

WEAVING TOGETHER OF KINDS AND WEAVING TOGETHER OF WORDS

THE RELATION BETWEEN THE *EIDETIC WORLD* AND DISCOURSE

IN PLATO'S *SOPHIST*

Postdoctoral Project

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Τελεωτάτη πάντων λόγων ἐστὶν ἀφάνισις τὸ διαλύειν ἕκαστον ἀπὸ πάντων· διὰ γὰρ τὴν ἀλλήλων τῶν εἰδῶν συμπλοκὴν ὁ λόγος γέγονεν ἡμῖν.

“The most complete disappearance of all discourse is to undo each thing from everything. For discourse has come to be for us on account of the Weaving together of *Kinds*.”

At *Soph.* 259E4-6 the visitor asserts that there cannot be discourse without *Weaving together of Kinds* or *Forms* suggesting thus that the structure of the *eidetic world* makes discourse possible. Along these lines, there is a striking parallelism between the structure of the *eidetic world* and discourse: just as the *Kinds* are woven together in accordance with specific rules, so is discourse itself a weaving together of linguistic elements (i.e. names and verbs 262C9, συμπλέκων τὰ ῥήματα τοῖς ὀνόμασι, 262D4) in accordance with certain rules (262A, 261D1-E2).

This parallelism, however, must have some limitations. Discourse does some times represent relations that take place in the world, but some times it misrepresents them and states things that do not take place in the world, e.g. ‘Movement is Rest’, ‘Theaetetus

flies'. Discourse has the power to assert both things that are (the case) as well as things different from the things that are (the case), i.e. things that are not (the case) (Λέγει δὲ αὐτῶν ὁ μὲν ἀληθῆς τὰ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν περὶ σοῦ, 263B4-5), and it asserts things that are not (the case) as if they were (the case) (Τὰ μὴ ὄντ' ἄρα ὡς ὄντα λέγει, 263B9).

This divergence between discourse and reality seems to be explained in the *Sophist* by the fact that the rules that regulate the elements of λόγος are different from the rules that regulate the relations among the basic elements of reality, i.e. the *Kinds*. Although the example of the letters of the alphabet is applied to both the *Weaving together of Kinds* and the *Weaving together of Words*, the principles that regulate the combination of words are far from being similar to the principles that regulate the relations among *Kinds*. The basic rule for the *Weaving together of Words* is quite simple: in order to make a λόγος names (e.g. man, deer, lion) are to be combined with verbs (sit, fly, run). In a way words do function as 'letters' or phonemes: consonants can be connected only through the mediation of the vowels and any combination of consonants and vowels is in principle phonetically possible. Similarly, any combination of a name and a verb makes up a sentence: 'man learns', 'man flies', etc.

Kinds, in contrast, behave differently and follow more complex rules. *Kinds*, strictly speaking, cannot be ultimately reduced to vowel-like *Kinds* (i.e. *Kinds* that facilitate the relation of other *Kinds*, e.g. *Being*, *Same* and *Different*) and consonant-like *Kinds* because vowel-like *Kinds* are ontological anterior to consonant-like *Kinds* (e.g. *Movement* and *Rest*), and vowel-like *Kinds* have a hierarchy of their own: *Being*, which is a *Kind* in which all *Kinds* participate and is not of a pure relational nature, is to be

distinguished from the *Kinds Same* and *Different*, which are also *Kinds* in which all *Kinds* participate but are of a pure relational nature. This hierarchy conditions the relations among *Kinds*: vowel-like *Kinds* combine with all *Kinds*, while consonant-like *Kinds* combine with all vowel-like *Kinds*, yet the intermediacy of vowel-like *Kinds* does not combine consonant-like *Kinds* with all consonant-like *Kinds*.

Given this state of affairs, one may ask whether a *Weaving together of Words* can be said to be equivalent to a *Weaving together of Kinds*, whether there is any correspondence between the elements of a *Weaving together of Words* and the *Weaving together of Kinds*, and how far that correspondence goes? My research intends to elucidate how exactly the *Weaving together of Kinds* makes discourse possible, what parallelism and correlation there is between the *eidetic world* and discourse, and what the limits of that parallelism and correlation are, that is to answer the question: where do the apparently similar or corresponding structures of the *eidetic world* and discourse diverge?

The procedure to answer these questions will be the following: (1) an assessment of the scope of Plato's ontological and logical theories in this dialogue, and (2) an examination of the structure of the *Weaving together of Kinds* and the basic structure of a λόγος. From this examination it shall be inferred (a) how the *eidetic world* makes discourse possible or what the basic ontological conditions for discourse are, (b) what the relation between the "fabrics" of the *Weaving together of Kinds* and the *Weaving together of Words* is, (c) and on the basis of this it will be possible to provide both an evaluation and a philosophical criticism of the theory of λόγος of the *Sophist*.

(1) An assessment of the scope of Plato's ontological and logical theories in the *Sophist* demands not only an examination of the scope and purpose of the notion of *Form* or *Kind* and the theory of the *Weaving together of Kinds* within the dialogue. Before answering whether Plato's ontological and logical theories in the *Sophist* are intended as a general explanation of the world of *Forms* or *Kinds*, or whether they have a more limited purpose restricted to the elucidation of specific philosophical puzzles—and if they have a limited scope what their general implications and commitments are—one should make clear how Plato arrived at the philosophical problems of the *Sophist*.

A historical study of the problem is in order, particularly because the *Sophist* marks a turning point in Plato's conception of *Forms* or *Kinds*. After having criticized and demolished his own theory of *Forms* in the *Parmenides* (131A ff.), in the *Sophist* Plato reacts both against Eleatic ontological views that in theory make discourse impossible, and Antisthenes' understanding of λόγος as a name. Plato's response to Eleatism and Antisthenes involves an ontology where *Forms* or *Kinds*, unlike in the *Republic* and previous dialogues, are neither paradigms (*Rep.* 472C2, D7 and 11, 484C9, 500E5, 540A9; *Parm.* 132D), nor sensible characteristics unified in one *Form* of which they all participate (*Phaed.* 100C6, 101C3-4, 102B1; *Rep.* 476D2, 478E2, 486E5; *Symp.* 211B3; *Parm.* 129A4, B6, 130B3, E6, 131A1, 5,6,C6, E5, 132A10), but powers (δυνάμεις) and relations. A λόγος, on the other hand, is not a simply accumulation of words as in the *Cratylus* (399A, 431B), it is not just something above the words it contains and to be distinguished from them as in the *Theaetetus* (201E2, 202B1, E3, 202B1, 202B3-4,

204A1-2, 205C1, D9-E2), it is something above the words it contains made possible by the way *Kinds* relate to one another.

Setting the *Sophist* in its historical context should make clear what problems the dialogue is attacking as well as its basic ontological presuppositions, i.e. what is Plato's understanding *Kinds* in this dialogue, why he thinks *Kinds* must relate to one another, and why their interrelationship is expected to make λόγος possible.

(2) A study and analysis of the structure of the *Weaving together of Kinds* and the basic structure of a λόγος involves two methodological moves: (2.1) a close textual analysis of the passages on the *Weaving together of Kinds* and *Weaving together of Words*, and (2.2) putting those passages in context within the dialogue and the general problems Plato is addressing.

(2.1) A close textual analysis of the passages on the *Weaving together of Kinds* and *Words* should not only involve a philosophical and philological examination, it should also involve a criticism of the secondary literature on the subject. The majority view is that the *Weaving together of Kinds* is a theory of predication, or that a theory of predication is to be inferred from the *Weaving together of Kinds*. According to this view Plato distinguishes in the *Sophist* different senses of being, e.g. identity, copula or predication, and existence (Frede (1967), Owen (1971), Ackrill (1957), Vlastos (1973)). The trouble is that this interpretation is grounded on a study of isolated passages of the dialogue, and that study makes use of formal predicate logic (e.g. three senses of being) without previous conscious reflection on the validity of such methodology. Strictly

speaking, there is no word for 'predication' in the *Sophist*, not even allusion to that notion. What Frede (1967, 15) and Owen (1971, 237) call 'predicate' is for Plato just a word or more specifically a verb. It is not crystal clear how Frede, Owen, Ackrill and Vlastos arrive at the notion of 'predication'. Frede, for instance, understands the 'sharing' and 'participating' of *Kinds* as predication, but he does not satisfactorily explain how we can introduce that notion into the interpretation of the dialogue.

In addition to methodological difficulties, the introduction of the notion of predication implies further philosophical difficulties and inconsistencies, some of them are the following: (a) The introduction of the 'is' of identity is problematic because in the *Sophist Being* is not responsible for sameness but the *Kind Sameness*. The two *Kinds* are *woven together*, but each one is a *Kind* of its own. *Sameness*, therefore, is not identified with *Being* in the dialogue. (b) Plato uses the letters of the alphabet to illustrate the *Weaving together of Kinds*. This example appears to rule out any analogy with predication. When one combines 'f', 'o', 'r' and 'm' into 'Form' none of the letters 'f', 'o', 'r' or 'm' acquires any of the properties of any other letter, e.g. 'o' does not become 'f'. The point of the letters example is that all items 'f', 'o', 'r' and 'm' collaborate to make something different from them. (c) Predication is a logical notion and the *Weaving together of Kinds* is an ontological phenomenon. If the notion of predication is to be applied to the *Weaving together of Kinds* one should explain how ontology and logic interact in the *Sophist*, and that explanation must bear in mind that the rules that regulate the *Weaving together of Kinds* and the *Weaving together of Words* are different. Those who use predication to interpret the *Sophist* fail, as a matter of fact, either to differentiate or to relate the discussions of the *Weaving together of Kinds* and the *Weaving of Words*.

(2.2) The passages on the *Weaving together of Kinds* and the *Weaving together of Words* also demand to be read in context. This is a challenging task because neither the *Weaving together of Kinds* and the *Weaving together of Words*, nor the issue of truth and falsehood are the main themes of the *Sophist*. The main theme of the dialogue is the search for a definition of what a sophist is, and that inquiry poses the problem of how it is possible to say what appears to be and yet is not, which is what sophists are recognized to do. This leads to a discussion on ‘what is not’, falsehood, and technical details such as what the negation means. Λόγος, therefore, is handled only insofar as it is the operative field and medium of the *Sophist*. In this context the *Weaving together of Kinds* is simply a rough outline of the *eidetic world* that explains how reality should be as to make discourse possible. The relations between *eidetic world* and individuals is never in the front line and it is indeed surprising that while the ontology that makes discourse possible is explained through the *Weaving together of Kinds* (i.e. a description of the relations that hold among the most general *Kinds*) the examples of *Weaving together of Words* concern particulars, e.g. ‘Theaetetus sits’ and ‘Theaetetus is not Socrates’.

It is clear that a fruitful interpretation of the *Weaving together of Words* requires two different strategies: putting the passage in context within the *Sophist* and Plato’s philosophy, and applying a methodology independent from Aristotelian and modern formal logic (something Cornford (1935) and Cherniss (1944) tried to do). The place to find the adequate methodology is naturally Plato himself. Dialectic and division assume that some *Kinds* may be part of or mingle with other *Kinds*, but the uniqueness of each

Kind can be pinpointed by locating it on a conceptual map that outlines its interrelations (see Moravcsik (1973, 325)). If that is the case, it is clear that the *Weaving together of Kinds* is not only the ontology that makes discourse possible but it is also the ontology that backs up and justifies the method of dialectic in the *Sophist* and dialogues that rely on its developments and conclusions such as the *Philebus* and the *Politicus*. Plato's method of dialectic is the best place to find hermeneutic devices, concepts, and vocabulary to study the *Weaving together of Kinds* and the *Weaving together of Words*.

I am persuaded that the methodological remarks under headings (1) and (2) are the basis for a philosophically original and illuminating interpretation of the *Weaving together of Words* in the *Sophist*. These remarks are the key to satisfactory answers to the questions: (a) how does the *eidetic world* make discourse possible or what are the basic ontological conditions for discourse in the *Sophist*? (b) And, what is the relation between the “fabrics” of the *Weaving together of Kinds* and the *Weaving together of Words*? (c) The answers to these questions, in turn, should be a sound foundation for an evaluation of the purpose of the discussion on λόγος in the *Sophist* and its theory of λόγος.

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