MODELS IN PLATO’S SOPHIST AND STATESMAN

Plato’s *Sophist* and *Statesman* use a notion of a model (*paradeigma*) quite different from the one with which we are familiar from dialogues like the *Phaedo*, *Parmenides*, and *Timaeus*. In those dialogues a *paradeigma* is a separate Form, an abstract perfect particular, whose nature is exhausted by its own character. Its participants are conceived as likenesses or images of it: they share with the Form the same character, but they also fall short of it because they exemplify not only that character but also its opposite. Mundane beautiful objects are plagued by various sorts of relativity—Helen is beautiful compared to other women, but not beautiful compared to a goddess; she is beautiful in her physical appearance, but not in her soul or her actions; she is beautiful in your eyes, but not in mine, and so on. The Form of the Beautiful, which is supposed to explain her beauty, is simply and unqualifiedly beautiful (*Symp. 210e5-211d1*).

In the *Sophist* and *Statesman* a model involves a mundane example whose definition is relevant to the definition of some more difficult concept under investigation, the target. The steps taken to define the example also reveal a useful procedure to be transferred to the more difficult case. This much should be fairly uncontroversial. In my view it is important to recognize that a *paradeigma* is not merely an example (or paradigmatic example) of some general concept. That is to focus on the content of the *paradeigma*—for instance, on angling as a sort of hunting (which is relevant to the sophist), or on weaving as a sort of intertwining (which is relevant to the statesman). Content matters, but the definition of the example also displays a particular structure discovered by a certain procedure, which is to be transferred to the more difficult case. Like a model house or model housing project, which shows on a small scale how the parts of a house fit together or how a house fits into a community, Plato’s *paradeigmata* reveal the structure of the target or its place within some larger structure. But unlike a model house or housing project, which is useful in building actual houses or communities, Plato’s models reveal how the conceptual components of the target should fit together or how the target itself is related to other objects. Those structural features shape its definition. I will use the word “example” when the issue is the similar content of the model and the target. I will speak instead of a “model,” when an example is used to reveal a procedure and a content-neutral structure to be looked for in the target.

Models are introduced at various stages of an investigation, typically at the outset or when the investigation has stalled, and they show how to continue the inquiry. For this

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1 I differ from Lane (1998, esp. 61-70), who construes *paradeigma* in the *Statesman* simply as example—a special case that reveals a common element shared with the target. Rosen (1995, 81-88) has a helpful discussion of the distinction between models and examples, though I disagree with his view (85) that there is only one model for the true account of statecraft. This disagreement reflects a difference between our conceptions of models in the two dialogues.

2 Dimitri El Murr (2006) calls attention to a difficulty, which the *Sophist* and *Statesman* do not explicitly address: How do the investigators choose an adequate model without knowing the target in advance? Some scholars have thought that Plato still relies on the doctrine of recollection familiar from the *Meno* and *Phaedo* (they cite *Stm. 277d1-7*, quoted below §3). If the inquirers already have some vague conception of the target, because their souls have previously experienced it when disembodied, that conception would enable them to choose an appropriate model, which would help them fully recollect the target. I agree with El Murr and Kato (1995) that the *Statesman* does not rely on the doctrine of recollection. I differ from El Murr, however, in