REVIEW ARTICLE — THE LONG MARCH TO PLATO’S STATESMAN CONTINUED¹

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Lane’s book emerges from a doctoral dissertation at the University of Cambridge. The title of the book refers to its central thesis and final conclusion: ‘Method and politics in the Statesman become one’ (p. 202), and gives Lane’s ‘paradigm’ for interpretation of the Statesman. Following the Introduction (with Summary) there are three parts: Method (I); The story as a fulcrum of the dialogue (II); Politics (III). Part II mediates between I and III: just as the myth forms the fulcrum of the Statesman, the interpretation of the myth forms the fulcrum of Lane’s book.

The essential statement of Part I is ‘the Statesman develops a combined method consisting of two elements: division (dihairesis) and example (paradeigma)’ (pp. 8–9). Division has, in Sophist and Statesman, ‘intimate links . . . with the use of an example of a special kind’ (p. 9). On the subject of example, Lane discusses the application of paradeigma in ancient rhetoric and the modern revival of ‘paradigm’ (Kuhn). In Part II one finds the intertwining of method and politics: ‘The link between method and politics, in the centre of the dialogue and so in Part II of the present book’ (p. 9). Lane interprets the myth (called ‘story’ by Lane) ‘as the fulcrum of the dialogue, which in hindsight makes sense of the preceding method and politics, and in foresight introduces the methodological and political themes still to come’ (p. 9). Part II aims at making the myth relevant for the interpretation of the whole dialogue as political philosophy.³ Part III deals with ‘political art’. Weaving, as the new paradigm for political art, makes possible a new analysis and understanding of political art, making clear: 1) ‘Statecraft emerges in a special relation to the other arts, able to judge and coordinate their opportunities for action, which results inter alia in the subordination of rhetoric’ (p. 10); 2) ‘the political expert is also to carry out the task of weaving together two conflicting

¹ This review article is a sequel to ‘The Long March To Plato’s Statesman’ which appeared in Polis, 16 (1999), pp. 93–125; the core of the reviewer’s interpretation of the Statesman may be found in his ‘Survival, War and Unity of the State in Plato’s Statesman’, Polis, 12 (1993), pp. 154–87.

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³ ‘In the aftermath of the story, method and politics are themselves unified’ (p. 9).

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factions in the city... conceived as characteristically disposed to err on one side or the other of the mean, in making evaluative judgments’ (p. 10).

Following Campbell’s example, Lane points to the close relation of philosophy and politics in Plato (p. 1). Normally the Statesman is interpreted either methodologically or as political theory (p. 2), seldom however have ‘studies of the method and politics of the dialogue... been combined in more than a consecutive way’ (p. 2). Lane’s book studies their ‘intimate connection’ (p. 2). As Lane’s central thesis is the identity of method and politics, it is to be expected that not only will the discussion of method prove relevant for politics, but also the other way round.

According to Lane, the ‘philosophical identity’ of the dialogue is formed by ‘the uncompromising vindication of the nature, possibility, and authority of political expertise (in relation to its rivals)’ (p. 3). This raises the following questions: content and authority of political expertise (in contrast to the authority of the laws); the basis of the authority of political expertise; and the question of how political expertise is to be distinguished from rival forms of expertise. ‘Both the method and the politics of the Statesman hinge on the question of the authority of political expertise and how it is to be distinguished from rival forms of expertise’ (p. 2). Concerning the rivals, the question is, for what reason should someone possessing political expertise be entitled more than his/her rivals coming from other arts to rule the state, and his rivals. ‘Knowing what to do’ and ‘knowing when to do it’ should be distinguished: ‘Political expertise is... knowledge of the relation between other forms of knowledge and the temporal demands of the moment of action, or the kairos’ (pp. 3–4). Political expertise coordinates the work of different experts, commanding when each expert should perform his role: ‘the statesman must know precisely what needs to be done at every moment and by whom’ (p. 5).

Lane contrasts Plato’s approach with those of Aristotle, Hobbes and Pocock. Hobbes stands in the background of her question about the authority of the statesman; Hobbes would pursue the establishment of political authority ‘as a matter of artifice’ (p. 11); Lane follows Popper when sadly contending that the Statesman ‘provides none of the meditation on human weaknesses and their possibly calamitous effects’ (p. 11); Plato is found still to be asking here, as in the Republic, ‘Who should rule?’ (p. 6), and not — as a genuine disciple of Popper should — how to prevent bad rulers causing too much...