

ON PLATO'S *STATESMAN*

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On the Translation

Once again, the main challenge of the present translation has been to translate Castoriadis while endeavoring to be faithful to his own distinctive translations from ancient Greek.¹ As Castoriadis himself noted in “The Discovery of the Imagination”: “The translations of passages . . . are my own. Often they diverge considerably (and sometimes on ‘elementary’ points of meaning) from existing translations. I have worried little about elegance” (*WIF*, p. 216). In his *Statesman* seminars, Castoriadis makes use of Auguste Diès’s standard Guillaume Budé French translation. But he departed therefrom when he felt he himself could better translate Plato’s text and elucidate its meaning. Translations of Plato differ rather substantially, if not wildly, within any one modern language, let alone between two or more. There would have been no way of capturing the specificity of the terminology, phrasing, and flavor of Castoriadis’s renditions through direct use of existing English translations for the *Statesman*. (The same goes for other Platonic dialogues he quotes and further ancient Greek authors he cites, remarkably well, from memory.) I have therefore again opted to render the distinctiveness of these French translations, whether Diès’s, Castoriadis’s own, or a combination thereof, directly in English myself. This has often required consultation of the Greek original, Diès’s French, and an English translation (Hamilton and Cairns’s *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*), and I have incorporated nuances of all three into the final English version given here.

The French original of these seven Castoriadis seminars prepared by Pascal Vernay and reviewed by the speaker himself offers a good running guide to the general locations in the *Statesman* where Castoriadis offers

translations of dialogue. Standards for providing citations and references are considerably stricter in the English-speaking world. Included, therefore, are specific additional references in scrolled braces “{}”—also noting “cf.” and a reference in such braces for quotations of not fully certain origin or for Castoriadis’s more general paraphrases. These added references should aid the reader who wishes to follow the commentary closely; any errors in them are my own.

In a number of instances, Castoriadis quotes or makes passing mention of other authors. In the past, I checked with Castoriadis directly concerning unreferenced quotations. Since I can no longer do this, I have now added some references myself, in consultation with the team of French editors. In some cases, however, this was not possible.²

As with his polyglot writings, Castoriadis’s spoken seminars span several languages, as if “no one language, or even three or four, could bear the weight of his thought.”³ Interestingly, a significant number of English words steal into Castoriadis’s lectures. These include: “second best” to translate *deuteros plous* throughout, “busybody” as the best translation of *polupragmonein* (2/19), and numerous colloquialisms—“Tell that to the marines!” (2/19), “jam session” (3/12), “They will laugh him down” (4/23)—as well as his paraphrase of President Reagan’s “political maxim” (4/30).

Also worthy of note are a few neologisms in French, English, or both languages. *Comitant*—Castoriadis’s neologism for Aristotle’s *sumbebēkos*—has again been translated as “comitant.”⁴ Note here my own subsequent discovery that “comitant” does indeed—or at least did—exist in English. It thus is not a neologism in our language. The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that this now “rare” term comes from *comitānt-em*, past participle of *comitāri*, “to accompany”—precisely the sense Castoriadis intended when creating his French neologism! (A search of several French dictionaries turned up no comparable existing, rare, or even obsolete term.) *Interrogativité* appears to be another Castoriadis neologism, this one improvised on the spot. I have created the English “equivalent,” placing *interrogativity* in quotation marks at its first appearance. There is a French word *sensorialité*. It is of relatively recent origin—1970, according to the *Grand Larousse de la langue française*, where it is defined as “the set of functions of the sensorial system, that is to say, of the specialized sensorial apparatuses, or organs of the senses, as they are classically distinguished.” Lacking an English equivalent, I have used (coined?) *sensorial-*

ity, it being a short stretch from the extant English adjective with Kantian connotations. (“Sensory makeup” might have given too exclusively passive an idea of Castoriadis’s conception thereof.) The 1951 coinage of another French word Castoriadis uses—*démiurgie*—is attributed to André Malraux. This neologism comes from the Greek *dēmiurgia*, meaning creative activity, workmanship, handicraft. I have merely rendered the word into “English”—*demiurgia*—thus availing myself of a minor prerogative contained in the creative activity of the translator.

Following standard editorial practice, first names have been supplied for all but the most obvious persons mentioned. Here again, any errors are my own. I have consulted the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* for spellings of classical names and places. “Sophist” appears in uppercase when referring to those specifically understood to fall into that category, but in lowercase when meant (as far as I could tell) more generally.

Nonsexist language is employed throughout: unspecified persons are arbitrarily designated as “she” or “he.” This practice, already employed previously, was developed in consultation with Castoriadis.

One nuance of the French text has not been rendered into English. Plato’s *Statesman* concerns knowledge, in particular the *epistēmē* of the “statesman.” Both *savoir* and *connaissance* may be translated as “knowledge”; but the former has a more formal connotation, while the latter often implies rather a familiarity, as in knowing (*savoir*) that one knows (*connaît*). Short of indicating each specific appearance, it is impossible to reflect this distinction in the translation.

Finally, we come to the title itself of Plato’s dialogue. In Greek, it is *Politikos*; in French, *Le Politique*. The English translation, the *Statesman*, is rather unfortunate, Castoriadis himself noted.⁵ Had these seminars been delivered by him directly in English, one could imagine him prefacing his remarks with something like the following:

Now, the English title, the *Statesman*, is particularly intolerable. I’ve said on many occasions that the Greek term *polis* is not to be translated as *city-state*, for the Greeks didn’t have a separate state apparatus. To call the person who was to be occupied with the running of the *polis* a *statesman* is, even in Plato’s perverse construction concerning the so-called royal man, totally unacceptable. Yet here we have the term enshrined in tradition as the common translation of Plato’s dialogue. We cannot pretend that this reality doesn’t exist and so must use this wholly unsuitable term; let us simply keep in mind its inadmissibility each time we employ it.

wise, when talking about the art of this “statesman” we refer to his “statesmanship,” whereas the Greek original speaks of *politikē*, which in French is *la politique* and in English usually is translated as *politics*. I would add to this imaginary aside the fact that, as opposed to *la politique* (politics/statesmanship), *le politique* can mean not only the statesman but also “the political” (or “the political sphere”), a relatively recent term derived from Carl Schmitt’s *das Politische*, which Castoriadis did not know.⁶ I have endeavored each time to choose the correct term in English—*statesman* or *the political*, *politics* or *statesmanship*—according to the text. The reader may now judge for herself whether I have successfully worked out the nuances and ambiguities, or whether alternative readings might be called for.