Plato's Statesman

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6

Plato on Normative Measurement

283b1-287b3

Rachel Barney

Late Plato is obsessed with measurement. At the climax of the *Philebus*, Measure claims first prize in the final rank-ordering of goods (66a).[1] In the *Theaetetus*, the definition of knowledge as perception is hijacked by a discussion of Protagoras' thesis that man is the measure of all things (152aff) – a claim which is still making Plato cranky as late as the *Laws*, where the Athenian makes a point of affirming that 'For us, *God* is the measure of all things' (716c). The Athenian also divagates on the importance of measurement to the city under several headings (691c-692c, 744d-747c, 817e-820e).[2] Meanwhile in the *Timaeus*, God's creation of the soul is recounted in terms of complex mathematical formulations (35a-36d). All of these passages are marked, outsize: they are there not because the argument requires them, but because they are important to Plato in their own right. In this chapter, I discuss another one of these striking texts: the passage at the centre of the *Statesman* in which the Visitor argues for the existence of normative measure [*to metrion*] as essential to all the crafts [*technai*].

With a few important exceptions,[3] scholars have not had much to say about Plato's obsession, and these passages have usually been treated as independent.[4] But some of them interlock in obvious ways. The Measure which the *Philebus* identifies as the highest good, but about which it has mysteriously little to say, must be identical to the normative measure whose existence is propounded in the *Statesman*. What the *Statesman* argues is that this norm-giving measure is

[1] More precisely, 'measure and the measured [*to metrion*] and timely [*kairion*] and everything that ought to be considered of that sort' (*Phlb*. 66a6-8): I discuss this passage in Barney (2017).

[2] Cf. Diès (1935, xliv-vi).

[3] Notably Sayre (2006); and now Gavray (2017), which is a landmark effort to understand Plato's late thought as a unified response to Protagoras, including a brief chapter on the *Statesman* (89–102).

[4] The exception is the relation of our *Statesman* passage to the *Philebus*, on which see Sayre (2006), Delcomminette (2005), Harte (forthcoming) and Gill (2019), with references. (Due to length limits, I will be sparing with references to secondary literature throughout.) I cannot explore the deeper metaphysical issues raised by these passages here, but that is not to dismiss them. On the contrary, we should bear in mind that Plato very likely holds that quantitative opposites are somehow the most fundamental principles of reality. This chapter is intended to complement discussions of that somewhat mysterious metaphysical idea by bringing out the ethical and epistemological significance of normative measure.

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necessary for the crafts; and the Demiurge's creation of soul in the *Timaeus* looks like an exemplary exercise of craft so understood. Scholars generally seem to assume that Plato's refutation of 'man the measure' in the *Theaetetus* has nothing to do with his own positive use of the concept; but this assumption has only to be made explicit for its implausibility to become apparent.[5] And in the *Theaetetus* too, Plato's fascination with measure has to do with its connection to craft, *technē*. His great complaint about Protagoras' Measure Thesis is that it eliminates the distance between the wise expert and everybody else (161c-162d, 169d-171c, 178b-179b). And once we note this pervasive association between craft and measure, one more text comes into view. For long before the *Statesman*, Plato's Socrates proposed the idea of a measuring art as 'our salvation in life'; and here as in the *Theaetetus* his foil is Protagoras (*Protagoras* 352b-357e).

All these texts look like pieces of a single puzzle. Or a better metaphor might be that they form a single topography, like the peaks of an undersea mountain range. To understand them in full, we would need to grasp the pattern they make together in Plato's thinking about craft, normativity, and practical reason. It would also mean seeing this thinking as part of his ongoing engagement with sophistic ideas, and those of Protagoras in particular. In working out his own understanding of craft and measurement, Plato is also thinking through a gigantic correction to the thought of his predecessors. This chapter aims to contribute to this interpretive project by looking at the case of the *Statesman* in particular.

I begin with a general analysis of the passage (section 6.1); from there, I turn to sketch the significance of measurement in Plato's earlier dialogues (section 6.2). This sets the stage for a simple question: what makes the concept of *normative* measure in particular so important to Plato here? In section 6.3 I return to the *Statesman* for a more specific question which may help with this larger one: Who are the 'clever people' here criticized for getting measure wrong?

6.1 *Statesman* 283b1-287b3: Structure and Argument

Our passage is a clearly organized unity, providing a two-part answer to the challenge which kicks it off. I divide it as follows:[6]

1. The *Imagined Objection*: Would the preceding discussion of weaving be rightly criticized for being too long? (283b1-c2)

[5] Objection: the Measure Thesis is about man as epistemic *subject*, while in the *Philebus* and *Statesman* 'measure' is an epistemic *object*, a feature of the nature of things. But the two cannot really be held apart: a *metron* is both the quantum measured and the standard or instrument that measures it, and either implies the other (cf. Aristotle *Metaph*. X.1).

[6] Where the Stephanus-number references below overlap or leave gaps, it is because the Visitor's rather rambling presentation is at times hard to allocate to one point rather than another.

First Part of the Response: The Argument for Normative Measure (283c2-284e11):

2. *The Ontological Thesis: The Existence of Real Normative Measure*: The art of measurement must be divided into two parts. One part, *comparative measure*, deals with 'the association of the great and small with each other'; the other, *normative measure*, deals with excess and deficiency in relation to some norm of due measure [*to metrion*] (283b6-e11, with recaps at 284e1-11 and 285b6-c2).

3. Three Arguments for the Thesis:

   i. *The Argument from Everyday Evaluation*: Judgements of normative measure are the foundation of our evaluations of agents as good or bad (283e3-7).

   ii. *The Argument from the Crafts*: Craft production is all about bringing into existence what is in due measure: if there is no such thing as normative measure, there can be no crafts (283e11-284b3).

   iii. *A Pragmatic Argument*: if there is no such thing as normative measure, the present search for the statesman is doomed (instantiation of (ii) above) (284b4-6).

4. *Reaffirmation of the Thesis, with a Caveat*: So normative measure must be 'compelled' into existence for the present inquiry, as the existence of Not-Being had to be for the sophist. A full proof would be an even greater undertaking than the other (284b7-d2), but the argument from the crafts is sufficient for present purposes (284d3-9).

5. *A Critical Corollary to the Thesis*: So certain clever people [*kompsoi*] are right to think that there is an art of measurement covering all things; but they do dialectic badly, and so fail to properly distinguish the two parts of it (284e11-285b6).

Second Part of the Response: Application to the Imagined Objection (285c4-287b3):

6. *A Teleological Claim* about the present discussion: The inquiry into the statesman, including the discussion of weaving, was primarily for the sake of training in dialectic, and only secondarily for the purpose of defining those things (285c4-286c5).

7. *The 'Likenesses' Speech*: there are no perceptible likenesses of things like statecraft: in such cases a small-scale paradigm (here, weaving) is useful (285d9-286b1).

8. *An Evaluative Principle*: Judgements of praise and blame relate the object judged to the relevant due measure. And this is determined by what the product or activity in question is *for* – as per the teleological claim, the improvement of dialectical skills (286c5-e4).

9. *Upshot*: The discussion cannot be blamed as 'too long' unless the critic can show that a shorter discussion would have better served this end. Even quite a long discussion, like the one here regarding weaving, can be the correct length. The *Imagined Objection* is thus dismissed (286e4-287b3).

At this point in the dialogue, weaving has been the subject of a *circuitous analysis* (as I will call it): it was first identified by a division under the insufficiently exact

rubric of clothes-making (279b-280e), then separated off from rival claimants (281a-283a), and finally defined as the art of combination which intertwines weft and warp (283a-b). The objection is initially that we could simply have given that definition (283b). But that objection is immediately rephrased as a more generic complaint that the discussion was 'too long' – no doubt in order to make it a suitable prompt for the general discussion of normative measure. Young Socrates distances himself from any such objection, but the Visitor persists in addressing it, and even refers to it as a *nosēma*, a malady (283b7, cf. *Phaedo* 89a-90e). (This feels like a breach of the fourth wall – a Platonic reproach to any readers who may be getting bored!)

The key move in the response to the objection comes right at the start, with step (2) above. The measuring art [*metrētikē*] must be divided into two, one part purely comparative and the other normative: the Visitor's emphasis will consistently be on the independent reality and importance of the latter. So we can distinguish two kinds of error to be rejected: *denialism* about normative measure and *conflationism*, i.e., treating it as reducible to the comparative kind.

Both sides of the Visitor's division are introduced in somewhat puzzling terms. The first part is described as one related to 'the communion [or association, *koinōnia*] of greatness and smallness [*megethous kai smikrotētos*] with each other' (283d7-9).[7] Since the topic was introduced in terms of excess and deficiency [*huperochē*, *elleipsis*] (c3-4, d1), we are presumably getting an analysis of that contrast in more fundamental terms. But this is not privileged terminology: in a typical Platonic display of anti-technical *variatio*, the Visitor also refers to the twin comparanda as 'exceeding and exceeded' [*huperballon*, *huperballomenon* 283e3-4], 'greater and lesser' [*meizon*, *elatton*, 283d11-12, 284a1-2], 'the great and the small' [*to megalon*, *to smikron*, 283e8-9], and 'the more and less' [*pleon*, *elatton* 284a8-9]. He also specifies some important modalities of these quantitative opposites: 'number and lengths and depths and breadths and speeds' (284e4-5).

This claim that measurement involves an 'association' of quantitative opposites involves three ideas at once. First, attributions of largeness and smallness always have to be understood as *comparative*, i.e., as judgements of relative excess and deficiency. To say that Socrates is tall can only be short for saying that he is taller than Cebes (for instance), taller than most people, taller than he used to be, etc. Saying that he is six feet tall may sound different, and has the important advantage (vital to the procedures of craft) of precision [*akribeia*]: but it is fundamentally the same kind of claim, differing only in taking a standardized quantum as comparator. Secondly, *all* measurements of quantity are reducible to this form, including judgements of number, length, volume, speed, and so on. And third, greatness and smallness so understood are always found in association *with each*

[7] Quotations from the works of Plato are from the translations included in Cooper (1997), sometimes with revisions; the excellent translation of the *Statesman* is by Christopher Rowe.

other. Anything taller than Cebes will also be smaller than something else. Like qualitative opposites (the hot and cold), opposed quantitative properties specify the extremes of an indefinite spectrum, and anything located on that spectrum instantiates *both*. So there are at least *two* senses in which any measurement involves an 'association' of the great and small. First, if it says that one thing is greater it also says (at least implicitly) that another thing is smaller. Second, whichever property it attributes to an object is really a specific *mixture* of the opposites greatness and smallness, and so manifests both.

This first part of the art of measurement is not hard to grasp: the Visitor is giving an analysis of the techniques of quantitative measurement as we normally understand them.[8] The other part of it is more unfamiliar. It is introduced, mysteriously, as having to do with 'what coming into being necessarily is' [*kata tēn tēs geneseōs anankaian ousian*] (283d8-9). At first the Visitor makes the existence of any such thing sound impossible:

> Does it not seem to you that by its nature the greater has to be said to be greater than nothing other than the less, and the less in its turn less than the greater, and than nothing else? (283d11-e1)

This *sounds* almost like a tautology given what 'greater' means; it is no surprise that Young Socrates says yes. But it is a trap, and the Visitor immediately self-corrects:

> VISITOR: What about this, then: shan't we also say that it really does happen [*hōs ontōs gignomenon*] that something done by us exceeds the nature of due measure, or is exceeded by it, in either actions or speech, and that it's indeed in this above all that those of us who are bad and those who are good differ?
> YOUNG SOCRATES: —So it seems. (*Plt*. 283e3-6)

The trap is an easy one to fall into: Plato's Socrates does so on at least three occasions. In the *Protagoras* the measuring art is defined as the investigation of excess and deficiency and equality *in relation to each other* (357b).[9] In the *Charmides*, Socrates affirms that the greater is related *only* to the less and vice versa (168b5-9). And in *Republic* 4, Socrates insists that 'of all things that are related to something, those that are merely themselves are related to things that are merely themselves,

[8] These are not, however, usually presented by Plato as a single art. Instead, he either takes the familiar *technai* to each incorporate the relevant kinds of measurement (*Phlb*. 55d-8d) or presents counting, weighing, etc. as distinct *technai* themselves (see section 6.2). But as Verity Harte points out to me, this variation is unproblematic: Platonic divisions vary according to the task at hand, and the contrast with normative measurement is all that matters for present purposes. Cf. n21.

[9] As Panos Dimas points out to me, at *Prt*. 357a5-7, our salvation is said to depend on the *correct* [*orthē*] choice of pleasure and pain. This is the language of normative measure; but in the *Protagoras* it seems to reveal 'conflationism': cf. section 6.3 below.

while those that are of a particular sort are related to things of a particular sort' (438d10-e1).[10] This conception of quantitative opposites as relata and relata as related *exclusively* to each other is a useful brake against certain kinds of fallacy and metaphysical error.[11] But this exclusivity rule also imports an error of its own: denialism about normative measure.[12] The point is obvious enough once made explicit: terms like 'greater' or 'smaller' or 'excessive' and 'deficient' can relate a subject either to an opposite *or* to a due or right measure.

Returning to our passage, note that this ontological thesis is not framed in the way we might expect from Plato. That is, he does not emphasize that due measure *really exists*, in some timeless or at least mind-independent way, but that it really does *come into being*. Thus *gignesthai* and cognates are repeated frequently, including the un-Platonic-sounding conjunction of *ontōs* and *gignomenon* in the crucial claim that it 'really does come into existence' (283e5, cf. 'what coming into being necessarily is'), as well as the initial phrasing *kata tēn tēs geneseōs anankaian ousian* noted above (283d8-9), and two occurrences of 'in relation to the coming-into-being of due measure', *pros tēn tou metriou genesin* (284c1 and 284d6). The point is clear: it's in the *practical* realm, and specifically the activities of the crafts, that due measure is most important. The key argument to follow, (3.ii) *the argument from the crafts*, claims this explicitly only for the works of human craft; but the *Timaeus* and *Philebus* make it clear that the creation of the cosmos is the same thing on a macrocosmic scale (*Ti*. 26e, 27b, 28c-30e, *Phlb*. 28a-30e). Both human and divine craft are said elsewhere to involve instantiating a timeless model in sensible materials (*Cra*. 389a-390a, *Resp*. 596a-598c, *Ti*. 27d-31b, 48e-49a). So the Visitor's ontological commitment to a normative measure which 'becomes' is perhaps meant to suggest the existence of one which eternally *is*, and which serves as model – but Plato is for once not very interested in it.

The passage cited above incorporates a rhetorical question which I have counted as the first of the Visitor's three arguments: *the argument from everyday evaluation* (3(i)). The idea seems to be that our habitual contrast between agents as good and bad depends on the evaluation of their actions as correct or incorrect, and that incorrect action is to be analyzed in terms of some excess or deficiency. So the ontological thesis must be granted if our most basic and general evaluative language is to be legitimate. But the Visitor's language is ambiguous: do 'good' and 'bad' here refer to *morally* good and bad people, anticipating Aristotle's doctrine of the mean?[13] Or does he mean merely that we are good and bad *at*

[10] Quotations from the *Republic* are in the translation by G. M. A. Grube, revised by C. D. C. Reeve in Cooper (1997).

[11] Cf. *Euthydemus* 289d-e: Fido is your dog; Fido is a father; Fido is your father. That would be a valid argument with 'spaniel' in the place of 'father', but relational identities work differently.

[12] The exclusivity rule is also problematic for non-quantitative cases: cf. master and slave in the *Parmenides* (133c-134e).

[13] Plato would here be helping himself to the moralistic tradition in which being *metrios*, measured, is an important good of character (cf. Periander *ap*. Diogenes Laertius I.98, Cleobulos Apothegms 5 and 6 (cf. Mullach, vol. 1, 219–235), Theognis 611–616 etc.).

various activities depending on whether we manage to attain due measure? The latter reading is soon brought into focus with the argument from the crafts, but the suggestion of the former lingers.[14]

This second argument, (3.ii) *the argument from the crafts*, is the Visitor's central line of attack, with the third, (3.iii) *the pragmatic argument*, introduced *en passant*:

> Well, with this account of things we shall destroy—shan't we?—both the various sorts of craft themselves and their products, and in particular we shall make the one we're looking for now, statecraft, disappear, and the one we said was weaving. For I imagine all such kinds of craft guard against the more and less than what is in due measure—not as something which is not but as something which *is* and is troublesome in relation to what they do; and it is by preserving measure in this way that they produce all good and fine things. (*Plt*. 284a5-b2)

The statesman is here alluded to as just an instantiation of the general principle; but in context it has a distinct status as a *pragmatic* argument (cf. perhaps *Meno* 81d-e). There is, after all, no point in inquiring into what cannot be discovered, because it does not exist at all. Hence there is a parallel with the inquiry into the sophist, observed with great emphasis at 284b7-c4;[15] but while the existence of not-being was the object of extended philosophical argument, here we are going to take a short cut.[16]

The Visitor is right about the necessity of due measure for defining the statesman, in at least two ways. Statecraft will turn out to be the art that rules the others, notably rhetoric, law, and military expertise: it decides whether and when they should be used, and thus specializes in judgements about what is timely and untimely [*enkairia*, *akairia*] (305d; cf. Aristotle, *Eth*. *Nic*. I.1-2 on politics as the architectonic craft). Second, its own proprietary specialty, in which it is analogous to weaving, also depends on judgements about the right moment [*kairos*], specifically as to when the two traits to be intertwined in the culture of the city – sharpness, speed and courage on the one hand, and quietness and moderation on the other – are to be praised or blamed (307a-c, cf. 307e). So the postulation of normative measure is indeed necessary for the present inquiry to go through: if the *kairos* is not an independent reality, something an expert ruler can know and produce, then statecraft as Plato hopes to define it is not a thing.

[14] Cf. *Cratylus* 385e-386d1: to hold that some people are good and others bad, we must hold that some are wise and others foolish; and that means holding that Protagoras is wrong, and that things are *not* however they may appear to us. Our everyday practices of evaluation imply a broadly objectivist stance.

[15] On the parallel cf. Lane (1998, 129).

[16] Section 284c7-d4 is puzzling: taken literally and without emendation, it seems to claim that the current discussion will be necessary for a more precise proof (or one somehow *about* precision, *peri auto takribes*) in the future. But what the trajectory of the passage as a whole seems to demand is rather an admission that a fuller proof *of this very point* would be in order later on.

The Visitor then sums up by emphatically reiterating the ontological thesis together with the argument from the crafts, combined into what looks like a biconditional: "so therefore it is to be thought that in the same way all the crafts exist, and at the same time greater and less are measured not only against each other but also against the generation of due measure. For if this <due measure> exists, those <all the crafts> are, and if those are this too is, but if either of them does not exist, neither of them will ever be." (284d4-9).[17] At this point the response to the objection is essentially complete, and the Visitor pauses for a rather elaborate little rant on philosophical methodology, which I have labelled the *Critical Corollary*. Certain clever people [*kompsoi*] are right, the Visitor comments, to claim that an art of measurement covers everything that comes into being: this is just the point he himself has been making. But they think that they are saying something wiser than they are; worse, they go astray in failing to divide the art. This leads him into a highly compressed sketch of the procedures of collection and division. I discuss the passage, quoting in full, in section 6.3. For now, I will just note that this sounds like a critique of a real opponent – the impulse of an author who can't bear to endorse an intellectual rival without a lengthy explanation of his reservations.

The second part of the *Response*, in which it is applied to the *Objection*, is more straightforward; I will have much less to say about it. The Visitor returns to the model of spelling, which has all along been the meta-paradigm of learning via a paradigm (277d-279a). He recalls that, just as when we are learning to spell the exercise of spelling a short word is not only for its own sake but for the sake of [*heneka*] learning longer ones, so too with dialectic. Implicit is the (8) *general teleological principle of practical evaluation*: the standard of due measure for *any* activity depends on what the activity in question is for the sake of. This teleological principle is left under-described, barely glimpsed in the Visitor's talk of what the present discussion is 'for'. It is tempting to supply some sort of framework of natural teleology (cf. the *Timaeus*), and it does at least seem plausible that Plato must hold that teleological questions are not merely subjective, to be determined by the preferences and interests of the participants. (Otherwise a discussion which is the right length for you might not be so for me – a disastrous result if our evaluative judgements are to be coherent, objective, and action-guiding. I will return to this 'realist' dimension of the argument in the last section.) But all that is left in the background here.[18]

[17] Would there really be no such thing as the *kairos*, the right moment, in the treatment of disease if there were no doctors to detect it? I suspect the Visitor's biconditional is about our epistemic state rather than ontology. That is: if the crafts exist, *as we know they do*, then we can also know that due measure exists as well; and if due measure exists, *as we now* (thanks to this very argument!) *know that it does*, the crafts exist too – that is, we can now see as vindicated, and more fully understand, the claim of the crafts to be producers of 'fine things'.

[18] This raises the question of what role normative measure plays in the art of dialectic itself. It would be disappointingly peripheral if it *only* served to mark off discussions which are too long or too

So the inquiry into weaving was for the sake of the inquiry into the statesman; the Visitor does not even bother to make *that* point explicitly, but leaps to the larger and more surprising one that the inquiry into the statesman is itself for the sake of making the participants better dialecticians in a general way.[19] Thus the discussion of weaving only counts as too long if it is too long for *that* purpose. Which it is not – or at any rate the imagined objector has not shown that it is. This endgame is perfunctory and unsatisfying. It is unclear whether the Visitor means to assert positively that the discussion of weaving was right-sized, or only that its overlongness is unproven. The latter is hardly surprising, since it was the Visitor himself who stated the objection and he did so without *any* argument attached. Moreover his reasoning here is alarmingly open-ended: how would we *ever* be able to say with confidence that some discussion was too long to improve the general dialectical capacity of the participants? What is really called for here is a more specific defence of the method of the circuitous analysis in particular. However the general vindication of normative measure is orthogonal to that concern, and for Plato it evidently takes priority.

By far the most discussed part of our passage is one apparently otiose to the argument: (7) the 'likenesses' speech at 285b9-286b1. Here the Visitor reaffirms his point about what the discussion of weaving was 'for the sake of', but in somewhat complicated and confusing terms. Since G. E. L. Owen's overly-ingenious 1973 article, the passage has been the subject of outsized scholarly controversy, which I will not undertake to summarize or resolve here.[20] The Visitor's basic point seems clear: the greatest things, including statecraft, are not bodily, and so have no 'perceptible likenesses' or 'manifest images'.[21] Therefore they can only be learned through the exchange of *logoi*, in philosophical dialectic. (The claim is not that they do not have sensible-particular instantiations, but that perception of these does not make the feature in question clear to us: you cannot learn anything about what statecraft is just by looking at pictures of Nelson Mandela.) Moreover, the greatest things are *hard* to learn, and so require *practice* in dialectic. But practice in dialectic is best acquired on *easy* things. Therefore in order to learn the

short. Bringing to bear the relevant passages of the *Philebus*, Delcomminette (2005) argues that dialectic applies due measure on every occasion that it determines some determinable correctly, thus imposing a kind of intellectual 'limit'. This idea that dialectic is itself an exercise in measurement is appealing, but to spell it out we would need to see how the natures of the objects which dialectic considers could all be understood in quantitative terms. Here we come up against the deep mysteries (as they are to me) of Forms as numbers.

[19] This is a rather offhanded way of telling us what the point of the *Statesman* as a whole is, but its surprise appearance so close to the midpoint of the dialogue gives it a certain dramatic weight: see below on Plato's love of mixed signals.

[20] Cf. Owen (1973), Kato (1995), Bates (2004), Rowe (1995a/^{2}2005, ad loc.), Dixsaut, El Murr, et al. (2018, 431–443), Lane (1998, 61–76, esp. 70–75), Thein (2013), Rowe (1996).

[21] Cf. *Phaedrus* 250b-e. The scope of the Visitor's honorific phrases is very unclear: but Dixsaut, El Murr, et al. (2018) seem right that they do not refer to all Forms as such, and also 'ne qualifieraient alors pas rituellement les réalités intelligibles *en général*' (438, cf. 435): the Visitor likely has in particular view *nous* and its kin.

greatest things we should also do dialectic about easy things. Weaving is one of those easy things (this is implicit, but there is no other good way to tether the speech to the broader agenda of the passage): so we were right to use it as preparation for our analysis of the statesman. This leaves open a number of questions about what makes one thing a 'likeness' of another, and how to integrate the points made here with the earlier discussion of *paradeigmata*; but for present purposes these can be set aside.

We can now step back to ask about the function of our passage as a whole. As we've seen, by establishing the existence of the *kairos* and normative measure in general it makes, as befits its central position in a roughly ring-composed work, a foundational contribution to the argument of the *Statesman* overall. But this raises a paradox: in that case, why is this key point introduced by way of the casual-looking pretext of the imagined objection? As Julia Annas drily remarks, 'Readers have been understandably dismayed by the way in which Plato makes the visitor comment on the apparent length and irrelevance of his digressions in a way which is itself lengthy and not obviously relevant.'[22] Why would Plato half-disguise an important principle as a peevish, ad hoc bit of self-defence? I think we can distinguish three things going on here, all typical of Plato's philosophical and literary strategies (or, since the moves in question are local ones, his *tactics*). First, he takes a kind of artistic delight in presentational self-deprecation, and the paradoxical use of the trivial as pretext for the profound. There is a distinct playfulness, an amusingly obvious disingenuousness, in framing one of your most important arguments as a boring digression about boring digressions. Second, this playfulness serves a philosophically important purpose. For it is a way of keeping his signals as to the function and relative importance of any given argument thoroughly mixed. The aim is to destabilize any assumptions we might passively absorb about which bits of the text are important: that's up to us to figure out, and we should be guided by the content of the argumentation, not its rhetorical framing. Third, this particular mode of destabilization makes, by ostention, a substantive point, about what we might call the localization or *embedding* of philosophical principles. Even the most small-scale judgements and decisions, if we are to make them rationally, turn out to depend on profound and difficult questions of principle. This is most vivid in the early dialogues, where the prompt for discussion is often a practical question; but Plato clearly stands by it in later works, and in our passage comes as close as he ever does to stating it flat out. Want to complain that some part of a Platonic dialogue, like this one right here, has gone on for too long? Well, Plato has bad news for you. Casual grumbling about the length of the *Statesman* turns out to commit you to some significant and profoundly Platonic philosophical propositions: you must be taking the

[22] Annas (1995, 47 n45).

metrion to be a reality, irreducible to purely comparative measure and fixed by the relevant teleological criteria, which you are implicitly claiming to grasp. You are attempting, in short, to apply an art which you may not even have realized exists: the art of normative measurement.

6.2 Plato and the Art of Measurement

I have said that late Plato is obsessed with measurement; but in truth his fascination with the measuring arts goes back as far as the *Euthyphro*.[23] Here Socrates argues that if the gods are in a state of discord with each other, it must be because they disagree about what is just and unjust, and fine and shameful, and good and bad (7d1-e5). These contrast with matters about which disagreement can be resolved by determining some measure. As exemplified by the canonical trio of counting, spatial measurement, and weighing, measurement is thus presumed to be a socially accepted method for determining non-obvious matters of fact, resolving uncertainties, and settling disputes. Another important passage on measure, in *Republic* 10, brings out that this involves a rational passage from appearance to reality: 'And don't measuring, counting, and weighing give us most welcome assistance in these cases, so that we aren't ruled by something's looking bigger, smaller, more numerous, or heavier, but by calculation, measurement, or weighing?' (602d6-9).[24]

So measurement for Plato is a rational procedure or method which answers unresolved questions and replaces appearance-based judgements with knowledge of reality. Its methods are transparent, its results public and authoritative: it is a kind of depersonalized, rationalist successor to the judgement-giving kings of Hesiod, or even to the Homeric *agōn* which publicly adjudicates the conflicting claims of heroes. Looking forwards, we can see in the complex of features which distinguish measurement – the correction of error, the replacement of opinion with knowledge, the passage from appearance to reality, the production of rational consensus through inquiry – as an early nucleus of the idea of *objectivity*.

[23] For the crucial cultural background – the more general fascination of the fifth-century intellectuals with the powers of techne and quantitative reckoning – the classic accounts are Nussbaum (1986, 106–109) and Heinimann (1975). I do not see, as Lane does, any 'mild disparagement of these paragon achievements' (1998, 128) in our passage. On the contrary, the Visitor is in effect arguing that the rational authority of these familiar kinds of measurement *also* rightly belong to certain kinds of *evaluative* judgements. The Visitor's critical tone is directed towards those who fail to keep normative measure clearly distinct, not toward either part of the art itself.

[24] These passages all deal with the familiar forms of quantitative measurement that will make up the comparative half of the art in the *Statesman*. They treat these as freestanding mini-arts; but not far behind is the thought that the other, more complex crafts require them (cf. *Republic* 7, 522b-c). The point will be repeated in the *Statesman* and elaborated enormously in the *Philebus*, where measurement is what gives all the arts their epistemic standing (55d-56d).

The allure of measurement for Plato, then, is that it is a form of inquiry which produces authoritative objective results. And so it shows that such a thing is possible; the question is whether and how it might be extended to more difficult questions. We are here at the birthplace of what we might call *Leibniz's Dream*: the aspiration to some kind of systematic procedure that would make *all* inquiry (including the resolution of philosophical disputes and ethical conflicts) reducible to something like the taking of a measure. The dream comes out into the open in the most striking passage on measure in early Plato, the discussion of the *metrētikē technē* in the *Protagoras*. Socrates here hypothesizes that (on the view of 'the Many') the only goods and evils in human existence are pleasures and pains, so that errors of choice must consist in mistakenly taking the lesser pleasure (or greater pain) rather than the alternative. So correct deliberation is reducible to correct quantitative judgement; and Socrates develops his conception of the required *technē* by way of analogy with the canonical trio of weighing, measuring size, and arithmetic (356a-7a). He then applies the model to the target case at hand: 'since it has turned out that our salvation in life depends on the right choice [*orthē hairesis*] of pleasures and pains, be they more or fewer, greater or lesser, farther or nearer, doesn't our salvation seem, first of all, to be measurement [*metrētikē*], which is the study of relative excess and deficiency and equality?' (357a5-b3). And, crucially, the connection of measurement to *technē* holds firm: 'And since it is measurement, it must definitely be an art, and knowledge' (357b4). The postulation of this art is sufficient to vindicate the thesis, shared by Socrates and Protagoras, of the 'sovereignty' of knowledge.

The *Protagoras* discussion resituates the basic *Euthyphro* measurement scenario within a single agent. Just as two people may disagree over which of two objects is larger, I may disagree with *myself* over time. For proximity makes all the difference to how things appear, including prospective and current pleasures and pains. Only an art of measurement can go beyond the appearances and thus establish a consensus between myself at different moments, so as to resolve confusions and conflicting desires, and above all to preclude mistaken action and regret (an idea that will be all-important to the Stoics). The account here is clearly only a placeholder – Socrates has not even decided whether we need an analogue to counting, weighing, spatial measurement, or all three. What matters to him is the point of principle: if problems of deliberation *can* be reduced to puzzles about comparative quantities, we can at least see *that*, and perhaps begin to glimpse *how*, they might be solved.

Taken together, these texts present what we might call 'phase I', the first movement, of Plato's thinking on measure. They collectively have the form of an observation which inspires a speculation. Given the almost magical powers of the measuring arts within their spheres, why should we not aspire to a *general* measuring art, one which could guide action across the board? Note that on this reading, measurement fascinates Plato simply as a locus of uncontroversial epistemic

success: what is important to him is the fact that it can be done. So we needn't postulate any particular fascination with the quantitative realm as such, or number in particular, based on the influence of the Pythagoreans, to explain the grip of measurement on his imagination.

What is lacking from these texts (hence 'phase I') is any invocation of *normative* measure. And our passage of the *Statesman* is the locus classicus for a 'phase II' in which this becomes key to Plato's thinking on the topic. But we can see it at work in other late dialogues as well, particularly in the *Philebus* conception of Measure (including *to metrion* and *kairion*) as a kind of ultimate good itself, a source of value prior to the order and proportion it instils in other things (*Phlb*. 66a; cf. also 24c6-d2, 52c1-d1, and implicitly *Euthyd*. 299b-c).[25] So where does this key innovation come from? We might suspect it starts from the association of measure with craft, which Plato has always seen as productive of order, proportion, and beauty. As Socrates says in a famous and tantalizing passage of the *Gorgias*:

> Yes, Callicles, wise men claim that partnership and friendship, orderliness [*kosmiotēs*], self-control, and justice hold together heaven and earth, and gods and men, and that is why they call this universe a *world order* [*kosmos*], my friend, and not an undisciplined world-disorder. I believe that you don't pay attention to these facts, even though you're a wise man in these matters. You've failed to notice that proportionate equality [*hē isotēs hē geōmetrikē*] has great power among both gods and men, and you suppose that you ought to practice getting the greater share. That's because you neglect geometry.[26]
>
> (*Grg*. 507e6-508a8)

This is the peroration of a complex dialectical argument in which Socrates has argued that craft bestows order and excellence on its objects, so that it is justice (including the punishment of incontinent souls) which has the *structure* of a craft (500a-1c, 503d-506e).[27] Here this idea of order [*kosmos* and cognates] is the key bridge between human craft and its divine, world-making counterpart (cf. esp. 503e-505c); measurement appears in its invocation of 'geometric equality', which looks like it might be a more specific precursor to the normative measure of the *Statesman*. As Dodds points out, although strictly speaking the phrase refers to 'the equality of ratios found in a geometrical progression', geometrical equality has from early on a *political* application: it is used for a conception of justice as distributing shares which are fair or 'equal' not by being identical, but by being in each case *proportionate* to the desert or standing of the recipient.[28] Typically this

[25] My thanks to Georgia Mouroutsou for this point. [26] Trans. D. Zeyl, in Cooper (1997).
[27] Cf. the different arguments for this thesis at *Republic* 1, 339a-342e and 349a-350c.
[28] Dodds (1959, 338–340). As Rachana Kamtekar points out to me, a geometric progression as such is of course within the scope of ordinary comparative measure; it is the idea of appropriateness

is contrasted with the democratic justice which simply gives an equal share to all. But Socrates' point in the *Gorgias* is that it *also* contrasts with the pleonectic ethic of maximization (as much as possible for me!) propounded by Callicles. From the point of view of the *Statesman*, we can see that both Callicles and the democrat are getting normative measure wrong: the one assumes that egoistic maximization is good, the other that brute comparative equality is. So perhaps this is the context in which the idea of normative measure comes to seem important to Plato: as a way of seeing what mistaken ideas of justice have in common.[29] (I will return to this thought at the end.)

Another key move towards 'phase II' of Plato's thought about measure can perhaps be seen in the discussion of craft at *Phaedrus* 268a-269d. Imagine a pretender to the art of medicine who boasts of being able to make people vomit, lower their temperatures, and so forth, for whatever purpose he pleases. Clearly this person would not count as a doctor. His conception of *technē* is heteronomous, we might say, or instrumentalist: in the absence of any recognition that the end of medical activity is *health*, and any understanding of what health consists in, his decision to cause vomiting or chilling can only be made on the basis of considerations external to the art itself. Heteronomous craft involves 'denialism' about normative measure, or at any rate proceeds without it; a real craft cannot. A real doctor must know the *right* time [*kairos*] to administer medicine, and the *right* [*metrion*] dosage to give, and those judgements of rightness depend on a systematic understanding of the end of health and the nature of the human body. In all this, the *Phaedrus* looks forward to the *Statesman*, where the crafts are vindicated by being explained as grasping and instantiating the relevant due measure.

Finally, that the art of the statesman depends on normative measure, and in particular on getting the *kairos* right, is already explicit (though not thematized in quite those terms) in the *Republic*.[30] For when the *kallipolis* falls, it is because of a failure of timing: the rulers breed the next generation out of season, having failed to correctly grasp the 'perfect' or 'geometric' number which should regulate the human cycle; eventually the ruling class decays beyond repair (*Republic* 8, 546a-e). The details here are notoriously baffling, to the point of looking either esotericist or comic, but these are perhaps only a placeholder: and the more basic point is a direct signpost to Plato's later account of statecraft. One of the many ways in

(which I take to be insinuated by the term *isotēs*) which implies normative standing. The relevant geometry and its political application do both seem to be Pythagorean in origin, as is flagged by Socrates' reference of the whole point to wise men [*sophoi*] and their account of the *kosmos*.

[29] It might be objected that Callicles and Glaucon are wrong about what the human good *is*, not in holding that it is to be maximized. More generally, ancient Greek eudaimonism is often taken to assume that human happiness consists in the maximization of something like pleasure, virtue, or contemplation. But the *Philebus* account of the mixed life looks to me like a thoughtful repudiation of any such assumption: the best life is not one that maximizes *anything*, but one that has the appropriate mixture of goods.

[30] My thanks to Devin Henry for this point.

which the *Statesman* is a natural successor to the *Republic* is that it gives a far more satisfactory explanation of how statecraft might fit the model of a craft: that is, an expertise deployed in the correctly-timed imposition of due measure on matter. The presence of this conception in both dialogues should leave us in no doubt as to how seriously, deeply, and literally Plato believed in it, even if his first draft of the details is bizarre.

6.3 Getting Measure Wrong: The *kompsoi*

We can now turn, as the text itself invites us to do, to the question of who and what Plato is here arguing *against*. We might initially think that no one would really deny the existence of normative measure; surely no one would be willing to forego making everyday evaluative judgements like 'too long' and 'too slow'! And the Visitor is right: if the possibility of a too-long discourse or a too-slow movie is uncontroversial, so must the existence of a *metrion* be – though of course just what *kind* of existence it has, and how it is to be determined, remain open questions. (I will say more about this at the end of this chapter.) And yet with the 'Critical Corollary' at 284e-285b, Plato seems to point the finger at an antagonist, or at least at someone who is getting normative measure wrong.[31] I quote it as a whole, with numbers to break down the steps:

> Yes, Socrates, and [1] what sometimes many clever people say, all the time supposing themselves to be expressing something wise, to the effect that there is therefore an art of measurement regarding everything that comes into being—this is actually the very thing we have just said. For in a certain way it is the case that all those things that are the products of the various kinds of expertise share in measurement; [2] but because of their not being accustomed to carrying on their investigations by dividing according to kinds, they [2a] straightaway throw these things together, despite their being so very different from each other, thinking them alike [*homoia*], and [2b] correspondingly they do the opposite of this with other things, dividing them not according to parts, when the rule is that [3a] when one perceives first a commonality [*koinōnia*] among many things, one should not desist until one sees in it all those differences [*diaphoras*] that are located in kinds [*eidē*], and [3b] conversely with the multifarious unlikenesses [*pantodapas anomoiotētas*], when they are seen among many things, one should be incapable of pulling a face and stopping before one has penned all the related things [*oikeia*] within one likeness [*homoiotēs*] and surrounded them in some real class [*genous tinos ousia*]. (*Plt*. 284e11-285b6)

[31] Strictly speaking, 'many of the *kompsoi*', but I take this to be periphrastic rather than pointing to a determinate sub-group, a bit like the vaguifying phrase *hoi peri* ('those around') some philosopher.

The Visitor here expresses himself with his customary murky allusiveness. In [1], it is granted that the *kompsoi* are getting something right about *technē* and measurement: namely that there *is* an all-encompassing art of measurement, relating to everything that comes into being. But the Visitor's tone is grudging from the start, with the clear suggestion that their perception of their 'wisdom' is overblown. In [2] we learn that they do dialectic wrong, and the criticisms in [2a] and [2b] explain how: they mistake similar things for identical and so refuse to divide them, and when they do divide it is not according to kinds. The contrasting [3a] and [3b] then sketch how to do dialectic correctly. There is no one-to-one mapping between these pairs, however; [3a] seems to present the corrective to *both* the failures described in [2]. A correct division means dividing a perceived unity into kinds, and that means *neither* mistaking its common feature for identity *tout court* (and so giving up on the division) *nor* getting its subdivisions wrong. That leaves [3b] free to describe the correct *converse* procedure, where we begin with a perception of multiplicity and proceed to uncover a unity: here the critique is of anyone who rests satisfied with the perception of *dis*similarities, where a less obvious shared likeness may also be present. Thus [3b] is a useful addition to our scanty Platonic texts on 'collection', and the passage as a whole a summary account of his late method of 'collection and division', though I will not here discuss how it compares to the others.[32] Its distinctive emphasis is on the need for rigour, persistence, and the ability to hold contrasting thoughts in place at the same time, so as to perceive aspects *both* of sameness *and* of difference. Bad dialectic involves a kind of laziness: taking obvious similarities or dissimilarities as final, without asking carefully what kinds they ground membership in.

We are now in a position to ask who Plato might take to be guilty of these errors in the case at hand. The term *kompsoi* is of limited help. Elsewhere in Plato *kompsos* and cognates clearly mean something like 'clever', with deprecating connotations which are stronger in some passages than others (and are here reinforced by the snarky *sophon ti*).[33] But it has no fixed referent: the term is more often used of devices and ideas than people, and such references to people as there are[34] form no clear pattern. Scholars have been surprisingly ready to accept Campbell's suggestion (offered without any real argument or supporting

[32] The method of the gods in the *Philebus* seems to be the same, but there the emphasis is on the complementary point that the *intervening* steps must be rigorously executed: what is important is to identify not only the 'one' and the variegated 'many', but to stop at *every* station of subdivision in between (16b-19a).

[33] *Kompsos* and cognates are Plato's default terminology (and not Plato's alone: cf. the quotation from Euripides' *Amphion* at *Grg*. 486c6) for disparaging intellectual ingenuity of a showy, self-satisfied sort (*Phd*. 101c8, *Cra*. 399a4, 426a2, *Tht*. 156a3, 171a6, 202d10, *Resp*. 568c1, etc.): e.g., for the denial of falsehood at *Cra*. 429d7, for trivial rhetorical techniques at *Phdr*. 266d9, and contrasted with a crude concern for truth at *Hp. Mai*. 288d4. (But note too what looks like limited positivity at *Cra*. 405d2, *Phd*. 105c2, *Grg*. 493a5, *Phlb*. 53c6, and *Resp*. 460a8, 495d4, 505b6.)

[34] *Phlb*. 53c6, *Cra*. 405d2, *Grg*. 493a5 *Ly*. 216a1 perhaps, *Resp*. 505b6 and 568c1.

evidence) that the *kompsoi* here are Pythagoreans.[35] This seems to me highly unlikely. We saw in section 6.2 that Plato's 'phase II' thinking about measure may have a Pythagorean heritage, and measure conjoined with *kairos* does seem to have been a motif of Pythagorean thought (DK 44B23, 58B4). But this association should not be overestimated: other Presocratic thinkers also invoked measure as a cosmological and normative concept (e.g. Heraclitus DK B30, B94). And reconstructing pre-Platonic Pythagorean views is notoriously tricky given the likelihood of retrojected Platonism in our sources. What seems to me unlikely is that the Pythagoreans discussed measure in a way which could have occasioned Plato's detailed critique of poor dialectical practice; and they seem an improbable target of the snarky valence of *kompsoi*, given the evidently sincere reference to them as *sophoi* in the highly relevant passage of the *Gorgias* noted above (507e6).

Several clues seem to point instead to a sophistic target. The sophists at least attempted to do dialectic ('eristic'), and so can reasonably be criticized for doing it badly. Moreover, it seems likely that over-simplified arguments about the same and different were standbys of sophistic eristic (cf. e.g. *Dissoi Logoi* I-5). Ironically, a star example would be Socrates' argument for the sameness of piety and justice at *Protagoras* 330c-1e; and here it is Protagoras who makes the point that we need to be careful not to confuse particular kinds of similarity and dissimilarity with similarity and dissimilarity *tout court* (331d-e).

What the Corollary criticizes in the *kompsoi* is a self-satisfaction which breeds laziness – a kind of middle ground, then, between innocent dialectical failure and the knowing deployment of fallacy. Critiques which overlap with this one can be found in several other passages. At *Phaedo* 101d-2a, Socrates, in completing his sketch of the method of hypothesis, dismisses certain refuters or contradiction-mongers [*antilogikoi*] who jumble things up yet remain satisfied with their wisdom (101e) – in contrast to philosophers, who are determined to discover the things which really are, one by one. Another case is a passage of the *Republic* in which Socrates laments that they have fallen unwillingly into the art of *antilogikē* (454a6-7), which happens to many people 'because they are unable to examine what has been said by dividing it up according to forms [*to mē dunasthai kat' eidē diairoumenoi to legomenon episkopein* – note the resemblance to the language of the *Corollary*]'. To avoid this we need to be clear about the *kind* of natural sameness and difference relevant to the case at hand (454b6, c9); contra yet another imagined objection, a male and a female doctor have the same natures in the relevant respect, and a male doctor and a male carpenter different ones. Third and closer still to our text is a reference in the *Philebus* discussion of dialectic to the 'wise' [*sophoi*] nowadays who 'make a one, haphazardly, and a many, faster or slower than they should; they go straight from the one to the unlimited and omit

[35] Campbell (1867, ad loc).

the intermediates. It is these, however, that make all the difference as to whether we are engaged with each other in dialectical or only in eristic discourse' (*Phlb*. 16e4-17a5).[36] All these passages seem to suggest that this kind of bad dialectic is a somewhat deliberate practice, associated with sophistic eristic and *antilogikē*. But the practitioner himself falls into the trap of oversimplification, even if he is happy with his results.

Can we put a name to this portrait of the bad dialectician? We do not have good enough evidence for Plato's contemporaries or predecessors to do so with any confidence. But we have some independent reason to suspect a reference to Protagoras. As I noted at the start, Plato uses Protagoras as a foil for thinking about measure in the *Protagoras* and *Theaetetus* both, and our presumption should be in favour of reading *Statesman* 283b-287b as part of the same project. This suggests that the term *pantodapas* here at 285b3 might echo a similarly loaded use of it by Plato's Protagoras in an important speech (*Prot*. 334a3-c6 at b7). And Protagoras' objection to Socrates' confusion of similars and sames in the *Protagoras* does not preclude – if anything, it suggests – that his own practice of *antilogikē* sometimes depended on related ploys. (The pre-Platonic art of argument has a situational ethic: it is part of your job as respondent to diagnose and object to the moves you would make yourself as questioner.) More important is a simple point: Protagoras is the only pre-Platonic thinker to whom we can be confident in attributing something close to the insight the Visitor attributes to the *kompsoi*. This is, again, that 'there is an art of measurement regarding everything that comes into being'. Whatever exactly Protagoras meant by his slogan, 'Man is the measure of all things', it entails precisely that: all things have a measure.[37]

But there is also a large problem with seeing Protagoras or the sophists generally as the target here. For they have a good claim to have *discovered* normative measure. Protagoras is credited with the discovery of 'the power [*dunamis*] of the *kairos*' by Diogenes Laertius (IX.52). He is also associated with 'correctness', *orthotēs*, of various kinds – indeed the term is plausibly a sophistic buzzword.[38] In the *Protagoras*, Hippias calls on both Protagoras and Socrates to preserve due measure, the *metrion*, in their speeches (338a-b). In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates contrasts Prodicus with the rhetoricians who boast of being able to speak both concisely and at infinite length. 'Actually, when I told Prodicus this last, he laughed and said that only he had discovered the art of proper speeches: What we need are speeches that are neither long nor short but of the right length' (*Phdr*. 267b2-5).[39]

[36] D. Frede translation in Cooper (1997).

[37] Plato's *ti sophon* also reminds me of Aristotle's snark towards Protagoras in *Metaph*. X.1: rightly understood the measure thesis says nothing very special [*peritton*] (1053b3).

[38] *Phdr*. 267c, cf. *Prot*. 339a2, Diogenes Laertius IX.55; also Prodicus' 'correctness of names', *Euthyd*. 277e, *Cra*. 384b). In the sophistic *On the Art*, it is said that 'where there is a boundary between correct and incorrect, there is an art' (V.30-32).

[39] Trans. Nehamas and Woodruff in Cooper (1997).

Given the general scantiness of our evidence for their thought, this is rather a lot of evidence that the sophists were Plato's precursors in discovering the importance and irreducibility of normative measure, particularly in the all-important matter at hand in the *Statesman*: the length of speeches.

At the same time, it is noticeable that these passages all have to do with *craft*; for Plato does have a fight to pick with Protagoras regarding the *technai*. In the *Theaetetus*, much of the debate between Socrates and Protagoras revolves around whether the Measure Thesis allows for the practice of any recognizable kind of wisdom or expertise on the part of Protagoras himself. In the famous 'Defence' passage, Socrates presents an impressive Protagorean account of what a relativist *technē* might look like (166a-168c). I have no space to discuss that here, and the philosophical puzzles it raises are complex; but if we take our cue from the Defence, at least, it seems that a 'Protagorean' craft could have no standard of success other than the satisfied customer: a Protagorean expert might profess adherence to the *kairos* or the *metrion*, but would have to ultimately derive it from the verdict of his 'patient' later on. That seems to me to be significantly different from the heteronomous craft of the *Phaedrus*, and not to amount to any kind of denialism or conflationism about due measure. But Plato might have disagreed. If as I have suggested measurement is important to him as a model of rational inquiry giving *objective* results, then a kind of 'due measure' ultimately determined by subjective responses might look to him like no measure at all.[40]

A final candidate target for Plato's snark is the author himself, or rather the Socrates of the early dialogues. For him as for no one else, we have explicit evidence for the error in question – in its strongest form, as denialism about normative measure – in the passages on the exclusivity of relatives in the *Charmides*, *Protagoras*, and *Republic*, which I noted in section 6.1. Socrates is also guilty of some of the dialectical failures complained of in the Corollary, most notably in the eristic arguments of the *Protagoras*. Above all, it is Socrates who (again in the *Protagoras*) propounds an art of measurement along wholly comparative lines.[41] Interpreters uneasy with the *Protagoras* argument have often enough seen it as un-Socratic, particularly in its reliance on the hypothesis of hedonism. But another way to diagnose what is wrong here is that this hypothesis is only necessary because the art of measurement is radically incomplete *as an art*, and so heteronomous. Because it does not incorporate normative measurement, the art cannot *itself* tell us which pleasures and pains are to be avoided and which

[40] See Gavray (2017) for an important attempt to bring together these texts (90–102, esp. 95–97), and for the sophistic origins of the normative concepts *kairos*, *prepon*, and the like. However, Gavray does not take into account the other possible targets of Plato's critique here. Our readings also differ fundamentally in that I do not accept that Protagoras really held the 'relativist' position Socrates elaborates in the *Theaetetus*, or even that Plato seriously means to claim that he did. If Protagoras *is* the target of the Corollary, it offers a tantalizing glimpse of a Platonic critique which is independent of the *Theaetetus*.

[41] As noted by Hutchinson (1988, 36–37). Cf. also Gavray (2017, 101).

chosen – the question which Plato will take to be obviously central in the *Philebus* – but can only defer to the hedonistic norms imported by its practitioner. So how could it be our 'salvation' in life (*Prt*. 356d-e) – and how could this merely instrumental craft be said to make knowledge 'sovereign' (*Prt*. 352b-d)? Viewed in this light, our *Statesman* passage may thus be more an exercise in self-correction than anything else.

6.4 Conclusions

We are now in a position to see that *Statesman* 283b1-287b3 is an important and surprisingly rare thing: a Platonic argument for moral realism. It goes unrecognized as such because the emphasis is not where modern readers would expect it to be, on vindicating the objectivity of *ethical* judgement in particular. But that is because for Plato the interesting challenge is the prior one of establishing the reality of objective normativity in general. Given that general truth about rational agency, the extension of objectivity to the moral realm looks easy enough: if rational action in the sphere of the crafts presupposes objectively discoverable norms for its orientation, why should we not presume that the same is true in the sphere of the virtues? The Visitor's airily ambiguous reference to our judgements of agents as good and bad now looks like a tossing of the burden of argument on to the opponent – onto anyone who would insist that in the ethical case, uniquely, our attributions of badness have nothing to do with objective excess and deficiency. A similar line of argument can be seen in *Republic* 1, and it is probably no coincidence that there too the subject at hand is the *technē* of the statesman in particular (349a-50c). For in the case of the ruler competence in the task at hand seems to import ethical judgements already (about justice and *phronēsis*, for instance): it is the most obvious zone of overlap between the domain of the crafts and that of the virtues.

The more specific claim that this objective normativity is *quantitative* in form, as due measure, is a very characteristically Platonic amalgam of familiar observation and profound speculation. Again, measure is for him the paradigm case of scientific method: it represents the power of rational inquiry to reach objective and authoritative results. At the same time it is also central to our most commonplace every-day evaluative judgements – too much, too little, too long, just right. This is 'embeddedness' at its most extreme: grant Plato that a discussion can be overlong, he thinks, and he can show you to be committed to the fundamental principles of his conception of objective normativity.

How much realism the argument gives is unclear. Again, an anti-Platonist – the Protagorean, say – can agree that there is such a thing as normative measure, conceptually independent of and non-reducible to the merely comparative kind. He can further agree that the *metrion* in each kind of rational action is dictated by what the activity at hand is 'for the sake of'. An anti-Platonic conception of value

could still be fit into this Platonic conceptual framework: we need only add that what human activities are 'for the sake of' depends on our perspectives as agents and observers, so that the *metrion* is a subjective matter as well. (In a sense of 'subjective' matching the sense I have been giving to 'objective' above: *not* a matter for scientific inquiry, *not* belonging to the realm of reality as opposed to appearances, *not* subject to rational convergence or consensus.) Plato would presumably retort that a subjective kind of 'measure' is no measure at all; I am not sure where the argument would go from there.

It is natural to suppose that Plato's main purpose here is to pursue this realist line of argument as far as possible, with his opponent the Protagorean subjectivist. But this may not be quite right. Once you start to look for them, conflationism and denialism about the two kinds of measurement turn out to be hydra-headed forms of error: I have already noted Socrates' own heteronomous measuring art in the *Protagoras*, the immoralist's drive for pleonectic maximization, and the democrat's unreflective demand for equal shares. And the same kind of mistake is routinely visible in everyday, unphilosophical contexts. In particular, we encounter conflationism whenever someone assumes that a shorter discussion or a greater pleasure or a bigger house or a faster-paced movie or a larger income is always a good thing. Or that a more centrist politician is *ipso facto* a better one, or that either income equality or the maximization of GDP is an obvious norm of the art of politics. And it is probably with political applications like these that we can best see that Plato's ontological thesis is not a truism, but continues to have some bite.

Of course, Plato's argument does not rule out the possibility that the *metrion* might *in some cases* supervene reliably on a maximum, a midpoint, or some other standard comparative measure. For all our passage itself says, the art of the statesman *might* involve allocating social goods by arithmetically equal shares, or seeking to maximize wealth. But the recognized arts do not seem to work that way. There is nothing specifiable in purely quantitative terms which the musician seeks to maximize (cf. *Republic* 349a-350c), or which the doctor or carpenter must always apply in identical amounts. Nor are there any arts in which a work is better the bigger or smaller or the longer or shorter it is. The reason we need to keep due measure and the merely comparative kind carefully distinct is that it is very rare for the two to regularly coincide so that the one is in practice reducible to the other. But it is apparently quite common for us to conflate the two in our thinking about ends. Plato thus suggests a caution and a diagnosis: when we see someone pursuing a purely quantitative end under the guise of a craft, they are almost certainly failing to be guided by the real norms inherent to it.[42]

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