

PLATO, *STATESMAN* 275D8–E1*

ABSTRACT

In his dialogue Statesman (= Plt.), Plato first sets out one way of thinking of the statesperson, on the model of a nurturer of a herd such as a shepherd; then he sets out a very different way of thinking of him, on the model of a weaver of a social fabric. Critics have long been wondering whether Plato wants to combine the two models or, on the contrary, to abandon the nurturing model in favour of the weaving model.

This article shows that a particular passage in the dialogue, 275d8–e1, is crucial for this question. As this passage is understood by all commentators and translators, it says that the statesperson is not a nurturer. This ought to have settled the question. But the article argues that we cannot read the passage like that. For an adjacent passage, 275b1–7, says that the statesperson is a nurturer. There is no way out of this contradiction, unless we reconsider the traditional reading of 275d8–e1.

The article defends a different reading of 275d8–e1, which avoids the contradiction. On this new reading, the passage does not say that the statesperson is not a nurturer, it says that her/his being a nurturer is not the grounds for her/him deserving the title ‘statesperson’.

Keywords: Plato; *Statesman*; models of statecraft; weaving model; nurturing model

A particular problem in the study of Plato’s *Statesman* is presented when, a good way into the dialogue, the Eleatic Visitor moves from thinking of the statesman according to the model (παρόδειγμα) of a nurturer (τροφός) of a human herd, comparable to a nurturer of other herd animals such as a shepherd, to thinking of him according to the model of the weaver (ὑφάντης) of a communal fabric comparable to the weaver of a good cloak. The problem, which has divided critics considerably, is whether Plato intends this move to mark the abandonment and rejection of the view of statesmanship on the model of nurturing, or whether the view of statesmanship on the model of weaving is meant to complement the nurturing model.

There is a passage in the dialogue, 275d8–e1, which, as it is standardly read, plainly denies that the statesman is a nurturer of humans—this passage, so read, ought to have settled the issue. I argue that this passage, so read, contradicts an adjacent passage, 275b1–7, in which the statesman is said to be a nurturer of humans. I defend a different grammatical interpretation of 275d8–e1, which avoids the contradiction; and argue that this is the only way of avoiding it. Contrary to how it is standardly read, 275d8–e1 does not deny that the statesman is a nurturer of humans; it denies that being a nurturer of humans is why he is called ‘statesman’. This reading makes good sense of the passage and of its argumentative context.

Here is the passage (*Plt.* 275d8–e1):

* This paper was written in the autumn of 2018, when Jens Kristian Larsen led a term-long seminar, at The Trinity Plato Centre, on Plato’s *Statesman*; I am grateful to the participants, and to Kristian above all. I also thank John Dillon and Christoph Horn for commenting on earlier versions; and Peter Larsen for his assistance in preparing the paper for submission.

τοῦ τὰς ἀγέλας ἐκάστας τρέφειν τοῖς μὲν ἄλλοις που πᾶσι μέτεστι νομεῦσι, τῷ πολιτικῷ δὲ οὐ μετόν ἐπηνέγκαμεν τοῦνομα, δέον τῶν κοινῶν ἐπενεγκεῖν τι σύμπασιν.

All the other sorts of herdsmen, I think, share the feature of nurturing their several herds, but although the statesman does not [share this feature] we still applied the name to him, when we should have applied to all of them one of the names that belongs in common to them. (Transl. Rowe, except for ‘nurturing’ instead of ‘rearing’)

It is clear, it seems, that this says that the statesman does not share in ‘nurturing’ τρέφειν, which means he is not a nurturer at all. It says this by the use of the participle οὐ μετόν, at any rate if we take this participle, as commentators and translators do, to mean ‘although he does not share [in it]’. The object of the participle is τρέφειν ‘nurturing’; this is the τρέφειν in which, as he has just said, all other herdsmen share with regard to their several herds.

The passage is situated immediately after the myth, which draws on and further articulates the nurturing model that has been introduced before it. Since the myth contains a criticism of the nurturing model, it would not be surprising, it seems, that Plato should follow the myth with a clear and unambiguous denial that the statesman is a nurturer. The denial, it may seem, is confirmed by the fact that soon after (at 279a–b) he introduces a different model of the statesman, the weaving model, with which the dialogue is then occupied till the end. If, as commentators and translators do, we read the participle οὐ μετόν to mean ‘although he does not share [in nurturing]’, I do not see how we can avoid the conclusion that 275d8–e1 marks the abandonment and rejection of the nurturing model.

It might be said that the denial at 275d8–e1 need only be understood to mean that the statesman does not himself feed humans, and that this is compatible with his being a nurturer of humans in a wider sense.¹ But this is not a plausible reading. The idea of the statesman’s being comparable to familiar herdsmen and nurturers of their respective herds requires that nurturing is not understood in this narrow way. Only a few lines earlier it is said that their present considerations are due to the nurturing model (‘the model of shepherds and cowherds’ τὸ παράδειγμα ποιμένων τε καὶ βουκόλων, 275b1–7). It seems arbitrary to suggest that the verb ‘to nurture’ (τρέφειν) is suddenly used in this narrow way.

However, if we take the Eleatic Visitor to be denying, in 275d8–e1, that the statesman shares in the nurturing of humans and is a nurturer of humans, we are faced with an immediate, serious problem. For only a few lines earlier the statesman is said to be one who ‘has care (ἐπιμέλεια) of the nurturing (τροφή) of humans’ (*Plt.* 275b1–7):

διὰ ταῦτα μὴν καὶ τὸν μῦθον παρεθέμεθα ἵνα ἐνδείξαιτο περὶ τῆς ἀγελαιοτροφίας μὴ μόνον ὡς πάντες αὐτῆς ἀμφισβητοῦσι τῷ ζητούμενῳ τὰ νῦν, ἀλλὰ κάκεῖνον αὐτὸν ἐναργέστερον ἴδοιμεν, ὃν προσήκει μόνον κατὰ τὸ παράδειγμα ποιμένων τε καὶ βουκόλων τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ἐπιμέλειαν ἔχοντα τροφῆς τούτου μόνον ἀξιοθῆναι τοῦ προσρήματος.

It was for just these reasons that we introduced the myth, in order that it might demonstrate, in relation to herd-nurturing, not only that as things stand now everyone disputes this function with

¹ This seems to be Weiss’s reading: ‘the human statesman is still regarded as one herdsmen among many, differing from these others only in having no direct hand in the feeding of his herd (275d8–e1)’; R. Weiss, ‘Statesman as ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΩΝ: caretaker, physician, and weaver’, in C.J. Rowe (ed.), *Reading the Statesman* (Sankt Augustin, 1995), 213–22, at 219, emphasis added. A similar suggestion is found in C.J. Rowe, *Plato: Statesman* (Warminster, 1995). In addition to the items referenced here and below, I have benefited also from D. El Murr, *Savoir et gouverner. Essai sur la science politique platonicienne* (Paris, 2014).

the person we are looking for, but also in order that we might see more clearly that very person himself whom alone, in accordance with the model of shepherds and cowherds, **because of his having care of the nurturing of humans**, it is appropriate to think worthy of this name, and this name alone. (Transl. Rowe, modified)

The phrase τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ἐπιμέλειαν ἔχοντα τροφῆς ‘because of his having care of the nurturing of humans’, if understood as referring to the statesman, implies that the statesman shares in the nurturing of humans and is a nurturer of humans. This is clear, even if we suppose that the phrase is intended as signifying a certain way, not any way, of being a nurturer of humans, such as by being in charge of and directing others who are more immediately involved in the nurturing. A variation of the phrase is used before the myth (ὡς σφεῖς τῆς τροφῆς ἐπιμελοῦνται τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης, 268a), where it certainly refers to a nurturer of humans.

It would seem, therefore, that Plato has contradicted himself within a single Stephanus page, or presented the character in charge of the discussion as doing so, first asserting, then denying that the statesman is a nurturer of humans.

Rowe’s commentary on 275d8–e1 is instructive, for he observes that it is ‘something of a surprise’ that the Eleatic Visitor should say that the statesman ‘has nothing to do with rearing *his* herd’ (Rowe uses ‘rearing’ where I use ‘nurturing’), since, he argues, the Visitor continues to treat the statesman as a nurturer later.² Rowe is right in thinking that some later passages suggest the nurturing model is still in place. Notable is 295e4–296a2, when it is said that humans ‘are grazed’ (βοιμεύονται) in cities by the lawmaker and statesman according to written laws;³ βοιμεύς is one of the terms for ‘herdsman’ in the original nurturing model, and ‘being grazed’ (βοιμεύεσθαι) is an exemplary form of being nurtured, which seems here to stand in for nurturing in general. Moreover, the idea of the statesman as godlike, which in the myth is shown to be implicit in the nurturing model, is repeated towards the end of the dialogue (303b5, οἷον θεὸν ἐξ ἀνθρώπων).

However, it is not sufficient to say that it is ‘something of a surprise’ that 275d8–e1 denies that the statesman is a nurturer of humans. If, as it seems we must, we understand 275d8–e1 as such a denial, we must ask whether such later passages need to be understood to imply that the nurturing model is still in place. And before we consider later passages, we need to decide what to do about the apparent contradiction between 275b1–7 and 275d8–e1.

Like Rowe and against many critics,⁴ Weiss argues that the model of the statesman as herdsman is retained after the myth;⁵ but she thinks the model of him as nurturer is

² Rowe (n. 1), 199: ‘This claim of E.S.’s [i.e. the claim that ‘the statesman ... has nothing to do with rearing *his* herd (d8–e1)'] is something of a surprise, since he will go on to assign to the statesman a vital interest in his charges’ education and choice of partners—and match-making, at least, was one of the functions specifically assigned to herdsmen at 268a, by implication as part of the ‘rearing’ (τροφῆ) of their charges.’

³ I take βοιμεύονται at 295e7 as passive rather than middle; but my point does not depend on this.

⁴ For several critics who think that the nurturing model is abandoned in and through the myth, see Weiss (n. 1), 218. More recent critics who argue that the nurturing model is abandoned include K.H. Sayre, *Metaphysics and Method in Plato’s Statesman* (Cambridge, 2006) and M. Schofield, *Plato. Political Philosophy* (Oxford, 2006), 165 (‘The old idea of the king as shepherd of his flock is successively defended, criticized and then abandoned for a new model: the statesman as weaver’). M.S. Lane, *Method and Politics in Plato’s ‘Statesman’* (Cambridge, 1998), 48 says that ‘the shepherd-definition was not abandoned altogether’.

⁵ Weiss (n. 1), 218: ‘There is indeed no reason to think—as do virtually all commentators on this dialogue—that the herdsman paradigm is abandoned or that it is supplanted by the weaver paradigm.’

abandoned.⁶ I doubt that Plato marks such a distinction between herding and nurturing; it seems, rather, that nurturing is considered a distinctive activity of, and hence a consequence of, herding. In any case, the contradiction between 275b1–7 and 275d8–e1 is not avoided in this way, since in 275b1–7, and in the phrase *κατὰ τὸ παράδειγμα ποιμένων τε καὶ βουκόλων τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ἐπιμέλειαν ἔχοντα τροφῆς*, ‘herding’ and ‘nurturing’ and ‘having care of’ (*ἐπιμέλεια*) are verbally combined with the result that what is designated is a single activity involving all three: the activity by a herdsman, or herdsmanlike person, of having care of the nurturing of humans.

Weiss appears to think that this passage (275b1–7) is not about the human statesman at all but about the divine herdsman and nurturer.⁷ This would avoid the contradiction between 275b1–7 and 275d8–e1, but it is not a tenable reading. Only one person is referred to in this passage; and this is the one for whom we are searching (*τῷ ζητουμένῳ*) and trying to make out more clearly (*ἵνα ... κάκεινον αὐτὸν ἐναργέστερον ἴδομεν*): the human statesman. Weiss is right to wonder why in this passage it is made so emphatic that only a single person deserves the title ‘he who takes care of the nurturing of humans’. The reason, I suggest, is that it is supposed that only a single expertise can be the ‘primary’ expertise responsible for the nurturing and care of humans (see *μᾶλλον καὶ προτέρα [τέχνη]* at 276b7–c2, quoted below).

It might be thought that 275b1–7 only reports how they were thinking of the statesman before the myth, whereas 275d8–e1 marks that they have now given up thinking of him in this way. This would avoid the contradiction between 275b1–7 and 275d8–e1. It is true that 275b1–7 reports how they were thinking of the statesman before the myth; the passage says that they were thinking of him according to the nurturing model (*κατὰ τὸ παράδειγμα ποιμένων τε καὶ βουκόλων τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ἐπιμέλειαν ἔχοντα τροφῆς*). However, the passage is clearly forward-looking (*ἵνα ... κάκεινον αὐτὸν ἐναργέστερον ἴδομεν*). It takes a step further in an investigation that was introduced immediately before the myth (and to which it refers) into the question: who is the caretaker of humans? (267e7–268a4; see below.) The question will presently be taken up again, now recast as: who is the primary caretaker of humans? (276b7–c2; see below for a reference to a primary caretaking expertise of humans.) The dialogue will remain occupied with these questions, intermittently if not continuously, till practically the end.

The apparent contradiction between 275b1–7 and 275d8–e1 is, to repeat, as follows. On a natural and apparently obligatory reading of the participle *οὐ μετόν* in the phrase *τῷ πολιτικῷ δὲ οὐ μετόν ἐπιτρέγκαμεν τοῦνομα* at 275d8–e1, the Eleatic Visitor denies that the statesman is a nurturer of humans; but a few lines earlier it is said, or directly implied by the phrase *τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ἐπιμέλειαν ἔχοντα τροφῆς*, that he is a nurturer of humans (275b1–7). We have found that there is no way to avoid this contradiction, if, as commentators and translators do, we read the participle *οὐ μετόν* in 275d8–e1 to mean ‘although he does not share [in the nurturing of humans]’. Is there a way out?

⁶ Weiss (n. 1), 217–19. See also Sayre (n. 4), 21–2: ‘As he points out in this regard (at 275d8–e1), the title ‘herd-rearer’ applied in human subjects is better reserved by a variety of experts, such as farmers, merchants, and doctors (from 267e), than by the statesman himself.’

⁷ Weiss (n. 1), 216: ‘In addition to the error it reveals, the myth should also enable one, says the Stranger, to see who alone merits the title of human nurturer in accordance with the paradigm of shepherds and cowherds (275b1–6). Let us note that the myth has indeed shown that the god alone has care of a human community in accordance with the paradigm of shepherds and cowherds.’

The question is whether we need to understand the participle οὐ μετόν, in the phrase τῷ πολιτικῷ δὲ οὐ μετόν ἐπὶνέγκομεν τοῦνομα, as being concessive and fact stating; if so, we must follow the translators who, apparently without exception, read the phrase as saying: ‘we applied the name to the statesman **even though he does not share** [in nurturing]’.⁸ There is, however, a different way of understanding the participle, which is both grammatically possible and makes good sense of the passage and its argumentative context. That is to understand it as explicative, and as denying a certain explanation: ‘**but it is not because of his sharing** [in nurturing] that we applied the name to the statesman’. Or, in an English closer to the desired Greek: ‘but to the statesman it was not inasmuch as he shares [in nurturing] that we applied the name’. This means taking the participle not, as per the traditional reading, as standing on its own (‘even though he does not share [in nurturing]’), but, rather, as qualifying the immediately following phrase: ἐπὶνέγκομεν τοῦνομα ‘we applied the name [to the statesman]’. Reading the participle in this way means we do not have two propositions in the phrase τῷ πολιτικῷ δὲ οὐ μετόν ἐπὶνέγκομεν τοῦνομα: that we applied the name to the statesman; and that he does not share in τρέφειν. We have only one proposition: that it is not because he shares in τρέφειν that we applied the name to him. The reference is to what they did previous to the myth (especially 267e–268a); and the name is ‘statesman’ πολιτικός.⁹

On the reading I am proposing, 275d8–e1 does not deny that the statesman is a nurturer of humans; it denies that being a nurturer of humans is why the statesman is called ‘statesman’. This reading avoids the apparent contradiction between 275b1–7 and 275d8–e1; I do not know of another way of avoiding it, and we have seen that other attempts at avoiding it have failed.

I propose the following translation (*Plt.* 275d8–e1):

It belongs, I suppose, to all the other herdsmen to share in nurturing in regard to their several herds, but it is not because of sharing in this that we applied the name to the statesman, even though it is proper to apply some one common term to all of them collectively.

The lines immediately following (275e3–8) might be thought to confirm that ‘nurturer’ is now excluded as a characterization of the statesman.¹⁰ However, the reading of these

⁸ The translations I know of this passage all read the οὐ μετόν as saying that the statesman is not a nurturer: F. Schleiermacher: ‘dem Staatsmann gerade kommt es [i.e. τρέφειν] nicht zu, ...’; H.N. Fowler, *Plato. The Statesman* (Cambridge, MA, 1925): ‘but the statesman does not [share in τρέφειν], yet we gave him the name of herdsman’; J.B. Skemp, *Plato’s Statesman* (London, 1952): ‘This characteristic [i.e. nurturing] is absent in the statesman and yet we called him a herdsman’; Rowe (n. 1), quoted above. R. Waterfield, in J. Annas and R. Waterfield (edd.), *Plato. Statesman* (Cambridge, 1995): ‘The statesman isn’t [‘concerned with maintaining [his] herd’]’; P. Accattino, *Platone. Politico* (Rome and Bari, 2010 [orig. 1997]): ‘ma non il politico [condivid[e] la funzione di allevare ...]’; G. Giorgini, *Platone, Politico, a cura di Giovanni Giorgini* (Milan, 2005): ‘L’allevare ciascuno il proprio gregge è ciò che tutti i pastori hanno in certa misura in comune con gli altri, ma questo non avviene per l’uomo politico a cui abbiamo invece attribuito questo nome, mentre avremmo dovuto attribuire un nome in comune per tutti quanti’; F. Ricken, *Platon. Politikos* (Göttingen, 2008): ‘aber obwohl es dem Staatsmann nicht zukommt [seine Herde aufzuziehen], haben wir ihm doch den Namen gegeben’; E. Brann, P. Kalkavage and E. Salem, *Plato. Statesman* (Indianapolis, 2012): ‘but we attached the name to the statesman, though it doesn’t apply’; M. Dixsaut, *Platon. Le Politique* (Paris, 2018): ‘mais le politique, lui, n’avait pas droit à ce nom [supposing she reads τροφός for the name]’.

⁹ Skemp (n. 8) takes the name to be ‘herdsman’ in his translation, as do many other translators. This is justified, on the traditional reading of οὐ μετόν.

¹⁰ See Rowe, commenting on this passage (i.e. 275e3–8): ‘Using the term “nurture” was another error’; C.J. Rowe, ‘The *Politicus*: structure and form’, in C. Gill and M.M. McCabe (edd.), *Form and Argument in Late Plato* (Oxford, 1996), 153–78, at 161.

lines is motivated entirely by the traditional reading of 275d8–e1. The Eleatic Visitor marks here a distinction between characterizing the statesman and the other herdsmen specifically in terms of ‘nurturing’ (τρέφειν) and characterizing them more generally in terms of ‘having care of’ (ἐπιμελεῖν) and ‘looking after’ (θεραπεύειν). Rowe translates: ‘By calling it some kind of expertise in “herd-keeping” or “looking after”, or “caring for”, as applying to them all, we could have covered the statesman too as well as the rest.’ By his choice of the counterfactual, ‘could have covered’ for ἐξῆν περικαλύπτειν, Rowe indicates that he intends the passage to say that, in actual fact and because they were using ‘nurturing’ rather than these more general terms, they were not able to cover the statesman too as well as the others.¹¹

However, the distinction between the more specific and the more general characterization, apparently made here for the sake of advancing the argument, does not have to mark the abandonment of the more specific characterization. On the contrary, the grounds for applying to a thing a more general term may be, precisely, that a more specific term applies to it: the statesman is a caretaker of humans because he is a nurturer of humans and nurturing is a form of caretaking. And ἐξῆν περικαλύπτειν may be understood not counterfactually but as a simple imperfect referring to what they have been doing so far: ‘we were able to cover [the statesman too as well as the others]’. Remarkably, they did in actual fact, both before and after the myth and as late as 275b5–6 (τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ἐπιμέλειαν ἔχοντα τροφῆς), move readily between, and combine, the more specific characterization in terms of ‘nurturing’ and the more general characterization in terms of ‘having care of’.¹²

We can see what point Plato is making in 275d8–e1 on our reading of this passage: being a nurturer of humans cannot be our grounds for naming the statesman ‘statesman’, because there are many other nurturers of humans who are not statesmen. This point, that there are many other nurturers of humans who are not statesmen, was made immediately before the myth, when the Eleatic Visitor described a dispute among different experts apparently all occupied with nurturing and caretaking of humans, such as farmers, merchants, doctors: they contend with each other and with the statesman to being the nurturer and caretaker of humans (*Plt.* 267e7–268a4):

merchants, farmers, millers and bakers, all of them, and gymnastic trainers too, and doctors as a class—all of these, as you well know, would loudly contend against the herdsmen concerned with things human whom we called statesmen that it is they who care for the nurturing of humans, not merely for that of human beings in the herd, but for that of their rulers. (Transl. Rowe, modified)

¹¹ So too L. Campbell, *The Sophistes and Politicus of Plato, with a revised text and English notes* (Oxford, 1867), 74 n. 4: ‘ἦν—ἐξῆν—ἐσημαίνεν] The imperfect is used because we are imagining what might have been done.’ Rowe also translates the δέον ἐπενεγκεῖν (‘we should apply’, ‘it is proper to apply’) in the last clause in 275d8–e1 (δέον τῶν κοινῶν ἐπενεγκεῖν τι σύμπτασιν) counterfactually: ‘when *we should have applied* to all of them one of the names that belongs in common to them’. On the reading I have defended, this is not correct, and I have translated: ‘even though it is proper to apply’.

¹² See 265e7 ὁ πολιτικός ἄρ’ ἐπιμέλειαν ἔχειν φαίνεται πότερα κοινογενοῦς φύσεως ἢ τινος ιδιογενοῦς; 267d8 οὐκοῦν τῶν νομειτικῶν ἡμῖν πολλῶν φανεισῶν ἄρτι τεχνῶν μία τις ἦν ἢ πολιτικῆ καὶ μίας τινος ἀγέλης ἐπιμέλεια; 268a2 παντάπασιν τῷ λόγῳ διαμάχονται ἂν οὗτοι σύμπαντες, ὡς σφεῖς τῆς τροφῆς ἐπιμελοῦνται τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης, οὐ μόνον ἀγελαίων ἀνθρώπων ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς τῶν ἀρχόντων αὐτῶν; and 275b5–6 quoted above. This is also why I understand ἦν at the opening of the sentence at 275e3 as a simple imperfect (‘And how **was it not** that “looking after” is common to them all’) and not, as Rowe does, as hypothetical (‘And how **would**—perhaps—“looking after” **not have been** common to them all’).

The Visitor adds that there is no such dispute with regard to the nurturers and caretakers of non-human animals (see 268a6–b6).

Shortly after the myth and 275b–d, this question is recast as: who is the ‘primary’ caretaker of humans, the statesman or one of the several other contenders? *Plt.* 276b7–c2:

ἐπιμέλεια δέ γε ἀνθρωπίνης συμπάσης κοινωνίας οὐδεμία ἂν ἐθελήσειεν ἕτερα **μᾶλλον καὶ προτέρα** τῆς βασιλικῆς φάναι καὶ κατὰ πάντων ἀνθρώπων ἀρχῆς εἶναι τέχνη.

I suppose no expertise, other than the kingly expertise and rule over all humans, would want to claim that it is a **more proper and prior** caretaker of the whole human community.¹³

The reason for introducing the notion of the ‘primary’ caretaker of humans is apparent: even though there will be many caretakers of humans, only one can be primary—most important, supreme. The question ‘Who is the caretaker of humans?’ is perhaps not a good one, since, as Rowe puts it, ‘every Tom, Dick and Harry of a τεχνίτης would have a claim to being him, because each in his own way takes care of human needs’.¹⁴ The question ‘Who is the primary caretaker of humans?’ is different, and of particular interest.

Trinity College Dublin

VASILIS POLITIS
vpolitis@tcd.ie

¹³ My translation. It is important that μᾶλλον καὶ προτέρα (‘more proper and prior’) qualifies the expertise of having care of humans.

¹⁴ C.J. Rowe, ‘Introduction’, in id. (ed.), *Reading the Statesman: Proceedings of the III Symposium Platonicum* (Sankt Augustin, 1995), 11–28, at 17.