ON PLATO'S STATESMAN

Cornelius Castoriadis
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. 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 renderings 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.

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." Interestingly, a significant number of English words steal into Castoriadis's lectures. These include: "second best" to translate deuters pious throughout, "busyness" 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. Comitans—Castoriadis's neologism for Aristotle's sumbebêkos—has again been translated as "comitant." 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 comitiâ-em, past participle of comitiâri, "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-
wise, when talking about the art of this "statesman" we refer to his statesmanship," whereas the Greek original speaks of politikē, which in Greek is la politique and in English usually is translated as politics.

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 use. I have endeavored each time to choose the correct term in English—statesman or the political, politics or statesmanship—according to text. The reader may now judge for herself whether I have successfully teased out the nuances and ambiguities, or whether alternative readings ought be called for.