

## Plato's *Sophist* 259E4-6

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There are at least seven different well-known interpretations of *Sophist* 259E4-6. In this paper I show them to be either misleading, in conflict with the context, or at odds with Plato's project in the dialogue. I argue that 259E4-6 tells us that in view of the fact that statements consist in the weaving of different linguistic terms that stand for different extra-linguistic items, if there is to be statements, then reality must consist in a plurality of items some of which *mix* with some and some of which do not *mix* with some according to certain ontological rules. My argument for this construal of *Sophist* 259E4-6 involves an analysis of the passage as well as an assessment of how that text fits into its context.

(1) (1.1) Τελεωτάτη πάντων λόγων ἐστὶν ἀφάνισις (1.2) τὸ διαλύειν ἕκαστον ἀπὸ πάντων· (2) (2.1) διὰ γὰρ τὴν ἀλλήλων τῶν εἰδῶν συμπλοκὴν (2) (2.2) ὁ λόγος γέγονεν ἡμῖν, (259E4-6).

“(1) (1.1) A most complete disappearance of all statements is (1.2) the undoing of each thing from everything [else], (2) (2.1) because on account of the Weaving together of Forms with one another, (2.2) statements have come to be for us.”

This short passage has been subject to various interpretations, some of them radically different from one another. I find those interpretations either misleading or unsatisfying and would like to propose yet a different construal that, unlike its forerunners, I believe not only is consistent but also in harmony with the context, as well as philosophically interesting and illuminating.

I will start by (I) reviewing the interpretations of Cornford, Moravcsik, Ross, Bluck, Ackrill, and Peck, and then move on to criticize them by studying the passage in its immediate context (II, III), as well as its (IV) composition and (V) relationship to previous sections of the dialogue. (VI) I will also briefly consider what the Eleatic Visitor thinks statements (λόγοι) are, and this will pave the way to (VII) an explanation of what

he assumes is the relationship between statements and the Weaving of Forms (i.e. reality). I will conclude (VIII) by summarizing the results of (I)-(VII) and explaining what exactly “Weaving together of Forms” in 259E4-6 means, whether that meaning commits Plato to the view that a Weaving of Forms underlies every statement, and what does it mean for the Weaving together of Forms to be a necessary condition for statements.

*(I) The many different views about 259E4-6*

*Sophist* 259E4-6 has been subject to a plethora of interpretations. The seven most prominent are the following:

(i) Cornford (1935, 300-301, 314) thinks that at *Sophist* 259E4-6 Plato is telling us that every statement (λόγος)<sup>1</sup> depends on the Weaving together of Forms (from now on WF) in the sense that every statement ‘contains’ a WF, and there cannot be a statement without such a WF. However, when he confronts the statement “Theaetetus is sitting” (263A2), Cornford downgrades his claim and says that every statement must contain at least one Form represented by a common or predicate term. Cornford does not explain how according to 259E4-6 a WF should underlie every statement, nor for that matter how he extracts from that text that at least a term of every statement stands for a Form (1935, 300). Moreover, Cornford is inconsistent when he affirms in the same breath that every statement ‘contains’ a WF and—as he implies—that some statements ‘contain’ only one Form (1935, 314). This cannot be right, because a WF, insofar as it is a weaving of

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<sup>1</sup> Cornford, F. M. *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (Routledge and Kegan Paul 1935) p. 300 translates λόγος as ‘discourse’. His translation of *Soph.* 259E4-6 runs: “Any discourse we can have owes its existence to the weaving together of Forms.” To this he comments: “It is not meant that Forms are the only elements in the meaning of all discourse. We can also make statements about Particulars. But it is true that every statement must contain at least one Form.”

Forms, must involved at least two Forms,<sup>2</sup> and a statement that only ‘contains’ one form cannot ‘contain’ a WF.

(ii) Ross (1951, 115), like Cornford, takes Plato to believe that a statement must contain at least a term that stands for a Form. He also recognizes that the predicate term normally stands for a Form, while the subject term is normally a proper name that stands for a particular. However, unlike Cornford, Ross explicitly considers the phrase “all discourse depends on the weaving together of Forms” to be an overstatement, for it is not compatible with the example “Theaetetus is sitting.”

(iii) Moravcsik (1960, 117-118) agrees with Cornford on “rational discourse” being made possible by the WF in the sense that a plurality of woven Forms underlies each meaningful sentence. However, Moravcsik has a totally different view about the constitution of that WF. He (1960, 126) thinks that the parallelism Plato draws between the WF and the Weaving of Letters, whereby consonants are connected by vowels (252E9-253A6), indicates that in statements like “Change<sup>3</sup> is not Rest” two underlying consonant-Forms and one underlying vowel-Form are involved. That becomes clearer, according to Moravcsik, if we bear in mind that “Change is not Rest” is for Plato equivalent to “Change partakes of the Different<sup>4</sup> in relation to Rest,” where the terms ‘Motion’, ‘Different’, and ‘Rest’ indicate that three Forms are involved. The same applies to “Justice is a Virtue”, which should be equivalent to “Justice partakes of Virtue,” and where again three Forms are involved (1960, 126-127). However, “Theaetetus is sitting,” which should be equivalent to “Theaetetus partakes in sitting” and “sitting is in relation to

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<sup>2</sup> Ackrill, J. L. *Essays on Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford University Press 2001) p. 73 notices that Cornford drops ἀλλήλων in his translation of the passage and points out that that is perhaps motivated by the fact that “Theaetetus is flying” does not appear to contain a plurality of Forms.

<sup>3</sup> Moravcsik, M. E. J. “Συμπλοκή Εἰδῶν and the Genesis of λόγος,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* (1960) 42 (2): 117-129 uses the term ‘Motion’. Considering that κίνησις is a general term that includes motion as well as substantial and qualitative change, I prefer to translate ‘Change’.

<sup>4</sup>(The) ‘Other’ is Moravcsik’s (1960) translation of (τὸ) ἕτερον, which I will be translating as (the) ‘Different’.

Theaetetus” (cf. the parallel “Not-being is in relation to Change” equivalent to “Change partakes in Not-being” at 256D11-12), does not stand for a WF involving three Forms, but only two. The WF involved in this case is such that the consonant Form for which the predicate term “sitting” and the particular for which the subject term “Theaetetus” stands are connected by the vowel Form for which the copula “is,” or “is in relation to,” stands. In a nutshell (1962, 61), in Moravcsik’s view, the WF is a necessary ontological condition for statements because statements must contain at least one Form that functions as connector of Subject – which may stand for a Form or particular—and a Predicate—which normally stands for a Form –. For that reason, ‘is’ in statements such as ‘Theaetetus is sitting’ stands for a Form.

(iv) Ackrill (1997, 1955) has a different and more sophisticated approach. The point of 259E4-6, according to him, is not whether a WF underlies every statement, but rather that the WF is a necessary condition for significant non-self-contradictory and non-tautological statements. It is a necessary condition for significant non-self-contradictory statements because if all Forms combined, self-contradictory statements like “κίνησις ἴσταναι” would follow and be true. And it is also a necessary condition for significant non-tautological statements because if Forms did not combined, only tautological statements would be possible. For that reason, according to Ackrill’s interpretation, if there is to be significant non-self-contradictory and non-tautological statements, Forms must weave with one another in such a way that some combine with some and some do not combine with some. The statement “Theaetetus is sitting,” for instance, is meaningful because the Forms (i.e. concepts) it contains include and rule out other Forms (concepts).<sup>5</sup> So in Ackrill’s view, a WF need not necessarily underlie statements but all

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<sup>5</sup> Ackrill’s (2001) view, as Moravcsik (1960, 121, n. 8) points out, raises the question whether for Plato all predicates fall into ranges of incompatibles. In addition to Ackrill (2001), Demos R. *The Philosophy of Plato* (Scribner’s 1939), Lorenz, K. and J. Mittelstrass. “Theaetetus fligt,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* (1966) 48 (1-3) 113-143, Philip J. “False Statement in the *Sophistes*,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Society* (1968) 99 315-327, Kostman, J. “False Logos and Not-Being in Plato’s *Sophist*,” in J. M. E. Moravcsik (ed.), *Patterns in Plato’s Thought* (Reidel 1973) 192-212, Sayre, K. *Plato’s Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved* (Princeton University Press 1983), Bluck, R. S. “False Statement in the *Sophist*,” *The*

statements presuppose the WF, and the WF involves both compatibility and incompatibility of Forms.<sup>6</sup>

All the previous interpretations are more or less on the same footing in understanding the WF as a weaving that involves in some way or another Forms such as Being, Sameness, Difference, Change, and Rest. Other interpretations, however, take εἰδῶν in WF (τὴν ἀλλήλων εἰδῶν συμπλοκὴν) not to refer to Forms.

(v) Bluck (1957, 182) criticizes Ackrill for being inconsistent. He thinks one cannot claim that discourse depends on the fact that Forms are interwoven with one another and mean by that that some Forms do not combine or mix. In Bluck's view, the WF is only about compatibility and not about incompatibility.<sup>7</sup> He supports this by pointing out that in the Weaving of Letters (252E9-253A6) nothing is said of letters not mixing, and in the comparison between the Weaving of Letters and the Weaving of Parts of Speech (261D ff.) the emphasis is on compatibility, not on incompatibility. Bluck thus thinks that the WF of 259E4-6 is not to be exclusively identified with the mixing of Forms and the structure of the world of Forms. It includes that, as well as "the way *we* weave Forms

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*Journal of Hellenistic Studies* (1957) 77 (2) 181-186, and Pelletier, F. J. *Parmenides, Plato, and the Problem of Not-Being* (The University of Chicago Press 1990) defend an 'incompatibility' notion of negation in the *Sophist*. Other interpreters strongly dispute this view, e.g. Frede, M. "Prädikation und Existenzaussage," *Hyponmemata* (1967) 18, Owen, G. E. L. "Plato on Not-Being," in G. Vlastos (ed.), *Plato I: Metaphysics and Epistemology* (Anchor Books 1970) p. 223-267, Lee, E. "Plato on Negation and Not-Being in the *Sophist*," *Philosophical Review* (1972) 81 (3): 267-304, and Ray, A. *For Images: An Interpretation of Plato's Sophist* (University Press of America 1984). For a treatment of this discussion see Pelletier (1990: 38-44).

<sup>6</sup> Ackrill (2001) calls the Forms 'concepts'. He must be using the term 'concept' in Fregean fashion, considering 'concepts' as objects that are the referents of predicates. However, 'concept' is sometimes taken to be a constituent of a thought and a mental representation. Forms in contrast are realities of their own totally independent of human affairs. For this reason it may be misleading to refer to Forms as concepts. It is also highly disputable whether Fregean concepts are totally thought independent. Although for Frege a thought may be a proposition and not a psychological event, it is odd to think that the thought 'Pegasus flies' is a totally thought independent reality as it is the case of Mont Everest.

<sup>7</sup> To say the least, Bluck's (1957) view that the WF is only about combining and compatibility is baffling. It will become apparent, as my arguments develop, that WF involves both mixing and non-mixing.

together when we talk.” The WF involved at 259E4-6, for Bluck, is a weaving together of names that Stand for Forms.<sup>8</sup> Statements about Particulars, e.g. “Theaetetus is sitting,” involve two or more Forms because the Subject term somehow stands for the Form Man insofar as Theaetetus somehow unpacks into a list of all the Forms of which he partakes.

(vi) Hackforth (1945, 57, footnote 2), in contrast to Bluck, argues that the weaving of words or parts of speech at 262C6 (συμπλοκή) and 262D4 (συμπλέκειν) shows that in the WF (συμπλοκή εἰδων) at 259E4-6 the εἶδη in question are not Forms (e.g. Being, Sameness, Difference, Change, and Rest) but words, and therefore it is just words that are woven in the WF of 259E4-6.

(vii) Peck (1962, 53-54) offers yet a different WF. For him the passage is not about mixings underlying statements or mixings of Forms being a condition for statements. He points out that the WF that precedes the passage is strictly about Rest mixing with Being, Sameness, and Difference, about Change mixing with Being, Sameness, Difference, and Rest, about all Forms mixing with Being, Sameness, and Difference, and about Sameness and Difference mixing respectively with Being. This WF can hardly be compared with “Theaetetus is sitting” and ‘Forms’ such as Man and Sitting. For this reason the WF of 259E4-6 cannot be the one that precedes the passage but that of 260C11-261A4, where εἶδος, he suggests, need not be a Form such as Being, Change, Rest, Difference, and Sameness, and includes Man and Sitting. There, the weaving in question is that of some εἶδος with Being, and it is thanks to that weaving that the εἶδος in question has being. The point made at 259E4-6 is then, in Peck’s view, that (a) there is a weaving together among the Form Being and all other Forms in virtue of which all those other Forms have being, (b) the Form of Statement is among those ‘all other Forms,’ (c) it then follows that the Form of Statement weaves with the Form of Being and has being insofar as it weaves together with or partakes in the Form of Being.

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<sup>8</sup> Ross, D. *Plato’s Theory of Ideas* (Clarendon Press 1951) p. 115 slips into this view when he paraphrases 259E4-6 as “all discourse depends on the weaving of Forms by the speaker or thinker.”

There is much to be criticized in all of these interpretations. I will, however, focus my criticism on what is strictly relevant for the understanding of 259E4-6.

(II) *Rebuttal of Bluck's, Hackforth's and Peck's views, and context* 259E4-6

It is astonishing how many construals and interpretations three Stephanus lines can have! At first blush the culprit seems to be the expression “the Weaving of Forms with one another” (τὴν ἀλλήλων τῶν εἰδῶν συμπλοκὴν), and it appears we need a clear grasp of what WF means, in order to produce a convincing interpretation of the whole passage and how the WF determines statements.<sup>9</sup>

As we have just seen, Cornford, Moravcsik, Ross, Ackrill took the WF at 259E5-6 to look back at the Weaving together of Forms such as Being, Sameness, Difference, Change, and Rest at 254B-258C. Hackforth took it to look forward to the weaving together of words at 262C6-262D4, Bluck to look forward to that very same weaving of words, though he associates that weaving to the analysis of statements at 261C-263D and emphasizes that it is a weaving together of words that stand for Forms. Peck in contrast, takes the WF to look forward to a weaving of all Forms with the Form Being at 260C11-261A4.

Hackforth, Bluck, and Peck find some support in the fact that εἶδος need not mean Form,<sup>10</sup> and the fact that Plato does talk about a ‘primary weaving of words’, i.e.

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<sup>9</sup> Other instances of συμπλοκή and συμπλέκειν in the *Sophist* are to be found at 240C2-3, where the subject matter is the weaving of Not-Being with Being, at 242D7-E2 in reference to weaving by making Being many and one, and both at 262C5-7 and 262D2-6 in reference to the weaving of words. Συμπλέξαντες at 268C6 is used idiomatically in the sense of ‘to wrap up (the discussion)’.

<sup>10</sup> It is true that εἶδος need not be a technical term. It is also true that it is open to discussion whether at 255D4 εἶδοιν, which picks up on τὰ αὐτὰ καθ’ αὐτά and τὰ πρὸς ἄλλα in 255C14-15, simply means “two classes” or implies that the two classes involved are of the same kind and ontological rank as Being, Sameness, Difference, etc. Nonetheless, it is hard to believe that εἶδη in τὴν ἀλλήλων τῶν εἰδῶν συμπλοκὴν are not meant in technical sense, for τὴν ἀλλήλων τῶν εἰδῶν συμπλοκὴν is itself a technical or philosophically loaded expression.

nouns and verbs, that constitutes primary or basic statements (262B9-C7). Additionally, the whole stretch of text 258C-259D, insofar as it is a transitional passage, seems to look backward and forward. This explains why interpreters wobble between a backward and forward looking construal of τὴν ἀλλήλων τῶν εἰδῶν συμπλοκὴν.

Indeed, 259E4-6 has a very particular location in the *Sophist*. It is inserted between the treatment of the Weaving together of the Forms Being, Sameness, Different, Change, and Rest (251C-258C) and an explanation of false statements (261C-263D). The stretch of text 258C-260B, in which 259E4-6 is inserted, is a “Summary of the case against Parmenides.”<sup>11</sup> That summary has five parts: (i) Parmenides is declared to have been rebutted (258C7-E5), (ii) the WF is reviewed and presented as a theory that solves the difficulties imposed by Parmenides’ theory (258E6-259B8, cf. 251E-252C9, 254B-D and 258E6-259B7), (iii) those who do not comply with that theory are criticized for arguing poorly (259B9-D8), (iv) difficulties implied by the lack of a WF are mentioned (259D9-E7), and (v) the treatment of the nature of statements is introduced (260A1-260B2). Within this context, 259E4-6 appears to represent a climax-point in the discussion, and that is confirmed by the literary construction of the passage.

(1) (1.1) Τελεωτάτη πάντων λόγων ἐστὶν ἀφάνισις (1.2) τὸ διαλύειν ἕκαστον ἀπὸ πάντων· (2) (2.1) διὰ γὰρ τὴν ἀλλήλων τῶν εἰδῶν συμπλοκὴν (2) (2.2) ὁ λόγος γέγονεν ἡμῖν, (259E4-6).

“(1) (1.1) A most complete disappearance of all statements is (1.2) the undoing of each thing from everything [else], (2) (2.1) because on account of the Weaving together of Forms with one another, (2.2) statements have come to be for us.”

The first colon of (1), i.e. (1.1), talks about the nonexistence of statements, while the second colon of (2), i.e. (2.2), speaks of exactly the opposite, the existence of statements. Similarly, the second colon of (1), i.e. (1.2), speaks of things not being woven, while the first colon of (2), i.e. (2.1), talks of the WF, i.e. of things being woven. As a result, the text has an ABBA chiastic construction, where the first A, i.e. (1.1), is the negation of the second A, i.e. (2.2), and the first B, i.e. (1.2), is the negation of the second

<sup>11</sup> “Summary of the case against Parmenides” is the name Rijk L. M. *Plato’s Sophist* (North-Holland Publishing Company) p. 1986 gives to 258C-260B.



B, i.e. (2.1): -A-BBA. Such construction, at least in the eyes of an ancient reader, is the sort of flag that highlights a turning point or a climax. Hackforth, Bluck, and Peck did have a motive to construe εἰδῶν συμπλοκὴν looking forward to the next section on statements. Nonetheless, they cannot be right for both textual and philosophical reasons.

The first thing to be noticed is that ‘WF’ (τὴν ἀλλήλων τῶν εἰδῶν συμπλοκὴν) in (2.1) must be the opposite of ‘the undoing of each thing from everything else’ (τὸ διαλύειν ἕκαστον ἀπὸ πάντων) in (1.2). This ‘undoing of each thing from everything else’ does not come out of the blue at 259E4-6. It was just mentioned by the Eleatic Visitor five lines above: “...to try to separate everything from everything [else] (τό γε πᾶν ἀπὸ παντὸς ἐπιχειπεῖν ἀποχωρίζειν) is not sound and moreover proper of someone absolutely uneducated and non-philosophical” (259D9-E2). “To try to separate everything from everything” is precisely what is done by those who present contraries in their arguments and claim without any qualification that the same is different and the different is the same (259C9-D2). Since this treatment of contraries is tagged as “an obvious new-born of someone who just came into contact with things that are” (259D6-7), Plato is clearly hitting at the Late Learners, who earlier in the dialogue were said not to allow for statements such as “man is good” because good is not (the same as) man and man is not (the same as) good (251B6-C6). The mistake committed by the Late Learners was diagnosed as ignoring qualifications on the way something (e.g. man, Not-Being) is or is not (something, e.g. good) (see 258E6-259B7).<sup>12</sup>

If people like the Late Learners “undo each thing from everything else” and “try to separate everything from everything [else]” because they do not make the proper qualifications needed to formulate statements and talk about Not-Being, and if the opposite of what they do is in 259E4-6 the WF, then the WF at stake in 259E4-6 must be

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<sup>12</sup> Ackrill (2001) and Moravcsik, M. E. J. “Being and Meaning in the Sophist,” *Acta Philosophica Fennica* (1962) XIV diagnosed the mistake of the Late Learners as ignorance of different uses of ‘is’. Frede (1967: 60, 61-67) has a different analysis of the distinction of different senses of ‘is’, and Brown “The *Sophist* on Statements, Predication, and Falsehood,” in G. Fine (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Plato* (Oxford University Press 2008) 437-462 thinks that ‘is’ is not the locus of the ambiguity, but the construction of the sentence.

something that allows for things to hold relations, i.e. be together in some way, and for the proper qualifications needed to formulate statements and talk about Not-Being. WF at 259E4-6 must be something that allows us to coherently talk about Not-Being and say “man is good” although man and good are different things.

The back-reference (ὁ καὶ πρόσθεν εἶρηται, 259C7) found in the Eleatic Visitor’s criticism of the Late Learners (258B9-D8) appears to go back to those qualifications and to 258E6-259B7, where the theory of the WF is summarized.<sup>13</sup> According to 258E6-259B7, Not-Being is, and it cannot be bare non-entity or nothingness (258E6-259B7). Not-Being is because kinds mix with one another and in

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<sup>13</sup> According to Frede (1962: 42) the back-reference is to 251E-252C9. I find more natural to take it to the closer 258B9-D8. Nonetheless, the two passages, 258B9-D8 and 251E-252C9, have the same implications. 251E-252C9 argues that (i) “if nothing has any capacity at all to associate with something for any result (“for any result” is the translation of εἰς μηδέν suggested by Campbell L. *The Sophistes and Politicus of Plato, with a Revised Text and English Notes* (Clarendon Press 1867)), then neither Change, nor Rest”—and this holds for everything whatsoever—“nothing would participate in any way in Being” (251E9-10). And if that is the case, we can add, then neither Change, nor Rest, would be and there would be neither Change, nor Rest—nor anything at all. Not only that, “if nothing has any capacity at all to associate with something for any result” (251E9), i.e. “if there is no mixing together” (252B6), then these theories, or for that matter any theory, “would not say anything” (252B5), presumably because there would not be anything to speak about, let alone anybody to speak with. (Contrary to what Frede (1967, 38) seems to suggest, I doubt that 252B1-6 is a different argument from 251E8-252A10) (ii) Moreover, if one forbids to call “anything by a term corresponding to a different thing because of a partaking [of that thing] in an affection (or property) of other thing” (252B9-10) (this is Campbell (1867) suggested translation with modifications), one would not be able to consistently apply the terms and qualifications ‘being’, ‘separate’, ‘of other things’, ‘by itself’, etc. (252C2-5), for these terms and qualifications assume that things relate to one another. In both passages 258E6-259B7 and 251E-252C9 the interest is in things mixing and negative relations being something that obtains. 258E6-259B7 describes a theory that explains such mixing, while 251E-252C9 is the formulation of the problem that leads to the postulation of the theory explained in 258E6-259B7. It should be noticed that 251E-252C9, directly follows and is a conclusion drawn from the criticism of the Late Learners (251A8-C6) who deny that man in any way mixes with good and therefore consider statements such as “man is good” to be meaningless. As a consequence, 251E-252C9 concludes that things such as man and good mix, while 258E6-259B7 theorizes about Forms mixing. The dialogue does not discuss the connection between the mixing of things of 251E-252C9 and the mixing of Forms in 254B-D alluded to in 258E6-259B7, but the alternatives we have is that the theory of the combination of Forms either exemplifies how things mix, or accounts for the mixing of things, or both exemplifies and accounts for the mixing of things. In any case, a connection is assumed between Forms and things in general, and what is at stake is not only a mixing of Forms but a mixing of entities in general.

that mixing Being and Difference pass through one another and all things, with the result that, by mixing or participating in Being, Difference is, but also is not what Being is, because it is different from Being, and being different from Being it is a not-being. The same applies to Being itself. By participating in the Difference, Being is different from all other kinds, and by being different from all the other kinds, it is neither each one of those kinds nor they all together, but it is itself, i.e. Being. As a result, Being is a not-being, and for that reason there must be Not-Being (259B1-7).<sup>14</sup>

The former is roughly the same theory and WF worked out at 254B-D, already anticipated at 251D-254B, and further developed at 254D-258D. It is a theory that provides qualifications on the way things are and are not in order to elucidate how things mix or relate to one another: Since there is a mixing of Forms, a Form can be said to be in respect to what it mixes with, and it can also be said not to be in respect to what it does not mix with, which can be just about everything it is not identical with. Man is thus good in the sense it mixes with the good, i.e. it is in respect to the good, and it is not good in the sense it is not the same thing as the good, i.e. it is not in respect to the good.

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<sup>14</sup> It is far from clear how exactly these mixings are supposed to work. That is an issue I will not be handling in this paper. The terms ‘mixing’, ‘weaving’, and ‘partaking’ sometimes appear to be synonymous, although van Fraassen B. C. “Logical Structure in Plato’s *Sophist*,” *Review of Metaphysics* 22 (1969) (3) 482-498 distinguishes them. Independently of whether or not ‘mixing’, ‘weaving’, and ‘partaking’ are synonymous, it is clear that the notion of partaking in the *Sophist* is vague and that the term ‘partaking’ refers to relations of different kind (Frede: 1967, 38). An ambiguity of the term συμπλοκή and its cognate verb συμπλέκειν I would like to point out, is that at 259E4-6 the συμπλοκή at stake is clearly *the* Weaving (τὴν ... συμπλοκὴν) of Forms in general or of all Forms (ἀλλήλων τῶν εἰδῶν), i.e. the way the world of Forms is organized—and by implication how the world as a whole including particulars is organized—not a weaving of some particular Forms as it is the case at 240C2-3, 242D7-E2. It is crucial to bear this in mind, because συμπλοκή in the latter sense is *a* συμπλοκή and may amount to the same thing as a mixing, whereas in the former sense, *the* συμπλοκή of Forms with one another simultaneously includes Forms mixing and not mixing. It should also be noticed that the notion of ‘mixing’ is puzzling. ‘Mixing of Forms’ in the *Sophist* is clearly not to be understood as the mixing that occurs when colours are mixed, for in contrast to mixed colours mixed Forms do not lose their distinctive feature(s). The mixing of words is by far clearer. When a noun and a verb mix, it occurs that the whole, i.e. the result of the mixing, says something different and above what the noun and the verb separately say on their own, and yet both the noun and the verb themselves do not change in any way.

Now, if we consider the development of the whole passage 258C7 to 259E6—where (i) Parmenides is declared defeated (258C7-E5), (ii) the new championing theory is recapitulated (258E6-259B8), (iii) people who do not comply to it, e.g. the Late Learners, are criticized for their incapacity to argue and make qualifications that will allow for things to hold some relation (259B9-D8), and (iv) it is contented that if the new theory were not the case, and if things that are different had not some kind of relation despite being different, then statements (259E4-6), let alone Philosophy, which relies on statements, would not be possible (260A5-B2)—it becomes apparent that we are dealing with an argument to the effect that if there were no WF (258E6-259B8, 258B9-D8), i.e. if the new theory were not the case and if things did not mix, there would be neither statements, nor Philosophy (259E4-6, 260A5-B2).

This alleged argument appears to hinge on the obvious fact that there are statements, and if Parmenides and the Late Learners imply that there cannot be statements, their view must then be scandalously counterintuitive. The argument may even suggest, as it was previously remarked (252C5-9), that Parmenides and the Late Learners views are self-defeating insofar as they make statements in order to formulate views that in the last analysis deny statements.

Unfortunately it is not crystal clear how this argument works, but part of my job in the rest of this paper will be to make a better sense of it. At this point, however, it should be clear that Hackforth, Bluck, and Peck, when they construe WF as looking forward, not only fail to see how 259E4-6 connects to its immediate context, but they also fail to understand the philosophical thread of thought of the whole “Summary of the case against Parmenides” (258C-260B). Now, I would like to turn to Cornford’s, Ross’, and Ackrill’s interpretations.

### (III) *Difficulties in Cornford’s, Ross’, Moravcsik’s, and Ackrill’s views*

Cornford, Ross, Moravcsik, and Ackrill correctly interpret WF in 259E4-6 as the Weaving together of Forms such as Being, Sameness, Difference, Change, and Rest earlier exemplified in the dialogue at 254B-258C. However, they also claim that 259E4-6 entails that a WF underlies every statement. This last claim is problematic for at least three different reasons. The first one, which—as I mentioned—was noticed by Cornford and Ross themselves, is that the paradigms of statement the Eleatic Visitor provides, i.e. “Theaetetus is sitting” and “Theaetetus is not flying,” are hard to reconcile with the claim that a WF underlies every statement. In “Theaetetus is sitting,” for instance, the subject term stands for a particular and only the predicate term, apparently, stands for a Form. And if only one term stands for a Form, Cornford and Ross cannot claim that a WF underlies every statement, because a WF must involve at least two Forms.

In view of this difficulty, Cornford admitted that in some cases, when the subject term stands for a particular, a WF does not underlie the statement. Ross simply blames Plato for incurring in an over statement, thereby violating the principle of charity and not providing a reasonable explanation. Moravcsik, in turn, pretended to solve the problem by increasing the number of terms that can stand for a Form. In “Theaetetus is sitting,” according to him, two terms, copula and predicate, stand for two different Forms that are woven together.

Moravcsik’s solution, however, will not do. One reason is that when Plato speaks of statement (ὁ λόγος) in 259E4-6, he seems to be making a general claim about all statements and is taking into consideration the class of statements as a whole. This is confirmed at 260a5-9, where the Visitor states “[it is a right moment] for the fact that statement is a particular one among the kinds that are ([ὥς ἐν καιρῷ] πρὸς τὸ τὸν λόγον ἡμῖν τῶν ὄντων ἐν τι γενῶν εἶναι), for if we are deprived of statement, we would be deprived of Philosophy, the most important thing.” Here ‘statement’ is considered as a class, the class that contains all statements and all subclasses of statements. Consequently, if there is no apparent reason to think that the Eleatic Visitor would not take “Plato is Aristocles” and “Plato is” to be statements, we must then read

259E4-6 as talking about any and every statement and including statements such as “Plato is Aristocles” and “Plato is.” The problem for Moravcsik’s theory is that it cannot account for these two kinds of statements, because in “Plato is” a particular and only one Form are involved, while in “Plato is Aristocles” subject and predicate stand for the same particular, so that only one term, the copula, could be said to stand for a Form, and with only one Form there cannot be a WF.<sup>15</sup> One could perhaps talk of Socrates ‘unpacking’ a Form, e.g. human-being, but that does not appear to be necessarily implied by the text and has the disadvantage of making the theory more complex.

A further reason why Cornford’s, Ross’, Moravcsik’s, and Ackrill’s claim that a WF underlies every statement is problematic is that it is just an assumption, not to say that it is bare speculation. There is not the slightest hint in the text at a WF underlying every meaningful statement. Third, Cornford, Ross, and Moravcsik make an apparently ungrounded transition from “*the* WF,” which is what the text has at 259E5-6 (τὴν ἀλλήλων τῶν εἰδῶν συμπλοκὴν), to “*a* WF.” They do not explain what prompts this transition and that seriously weakens their interpretations.

Akrill avoids the former errors and his is the best interpretation thus far. While Cornford, Ross, and Moravcsik assume that 259E4-6 entails a direct connection between statements and the/a WF, such that every statement corresponds to a WF and is meaningful insofar as it corresponds to a WF, Ackrill takes that connection to be indirect and general, for he simply claims that the WF is an necessary ontological basic condition for the possibility of significant statements. Ackrill supports his account in two moves. First, he points out that according to the *Sophist*, if all Forms mixed, contradictory statements like “κίνησις ἴσταναι” would follow and be true, whereas if no Forms mixed, only tautological statements, or no statements at all, would be possible. For that reason, some Forms must mix with some other Forms and some do not mix with some other

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<sup>15</sup> It might well be the case that Plato in the *Sophist* does not have in view statements like “Plato is Aristocles.” He seems to be concerned with statements where the subject term stands for either a Form or a particular and the predicate term for a Form. However, “Plato is” is a case where the subject term stands for a particular and the predicate term for a Form.

Forms. Second, he concludes that a statement is possible and meaningful because the Forms it contains include and rule out other Forms. The fact that some Forms mix with one another and some do not, entails that each Form includes other Forms and excludes others. The point Ackrill is ultimately making is that the Eleatic Visitor is putting his finger on the fact that a word applied to everything without exception is useless for the purpose of description and signification (2001, 77) because words are used to identify concepts and a concept can be identified only insofar as it excludes other concepts, and that is a necessary precondition for statements.

No doubt Ackrill has hit on a necessary condition for statements. One may, however, doubt that it is the necessary condition the Eleatic Visitor has in mind. The problem with Ackrill's interpretation is that although it makes reference to the fact that some Forms must mix with one another and some do not, it places emphasis on Forms or concepts as referents of words, while the Eleatic Visitor's emphasis seems to be on the combination itself of Forms that makes reality and eventually statements possible. In order to better understand how exactly the WF conditions statements and what the Eleatic Visitor's argument at 258E4-6 is, I propose we take a closer look at the text of 259E4-6.

#### (IV) *Logical Structure of 259E4-6*

(1) (1.1) Τελεωτάτη πάντων λόγων ἐστὶν ἀφάνισις (1.2) τὸ διαλύειν ἕκαστον ἀπὸ πάντων· (2) (2.1) διὰ γὰρ τὴν ἀλλήλων τῶν εἰδῶν συμπλοκὴν (2) (2.2) ὁ λόγος γέγονεν ἡμῖν, (259E4-6).

“(1) (1.1) A most complete disappearance of all statements is (1.2) the undoing of each thing from everything [else], (2) (2.1) because on account of the Weaving together of Forms with one another, (2.2) statements have come to be for us.”

Plato's phraseology in this passage is surprisingly convoluted. It is not clear what the relationship between the two statements involved is:

(1) A most complete disappearance of all statements is to undo each thing from everything [else].

(2) On account of the Weaving together of Forms with one another statements have come to be for us.

Let alone is unclear what the relationship between the cola of (1) is,

(1.1) a most complete disappearance of all statements

(1.2) is the undoing of each thing from everything else.

nor is it clear how the two cola of (2) relate,

(2.1) because on account of the Weaving together of Forms with one another

(2.2) statements have come to be for us.

It is not completely clear what propositions (1) are telling us when they claim that ‘(1.1) a most complete disappearance of all statements’ is ‘(1.2) the undoing of each thing from everything else’, in other words, that ‘(1.1) Non-Statement’ is ‘(1.2) Non-Weaving’. The point is certainly not that ‘Non-Statement’ is identical with ‘Non-Weaving’, which is obviously false, for these are manifestly two different concepts. It should also be emphasized that ‘Non-Weaving’ is not a predicate of ‘Non-Statement’, for ‘Non-Weaving’ in the Greek, as the article shows (τὸ διαλύειν ἀπὸ πάντων), is a subject. Propositions (1), therefore, do not intend to express identity of subject and predicate and must claim that ‘(1.2) Non-Weaving’ is ‘(1.1) Non-Statement’. So it seems we have no other choice but to understand propositions (1) as claiming that if there is ‘Non-Weaving’, there is ‘Non-Statement,’ i.e. that ‘Non-Weaving’ implies ‘Non-Statement’. We can thus express (1) as: (1) ‘(1.2) if there is no Weaving, (1.1) then there is no Statement,’ or (1) ‘(1.2) Non-Weaving implies (1.1) Non-Statement’. Since (1) is a counterfactual, Plato must be assuming that ‘Non-Weaving’ is not the case and ‘Weaving’ is the case, and that ‘Statement’ being the case depends on ‘Weaving’ being the case and ‘Non-Weaving’ not being the case.

Propositions (2), on the other hand, tell us that ‘(2) (2.2) Statements are (2.1) on account of Weaving’. Here ‘on account of’ (διὰ) suggests that ‘Statements’ being the case depends on ‘Weaving’ being the case, and that it is not the case that ‘Statements’ are the case and ‘Weaving’ is not the case. Proposition (2) therefore states that ‘(2.2) Statements imply (2.1) Weaving.’ ‘On account of’ indicates beyond any doubt that (2) is



an implication, and since (1) and (2) have a parallel structure, then (2) confirms that (1) is also an implication.

Interestingly enough, proposition (1) ‘Non-Weaving implies Non-Statement’ is a transposition of proposition (2) ‘Statements imply Weaving’. This is astonishing because the two statements are equivalent and in the end state exactly the same thing, namely that ‘it is not the case that Weaving is not the case and Statements are the case’, i.e. ‘it is not the case that Statements are the case and Weaving is not the case’. One wonders what the point of stating in the same breath statements (1) and (2) is. A clue may be provided by the fact that proposition (2) is introduced by a ‘for’, ‘because’, or ‘in fact’ (γάρ), which indicates that (2) ‘Statements imply Weaving’ should explain or confirm (1) ‘Non-Weaving implies Non-Statements’. However, since (1) and (2) are equivalent, there is no apparent logical reason why (2) should explain (1). Moreover, since (1) and (2) state exactly the same state of affairs and are equivalent, there is no reason why (2) should ontologically explain (1).

A possible reason why (2) explains or confirms (1) is that (2)—unlike (1)—is presented in positive terms and is therefore simpler than (1). While (1) talks of “complete disappearance of statements,” i.e. of there not being statements, (2) talks of there being statements. Unfortunately this account does not seem to shed much light on the text. A second possibility is that (2) does not explain (1) in logical or ontological terms but in terms related to the text or context, in terms of how the information is presented to the reader. If that is the case, then WF in (2) should explain or confirm with the context’s help why “the undoing of each thing from everything else” in (1) entails “a most complete disappearance of all statements.” This is in harmony with 259E4-E being a transitional passage that is drawing a conclusion on the basis of premises already known and is perhaps presenting information already discussed under a new light.

All this indicates that at this stage in the dialogue the Eleatic Visitor feels entitled to claim that there would not be statements if Forms were not woven, because it has already been proven that the existence of a WF is a necessary condition for reality and statements. The introduction of the counterfactual ‘(1) if there is no WF, then there is no

statements' is thus assumed to be supported by a previous proof of the WF. Further, if the WF is an ontology that makes possible statements and 259E4-6 takes that ontology to be a given fact, it then follows that, as (2) states, if there are statements, it cannot be the case that there is not WF, because statements entail the WF, insofar as the WF is a necessary condition for statements. From this vantage point, we can paraphrase the passage as follows:

"We can conclude that (1) (1.1) there would not be statements, (1.2) if there were no Weaving of Forms, (2) (2.1) because we have already made clear that the Weaving of Forms is (2.2) a necessary condition for statements."

If this analysis is correct, it turns out that in order to understand 259E4-6, it will not suffice to grasp what WF means, but we also need to grasp from the context what is the relationship between the WF and "the undoing of each thing from everything else," and, of course, what "the undoing of each thing from everything else" is. Not only that, since both (1) and (2) talk about statements, we should expect that something about statements—that will help us understand 259E6-4—has already been said. However, before embarking on that elucidation there is something about the logical structure of the passage to be noticed. Since (1) 'Non-Weaving' implies 'Non-Statement' and (2) Statements imply Weaving, (1) and (2) exclude the possibility of statements without WF, but not the possibility of WF without statements, so that the WF makes statements possible and determines them, while statements do not determine the WF in any way. It follows from this that the WF is logically, and as we shall see also ontologically, prior to statements. I will return to this point in section (VII).

*(V) The 'undoing of each thing from everything else' and assumptions 259E4-6 makes about statements*

What does "the undoing of each thing from everything else" mean and imply for statements? As we have seen, Ackrill was right to emphasize that if all Forms mixed contradictory statements like "κίνησις ἴσταναι" would follow and be true, that if no

Forms mixed, only tautological statements, or no statements at all, would be possible, and therefore Forms must weave with one another in such a way that some mix and some do not mix. Yet, he was wrong to hastily speculate and conclude that the point made at 259E4-6 is that a statement is possible and meaningful because the Forms, i.e. ‘concepts’, it contains include and rule out other Forms, i.e. ‘concepts’. That is only part of the story. He needed to inquire what the Eleatic Visitor says or suggests about statements in connection with the WF and its contrary opposite, i.e. “the undoing of each thing from everything else”.

Ackrill’s act of speculation is nonetheless understandable. The example of WF at 254D7-B gives no explicit hint at the relationship between the WF and statements. However, the purpose of that example is to illustrate a theory that avoids the flaws of the theories of the Pluralists (242C-244B), Parmenides (244B-245E), the Materialists (245E-248A), the Friends of Forms (248A-251A), and the Late Learners (251A-C). Those flaws amount to making reality, as we know it, impossible, as well as producing theories that are incompatible with language. This is particularly obvious in the inconsistencies of Parmenides’ and the Late Learners’ theories.<sup>16</sup>

According to the *Sophist*, Parmenides’ theory is inconsistent because it holds that the whole (τὸ πᾶν) is one (ἓν) in the sense of non-plurality, and at the same time calls it Being. Parmenides pleads for the existence of only one entity, but applies two words to one referent, and assumes thus the existence of at least three entities (244B6-D12).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The Friends of Forms make impossible certain important relations among things. They distinguish between things that come to be and things that are. Things that come to be are grasped by sense perception and have the power to affect or being affected, while things that are, are grasped by reason and cannot affect or be affected. One problem with this theory is that it cannot account for the knowledge if Forms are the objects of knowledge because knowing supposes that the object of knowledge affects the knower and is affected by the knower that grasps it (247E7-249D4). The materialists’ view conflicts with the facts of the world. Since they say that there are only bodily things, meaning by that that there are only things that can be touched, they do not account for things that cannot be touched, such as soul and justice (245E5-247E6).

<sup>17</sup> There is disagreement as to how to construe this passage. Bluck (1975: 72) believes that at 244D1 the participle ἔχον goes with ὄνομα and takes the text to mean: “since it [i.e. the name] could not explain itself.” According to Ackrill (1957: 73) the argument “simply suggests that if names exist they must designate things other than themselves.” De Rijk (1986: 96) takes ἔχον to

Parmenides assumes the opposite of what he preaches for! Yet, the text hints at a deeper problem. In order to argue that there is only one entity, Parmenides must make use of words, and that is inconsistent with what he intends to prove because the very same concept of word supposes the existence of at least two entities: a phonetic configuration and some other different object for which that phonetic configuration stands (244B6-D9).<sup>18</sup> The mere act of arguing for non-plurality refutes Parmenides simply because arguing supposes the use of words, and words imply more than one entity, not to mention that an argument consists of a considerable number of words.

We learn four things from Parmenides' flaws: (i) any theory must be consistent with what it claims, (ii) the world as we know it must consist in a plurality of entities, (iii) any theory about the ontology of the world as we know it must be consistent with the fact that the world consists in a plurality of entities, (iv) and any theory about the ontology of the world as we know it must be consistent with the fact that theories are formulated with words, statements, and arguments.

The Late Learners, in contrast, accept the existence of a plurality of items. The problem is that they do not accept any relationship among those items. They believe people are wrong to claim that man is one thing F and 'naming' it many different things other than man (e.g. blue, thin, tall, unjust, just, etc) (251A9-B4). The Late Learners think that one thing cannot be many things [other than itself], nor can many things be one thing<sup>19</sup> (251B7-C2). It follows from this, in the Late Learners' view, that the statement

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be an attribute and reads "some name which would be lacking (*ouk an echon*) sense." De Rijk thinks Bluck is mistaken in remarking that the argument "simply suggests that if names exists they must designate things other than themselves." The point made in the passage is, according to de Rijk, that "the Monist would be involved in self-contradiction if he were to attempt to avoid the ridiculous assumption of 'One thing—two names' by declaring the name 'being' to be an *empty* one, for in separating, then, the thing conceived of (*pragma*) from that empty name he would be faced, again, with two 'things'."

<sup>18</sup> For that reason, Parmenides cannot reply that there is only one thing and that that thing is a name that names itself, i.e. a name that names nothing

<sup>19</sup> The text says: "we name an object many things," though the modern reader would expect either "we name an object in many ways," which may make allusion to both reference and predication, or "we name an object with many different names" which makes allusion to reference. The Greek

‘man is good’ should state that the items man and good are the same thing. However, the terms ‘man’ and ‘good’ refer two different items and no item can be more than one thing. In other words, no item can be more than what it itself is. For that reason, according to the Late Learners, we should say ‘man is man’ and ‘good is good’, not ‘man is good’, and apparently, if we said ‘man is good’, ‘man’ and ‘good’ should refer the same thing. It also appears that the Late Learners would reject ‘man is not good’ because they believe we cannot say anything about man that is not man.

It follows from this that according to the Late Learners only tautological statements such as ‘man is man’ are sound and meaningful, and—to use Aristotelian language—that any predication that attributes properties is unsound and meaningless.<sup>20</sup> At the logical level, the Late Learners do not accept the distinction between subject and predicate, for they accept only subjects and reject predicates. Correspondingly, at the ontological level, they do not distinguish bearers of properties and properties, reject properties, and only accept entities that do not bear properties. And since it seems they would not accept “Plato is to the left,” it appears they do not even accept any relation whatsoever among items.

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uses the verb ἐπωνομάζειν, which literally means: “to attribute a name”, though it may occasionally mean: “to attribute a qualification”. When we name, we apply by means of convention a phonetic configuration to something, but when we state, we say that something is a quality or property of something. It is important to be clear about the ambiguity of the term because the Late Learners do not recognize at all a distinction between naming and stating.

<sup>20</sup> A tautological statement does not attribute a property. It is redundant and strictly speaking it does not suppose a distinction between subject and predicate terms. In a way we could say that such a statement has only subject terms, and if at the logical level we have only subject terms, then at the ontological level we have no distinction among classes of entities and all entities stand in the same class and rank, in this case the subject class. I would disagree with Cornford, who claims that the theory of the Late Learners is a theory of predication. In my view, by restricting the formulation of statements to tautologies, e.g. ‘man is man’, the Late Learners properly speaking eliminate predication understood as the attribution of a property or quality, for they, strictly speaking, eliminate the class of predicate terms. It seems that the Late Learners have no interest at all in predication. They think statements refer or stand for something. They think, for instance, that ‘man is good’ is meaningless because man is nothing else than man, and ‘man is good’ therefore cannot stand for anything. ‘Man is man’, in contrast, is meaningful because there is such thing as man that is man and ‘man is man’ stands for that.

The Late Learners propose a world that consists in a plurality of isolated items that bear no relation whatsoever to one another. A problem with this ontological picture is that if items are unrelated, i.e. do not mix with one another, how can we possibly say that they do not mix and weave with one another? When some one says that items do not mix with one another, she is inevitable associating them in some way!

Suppose, for instance, that X and Y are not the same item, that X is not a property of Y, nor Y a property of X, that there is no specific connection or relation between X and Y that involves one of these items affecting or being affected by the other or even having a Cambridge relation with the other.<sup>21</sup> Yet, even if they do not hold any of the relations just mentioned, insofar as there is X and there is Y, there is a relation X and Y cannot avoid having, and that is being different from one another. If each of them is an individual item of its own, then X and Y cannot fail to be different from one another and although they do not mix—in the sense that they are not the same, none is a property of the other, and they do not hold any causal or Cambridge relation to one another—we cannot say that they do not hold any relation with one another, i.e. that they do not weave with one another. Insofar as X and Y are each an individual item of its own, and insofar as they belong to the same domain or world (see 242C8-244B4), they cannot avoid being different, weaving together, and holding some relation. By just being and being in the same domain or world, items already hold some kind of relation or weaving.

A consequence of this is that when someone claims that items do not mix with one another, he must assume that there are several items distinguishable and different from one another, and that already involves a relation. If some one takes some items to be

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<sup>21</sup> A Cambridge relation is a relation X holds with Y, such that it holds at some time T1 but not at a time T2, and holding or not holding does not affect in any way the intrinsic properties of X and Y. E.g. at T1 X is to the left of Y and Y to the right of X, and at T2 Y is to the left of X and X to the right of Y. The relation between X and Y changes from T1 to T2, and the extrinsic properties of X and Y also change from T1 to T2. However, the intrinsic properties of X and Y do not change from T1 to T2, X and Y remain each X and Y correspondingly. Some relations have a greater impact on the intrinsic properties of their *relata*. E.g. Methane combines with oxygen in the air to make carbon dioxide and water vapor ( $\text{CH}_4 + 2 \text{O}_2 \rightarrow \text{CO}_2 + 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$ ), i.e. as soon as methane relates to oxygen their intrinsic properties change.

distinguishable and different from one another and be in the same domain or world, she *ipso facto* takes those items to hold a certain relation, for to be in the same domain or world and be different already involves a relation. So one can deny that things are mixed in the sense of not being the same, not being one a property of the other, not holding any causal or Cambridge relation, only if one assumes they are mixed in a primordial way, i.e. only if one assumes they are woven together.

As in the case of Parmenides' theory, the Late Learners are faulty of inconsistency, for it seems that in order to formulate their theory they need to assume what they reject. Moreover, it is not possible to formulate their theory unless reality is ontologically organized in exactly the opposite way their theory preaches. From the flaws of the Late Learners we learn that (i) the world must not only consist in a plurality of items, but those items must also relate to one another, (ii) any theory must be consistent with the fact that the world consists in a plurality of entities that relate to one another, (iii) as well as with the fact that theories are formulated with sentences that claim relations among things, and (iv) by just being and being in the same domain or world, items already hold some kind of weaving.

By criticizing Parmenides the Eleatic Visitor shows that the world consists in a plurality of items and that language supposes a plurality of items. By criticizing the Late Learners he shows that it is fundamental to the ontological constitution of reality that it consists in a plurality of items that bear a necessary and fundamental relation or weave with one another.

However, despite fact that reality consists in a plurality of items that bear a necessary and fundamental relation or weave with one another and it is obviously not the case that nothing relates in some way to something else, it can neither be the case that everything *mixes* with everything unrestrictedly. That would bring us back to Parmenides' view, for If X *mixed* with Y unrestrictedly, X would have all the properties of Y and Y would have all the properties of X, so that there would not be any distinction

between X and Y, and Y and X would be one single item (252D6-8).<sup>22</sup> So if neither a one-entity ontology, nor a plurality of totally unrelated or *unmixed* entities, nor a plurality of entities that *mix* without any restriction is the case, then items must *mix* restrictively, which obviously entails that they must fail to *mix* unrestrictedly (252E5-6), as a result some items must not *mix*, and there are specific rules for their *mixing* and not *mixing*.

“The undoing of each thing from everything [else], (259E4-5)” and “to ... separate everything from everything else, (259D9-E1)” is then an ontology, or for that matter any ontology, that isolates items as the Late Learners and, in an even more radical way, Parmenides do. The WF is simply a theory that avoids these pitfalls, and interestingly enough is not defended in the *Sophist* as the only theory that avoids such pitfalls, so that the attentive reader is left to think that one could perhaps devise a different theory that satisfies the very same ontological conditions. This suggests that the ultimate and indisputable asset of the WF is the fact that it abides by the basic ontological conditions Parmenides and the Late Learners disregard.

The ontological conditions Parmenides and the Late Learners fail to meet are extremely general. They are conditions that determine the possibility of there being items that relate to one another, of which we can talk, and which we can know. For this reason, these conditions apply to the whole of reality, and as such they apply to everything that is. So if the WF only talks of Forms and does not (explicitly) mention particulars, that does not mean that what it says about Forms does not apply or has a direct impact on particulars, it must actually apply to them insofar as they are things that are, things that are part of reality. Under this light, 259E4-5 is to be understood as follows:

(1) (1.1) there would not be statements, (1.2) if reality did not ultimately consist in a plurality of items that relate to one another in such a way that they mix and do not mix among themselves according to certain ontological rules [explained at 254B8-256D9]. (2) (2.1) On account of the ontological rules that make the Weaving together of Forms possible, which are rules that structure the whole of reality, (2.2) statements are also possible.

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<sup>22</sup> This involves the inconsistencies diagnosed in the criticism of Parmenides' theory, but also an ontological impossibility. If an entity simultaneously has every property and there are contradictory properties, that entity would simultaneously have contradictory properties.



Now, if the conditions that drive the Eleatic Visitor to postulate the WF are the most basic and most general ontological rules or conditions of reality, and if they apply to the whole of reality and everything that is, including Forms and particulars, then we should not be surprised by the Eleatic Visitor's fluctuation from examples of statements involving combinations of Forms, e.g. "Change rests," to examples that at first blush do not appear to involve combinations of Forms, e.g. "Theaetetus is sitting" (263A2), "man is good" (251B9-C1) and the non explicit or implicit exclusion in arguments of the possibility of statements that do not involve weavings of Forms, e.g. "Plato is Aristocles", "Plato is."

Consequently, the Eleatic Visitor's point at 259E4-6, *pace* Cornford, Ross, and Moravcsik, is not that every statement expresses or reproduces *a* WF, but that *the* WF determines the possibility of every statement independently of whether or not it expresses a mixing or non-mixing of forms, or a mixing or non-mixing of particulars and Forms, or perhaps even a mixing or non-mixing of Particulars.

(VI) *"The undoing of each thing from everything else" and statements*

Thus far it is clear what the WF and "the undoing of each thing from everything [else]" are. It is not fully clear, however, why would statements be impossible if items had no connection whatsoever with one another and did not connect according to the ontological rules the WF abides by. To answer this question we need to know what the Eleatic Visitor understands by statements. In the section subsequent to 259E4-6, between 261C6 and 264B8, the Eleatic Visitor will explain that a statement is a weaving of words such that as a whole says something over and above and different from what the individual words it contains say on their own (262D2-6). However, we need not look forward in order to have an idea of what the Eleatic Visitor thinks statements are. Already in his criticism of the Late Learners, the Eleatic Visitor unpacks some views about statements.

The Late Learners—as we have already discussed—are criticized for maintaining that it is impossible to meaningfully state ‘man is good’. They claim that it is impossible for one thing to be meaningfully ‘named’ many things and for many things to be meaningfully ‘named’ one thing, i.e. it is impossible for one thing to be many things, and for many things to be one. In other words, they claim that if the variables X, Y, Z stand for different items, one can neither say ‘X is Y’, nor ‘X is Y, Z’, nor Y, Z is X. In their view, the terms of statements must stand for the same item and statements must have the form ‘X is X’. So that the item for which the first instance of ‘X’ stands is the same as the item for which the second instance of ‘X’ stands. It appears that if by chance a statement has the form ‘X is Y’, the Late Learners would think that if ‘X is Y’ is to be meaningful, then ‘X’ and ‘Y’ must stand for the same item.

If this is what the Eleatic Visitor criticizes, then he must think that it is perfectly right to state ‘man is good’ and claim that one thing is many things and many things one. He must think that in a meaningful statement ‘X’ and ‘Y’ can stand for different items and the statement can state that the different items for which ‘X’ and ‘Y’ stand hold a certain relation. So the Eleatic Visitor must be committed to the view that a statement contains different terms that can stand for different items and expresses a relation among those items.

This makes a lot clearer what 259E4-6 intends to say. If reality did not ultimately consist in a plurality of items fundamentally and necessarily woven together in such a way that some *mix* with some and some do not *mix* with some according to certain ontological conditions, there would not be statements because statements consist of different linguistic terms that relate to one another and stand for different extra-linguistic items that relate to one another according to certain rules and conditions. So if reality did not consist in a plurality of different related items, there would not be statements insofar as statements express relations about extra-linguistic items.

If this is exactly what the Eleatic Visitor is telling us at 259E4-6, then the recapitulation and argument he is making through 258C-260B should be the following: (i) Having declared Parmenides defeated and having proven that an ontology that consists in

totally unrelated items is counterintuitive insofar it prevents the possibility of statements and language (258C7-E5), (ii) it is necessary to conclude that items relate to one another in such a way as to make language possible. A theory that satisfies this demand is the WF (258E6-259B8). (iii) This theory avoids the difficulties presented by Parmenides' view, as well as those presented by the Late Learners, who think that reality consists in a plurality of items but take them not to relate in any way whatsoever with one another (258B9-D8), thereby preventing the possibility of statements and language. (iv) So if the new theory were not the case in the sense that items are totally isolated from one another, and if reality did not consist of a plurality of different related items but in one item or a plurality of items that bear no relation to one another, then statements (259E4-6, cf. 258E6-259B8, 258B9-D8), let alone Philosophy (260A5-B2), which obviously relies on statements, would not be possible.

The point implied is not only that statements are an obvious piece of reality, so that denying statements is obviously counterintuitive, but also that denying statements is self-contradictory because in order to deny statements, let alone in order to postulate a theory that denies statements, we need to be committed to the possibility of denying statements. And if we are committed to the possibility of denying statements, we are *ipso facto* committed to the possibility of formulating statements and the possibility of stating our denial of statements. Stating the impossibility of statements demands their possibility and the fact that there are statements allows us, interestingly enough, to affirm and deny them. Not only that, in order to deny the WF and that items relate to one another, we need to formulate a statement and be committed to the possibility of statements, and if we are committed to that, we are committed to saying something about something, which implies that we assume a plurality of items that relate to one another. So whoever denies statements, the WF, and that items relate to one another, is inconsistent and not in a position to seriously defend her view (258B9-D8). The view that items do not mix or do not weave at all, i.e. that there is no WF, and that statements are impossible is self-defeating, as it was already anticipated at 252C5-9.

We can now conclude that (1.2) if items did not relate to one another, (1.1) there

would not be statements, and it would be impossible to state that items do not relate to one another, as well as that they relate to one another. (2.1) But if items relate to one another, then there can be statements, and it would be possible to state both that statements are impossible as well as that they are possible. Any theory that claims that items do not relate to one another and that statements are impossible, is then not only scandalously counterintuitive and inconsistent, but also self-defeating.

(VII) *The relationship between the WF and statements implicit in 259E4-6*

Interestingly enough, in 259E4-6 the Eleatic Visitor is assuming that the existence of statements is a reliable touchstone for proving the consistency and feasibility of an ontological theory. As we have seen, he appears to believe that every ontological theory must be consistent with statements, and if every theory is formulated linguistically and involves statements, then—on the face of it—every theory must be consistent with statements. Perhaps he is even thinking that the existence of language and statements is *per se* obvious, simply because if we do not accept language and statements, we cannot get off the ground to speak, think, theorize, and philosophize about anything (see 261A5-B2). Yet, as his analysis of “Theaetetus is not flying” into “Theaetetus partakes in Difference in respect to flying” and his consideration that we can meaningfully say “Theaetetus is flying” shows, the Eleatic Visitor would not go as far as to say that the way we normally speak and whatever we state is necessarily a touchstone or evidence for proving anything about reality.

This brings us to a feature of 259E4-6 that still remains unexplained. I mentioned at the end of (IV) that the logical structure of (1) and (2) excludes the possibility of statements without WF, but not the possibility of WF without statements, so that the WF determines the possibility of statements and is logically and—as we have just seen—ontologically prior to statements, whereas statements do not determine the WF in any way. The relation between the WF and statements is asymmetrical and its direction is from the WF to statements. This entails that the WF is ontologically independent from

statements, but statements ontologically depend on the WF, so there can be WF without there being statements, but there cannot be statements without there being WF.

Now, if the Eleatic Visitor holds that the WF ontologically determines the possibility of statements in general terms but not the way we normally speak and what we can possibly state, then he must think that the WF completely determines the possibility of statements, but does not determine, at least completely, the structure, composition, and content of statements, while statements, their structure, constitution, and content have no impact whatsoever on the WF. This is crucial to understanding how Plato conceives of the relationship between the WF and statements.

The exact relationship between the WF and statements becomes apparent in the loose parallelism the Eleatic Visitor draws between (i) the weaving together of letters, (ii) the weaving together of words that issues statements, and (iii) the WF. This is obviously a parallelism between (i) the combinations of letters that issue syllables (and eventually words), (ii) the combinations of words that issue statements, and (iii) the ontological features of the WF.

This parallelism hinges on the letter analogy, which runs as follows:

- (i) Consonants cannot (directly) combine or mix with consonants. They can, however, (directly) mix with vowels, and by the bridging of vowels they can (indirectly) mix with other consonants (253A4-6).
- (ii) In the same way, words cannot mix as to produce statements unless they come in two different kinds (261D6-E6), i.e. vowel- (i.e. verbs, ῥήματα) and consonant-words (i.e. nouns, ὀνόματα) (262A1-7) (261D1-3), so that consonant-words do not (directly) mix with consonant-words but (directly) mix with vowel-words (262A9-11). The strings ‘lion deer horse’ and ‘walks runs sleeps’ are not mixings and do not issue a statement because the words they contain do not show or say as a whole anything above what they say on their own individually (262B1-262C7), whereas in ‘ἄνθρωπος μανθάνει’, ‘ἄνθρωπος’ and ‘μανθάνει’, which are words of different kind, do not simply name each on its own something different separately, but both terms in combination and as a whole say

something about man and learning, namely that a man is undertaking the action of learning (see 262D2-6). Whether by the bridging of vowel-words consonant-words (indirectly) mix, that is something we need to examine.

(iii) In the case of Forms, similarly, Forms cannot mix with every Form, for otherwise self-contradictory statements such as “κίνησις ἴσταναι” would be true. If some Forms are to mix and some are not to mix, then there must be two kinds of Forms, consonant- and vowel-Forms, so that consonant-Forms do not (directly) mix with consonant-Forms but (directly) mix with vowel-Forms (253B9-C3, 253D5-E2, 255C14-D1).<sup>23</sup> As in the case of words, whether consonant-Forms (indirectly) mix by the bridging of vowel-Forms, that is something that needs to be scrutinized.

This analogy among letters as elements of syllables, words as elements of statements, and the WF must be taken very loosely, for it is an oversimplification and incomplete. There are important disanalogies among letters, words as elements of statements, and the WF. To begin with, it is true that in the layman’s view virtually any consonant can combine with any vowel, and any vowel my function as a bridge to link any two consonants. Similarly, any mixing of a consonant-word and a vowel-word is syntactically possible, e.g. “procrastination flies” makes perfect sense. Yet, we cannot really say that a vowel-word can link any two consonant-words, for although “procrastination kills serendipity” makes sense, “procrastination dies serendipity” does not. This disanalogy, however, is not too crucial. Highly misleading, though, would be to fully apply the parallelism to the WF. It is correct to say that consonant-Forms combine with any vowel-Form, for vowel Forms are Being, Sameness, and Difference and everything ‘is’ and is in some way ‘the same’ and ‘different.’ Yet, we cannot say that any two consonant Forms, e.g. Change and Rest, could be bridged by any vowel Form, e.g. Being, for if that were the case, it will then be possible for Change to be Rest and *vice versa*. The letter analogy falls short of the weaving of words and the WF because the

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<sup>23</sup> I will not discuss here whether Plato means by γράμματα letters or phonemes. See Ryle, G. “Letters and Syllables in Plato,” *Philosophical Review* (1960) 69 (4): 431-451.

weaving of words and the WF are more complex and have more restrictions than the weaving of letters. All this indicates that the weaving of words is more complex and has more restrictions than the weaving of letters, and that the WF is more complex and has more restrictions than the weaving of words.<sup>24</sup>

This criticism of the letter analogy shows that although we can mix the terms ‘Change’ and ‘Rests’, the extra-linguistic items Change and Rest do not mix. The terms of a statement stand for extra-linguistic items, but the statement itself need not express a weaving (mixing or non-mixing) of extra-linguistic items. A statement, therefore, is a weaving of words that may or may not find a counter part in the extra-linguistic world. Statements such as “Theatetus is sitting” or “Change is not Rest” do consist of words that stand for items that obtain in the extra-linguistic world and express relations among items that also obtain in the extra-linguistic world, and for that reason they are said to be true (263B4-5), whereas statements such as “Theatetus flies” and “Change is rests” consist of words that stand for items that obtain in the extra-linguistic world, but they do not express relations among extra-linguistic items that obtain in the extra-linguistic world (263B7-9). As Plato puts it, such statements assert things (i.e. relations) that are not, i.e. that are different from what obtains of the subject term (263D1-4), and for that reason they are said to be false. While Change being the same thing as Rest and Change being at rest are ontologically impossible, “Change is Rest” and “Change rests” are linguistically possible. If there is a linguistic impossibility, that would be to pretend that ‘Theatetus Plato’ or ‘sitting flying’ say something over and above their elements and constitute statements.

This all leads us to conclude that if 259E4-6 is telling us that (1.2.) “the he undoing of each thing from everything else” implies (1.1.) “the impossibility of statements”, and if (2.2.) “the existence of statements” implies (2.1) the WF, then the logical structure of this text is giving us a hint at the fact that statements work differently than the extra-linguistic world, i.e. that the weaving of words works differently than the weaving of

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<sup>24</sup> There is a lot more to be said about the latter analogy, but I have to postpone that to a different occasion.

extra-linguistic items. Consequently, the text is consistent with the possibility of statements having rules and features of their own fully independent from those of the extra-linguistic world.<sup>25</sup>

### (VIII) *Conclusion*

We are finally prepared to make sense of *Sophist* 259E4-6:

(1) (1.1) Τελεωτάτη πάντων λόγων ἐστὶν ἀφάνισις (1.2) τὸ διαλύειν ἕκαστον ἀπὸ πάντων· (2) (2.1) διὰ γὰρ τὴν ἀλλήλων τῶν εἰδῶν συμπλοκὴν (2) (2.2) ὁ λόγος γέγονεν ἡμῖν, (259E4-6).

“(1) (1.1) A most complete disappearance of all statements is (1.2) the undoing of each thing from everything [else], (2) (2.1) because on account of the Weaving together of Forms with one another, (2.2) statements have come to be for us.”

Bluck, Hackforth, and Peck were wrong to construe this passage out of its context. The Eleatic Visitor may have agreed with Peck that statements are among the things that are. However, his concern at 259E4-6 is not to show that statements are among the things that are but to show that reality, i.e. things that are, must fulfill certain ontological conditions in order for statements to be possible. The point made by 259E4-6, *pace* Cornford, Ross, and Moravcsik is not that statements must contain Forms but that statements in order to be what they are must abide by the basic rules of reality. Ackrill was right to say that the WF is a necessary condition for significant non-self-contradictory statements. However he does not do justice to the text in suggesting that the Eleatic Visitor intends to say that a word applied to everything without exception is useless for the purpose of description and signification because words are used to identify concepts and a concept can be identified only insofar as it excludes other concepts.

At 259E4-6 the Eleatic Visitor is simply telling us that after refuting Parmenides and the Late Learners and having identified what conditions an ontology must fulfill in

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<sup>25</sup> The application of the letter analogy to both Forms/items and statements also shows that the Eleatic stranger is not analyzing statements into Subject and Predicate or terms that stand for entities that are bearers of properties in contrast to entities that are properties. His analysis is rather into consonant and vowel terms.



order to be compatible with the existence of statements, he can conclude that (1) (1.1) there would not be statements, (1.2) if reality did not ultimately consists in a plurality of items that relate or weave with one another in such a way that some *mix* with some and some do not *mix* with some according to certain ontological rules. (2) The reason for that is that (2.1) on account of the ontological conditions and rules that make the WF possible, which are conditions and rules that regulate the whole of reality, (2.2) statements are also possible. The Eleatic Visitor is nailing down the fact that if reality did not ultimately consists in a plurality of items some of which *mix* with some and some of which do not *mix* with some according to certain ontological rules, there would not be statements because statements consist in the weaving of different linguistic terms that stand for different extra-linguistic items that bear some relation to one another.

The WF here is not to be understood as any particular weaving of two or more forms, but in a more general sense as the basic ontological conditions that make both reality and statements possible. That is confirmed by the fact that those basic ontological conditions compatible with the WF are the contrary of “the undoing of each thing from everything [else].” For this very reason, the Eleatic Visitor cannot be telling us at 259E4-6 that a statement must necessarily contain a WF. He must rather be telling us that statements suppose and imply the basic conditions of reality identified in his critique of Parmenides and the Late Learners.

The passage assumes a certain parallelism between statements and the WF. Just as items have to come in at least two different kinds in order to constitute a reality that consists in a plurality of entities that do not mix indiscriminately, in the same way words in order to constitute statements must come in at least two different kinds.<sup>26</sup> However, this parallelism is to be taken *cum grano salis*. The logical structure of 259E4-6 implies that the WF determines the possibility of there being statements, although the Eleatic Visitor also thinks that the WF does not determine the way we normally speak and what we can possibly state. This indicates that he must be aware that the syntactic form and

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<sup>26</sup> At 261D2 ff. ὀνόματα is used in the general sense of ‘word’, but at 261E4 ff. it is used in the much narrower sense of name or noun in opposition to ῥήματα.

structure of a statement need not reproduce or be completely analogical to the structure of the combination of items it pretends to express.

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