

# Plato's *Statesman*

Proceedings of the Eighth Symposium  
Platonicum Pragense

Edited by  
Aleš Havlíček, Jakub Jirsa  
and Karel Thein

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## LETTERS AND MODELS: ON THE *STATESMAN*, 277D–278E

Jakub Jirsa

It might be interesting to notice that the nature of political power is the topic of Plato's longest works: the *Republic*, the *Laws* and the *Gorgias*. The discussion of politics in these dialogues is usually related to a metaphysical, epistemological or cosmological discussion so that it is not hard to figure out that Plato wanted to see practical political philosophy interrelated with what we nowadays call theoretical philosophical disciplines. Therefore, if the *Statesman* has the goal to define the true statesmanship then we should expect to find in it both high-level epistemology or metaphysics and political philosophy.

In the *Statesman* Plato on several occasions digresses from the search for the "account of the name of the expertise of the statesman" (*Polit.* 267a5–6)<sup>1</sup> into methodological reflections upon the very method used in this search.<sup>2</sup> The digressions seem to disturb the dramatic line of the dialogue and several interpreters thus considered it to be ill-structured and badly composed.<sup>3</sup>

However, I think there is a straightforward reason why Plato feels the need to supply the search for the true statesman with reflections about knowledge. It might be useful to mention the obvious once again: the *Statesman* is a dramatic sequel to the *Theaetetus* and

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<sup>1</sup> I use Rowe's translation, if not stated otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> The main methodological digressions are: *Polit.* 262a–263c, 277d–278e, 283c–287c (where 285a–b serves as a compact summary of the method so far).

<sup>3</sup> El Murr lists several doubts about critiques of Plato's stylistic skill in the *Statesman* in *Politics and Dialectic in Plato's Statesman*, in: *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, XXV, 2009, pp. 229–232.

*Sophist*.<sup>4</sup> When Socrates asks Theaetetus to tell him what knowledge is (*Tht.* 146c3), Theaetetus' first attempt to answer enumerates different kinds of knowledge and crafts: geometry, cobbling etc. In the subsequent argument Socrates shows the mistake of this attempt: whoever does not know what a given  $x$  is, does not know particular kinds of  $x$  either (*Tht.* 147a–c).<sup>5</sup>

The task of the younger Socrates and the Eleatic stranger in the *Statesman* is often phrased as looking for a kind of knowledge (*epistēmē*) which corresponds to statesmanship<sup>6</sup> and the rulers are said to be the true experts or “knowers” (ἀληθῶς ἐπιστήμονας, *Polit.* 293c7). Therefore, if we want to know what statesman(ship) is, we have to know what knowledge is. I believe that this is the reason why Plato includes the metaphysical and epistemological reflections into this dialogue. They were not necessary in the *Sophist* since sophistry is not a kind of knowledge and sophists do not possess proper knowledge. Since the sophists operate with falsehood, it was important to explain what falsehood is. The true statesman, on the other hand, operates with knowledge and therefore in order to know the statesman(ship) we have to know about (at least the relevant aspects of) knowledge.

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<sup>4</sup> The case of children learning their letters is said to be an example of a general way how our soul “experienced this same thing in relation to individual elements of everything” (περὶ τὰ τῶν πάντων στοιχεῖα, *Polit.* 278c8–d1). This reflects the thesis from the *Theaetetus* that “the elements are much more clearly known and the knowledge of them is more decisive for the mastery of any branch of study than knowledge of the complex” (*Tht.* 206b7–9). Yet, the final attempt in the *Theaetetus* to explain what knowledge is fails on the example of letters: when writing Theaetetus correctly because of having a correct opinion about each and every letter, one does not yet have any knowledge (presumably) about the name Theaetetus but merely a correct opinion (*Tht.* 207e–208b). That seems to me to be an analogy to the pupils in the *Statesman* and I suppose the passage from the *Statesman* serves (besides other things) to explain the problems with the example in the *Theaetetus* as well. On the relation between the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist* and *Statesman* see Mary Louise Gill's paper in this volume.

<sup>5</sup> For a critical assessment of this passage cf. J. McDowell, *Plato: Theaetetus*, Oxford 1973, pp. 114–115.

<sup>6</sup> Plato, *Polit.* 259c2, 261c8, 266e11, 267a8, 284b5, 288e6, 292e10, 295b3, 300e9.

In the following paper I will discuss one of passages concerning knowledge (*epistêmê*), which introduces the famous case with children being acquainted with letters (*Polit.* 277d–278e). This story is said to serve as an example or model for a usage of another model.

Some interpreters – and especially Stanley Rosen<sup>7</sup> – seem to be puzzled with the translation of the term παράδειγμα: does Plato mean an example or a model?<sup>8</sup> The problem (if it is a problem at all) is one of translation, since the term covers both these meanings. I understand that example always stands as one item of the class and model is an “entity or conceptual construction that allows us to understand the individual”.<sup>9</sup> Now it is not hard to show that Plato uses both of these meanings. The *technê* of weaving is not an example of statesmanship, but it can serve as a model for its *pragmateia* (*Polit.* 279a7–8); however *the activity* of weaving which consists in combining different threads according to a certain intended order serves as an easily comprehensible example of combining (or combination) which is an essential part of the statesman’s activity as well (cf. *Polit.* 311b–c).

When talking about a model in relation to Plato’s dialogues, I should perhaps emphasize that the model is in the dialogue understood solely in the terms of epistemological priority, since it is better known to us than the more complex entity it is supposed to illuminate. There is absolutely no need to suppose any ontological priority of the models I am going to talk about (as opposed, perhaps to the *paradeigma* in the *Timaeus*, 28a7, c6 etc.).

There is one disclaimer to be mentioned right at the start. My discussion deals with dialectics, which I understand here primarily as the method<sup>10</sup> which allows us to arrive to the destination, i.e. to the knowledge of definition. Dialectics is thus a kind of intellectual way or journey (ὁδός, cf. *Polit.* 266e1, 268d5, 265a2). In my purely *meth-*

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<sup>7</sup> S. Rosen, *Plato’s Statesman: The Web of Politics*, New Haven – London 1995, p. 81 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Skemp translates “example”, Rowe uses “model”; *LSJ* offers pattern and model as the first meaning and precedent or example as the second one.

<sup>9</sup> S. Rosen, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>10</sup> The term μέθοδος is mentioned at *Polit.* 260e9, 266d7 and 286d9.

*odological* discussion I will try to avoid – as much as possible – the otherwise important question concerning the domain of this method. I will not discuss “what actually gets divided”, rather I will focus on several smaller questions related to the dialectical method itself.

## I. The model for model in the Statesman Awakening from a dream

The dialogue *Statesman* seems to be full of abrupt interruptions followed by critical reviews of the previous parts of the text. Right after the myth which was supposed to portray the divine herdsman (*Polit.* 275b–c) the Eleatic stranger announces that the myth entails at least two mistakes (one smaller and one bigger).<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, it could still be of some use if it is critically examined in order to reveal these mistakes (*Polit.* 274e). The following *diairesis* uncovers yet another mistake in skipping one available division (*Polit.* 276c), but finally it arrives to its goal and defines the expertise of statesmanship as “herd-keeping that is voluntary and relates to willing two-footed living things” (*Polit.* 276e10–12).

Young Socrates seems to be entirely happy with the result, but Eleatic stranger cools down his excitement: they are far from having reached the complete shape of the king; their account (*logos*) has now rather a rough contour without being filled with properly mixed colours (*Polit.* 277a–c).<sup>12</sup> When asked about the present insufficiency of their account, Eleatic stranger answers:

“It’s a hard thing, my fine friend, to demonstrate sufficiently any of the more important subjects without using models. For it looks

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<sup>11</sup> According to Eleatic stranger the big mistake was that “when asked for the king and statesman from the period of the present mode of rotation and generation” they “replied with the shepherd from the opposite period, who cared for the human herd that existed then, and at that a god instead of a mortal”. The lesser mistake, which – as Melissa Lane shows in her paper in this volume – will be more important later in the dialogue, was that they “revealed him as ruling over the whole city together, without specifying in what manner he does so” (*Polit.* 274e–275a).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. explanation of this failure in M. Miller, *The Philosopher in Plato’s Statesman*, Las Vegas 1990, pp. 55–57.

as if each of us knows everything as if in a dream,<sup>13</sup> and then again is ignorant of everything when as it were awake.” (*Polit.* 277d1–4)

I take it that the sufficient demonstration (ικανῶς ἐνδείκνυσθαι), which Eleatic stranger wants to reach, corresponds to the state of knowledge while being awake. Now how does the usage of models (*paradeigmata*) relate to this distinction between knowledge “as if in a dream” and knowledge when being awake?<sup>14</sup>

An immediate answer is that dreaming and being awake stands for two cognitive states with different epistemic certainties and using models is the way how to change from one-lower to the other-higher one. However, the dream metaphor can serve other purposes as well.<sup>15</sup> Theaetetus in the eponymous dialogue suggests the last definition of knowledge to be “true judgment with an account” (*Tht.* 201c8–d1). He says that he heard this definition from someone and admits that he is incapable of explaining the meaning of this definition but “could follow if someone explained it”. Socrates then replies: “listen then to a dream in return for a dream” (*Tht.* 201d) and continues with the explanation he heard himself.

The dream stands here for a cognitive state in which one is incapable of explanation, but can understand it, if it is given by someone else. We will see that the usage of models shares a similar pattern (cf. the reoccurrence of the dream-awakening metaphor at 278e10–11).

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<sup>13</sup> I changed Rowe’s translation: first, Rowe omits ικανῶς, which I render “sufficiently”; second, I understand γὰρ as explanatory and, finally, I translate οἷον ὄναρ simply as “in a dream” instead of “in a kind of dreamlike way”. I believe the distinction concerns not only the way we know something, but our own cognitive stance. One could argue that in a dream we know things “in a kind of dreamlike way”, but compare the *Theaetetus*, 158b–d: even in a dream “the soul contends that the beliefs of the moment are preeminently true” (transl. M. J. Levett, rev. M. Burnyeat).

<sup>14</sup> The passage echoes Heraclitus’ distinction of the awakened state of mind as opposed to being asleep, i.e. between a common *logos* and private or own (*idion*) state of mind, cf. fragments *DK* 22 B1, B2 and B114.

<sup>15</sup> For a different interpretation of the meaning of this dream simile see Shinro Kato, *The Role of paradeigma in the Statesman*, in: Ch. Rowe (ed.), *Reading the Statesman. Proceedings of the Third Symposium Platonicum*, Sankt Augustin 1995, pp. 166–167.

Moreover, in the *Sophist* Eleatic stranger conducts a two-fold division of productive arts (or generally production) into (i) human and divine on the one hand and (ii) production of originals and copy-making on the other (*Soph.* 265b–266d). According to Eleatic stranger dreams belong to the divine copy-making while drawing is a human copy-making providing us with “human dream made for people who are awake” (*Soph.* 266c9). Theaetetus summarizes that the copy-making produces likenesses of the real entities (τὸ μὲν αὐτῶν ὄν, τὸ δὲ ὁμοιωμάτων τινῶν, *Soph.* 266d7–8).

This seems to explain the abundance of metaphors taken from the fine arts (sculpturing, drawing and painting) which Eleatic stranger used to describe their present state of inquiry concerning statesman earlier in our dialogue (*Polit.* 277a–c, cf. above). The statesman was drawn or sketched so far only to produce a “human dream made for people who are awake” and thus the account misses the real statesman as much as shooting through the photograph of Abraham Lincoln does not mean killing the real Abraham Lincoln.

In order to wake up from the dream to the state of true knowledge (*epistēmē*), Eleatic stranger remarks that the model he wants to use demands a model in order to be rightly comprehended.

## II. Learning the letters

The model in question concerns children when γραμμάτων ἔμπειροι γίνωνται (*Polit.* 277e3–4). Now the children can correctly tell (or point out, φράζειν) individual letters (στοιχεῖον) in shorter and less complex syllables. However, they fall into error concerning the same letters in other (presumably more complex) syllables and are misled both in what they think and in what they say.<sup>16</sup>

The proper method for the teacher is to introduce the easier syllables within which they are confidently recognizing the *stoicheia* and then compare them to the *stoicheia* in unfamiliar and more complex syllables. By means of the comparison they will find out that there is “the very same likeness and nature” (τὴν αὐτὴν ὁμοιότητα καὶ φύσιν)

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<sup>16</sup> With the expression δόξει τε ψεύδονται καὶ λόγῳ (278a3) Plato describes the situation in which we say something untrue but since we believe it at the same time, we do not lie.

within both syllables and finally taking the more simple syllables as models they recognize:

“... that each of all the *stoicheia* in all syllables is called both different, on the basis that it is different from the others, and the same, on the basis that it is always the same as and identical to itself.”  
(*Polit.* 278b5–c1)

The result is that the pupils recognize examples of the same letters within different syllables. The easier and less complicated syllables then function as models for better understanding of the letters in the more complex syllables.

It would be surprising if this would not be an allusion to the previous discussion in the *Sophist*. Plato here conceptualizes the true opinion and recognition of *stoicheion* (letter) in the terms of the properties that in the *Sophist* play the role of *megista genê*. In order to recognize the *stoicheion*, we need then to recognize its difference from the *stoicheia* of other kinds and to recognize its sameness with the *stoicheia* of its own kind which might appear in different syllables. But before reaching the general speculation about the nature of *paradeigma* let's pause and reflect on what the children actually do and what do they learn.

The phrase “γραμμάτων ἔμπειροι γίγνωνται” does not seem to help much. Christopher Rowe translates “acquiring skill in reading and writing”, Skemp chooses to use present perfect simple “have only just learnt their letters”, Miller goes for “just learning to spell”, Rosen has “becoming experienced with letters”, Fowler in the Loeb edition “just getting some knowledge of letters” and Sayre “acquainted with alphabet”.<sup>17</sup> The basic question is whether we are concerned with writing or reading, or – as Gilbert Ryle vehemently insisted that this question should be posed – with phonetics or graphology?<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ch. Rowe's translation in J. M. Cooper (ed.), *Plato. Complete Works*, Indianapolis 1997, p. 320; J. S. Rosen, *op. cit.*, p. 81; K. M. Sayre, *Metaphysics and Method in Plato's Statesman*, Cambridge 2006, p. 78; M. Miller, *The Philosopher in Plato's Statesman*, p. 59. Further, Auguste Diès in *Plato: Œuvres Complètes*, IX,1, Paris 1950, p. 34. translates: “... fait connaissance avec l'écriture...”

<sup>18</sup> G. Ryle, *Letters and Syllables in Plato*, in: *Philosophical Review*, 1960, pp. 431–451.

Unfortunately, we do not have reliable sources on grammatical education from Plato's times and modern interpretations usually rely on Hellenistic authors such as Dionysios of Halicarnassus or Quintilian.<sup>19</sup> It might be interesting to note that according to these authors, pupils first learnt the alphabet without the (written) letters; the written characters were introduced to them only after they mastered listing the alphabet phonetically as *alpha*, *beta*, *gamma* and so on.<sup>20</sup> When the pupils were able to associate all the names of the letters with the written characters they moved to syllables. First, they had to learn to read (and write) the easy ones ( $\beta\alpha$ ,  $\beta\epsilon$ ,  $\beta\eta$ ,  $\beta\iota$  ...) before they moved to the more complex ones.

On the basis of what we know about the learning process one could conclude that Plato's example fits right into the stage when the pupils are introduced to more complex syllables; but here again our (admittedly later) sources tell us that the syllables were spelled and read with the help of the names of the letters, i.e. *beta* – *alpha* and not simply [*ba*], so that the problem with recognizing individual letters could not occur. So either Plato talks about some kind of exercise about which our sources are silent or he has a different kind of learning in mind.

The very terms *gramma* and *stoicheion* do not help us to understand the example better either, because Plato uses *gramma* both as an articulate sound (e.g. *Philb.* 18c) and written character (e.g. famously in the *Republic*, 368d, or in the *Theaetetus*, 163b–c).<sup>21</sup> Similarly with *stoicheion* that is used in *Cratylus* 426d for articulate sound, but its usage is ambiguous at several other places (cf. *Tht.* 202e and *Crat.* 424d). Hermann Diels claims that even Aristotle

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<sup>19</sup> H.-I. Marrou, *Geschichte der Erziehung im Klassischen Altertum*, Freiburg – München, pp. 222–223; G. M. A. Grube, *The Greek and Roman Critics*, Toronto, pp. 288–289.

<sup>20</sup> H.-I. Marrou, *op. cit.*, p. 222; cf. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* I,1,24–25 quoted below.

<sup>21</sup> For the list of similar passages complicating Ryle's conclusion that Plato is primarily interested in the phonetics see D. Gallop, *Plato and the Alphabet*, in: *Philosophical Review*, 1963, pp. 364–366.

does not lexically differentiate *stoicheion* as an articulate sound from *gramma* as a written character.<sup>22</sup>

The story, I believe, cannot be about recognizing the shapes of letters in the written text and (re)writing down these shapes again. The shape (*schêma*) of letters in Greek alphabet does not change in different syllables or in relations to other letters. It is not so hard to track down the same letters and it does not need comparison of different syllables (but rather different hand-writing styles perhaps). Further, to learn to write down a letter one does not compare the letter in different syllables but writes down the shape again and again.<sup>23</sup>

Gallop – in the above mentioned debate with Ryle – rightly mentions that “learning (or knowing) one’s letters means learning (or knowing) *inter alia* how to correlate characters with sounds”.<sup>24</sup> According to me, it is the case of dictation, writing down the recited text, that makes the best sense in this particular passage as well as for the broader picture. The children try to write down the syllables or words dictated to them and in the case of simple ones such as “πόλις”

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<sup>22</sup> H. Diels, *Elementum: Eine Vorarbeit zum griechischen und lateinischen Thesaurus*, Leipzig 1899, p. 33.

<sup>23</sup> We have a letter testimony on learning to write in Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, I,1,24–25; pupils learned to write down the whole alphabet and the teachers then started to reverse the order of letters in order to make sure the kids know the letter by themselves and not only as a part of a given order: “At any rate I am not satisfied with the course (which I note is usually adopted) of teaching small children the names and order of the letters before their shapes. [25] Such a practice makes them slow to recognise the letters, since they do not pay attention to their actual shape, preferring to be guided by what they have already learned by rote. It is for this reason that teachers, when they think they have sufficiently familiarised their young pupils with the letters written in their usual order, reverse that order or rearrange it in every kind of combination, until they learn to know the letters from their appearance and not from the order in which they occur” (transl. H. E. Butler).

<sup>24</sup> D. Gallop, *op. cit.*, p. 365. Similarly Jean-François Pradeau comments on the term *grammatikê* occurring at the *Philebus*, 18d2: “Il s’agit de la *grammatikê*, qui suppose donc la connaissance des lettres et la maîtrise de leur combinaison comme de leur prononciation ... la *grammatikê* embrasse aussi bien l’écriture que l’oralité.” Commentary by J.-F. Pradeau in *Platon: Philèbe*, Paris 2002, p. 244.

they easily recognize the vowel “ο” and therefore write correctly the letter omicron. However, when asked to write down “κοινός” or “κοῦρος” they may have difficulties and their teacher must write down or spell the words for them so that they see the similarity and difference.

The process of learning then consists in comparing the familiar syllables to the complicated ones. Comparison (παραβάλλω) then reveals the same similarity and form<sup>25</sup> in both compared syllables, i.e. the same character. After comparing all unknown syllables with the correctly understood ones the result is reached: “each of all the individual letters is called both different (ἕτερον), on the basis that it is different from the others, and the same (ταῦτόν), on the basis that it is always the same as and identical to itself, in all syllables” (278b5–c1). In this way we can say that the children really know their letters, when they are capable to discern them always in all the syllables regardless of their complexity.<sup>26</sup>

### III. The nature of a model and its role in dialectics

Eleatic stranger then makes a general conclusion concerning the nature of model: models originates when there is one and the same thing in two different entities and it is correctly understood (ὄν ... δοξαζόμενον ὁρθῶς) in one entity and when it is brought together (συναχθὲν) with the other entity it “brings about a single true judgement (μίαν ἀληθῆ δόξαν) about each separately and both together” (278c4–6).

Later we are told that the entity within which the rightly understood element occurs is supposed to be somewhat simpler or less significant (ἐλάσσων, 278e8; e.g. less complex and shorter syllables in the example above), basically easier to understand. The same form (ταῦτόν εἶδος) is then transferred (φέροντές) to the more important (and more complex) entity. This then is a comparison – illumination

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<sup>25</sup> I translate φύσις as “form”, cf. *LSJ ad.loc.* II,2.

<sup>26</sup> One further note; Plato’s insistence that pupils must know the letters in all the syllables (ἐν πάσαις ταῖς συλλαβαῖς at 278b6) corresponds to the learning process within which the pupils should go through all possible syllables before starting with words themselves, cf. H.-I. Marrou, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

of a more complex entity by the simpler entity due to the fact that both share the same *eidos* which I understand here as an aspect. This process then leads us – as Eleatic stranger says – from dream to reality (278e10–11). If earlier Eleatic stranger said that we seem to know everything as if in a dream but are ignorant when awoken (277d2–4) then here he presents a model and comparison as a possible method to achieve correct understanding while awoken.

Several interpreters understand this passage as a clarification of something essential concerning the dialectical method or indeed as a clarification of the method as such.<sup>27</sup> So for example Shinro Kato concludes his article on this passage: “for this method of *paradeigma*, which is defined in the *Statesman*, seems to be presented here as a rule of procedure in general in the inquiry of dialectic”<sup>28</sup> and Kenneth Sayre writes that “the role of paradigms in this account is to help the student arrive at true judgement (ἀληθῆ δόξαν, 278c6) in cases that were initially unfamiliar and eventually achieve knowledge (ἐπιστήμης, 277d7) in that regard”.<sup>29</sup>

It is not hard to see why many interpreters consider the passage as an illustration of dialectics. The Eleatic stranger opens the investigation into the nature of model with statement that the current discussion seems to “touch upon the state of knowledge in us” (τὸ περὶ τῆς ἐπιστήμης πάθος, 277d7). And Eleatic stranger concludes the investigation saying that we should not be surprised “if our minds by their nature experienced this same thing in relation to the individual elements of everything” (περὶ τὰ τῶν πάντων στοιχεῖα, 278c8–d1). Generally it seems that Plato finally provides us with a description how to gain knowledge based on the recognition of the sameness and difference within each entity (278b4–c1).

But are the reasons listed above sufficient to connect the *paradeigma* passage so closely to the dialectical method in general? And,

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<sup>27</sup> D. El Murr, *Politics and dialectic in Plato's Statesman*, p. 242; M. S. Lane, *Method and politics in Plato's Statesman*, p. 68–69; K. M. Sayre, *Metaphysics and Method in Plato's Statesman*, p. 85.

<sup>28</sup> Shinro Kato, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

<sup>29</sup> K. M. Sayre, *Metaphysics and Method in Plato's Statesman*, p. 85. Sayre's opinion goes strangely against the rules of logic since the knowledge (ἐπιστήμης) he mentions is not a conclusion but an opening remark of the discussed passage.

moreover, does the text of passage itself support this interpretation? I will argue that the answer should be negative in both cases.

The enigmatic phrase τὸ περὶ τῆς ἐπιστήμης πάθος at 277d7 is not only the first occurrence of “knowledge” in the entire passage but also the last one. When presenting the model and making the general conclusion about the use of models Eleatic stranger speaks carefully about gaining experience (ἐμπειροὶ γίνωνται, 277e3–4), distinct perception (διαισθάνομαι, 277e7) and about true or correct opinion (278b3–4, c5–6, d4, e1). The shorter and correctly understood syllables are described as δοξαζόμενα ἀληθῶς (278b3–4) and it is never said that the children have any knowledge about the letters or syllables.

When giving the general account of a model Eleatic stranger describes the model as δοξαζόμενον ὀρθῶς and its comparison with the unknown entity results into one true opinion (μίαν ἀληθῆ δόξαν) of both of them (278c5–6). During the entire passage Eleatic stranger does not use the term ἐπιστήμη and I would find it hard to believe that Plato begins to mix up this terminology right in a sequel to the *Theaetetus*.

There is, I believe, another reason why to be sceptical concerning the interpretation of learning the letters as a general model for dialectics. The learning in question presupposes a teacher, someone who knows already and leads the disciples on their way.<sup>30</sup> In order to be able to compare the same element in simple and complex entities so that the comparison results in our better understanding of the complex entity, we would have to know in advance the element we are comparing. To put it in another words, the right model or example (the simpler entity) can be correctly picked up only by someone who already knows what should be illustrated and therefore can choose an appropriate model for it.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Kato recognizes that, but does not deal with this possible problem, cf. Shinro Kato, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

<sup>31</sup> Melissa Lane, *Method and politics in Plato's Statesman*, p. 68, argues that a sharp separation between teaching and gaining knowledge is misplaced when it comes to Platonic dialogues. However, I doubt that the pupils and their grammarian engage in whatever sort of platonic dialectic or knowledge-gaining.

The passage on the nature of model shows the importance of *comparison*. We have to place the two syllables next to each other (παρατίθημι) and compare them (παραβάλλω) in respect of their constituents so that we reach the correct opinion concerning the sameness and difference of particular letters constituting these syllables (278a9–c1). The two entities must be “brought together” (συνάγω, 278c5) so that one could transfer the common *eidos* from one to another (278e8–10), i.e. so that the two entities can be compared and we can grasp the sameness and difference of their elements.

The comparison is an essential part of learning process as it is described by Eleatic stranger in the *Statesman*. The comparison of syllables serves as a model for comparing the art of weaving with the art of political rule. But in both cases – in the case of disciples as well as in the case of the younger Socrates and the stranger from Elea – the comparison is a didactic tool used for demonstrating the features that the unknowing partner ought to recognize while the more educated partner knows what to demonstrate as a suitable model for comparison. This is what I will call a *didactic use of dialectics*.

This problem, however, reveals a serious question concerning Plato’s epistemology: namely, the origin of any true knowledge (*epistêmê*). Does Plato in the so-called later dialogues reject recollection as the original source of human knowledge or does he still presuppose it so that one must rely on it within the practice of dialectics?<sup>32</sup> According to the above mentioned interpretations

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<sup>32</sup> Notice that remembering (*ἀπομνημονεύω*) was mentioned in the myth as a source of knowledge within the reign of Zeus (273b2). Some authors tried to argue that the remarks on dreaming in our passage are allusions to the recollection in the *Meno*, where Plato writes that the correct “opinions have now just been stirred up like a dream” (*Meno*, 85c9–10); H. Cherniss, *Aristotle’s Criticism of Plato and Academy*, Baltimore 1944, p. 47; V. Goldschmidt, *Le Paradigme dans la Dialectique Platonicienne*, Paris 1945, p. 53–54. Shinro Kato (*The Role of paradeigma in the Statesman*, p. 167) and Melissa Lane (*Method and politics in Plato’s Statesman*, pp. 64–66) believe that the *Statesman* leaves the recollection behind and offers a new way how to achieve knowledge. On the other hand authors like Norman Gulley, Richard Bluck or Kenneth Sayre argue that recollection has its role even in the process of dialectics or at least that dialectics requires

that associate the passage concerning comparison directly with knowledge and dialectics, it seems that one can reach knowledge solely through a more or less complex process of comparisons without recollection or any similar sort of cognitive process. My own view, which I will clarify in the following argumentation, is that dialectics cannot be fully understood on the model of learning the letters. And, moreover, I will try to show that comparison cannot serve as a sufficient tool for gaining knowledge of what was previously unknown.

The example with learning letters occurs several times in the dialogues (e.g. *Tim.* 48b–c, *Th.* 202e ff., *Soph.* 253a, *Philb.* 17a–b). One of these occurrences is in the *Philebus*, 17a–b, where it serves as the first of three examples helping us to understand the divine gift of dialectics. The third example deals with the letters again, however this time it is not the case of school-learning of the ABC. We are being told about a divine man (or semi-god) Theuth who according to the Egyptian tradition first discovered a structure in the *apeiron* of our articulated, continuous voice or speech (*phonê*). Theuth discovers the letters in speech (ἐν τῷ ἀπειρώ, 18b8–9) and divides them into (1) vowels and (2) consonants which are subdivided into (2.1) voiced or intermediates (semivowels) and (2.1) mutes.<sup>33</sup>

On the one hand, Theuth divides or delimits the flow of *phonê* into particular letters and different groups of these letters, but on the other hand, the story is said to serve as the example of collection. The process of collection is described in the preceding lines as starting from unlimited (*apeiron*) recognizing that each plurality is determined by some number and “from all of those reaching the one” (*Philb.* 18b1–4).<sup>34</sup>

In the story of Theuth’s invention of the alphabet one can actually find two collections. The first one is explicitly mentioned in the text.

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some form of prior knowledge, cf. N. Gulley, *Plato’s Theory of Knowledge*, Methuen 1962, p. 111–112; R. Bluck, *Plato’s Sophist*, Manchester 1975, p. 39. K. Sayre, *Metaphysics and Method in Plato’s Statesman*, p. 39.

<sup>33</sup> Compare the same division in the *Cratylus*, 424c–d; cf. H. W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar for Colleges*, New York 1920, pp. 8–10.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. interpretation of S. Menn, *Collecting the Letters*, in: *Phronesis*, 43, 4, pp. 291–305.

Theuth recognizes that there is a bond (δεσμός) which ties the letters together. Moreover, he sees that the letters cannot be properly understood on their own (for example solely the alphas or betas) but they make sense as the letters only in relation to other letters. Therefore he establishes one single science for all the different letters: *grammatikê technê* (*Philb.* 18c7–d2).

And since Theuth delimits/reduces the *apeiron* of the continuous speech into a limited plurality, the collection must appear in the process of establishing particular elements (*stoicheia*) of speech as well. What I mean is this: the word γάργαρα has seven letter-parts (gamma, alpha, rhô, gamma, alpha, rhô and alpha) but it consists of three elements: alpha, gamma and rhô.<sup>35</sup> Teuth had go through this reduction of seemingly unbounded plurality down to its basic and recurrent elements and I think it counts as a case of collection (all alphas into one group, all betas in another and so on).

Theuth did not learn the alphabet from anyone; he invented it or established it. This is, according to me, the case of *original dialectics*. The comparison which was crucial in the didactic dialectics has essential role in Theuth's case as well, since he had to compare different phonemes in order to establish the individual letters-elements and later their groups. However, we clearly see that one needs more than just a simple comparison in order to establish different letters and one science describing an order within a seemingly unbounded/unlimited *phonê*.<sup>36</sup>

When Theuth suffers with the *apeiron* of *phonê*, he receives no help from a teacher. Consequently, there are at least two problems which did not occur in the above discussed passage from the *Statesman*. First, when comparing the complex or complicated parts

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<sup>35</sup> The letters as *stoicheia* are in this respect more similar to Empedoclean four elements constituting plurality by their structured mixture rather than to Democritean numberless atoms. Dorothea Frede is therefore wrong to call the letters "Atomen"; *Platon: Philebos*, transl. & ed. D. Frede, Göttingen 1997, p. 146.

<sup>36</sup> The fact that Theuth is called god or divine (εἶτε τις θεὸς εἶτε καὶ θεῖος ἄνθρωπος at *Philb.* 18b6–7) can mean two things: either the usage of dialectics makes one divine or one needs a divine guidance even for proper conduct of dialectics. The second possibility suggests that humans cannot reach knowledge unless they are helped on their way by deities.

of *phonê* with simple parts within which he already correctly established all the *stoicheia* Theuth cannot take for granted that the model he chose corresponds to the problematic part in the relevant aspects. And second, perhaps more basal question, how does Theuth gain – at the very beginning of the process – the first item of knowledge he can start working with (since comparison presupposes that one of the compared items is already known)?

In this respect, I think, a dialectician who is not guided by a teacher needs some sort of cognition which might be called an “insight” or indeed a recollection. This kind of cognition is needed in order to grasp the very first (and in this respect basic) items of knowledge with which the complexities might be compared so as to achieve some knowledge about their constitutive elements as well. The first problem listed above could be avoided since whenever Plato talks about *stoicheia* he presupposes a final number of these basic constitutive elements similarly as there is a final number of letters in the alphabet.<sup>37</sup> Therefore even without guidance one could find the relevant items to compare; the entire process of try-and-error would be only much longer than suggested by the above discussed passage about learning the letters.

#### IV. Letters and models in the Statesman: conclusion

When we compare the two passages introduced above – the initial text from the *Statesman*, 277d–278e, and the *Philebus*, 18b–d, – the limitations of the method described in the *Statesman* passage is not hard to see. Indeed, it is not the only passage concerning the dialectical method in the dialogue and I am aware that all these passages together form a much more complex picture. The small conclusion I wanted to establish is that the passage about the letter learning and the use of models has only a very limited role in the description of the dialectical method: it describes the functioning of didactic dialectics that can result in correct opinion (278c6). In order to reach knowledge, if it is not reserved only for semi-gods, one needs more than just comparing what one is told to compare.

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. W. Burkert, *Στοιχεῖον. Eine semasiologische Studie*, in: *Philologus*, 103, 1959, p. 173; G. Fine, *Knowledge and Logos in the Theaetetus*, in: *Plato on Knowledge and Forms*, Oxford 2003, pp. 243–244.

Despite the fact that Plato in the *Sophist* describes the dialectician by analogy with the grammarian (*Soph.* 253a–d), dialectics should not be understood merely on the basis of the example with learning letters.<sup>38, 39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. K. M. Sayre, *Metaphysics and Method in Plato's Statesman*, p. 82.

<sup>39</sup> This chapter was written with the support of the Czech Science Foundation (P401/11/0568).