence, he says that it is a good thing. Death is either perpetual dreamless sleep, which would be fine, or a transition to another place where he will be received favorably by divine judges and have pleasurable occasion to converse with poets and heroes such as Homer and Odysseus. He is not angry with his killers, for no evil is befalling him. However, his successors and admirers will punish them. He goes to die and the jury to live. Only the god knows which lot is better.

Crito (performed). Crito has slipped silently into Socrates' prison before dawn and has discovered Socrates sleeping peacefully. He is amazed that a condemned man could be so calm. He announces bad news when Socrates awakens. The Athenian ship that takes the annual thank-offering to Delos (a sacrifice in payment for the salvation of Theseus and his comrades from the Minotaur) has arrived at Sunium and will return to Athens today. Thus, Socrates must die tomorrow. Socrates contradicts Crito. He asserts that a woman in white came to him in a dream, telling him that on the third day he will come to fertile Phthia. He will die the day after tomorrow. This moves Crito to beg Socrates to save himself. Crito and other friends can arrange an escape. They would happily bear the financial and political costs. Crito adduces reasons why Socrates should accept their offer and resist the evil being done to him. Socrates declines. He engages Crito in dialectic, forcing him to admit that one should perish rather than do wrong. Then he enters into a dialogue with personified laws of Athens, who contend that it would be wrong of Socrates to destroy them by escaping. Socrates agrees that these laws have done nothing but help him all his life and that he has implicitly contracted to obey them by not

emigrating to another city. Therefore, he has no right to flout them when they demand his death. If he does it, the personified laws of Hades will not receive him kindly. The escape is off.

Phaedo (performed prologue, narrated main body). In the prologue, Echecrates asks Phaedo if he was there when Socrates drank the poison. He wonders too why so many days passed between the trial and the execution, who else attended it, and what Socrates said. Phaedo replies that he was there, that the execution was delayed owing to the legal requirement of ritual purity while the Delos ship was away on its mission, and that fourteen named comrades of Socrates and some others were present. Socrates was happy and was narrating a tale about pain and pleasure. Cebes interrupted by relaying a question from Evenus, who wondered why Socrates was writing poetry. Socrates said that he was reacting to a recurring dream in which he was commanded to practice music. He had always supposed that philosophy is the greatest music but now he was writing poems to be sure. Evenus was to be told this and urged to follow Socrates into death as soon as possible – but not to commit suicide, an impious deed. Simmias and Cebes asked Socrates what he meant by this. As recounted by Phaedo from here on – so that the dialogue becomes a performed narration – there ensued an inquiry into the immortality of the soul, the details of which I shall skip. It is enough to report that the conclusions seemed more plausible than certain. Socrates finished the quest with a myth in which souls purified by philosophy rise after biological death to fair abodes where they exist without bodies. Something like this being true, he said, people should pursue wisdom and virtue in this life and repeat such stories as if they were magic incantations. Socrates then made final dispositions of his affairs and died saying “Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius. Make this

offering and do not forget it.”

This survey of the seven dialogues has been superficial. Still, I think it begins to show that the series tells a coherent story about Socrates, a tale with three simultaneous trajectories. The thesis that the seven dialogues spin this yarn, and that Theaetetus, Sophist, and Statesman constitute a major section of it, would have to be confirmed by rigorous examinations of all the arguments and dramas. Here, pending such later verification, I can offer a preliminary outline of the course that I think the threefold tale takes, concentrating on the trilogy that is my subject and paying minimal attention to the other plays.

The first trajectory that the series seems to trace is Socrates’ descent into death, or what the Germans would call his Untergang (going under). The plays present vignettes associated with steps of Socrates’ ordeal: indictment; arraignment; trial with silencing, vilification, and conviction; death row; execution, and the slaying of the mathematician who was his physical image and for whom he initially had philosophic hopes, which occurs in tandem with the routing of the Athenian army. Theaetetus, Euthyphro, Sophist, and Statesman also link the first events in Socrates’ descent with studies of the most important elements of Greek and Athenian culture: geometric science, Homeric piety, sophistry, and aristocratic political thought. I think that this scheme is so obviously systematic that Plato must have a theoretical purpose for it. There is a *prima facie* obligation to inquire what Plato means to achieve with his plainly visible program of the four dialogues.

My hypothesis, which must be verified by later close examinations of the dialogues, is

that in the first four plays of the series Plato connects incidents in Socrates' Untergang with cultural studies to illuminate the causes of Athens' debacle and Socrates' doom. Theaetetus associates the city's disaster with its rejection of philosophy. As for the murder of Socrates, Plato knows that it resulted from the hatred generated by Aristophanes and from the anger of powerful people who were embarrassed by being made to look like fools. However, these were proximate causes. They could not have had their fatal consequences if the Athenian culture had not been thoroughly anti-philosophical, so that the charges against Socrates could resonate with jurors and incite them to kill him. The four dramas explore the scientific, religious, sophistical, and political reasons why Socrates had to die, perhaps along with philosophy itself. They do this by creating a fictitious history in which fundamental Athenian assumptions are examined and exposed as inimical to philosophy, deadly to Socrates, and erroneous, so that the cultural hostility to Socrates has been unjust. Here is a synopsis of the history that I think the plays present:

At the beginning of Theaetetus, Socrates already suspects that his death is imminent. He plainly wants to prolong the existence of philosophy by recruiting one more promising boy to his way of life. He goes to Theodorus's school because geometry is the technē closest to philosophy. An excellent student there could be the right lad, one who could be given a start and bequeathed to Plato or Ctesippus for further, long-term education. However, if such a boy exists, there are also factors in Greek geometric science that would militate against his conversion to philosophy and dispose him to condemn and resist Socrates personally. To wit:

Geometry begins with axioms suggested by inspections of drawings (example: parallel

lines never intersect). Employing names, definitions, images, measurements, and calculations, it reasons from these premises to results touted as science. Founded and built up as it is, it equates knowledge with perception and its implications. Theaetetus believes that something perceived is something known. However, this notion is incomplete at best and almost wholly false at worst. What is more troubling, the boy's teacher, Theodorus, was a friend of the sophist Protagoras and has been mixing his teaching of geometry with transmission of the sophist's notion of truth. This combination extends the equation of knowledge with perception beyond geometric figures and numbers to all being. Not only are perceptions of things like the behavior of parallel lines and commensurable numbers treated as certain knowledge but perceptions of all natures, all physical qualities, all virtues and vices, and all characters and actions of persons are thought infallible as well. Greek geometric science thus supports the tendency of the many to assume the inerrancy of perception, with lethal consequences for people perceived as threats. Pursuant to his fictitious purpose (and Plato's analytic aim), Socrates therefore must try to show Theaetetus that his diet of pure, good geometry and Theodorus's adulterated, sophistical, Protagorean version of it fails to attain to fully adequate cognition, stifles philosophic growth, and unjustly endangers men seen as dangerous. Accordingly, Socrates does two things. He criticizes Theaetetus's Protagorean idea of knowledge. In the middle of the dialogue, in an excursus that many mistakenly interpret as a digression, he also attacks its political implications. The epistemological critique requires careful thought that gives the geometric understanding of science and Protagoras's extension of it to everything a fair hearing, allowing them to erect every possible defense, before rejecting them. This exercise does not demand a positive epistemology and Plato makes no effort to supply one. To the extent that the dialogue is an epistemological



study, it has only a negative aim: it seeks to demonstrate that while Athenian science is partially to blame for the death of Socrates and the smothering of philosophy, it cannot justify its claim to be epistēmē because it has no idea what knowledge is. With regard to that issue, the dialogue is professedly aporetic.

Socrates makes progress with Theaetetus, inducing him to recognize that he does not know. This encourages Socrates to request the meeting on the next day. However, Socrates has shown Theodorus up in front of his students. Theodorus has been truculent, giving off visible signs of feeling humiliated, deeply offended on behalf of his friend Protagoras, and grievously angered. In his pique, he has compared Socrates with mythical murderers and robbers.

Socrates proceeds to the king archon's office, where he must reply to the charge of impiety. As he will say later in Apology (35d), he believes in gods more than any of his accusers do. As we have noticed in Euthyphro, he also assumes that he is being prosecuted because he rejects unseemly stories about wars of the gods. He is truly pious. In the legal precinct, he meets Euthyphro, a man whose motive for indicting his righteous father, that he must piously imitate Zeus, is scandalously impious. Meletus is a man much like Euthyphro. He has impiously accused the pious Socrates of capital crimes because Socrates disdains the mythical blasphemies. The fact that monsters such as Euthyphro and Meletus can prosecute pious men while Socrates will be tried demonstrates that Athenians see their well-being as dependent on the pleasure of malevolent gods and view philosophic holiness as a threat that must be quashed. Socrates must expect death from Homeric believers. This is not to argue that Plato has

diagnosed a principled dispute between poetry, religion, and faith on one side and philosophy on the other. Rather, his portrait of Socrates indicates that a wondering openness to divine reality unites with philosophy in opposition to corrupted religiosity, which is marked by dogmatic literalism (fundamentalism), power lust, and murderous paranoia. Some scholars construe Socrates' professions of wondering faith and piety as exoteric pretense. Right or wrong, their thesis distracts us from Plato's portrait of the evil of libido dominandi in religion.

Confronted by crowds of aggressive, paranoid fundamentalists, Socrates cannot expect to prolong the existence of philosophy by converting many. He goes to the next day's meeting with Theodorus and his pupils hoping to make Theaetetus more philosophic. However, just as Anytus was angered by Socrates' criticisms of Themistocles and Pericles (Meno 93b-94e), Theodorus was upset by his critique of Protagoras and his science. When Socrates observes that Theodorus has the Eleatic stranger in tow, he correctly suspects that the geometer has brought the newcomer along to refute him. Indeed, as scholars in the tradition of Leo Strauss have noticed, Theodorus has brought the stranger to prosecute Socrates in a philosophic trial.<sup>7</sup> Just as Anytus will push Meletus forward as the lead prosecutor in the criminal law suit against Socrates, hoping to kill him to terminate his contact with the young, Theodorus now trots out the stranger to annihilate Socrates philosophically, hoping to abort his education of Theaetetus. Sophist and Statesman will mime the political prosecution of Socrates, convicting him of essentially the same charges that will be brought in his real trial, that he is a sophist who corrupts the young.

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<sup>7</sup>For example, Stanley Rosen, Plato's Sophist, 23-24; Jacob Howland, The Paradox of Political Philosophy: Socrates' Philosophic Trial.

Socrates will be silent in these dialogues not because his replacement as protagonist by the stranger symbolizes some momentous change in Plato's thought but because defendants in law suits must be silent when the cases for the prosecution are being presented.

To prevent my analysis from going astray, I need to check myself at this point and make sure that I have a correct understanding of who or what the Eleatic stranger is, how he is treating Socrates, and the propriety of that treatment. Scholarly opinions about these matters are wildly disparate. Although Kenneth Sayre knows of the importance of Platonic drama, he seems to join analytic philosophers in ignoring it here. He argues in various essays that the stranger represents Plato's philosophic development. That is, the stranger is a better trained, more powerful thinker than Socrates, who must be retired as the discussion leader of the dialogues because all he knows how to do is refute and he is incapable of leading anybody to the higher analytic logic of Forms that Plato now has recognized as the real work of philosophy.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps Sayre and the analytic philosophers would say that I simply am thinking about the wrong things. Mitchell Miller, on the other hand, always heeds implications of Plato's drama on principle. He agrees that Sophist and Statesman are philosophic versions of the trial of Socrates. However, he believes that Socrates is "amongst friends" in the trilogy, that Theodorus's reactions to Socrates are "cheerful" rather than aggrieved, and that, unlike the later criminal trial, the philosophic

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<sup>8</sup>Kenneth M. Sayre, Plato's Analytic Method, 154; Plato's Literary Garden: How to Read a Platonic Dialogue, 31; Plato's Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved, 190-193.

process acquits Socrates of the charges, vindicating his philosophy.<sup>9</sup> He would declare that I have mistaken Theodorus's banter for grievance and philosophic agreement for critique. Stanley Rosen contradicts both Sayre and Miller. Contra Sayre, he holds that "the Stranger and Socrates share the same principles of logos and analytical thinking." Contra Miller, he argues that Socrates actually is a sophist. The reason for his stance is that there is a point at which Socrates and the stranger part company. "Socrates pretends to have no positive doctrines and spends much of his time in aporetic conversations with the future leaders of Athens, conversations that can only deepen their perplexity and leave them prey to the twin wolves of skepticism and cynicism." So, "Socrates is guilty as charged."<sup>10</sup> Rosen would think that I overstress the injustice of Athens and the stranger in their prosecution and correction of Socrates and underestimate Socrates' ironic destructiveness and political guilt. Catherine Zuckert seems to accept the argument that the Eleatic dialogues are a philosophic trial of Socrates. Contradicting all three of the other writers, she understands the drama as a conflict between antagonistic views of the nature of philosophy, with Socrates focused on a quest for a Good upon which the intelligibility of all things depends and the stranger confident that he has a science of the intelligibility of the whole premised upon judgments of how things are the same and different. She concludes: "If the Eleatic is an exemplar of the dialectical science and thus of philosophy, as he suggests, then in his judgment Socrates cannot be a philosopher, even though the Eleatic is too urbane to say so explicitly. He

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<sup>9</sup>Miller, The Philosopher in Plato's Statesman, 2-3.

<sup>10</sup>Rosen, Plato's Sophist, 23-24.

contents himself with intimating that Socrates is a sophist . . . .”<sup>11</sup>

This sort of disagreement among authoritative writers liberates one to read Plato’s drama as one thinks best, offering appropriate reasons for one’s interpretations. My analysis can resume with some replies to the scholars who would reject it. Sayre’s argument that the Eleatic stranger represents the development of Plato’s ideas is advanced with instructive and consistent reasoning in several books and articles of great distinction but it is entirely a priori. That is, Sayre fails to consider the possibility that reasoning equally good or better could be offered for an alternative, that the Eleatic stranger represents not philosophic progress but an Athenian philosophic position antithetical and inferior to that of Socrates. He simply assumes the accuracy of his reading. By neglecting Platonic drama, he also ignores evidence that might have tipped the scales in favor of the alternative if it had been seriously investigated. It may be that his assumptions are guided by his conviction that philosophers are “essentially logicians.”<sup>12</sup> Someone entertaining that opinion certainly would be gratified by the extensive logical reasoning found in Sophist and Statesman, which exceeds that of the other dialogues. However, philosophy might not be essentially logic. That definition seems incompatible with the Seventh Letter’s critique of the weakness of logoi. The Seventh Letter, Republic, Symposium, Phaedrus, and possibly even Philebus support Eric Voegelin’s treatments of Plato’s work not primarily as

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<sup>11</sup>Zuckert, Plato’s Philosophers, 706.

<sup>12</sup>Sayre, Plato’s Analytic Method, 37.

logic but as philosophic mysticism.<sup>13</sup> (To a degree, Voegelin's judgment surprisingly was shared by no less an analytic philosopher than Gregory Vlastos, although for Vlastos mysticism might have been a defect in Plato's work, not a virtue.<sup>14</sup>)

Miller's argument reminds us of Socrates' worry in Phaedrus that writings always say the same things and that no one can ever get them to explain what they mean. Miller cannot appeal to the texts to show that Theodorus's replies to Socrates are cheerful banter. Although it seems clear to me that Theodorus's words are angry, I cannot cite the texts to prove this beyond doubt. We cannot settle our dispute about the emotions in Theodorus's statements by inspecting them. However, I think that later close analysis of the Eleatic stranger's arguments will lead inexorably to the conclusions that the stranger insinuates that Socrates is a sophist and that he intends his logic to replace Socrates' philosophy, not defend it. If I am wrong, Theodorus and the stranger (that is, Plato) still would have had to realize that the stranger was creating the impression that he was accusing Socrates of sophistry, as witness our modern reactions. One might have expected "friends" of Socrates to state explicitly that the stranger's definitions of the sophist did not apply to him, perhaps detailing essential differences between his philosophy and sophistry. Theodorus and the stranger take no such pains. This casts doubt on Miller's interpretation.

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<sup>13</sup>See especially several of the essays in The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 12, Published Essays 1966-1985.

<sup>14</sup>Gregory Vlastos, Platonic Studies, 52, 54.

I have three objections to Stanley Rosen's position. First, Rosen accuses Socrates of a grave injustice. In the Seventh Letter (324e), Plato calls Socrates "the most just man." I do not believe that he would portray Socrates as unjust. Second, and more important, Rosen appears to suppose that philosophers should teach doctrines to prevent the many from becoming skeptical and cynical, thus keeping them from running amuck. I assume, rather, that they should acquaint people with the truth of the human condition, insofar as it can be known. If this truth is not that being is absurd, if the truth is that we seem to have some awareness of principles of the right way of life but cannot be absolutely certain of them, reporting that would suggest the unacceptability of skepticism and cynicism on the one hand and counteract fanaticism on the other. I believe that Socrates aimed at this sort of balance in his teaching. If he had behaved as Rosen thought proper, he would have stimulated a false certainty, becoming a rational rather than a religious Euthyphro. Third, I think that analysis of the reasoning of the dialogues will demonstrate that the stranger and Socrates do not share the same principles of logos and analytical thinking.

Catherine Zuckert's take on the Eleatic stranger's intentions toward Socrates seems to me to be essentially correct. Pending an attempt to demonstrate this by analysis of the arguments of the Eleatic dialogues, I think I can begin to show it by looking more closely at the drama of the opening of Sophist. We find Socrates waiting at the geometry school on the morning after his arraignment. Four people approach. Theodorus speaks first, saying: "According to yesterday's agreement, Socrates, we have come ourselves, orderly (kosmiōs), and we bring also this stranger, by origin [or by birth] from Elea (to men genos ex Eleas), a comrade of those around Parmenides and Zeno, very much a philosophic man" (216a1-4).

This speech raises important questions. Why does Theodorus tell Socrates that he and his students have come “according to yesterday’s agreement, kosmiōs”? Why has he brought along the stranger? Why does he say that the stranger is “by genos from Elea” when it would suffice to state that he is “from Elea”? Who or what is the stranger? How should we interpret Theodorus’s description of him as “a comrade of those around Parmenides and Zeno, very much a philosophic man?”

I cannot prove that Theodorus’s salutation is not a normal Hellenic courtesy. However, I surmise rather that his greeting initiates the “philosophic” prosecution of Socrates. When law suits in Athens are approved by the king archon at arraignment, prosecutors and defendants are ordered and consent to meet in court at specified times. I assume that Athenian customary law considers it kosmiōs to comply. So, Theodorus appears to regard his accord struck with Socrates post-Theaetetus as the equivalent of an arraignment agreement – hardly a “friendly” sentiment. Now, Theodorus has his own idea of what a philosopher is, which later analysis will show differs from that of Socrates. He is suing Socrates on behalf of the cosmic society of “philosophers” to which he belongs, not on behalf of Athens. To sue or to prosecute in a Greek society, one must be a citizen of that society by birth. Elea is the capital of philosophy. Theodorus is establishing the right of an Eleatic by genos, the stranger, to prosecute Socrates. “Prosecutor of Socrates” is who and what the stranger is. By calling the stranger “quite a philosophic man,” an associate of the circle around Parmenides and Zeno, Theodorus probably also is pulling rank on Socrates, asserting that the stranger’s philosophic credentials outweigh



those of the eristic hooligan who unfairly trounced an unpracticed geometer yesterday..<sup>15</sup>

Socrates seems to sense the legalistic cast of Theodorus's language and the challenge to his credentials. That is why he suggests that Theodorus has brought "some god" to refute "us who are worthless in logos," a "sort of god of refutation." I shall address the perhaps ironically posited godhood of the stranger below. Just now I want to concentrate on Socrates' reaction to the threatened refutation. When Theodorus denies that the stranger is a deity or contentious but affirms that he is divine qua philosopher, Socrates replies, as we have seen, that philosophers are as difficult to recognize as gods, adding that he means "the not counterfeit but real philosophers" (hoi mē plastōs all' ontōs philosophoi). He thus alerts us to a very important fact, that there is a difference between sham and real philosophy, prompting us to wonder about the criteria for the distinction. He does this as he speaks of the ignorance of the many projecting appearances onto philosophers. I think he is expressing the suspicion that the stranger is a fake philosopher who will join the ignorant many in classifying him with unsavory politicians, sophists, and madmen. This supports Zuckert's reading of the Eleatic dialogues as Plato's dramatizations of a conflict between antagonistic ideas of the nature of philosophy, with Socrates indicating that we are about to witness the presentation of a counterfeit philosophy that ignorantly smears him.

Someone will object indignantly that such a reading of the Eleatic dialogues is incredible, asking why Plato would knowingly waste hundreds of pages on the elaboration of an intricate "philosophy" that was totally worthless. A reasonable question, which I answer with another: Why should we assume a priori that a Plato who has spent his life writing aporetic dialogues that

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<sup>15</sup>Cf. Zuckert, Plato's Philosophers, 682.

are sensitive to the limits of human reason suddenly proclaim a breakthrough to an indubitable science that conquers the previously impassable boundaries? Guided by the Seventh Letter, why not suppose that the Eleatic dialogues are aporetic, just like all the others, with their impasses unnoticed by a chief speaker who is a sham philosopher? It should be noted that Plato's earlier aporetic dialogues were not wastes of effort. Their typical procedure was to posit one or more seemingly powerful theses, work out the implications of these apparently compelling ideas minutely, with scrupulous justice, and follow the logic into aporiai that opened souls to higher visions. These exercises were valuable, not worthless. If the Eleatic dialogues rendered the same services, with discernment of the aporiai being left up to readers because the protagonist is a fake philosopher who was unaware of them, they would be just as worthwhile as the others.

I think that Sophist and Statesman proceed from the premise that there can be a science of the intelligibility of the whole that prescind from the Good. It is his obtuseness to the Good that accounts for the sham character of the stranger's philosophy and his inferiority to Socrates. Plato lets the stranger push his science of the intelligibility of the whole without a Good as far as it can possibly go. He makes the strongest case for it that reason can devise and that fairness requires, as summarized above. However, he also lets the stranger unwittingly reveal that the proposed science contains aporiai that preclude its acceptance as a victory of human reason.

As more than one commentator has noticed, the Form of the Good is absent from Sophist. As far as I can tell from Brandwood, the word "good" only appears once in the entire dialogue, put in the mouths of others by the stranger. What seems to happen in Sophist is that the stranger leads off with several partial definitions of the sophist, more than one of which clearly implicates

Socrates, and then develops an ontology of being and the being of nonbeing that serves to refute Socrates' supposed sophistical claim that false speech is impossible. The ontology is presented with powerful logic, reasoning sufficiently compelling to convince modern scholars that Plato's metaphysical ideas have developed. The logic also has perplexing flaws that suggest that we are in the presence of the sham philosophy about which Socrates forewarned us. One example of such a defect is that it seems hard to see how sophistry could be understood without reference to its contempt for a Good. We readers are invited to ponder the conflict between Socrates and the stranger regarding ontology and sophistry. We are asked to judge whose philosophy is real and whose sham, deciding whether real philosophy demands, say, the ascent to the eternal Good of Republic or a logic of the similarities and differences of transient phenomena. Plato probably hopes that the exercise will help to open our souls to visions of the Good. Theaetetus is too raw to do the necessary thinking. He is led to agree with the stranger's ontology and definition of sophistry. His agreement amounts to a vote to convict Socrates of sophistry. This represents Plato's opinion that Greek sophistry is also guilty of the murder of Socrates.

At the beginning of Statesman, we wonder why Socrates thanks Theodorus for the introduction to Theaetetus and the stranger. Contemporary scholars think it self-evident that Socrates is grateful for having been taught a great new philosophy that excels his own. This is a seemingly natural assumption. However, it is not the only possible interpretation and not clearly the right one. If Socrates is on "philosophic" trial in both Sophist and Statesman, we are justified in looking for parallels between this lawsuit and his criminal trial. In Apology, after Socrates has cross-examined Meletus, humiliating him, and after he is convicted and sentenced,

he behaves as if he is grateful for a good thing that has been done to him. Meletus, on the other hand, surely thinks that he now has had his revenge on Socrates. In Statesman, we have Socrates humiliating Theodorus (again) and Theodorus swearing by Ammon to get even later. This oath appears to betray agitation rather than cheerfulness, for we have the geometer's own testimony in Sophist that he dislikes being embarrassed. If his desire for revenge is as nasty as I think, his intention is realized when young Socrates succumbs to the stranger's argument. Thus, it seems to me that just as he will be glad to find out his biological fate in Apology, Socrates thanks Theodorus here because he is happy to have learned in Sophist what he cannot escape facing intellectually. He is reconciling himself to his "philosophical" conviction and realizing that it can be turned to the improvement of his soul.

I believe that Statesman, like Sophist, dispenses with the Form of the Good, even though there is talk of a "mean" that seems to do some of its work and the word "good" appears more frequently than in Sophist (I think in conventional rather than Socratic senses). A cosmology is developed in parallel with the ontology of Sophist. A dialectic that embraces both diairesis and myth making is invented and proclaimed the true philosophy and science of free men. A "mean" that seems to replace the Good is derived from the dialectic. A theory of virtue that contradicts Socrates' concept of virtue is announced. A conservative political theory is erected on all those foundations. The cosmology, the dialectic, the "mean," the un-Socratic ethic, and the political theory appear to have perplexing ambiguities, contradictions, and logical flaws, such as visible errors in the logical reasoning that are not obviously corrected. The aporiai invite Plato's readers to decide which of Socrates' and the stranger's philosophy and political theory are

real and which are sham. Do a real philosophy and political theory require Socrates' ascent to the Good with its attendant vision of justice mediated by philosopher kings or the stranger's diairesis, myths, and other scientific teachings mediated by a logician? What seems to be evident is that the stranger's "statesmanship," or politikē technē, not only differs greatly from Socrates' alēthōs politikē technē but also makes it appear unscientific and useless at best and destructive of the safety of the city at worst. Socrates comes off as one of the "greatest sophists." The argument convinces the young Socrates. The stranger thus secures another vote to convict the philosopher. Socrates' prediction in Gorgias (521e-522a) comes true in Plato's fiction just as it does in reality: He is convicted by a jury of children. This explains how Athenian political culture is guilty of the murder of Socrates. As I have repeated frequently, the proof of this interpretive pudding must be in the eating. Full exegesis of Sophist and Statesman will have to determine whether the arguments of those drama actually fit this hypothesized story.

Socrates' fictitious conviction of sophistry in Sophist and Statesman sets the stage for the remaining dramatic steps of his Untergang in Apology, Crito, and Phaedo, as summarized above.

The second trajectory that Plato's dramatic series describes is Socrates' ascent from death to eternal life. As happens so frequently in Plato, the way down is the way up. With every step of his descent toward execution, Socrates reconciles himself more and more to it, relinquishing the hold that he and philosophy have on life and rising to a tranquil embrace of posthumous immortality. In Theaetetus he knows that he himself will die but thinks that he can contribute one more youth to the perpetuation of philosophy. By the end of Politikos, when Theaetetus and

young Socrates have convicted him, he clearly abandons this hope, for he requests no more meetings and he later prophesies to Eucleides that Theaetetus will be celebrated or talked about (ellogimon), which is not to say that he will become philosophic. Socrates probably already has given up his project by the end of Sophist. In parallel with Apology, he seems glad at the start of Statesman to have found that he must accept his cultural fate and rise to a higher fulfillment. At the close of Apology, Socrates muses that, if the myths are true, there will be pleasant philosophy after death, although only the deity knows whether death or life is superior. In Crito, he stops emphasizing this uncertainty, speculating that he will arrive in Hades after death and not be ill-received. In Phaedo, he tells a story to support a guess that souls purified by philosophy go to beautiful homes after departing from their bodies or, at least, that something like this is true, so that his tale should be repeated as an incantation from now on. His reservation makes us wonder whether he believes in immortality literally or in some figurative sense, one that symbolizes realization of an eternal quality in the well-lived life here.<sup>16</sup> I do not know. Either way, Socrates finishes his ascent from death to life as he utters his famous last words, which indicate that he thinks he has become healthy.

The third trajectory that Plato's serial dramas track is his own meditative-mythical spiritual voyage inside the soul of his hero Socrates along the down-up course of death and life. I am basing my concept of meditative-mythical spiritual travel on the work of Zdravko Planinc, which I have adapted to my own purposes in my own language. In Plato through Homer, Planinc argues that Homer was a poet-shaman whose consciousness meditatively transmigrated

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<sup>16</sup>For profound analyses of this issue, see Eric Voegelin, "Immortality: Experience and Symbol," in Collected Works, vol. 12, and Jacob Klein, "Plato's Phaedo," in Lectures and Essays.

into the psychē of Odysseus as the hero sailed the axis mundi. Odysseus was a wily scoundrel but, as he faced terror after terror on his voyage, he rose toward the divine reality, becoming a finer man. Homer spiritually entered the experiences of Odysseus to face temptations symbolized by the ethical and physical dangers that plagued Odysseus. Planinc contends further that Plato adopts Homer's plan. Plato is a philosopher-poet-shaman whose consciousness transmigrates into the psychē of Socrates, which in turn transmigrates into the psychē of Odysseus in Plato's plays. In Timaeus, Critias, and Phaedrus, Plato "refigures" tropes from the Odyssey, creating the dialogues as mimes of the myths. In spirit, he journeys with Socrates-Odysseus down toward Hades and up toward divine being. He does this not to make Socrates transmit doctrines but to overcome his own philosophic temptations in the person of Socrates-Odysseus.

With Planinc's kind permission, I shall avail myself of his insights for my analysis. In all of the seven dialogues centered on the last days of Socrates, Plato again refigures poetic tropes, making his plays mimes of the myths. His consciousness transmigrates into the soul of Socrates, which in turn transmigrates into the souls of mythical Hellenic characters. Plato goes with the Socrates-heroes down toward spiritual death and up toward spiritual life, facing philosophic temptations that threaten to snare and imprison his soul. The proof that Plato again is behaving as a philosopher-poet-shaman consists in sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit allusions to Homer and other poets that he embeds in his texts.

I shall begin to illustrate this reading with a brief sketch of the ascending branch of

Plato's meditative-mythical journey. In Apology, Socrates cites Achilles in explaining why he will not give up philosophizing to prevent his execution. Quitting to avoid assassination must have been an option that occurred to Plato too. Achilles' divine mother warned him that he would surely die if he killed Hector. Achilles resolved to do so regardless of the certainty of his demise.<sup>17</sup> The philosopher-poet-shaman says that he must take the analogous stance. So, in this play, Plato-Socrates has become Achilles embracing his dangers to stay true to his mission.

In Crito, when Socrates reports his dream of a beautiful woman in white informing him that he will come to fertile Phthia in three days, he is paraphrasing Achilles' furious bluster to Odysseus. Achilles swears to let the Achaeans be massacred while he departs and reaches his home in Phthia three days hence with his plunder. His angry vow is frustrated. Achilles is killed at the end of that time.<sup>18</sup> Plato refigures the trope. Achilles' rage at being cheated of a female captive presumably is replaced by the just anger of Plato-Socrates over Athens' perfidy toward the philosopher. Achilles' plan to deny the Achaeans his prowess and let them be slaughtered while he pursues safety and wealth is supplanted by Plato-Socrates' temptation to deprive Athens of philosophy, let its citizens go to blazes, and delight in private communion with the Good. The woman in white is a goddess, not the petulant warrior. She changes Achilles' pledge from a resolution to survive and reap material profit into a prophecy of imminent death in exchange for eternal life in blessedness. Her promise is right, not wrong. The subject of her

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<sup>17</sup>Homer, Iliad, xviii, 96, 98.

<sup>18</sup>Homer, Iliad, ix, 363.



prophecy is not the invincible fighter who will prevail in battle before being killed but the willing victim whose execution will be a victory. Thomas Payne contends that Plato-Socrates is Achilles resisting Agamemnon's envoys, who are personified by Crito.<sup>19</sup> Owing to the changes in the trope, I am a bit worried by this interpretation. I suggest instead that the soul of Plato-Socrates has become Odysseus hearing a divine promise of his homecoming. In either case, Achilles harvested death by going back on his decision but Plato-Socrates wins eternal life by adhering to his.

In Phaedo, the question about the delay in Socrates' execution and the explanation about the thank-offering ship refer directly to the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur. Jacob Klein has shown that the scene of Socrates' death attended by nine named Athenians, five named disciples from other Hellenic cities, and anonymous Athenians replicates Theseus's dangerous adventure with nine young men, five girls, and a ship's crew. The winding argument is the labyrinth, Phaedo is Ariadne, and fear of death is the Minotaur with whom Socrates-Theseus duels.<sup>20</sup> I can add nothing to Klein's exegesis except to observe that the temptation that Plato-Socrates-Theseus faces down, the fear of death, is only the second greatest philosophic temptation. The first and worst is confronted earlier in Sophist and Statesman.

Turning now to the descending leg of the journey, Plato-Socrates appears in Theaetetus to

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<sup>19</sup>Thomas Payne, "The Crito as Mythological Mime," Interpretation 11:1 (1983), 1-23.

<sup>20</sup>Klein, "Plato's Phaedo."

be Odysseus on the second stop of his voyage after the sack of Troy, in the country of the lotus eaters. I gather this not from quotations but from parallels. Odysseus, who always refers to his men as his comrades, dispatches two of them into the interior of the land to learn what the inhabitants are like. The people are not hostile. They give the scouts lotus to eat, whereupon the two lose their desire to return home. Odysseus has to drag them back to the ships, bind them to the benches, and escape. I believe that Plato refigures this trope. The geometry school is the lotus country because those who gorge on the mathematics there become complacent, supposing that they have scaled the heights of human intellectual endeavor and that they need rise no higher. Philosophers are strongly tempted to accept the certainties of mathematics as the perfect science that they seek. Two “comrades” of Plato-Socrates-Odysseus are already in the lotus land when he arrives, Theaetetus and young Socrates, the boys who are “kin” because they bear the image and name of Socrates. In an intellectual sense, they have become terminally comfortable there and Plato’s soul could be snared too if he ate the geometric lotus. The two lads have to be dragged out of smug scientism and up towards their real philosophic home. The rescue initially succeeds in the case of Theaetetus (and perhaps in that of young Socrates) but it is thwarted by subsequent catastrophes, just as Odysseus ultimately loses all his men.

When Socrates goes to the porch of the king and meets Euthyphro, there are no allusions to Odysseus, Achilles, and Theseus. It might be argued that this scuttles my interpretation of Plato’s sevenfold series as a poetic meditative-mythical psychic journey in which the philosopher vicariously confronts philosophic temptations. However, Euthyphro does not contradict my thesis at all. Dogmatic religious fundamentalism is the presumption that one knows the mind of

God. This is one of the most dangerous temptations of the spirit, an enticement that can take philosophic forms, as witness Hegel. The temptation can be symbolized by the attempt of Talos, the apprentice of Daedalus, to fly to the sun, an effort that must result in the melting of the soul's wings and a plunge to a spiritual death. Like Talos, those who indulge their reckless pride justify themselves by construing the strength and sincerity of their convictions as their warrant. Plato's soul journeys with Socrates to meet Euthyphro, whose name implies "whole-heartedness" or "sincerity." Approaching this incarnation of sincerity dialectically, Plato-Socrates easily refutes Euthyphro's rationalizations of his presumption, thus resisting the temptation. However, like Talos, the sincere fundamentalist Euthyphro is unfazed by reason. His mind is closed so he persists in his dogmatism. Now, if Plato-Socrates is mastering this stubborn evil inclination of the spirit here, why is there no reference to Odysseus, Achilles, or Theseus? The answer is that Socrates explicitly claims Daedalus as his ancestor and actually becomes Daedalus in a way that Euthyphro senses but does not understand. Socrates is Daedalus not because he magically sets Euthyphro's words in motion but because he tries to warn Euthyphro away from the sun.

In the next episodes, Sophist and Statesman, the soul of Plato-Socrates has been translated to a new scene in which two Homeric tropes have been collapsed into one. The pleasantries addressed by Socrates to the Eleatic stranger are paraphrases of speeches in different books of the Odyssey.<sup>21</sup> In the first Homeric passage, Odysseus petitions the Cyclops as a suppliant, requesting the generosity due to strangers and warning him that Zeus, the avenger of suppliants and strangers, watches over them. In the second text, Odysseus has returned to Ithaca

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<sup>21</sup>Homer, Odyssey, ix, 272; xvii, 485-487.

disguised as a beggar and Antinous, one of the most powerful suitors of Penelope, has struck him. An anonymous youth tells Antinous that he ought not to have done that, for deities visit cities in all kinds of shapes, beholding the hybris and righteousness of men. So, we know that Plato-Socrates has spiritually flown to a place that merges the country of the Cyclopes with a not-yet reclaimed Ithaca. However, we still must establish who he has become. Is he Odysseus or the Cyclops and Antinous? Also, which of these figures is the Eleatic stranger? Let us try to find out by consulting the text. We must return again to the opening scene of Sophist.

As we have seen, Theodorus keeps yesterday's agreement, arriving at his school with his two pupils and the stranger and telling Socrates that the Eleatic is very much a philosophic man. Socrates replies by asking whether Theodorus has not brought some god, for Homer says that the gods, and especially the god of strangers, go with reverent and just men beholding the hybriatic and lawful deeds of mankind. Perhaps, he continues, the stranger has come to "refute us who are worthless in logos," acting as "a sort of god of refutation." The case apparently is open and shut. Socrates has imputed philosophic guilt to himself. Hence, the stranger is Zeus Xenios, the god of strangers, Theodorus is Odysseus, and Socrates is the philosophic equivalent of Polyphemus, the lawless monster. In terms of the second Homeric passage, the stranger is Odysseus disguised as a god and Socrates is Antinous.<sup>22</sup> This time, it will be thought, my reading of the story of Plato's seven-fold series is well and truly sunk.

I reply that this interpretation is too hasty. Socrates has more to say. When Theodorus

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<sup>22</sup>Thus Seth Benardete, The Being of the Beautiful: Plato's Theaetetus, Sophist, and Statesman, II.69.

denies that the stranger is a god but nevertheless praises him as divine qua philosopher, Socrates, as we have noted, answers that the real philosophers – not the sham ones – appear in all kinds of shapes because of the ignorance of the others, judging the lives of those below. Sometimes they appear as politicians, sophists, and madmen. As such, they seem to be of great value to some and worthless to others. Socrates was quoting Homer when he first alluded to the stories of Odysseus and the Cyclops and Odysseus and Antinous but now he has spoken on his own authority about the real and fake philosophers and what happens to the real ones. In doing this, he has cautioned his interlocutors and us that we have entered a world in which we have to ask whether things are as they appear at first glance. What is real and what is illusory? I presume that Socrates is the real philosopher and that he is (as he has claimed in Euthyphro, and as Plato has testified in the Seventh Letter) more reverent and just than anyone. I would expect Zeus Xenios to be going with Socrates to the school, where Socrates, not the stranger, is a guest of Theodorus who has the right of a suppliant to petition for good treatment. I think that Socrates has been ironic in hailing the stranger as a god and in making himself out as the counterpart of Polyphemus and Antinous. He has been urbanely warning Theodorus and the stranger not to carry out their plan to prosecute him as a sophist and an unsavory politician lest they incur the wrath of Zeus. He has politely cast himself in the monstrous roles to avoid being a confrontational guest, hoping that his hosts will take the hint that they are about to become the actual villains who will foist illusory perceptions onto him. The reality is the reverse of the appearance that Socrates has urbanely created. He is the Odysseus who is in danger of being devoured by Polyphemus and struck down by Antinous. The stranger is Polyphemus/Antinous.

I can offer some additional dramatic reasons for favoring this interpretation. Socrates is

the one who will be devalued by the stranger, just as Odysseus was degraded to the status of fool and enemy by Polyphemus and scorned as a useless burden on the earth by Antinous. It is not the other way around, with Socrates degrading the stranger. When Socrates asks for an account of sophist, politikos, philosopher, he is acting as a suppliant and beggar, just as Odysseus did before Polyphemus and Antinous. It is not the other way around, with the stranger asking something of Socrates. Further, I cannot see how Socrates' self-accusation, if it were serious, would make sense in the context of the drama. Socrates is speaking to Theodorus and the stranger. If the stranger has come to refute Socrates for horrors perpetrated in argument, these crimes would have to be actions about which Theodorus and the stranger knew and cared. If the references to Homer are relevant, the misdeeds would have to resemble those of the Cyclops and Antinous too. If the stranger were an angry Zeus Xenios, Socrates' felonies would have to be sins against the deity's law of hospitality. The atrocities of Socrates that would be both known and important to Theodorus and the stranger can be reduced to a short bill of particulars.

Socrates subverted the Protagorean geometric concept of science and its application to human affairs, driving Theaetetus into aporia. He also has dabbled in politics unscientifically. Those crimes, if crimes they were, do not resemble anything Polyphemus or Antinous did. Finally, the stranger simply looks like Polyphemus more than Socrates does. The Cyclops was an inveterate classifier, sorting his cheeses into crates by kind and his sheep into pens by age. The stranger's science is wholly based on classification. Socrates classifies too but his philosophy ultimately rests on other foundations. An additional point, which is interesting but not decisive, is that "Polyphemus" breaks down etymologically into the Greek words for "much" and "speech." Generally, the word Polyphemus means "much spoken about, famous." However, Liddell and

Scott offer a second translation that is not at all wrong: “wordy.” The stranger is wordy on principle, unlike Socrates relying entirely on logos. To conclude, I think that the drama suggests that the real name of the stranger is Polyphemus/Antionous.

If this is so, it follows that this is the meaning of Sophist and Statesman: There are a counterfeit metaphysics, a sham cosmology, and a fake political theory that seem to represent the power of a Polyphemus and an Antinous. They have so many valid things to say and they can be presented so compellingly that a philosopher can be snared, devoured, and struck down by them. They must be experienced in all their might and then transcended by following the via negativa of aporia to visions of the Good. One last time, I caution that this reading must be confirmed by full analysis of the arguments of the dialogues.