Difference, *συμπλοκή* and the hierarchy of ideas in Plato's *Sophist*

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Abstract

Starting from the dialectic of intertwinement, the weaving together (συμπλοκή) of ideas in the Sophist, *this paper tries to determine the place, function and significance of Difference and Hierarchy among platonic ideas. To that effect, it is first established that and how the notion of difference becomes the fundamental and even substantial structural principle of the dialectic of being and non-being, motion and rest, and finally of the notions of unity and identity themselves. In the second instance, the question of the hierarchy among ideas is interpreted and understood as the question of liberty. Namely, that very hierarchy is understood as an intrinsic and an innate one, i.e. as the set of dialectical relationships between ideas that follow from their own essence and being, which therefore is not nor cannot be externally imposed or forced upon them. Such a character of hierarchy is, then, recognized and exemplified in the case of the individual and the collective, where it turns out not only that there exists a clear idea of individuality in Plato, but also that every individual necessarily belongs to some collective and indeed seeks to unite with the collective in the same way and for the same reasons every thing or idea tends towards its form, or its own proper good.*

The same origin or foundation that enables participation[1] enables and conditions the interlacing and intertwinement, the weaving together of ideas, their συμπλοκή.[2] This foundation is, again, the *Difference*. So, without difference there would be no μέθεξις and no συμπλοκή. This difference puts the latter in a relation of mutual conditioning. Thus, there would be no συμπλοκή if there were no μέθεξις, just as μέθεξις would not be possible without συμπλοκή and could not take place outside it. So, further progress towards the complete articulation of the relationship between identity and individuality, on one hand, and difference or plurality, on the other, goes through the explanation of the weaving together of ideas, or συμπλοκή τῶν

εἰδῶν. Ideas participate in each other because they are woven together in such a way that one idea becomes inseparable from another. Its being and essence, its εἶδος, or οὐσία, are determined by its being mixed with other ideas. More precisely, the being and essence of at least some ideas is determined and established as such (as an ideal being and essence, as the being and essence of an idea, and of that particular idea, not some other) by the mixture of their own proper attributes with attributes of other ideas. Therefore, one can read συμπλοκή as an epitome of μέθεξις which proves that (and shows how) their being the unity of identity and difference is absolutely indispensable for the very being of ideas, or how much their identity is established by and made of difference. For in συμπλοκή we have the difference as the determining factor for the essence of every single idea. So (the fact of) συμπλοκή is the existence of difference in identity, or an existence of *μέθεξις*, its realization and embodiment.

In view of the fact that in the *Sophist* Plato speaks about Being and Essence (οὐσία) rather than about Justice, Good or Liberty, someone might think that this has nothing to do with the problematic of the *Republic* or any other explicitly political dialogue. But, that is an unsustainable position, because Plato's insistence on the decisive significance of the theory of ideas for his political philosophy leaves little space for such ventures. In fact, everything points in the opposite direction, namely in the direction of the complete unity of metaphysics and politics, or of ethics and politics in Plato.[3] Consequently, every metaphysical statement has a clear and decisive impact and importance in the political context as well. What counts for the ideas as such, taken in their own proper realm and with respect to their specific οὐσία, must apply to the field of the best (or, at least, the best possible) community and its structure, character, rules, members and practices.

This is only too obvious throughout the *Sophist*, but even more so in those parts of the dialogue which explicitly deal with the concept and problem of συμπλοκή of ideas (e.g. 251d-257c). For, while the discussion about the possibility of false statements, concepts and discourses pertaining to One and Many (243d-245e) does indeed have important consequences for the relationship between the individual and the collective which are easily inferred from such an elevated ontological discussion; and while the succeeding analysis of Motion, Rest, Change and Becoming (246a-250e), and especially the definition of Being as Power to affect and be affected, or to act and be acted upon (247e1-4, 248c8-10), have an even more immediate bearing on the socio-political reality[4]; it is in this passage about the συμπλοκή of ideas that the possibility of the relationship and unity of the individual and the collective really decisively opens. It is here that one recognizes the necessity of multiplicity in the ideal and realizes, not only that ideas are individual collectives (or collective individuals), i.e. unique

inseparable multiplicities, but also why they are such.

Having previously (250b-c) established the Being, that is, the reality and existence, as an idea, Plato goes on (251d-253e) to explain and analyze the mutual participation, intertwinement, the weaving together of ideas, or simply their συμπλοκή. The whole passage is dedicated to proving that ideas do "interlace," "intertwine," or "blend" (as Cornford has it[5]). Thus, he first shows that it is logically impossible for ideas not to "blend" at all (252a-c), just as it is impossible for all of them to combine (252d). Therefore, the third choice imposes itself as the natural one. It must be that some ideas can and do combine, while others do not (252e-253a).[6] This is exactly a breaking point, which invokes dialectic as the necessary art here. Generally, dialectic is called upon whenever the situation is not black-and-white, whenever we have a complicated, intricate state of affairs and whenever we are demanded to make decisions in such situations.

Dialectic is generally a practical science or art because, more than any other method and form of thinking, it is directed to practice and has practical consequences. Dialectic links theory and practice by having them both, or by being both, and that is one of the reasons why it is the most proper philosophical method for Plato. It combines philosophy and politics in itself and is hence the epitome of the fundamental principle of his philosophy and thought in general. Dialectic is "a guide on the voyage of discourse" (253b11), it teaches the correct and proper use of that discourse, and by virtue of its being a theoretical-practical method and science, this voyage starts in the ideal and ends in the practical. For our only power, our only tool and weapon in the world, that on which depends our very survival (physical, psychical, cultural and any other) is our intellect, our faculty of thinking and knowing, so it is of ultimate importance that we know how to think accurately, clearly and distinctly.[7] That is why Plato does not hesitate to pronounce dialectic as a "science [which is] perhaps the most important of all."[8]

It is exactly this need for clearness in our thoughts, thinking and knowledge that we accomplish with "the science of dialectic," whose "business" is "Dividing according to kinds, not taking the same form for a different one or a different one for the same" (253c11-13). The dialectician is the only one who "discerns clearly one form everywhere extended throughout many, where each one lies apart, and many forms, different from one another, embraced from without by one form, and again one form connected in a unity through many wholes, and many forms entirely marked off apart. That means knowing how to distinguish, kind by kind, in what ways the several kinds can or cannot combine" (253d5-e1). And, which is of no less importance, the other name for dialectician is philosopher, "lover of wisdom" (253e4-5).

Therefore, just like μέθεξις in the *Parmenides*, in the *Sophist* now

συμπλοκή brings dialectic out to the front through its form and structure. Admittedly, both concepts are analyzed dialectically from the outset, so the result is not unexpected. And, one can safely assume that, if some other method were applied, the concepts and the whole examination would most probably have been different. But, that needn't concern us. All we are after in both cases is to get to the bottom of dialectic, and we couldn't have found better examples for that. Indeed, the fact that μέθεξις and συμπλοκή invoke, produce and issue in dialectic (in philosophy as dialectic) just as much as they are invoked, produced and structured by that same dialectic, is very welcome and convenient here because Plato's whole thought is permeated with dialectic and multiply marked with it. Therefore, this fact helps one grasp the notion of dialectic in its entirety by revealing its different aspects and dimensions. And without that, one can never hope to even begin to understand what Plato's political philosophy is all about.

In the immediate following section of the dialogue (254c-257c), Plato continues in the same dialectical vein and undertakes to demonstrate how συμπλοκή works on the example of the most paradigmatic (he says "important") set of ideas, that is, Being, Motion and Rest (254d3-4). This enterprise, however, shows dialectic to be rather static: everything is simply being discovered as fixed and is even further fastened in its proper constellation. Nothing is really produced nor created by the movement of thought. Thus, having both motion and rest pre-set and given, Plato continues towards exposing the basis of actually every possible relationship of ideas, and of their combining in particular.

This foundation is furnished by the concepts/ideas of *sameness* and *difference*, or of *the same* and *the different*.[9] The discussion that follows (255a-d) exposes the constellation of the five ideas (Being, Motion, Rest, Identity and Difference) in such a way that difference definitely acquires a central place in it, thus not only showing that every idea is a constellation of its identity (identities) and difference (differences), but also that difference is the motor of dialectic and therefore of the ideal as well. Namely, it is clearly shown that, without difference there could be no relationship between ideas – and hence no ideal realm, nor any ideality whatsoever. (One must not forget that the case in question is an exemplary one.[10]) The importance ascribed to difference here is so huge that Plato ends up stating that the nature of difference "pervades all the forms, for each one is different from the rest, not by virtue of its own nature, but because it partakes of the character of difference" (255e3-6). And he goes on to demonstrate how every idea, the essence and being of every idea, is the result of dialectical interplay of identity and difference.[11] And in this interplay, indeed thanks to it, one becomes fully aware of the possibility of the characteristically Platonic, *static dialectic*.[12]

Furthermore, the dialectic of identity and difference – which, as we have seen, is based primarily on difference and is pervaded by it – pertains to the very idea of Being as well. Thus, after explaining that and how difference enables one to speak (and think) of both Being and Non-Being – thereby also connecting, uniting the idea of being with its opposite and completing it, that is, finishing and fulfilling its (both inward and outward) determination[13] – the conclusion easily follows: *difference pervades.* Moreover, it pervades the idea of Being as such, it at once enables it and determines it. Once again, there can be no idea of Being without the idea of Difference. The idea of Being *participates in the idea of Difference, and vice versa,* but it is the latter that carries the structuring power. That is why Plato states that non-being is difference immediately afterwards (257b2-4), but now its character as the determining force of Being is clearly made possible only because it is recognized as difference. Difference is, in fact, the creative force here. That is why Plato compares it to knowledge and emphasizes this comparison by saying that "The nature of the different appears to be parceled out, in the same way as knowledge" (257c6-7).

Together with its counter-part, identity, difference gets to be related, compared and united (identified) with being and knowledge, the two most important and prominent attributes of the paramount idea, the idea of all ideas: the Idea of the Good. After all, the Idea of the Good as the idea of ideality necessarily holds the identity (identities) and difference (differences) of ideas in itself and as itself.

For this reason Plato, in the section that closes the discussion of Being and Difference (257d-259d), further explains the nature and the status of Difference in the dialectic of ideas (and of the ideal in general) only to end up in assigning it the central and fundamental position and role.[14] Finally, this position and role are confirmed and strengthened with regard to the very possibility and nature of philosophical discourse and thought.[15]

What follows from all these deliberations is a simple fact that Being is the *harmony of differences,* which posits it among the fundamental principles and ultimate ends of dialectic. For, in its most significant part, dialectic is the science of Being; the science, method and knowledge of the difference between that which is and that which is not. This is how Plato's "definitions" of Being[16] could be understood and interpreted, in spite of their apparent negativity and dismissal of the alternative. Of course, such an interpretation particularly invokes and relies on the insight that, with regard to any given pair of opposed ideas, Being is "a third thing over and above these two [παρὰ ταῦτα]" (250b7). On one hand, because it seems that, in the given context (i.e. in the context of the dichotomy between motion and rest, which directly issues in another dichotomy: that between mobile and immobile dialectic, or between the path to knowledge and that knowledge itself), the only logical

conclusion of this statement is that the Being must be the unity of the two, if it is to be in accordance with the usual Platonic logic, which always ends up in setting the third term as the resolving unity of the previous two. On the other hand, the relationship that is established between Being and Non-Being gives us the right to conclude this. For, Non-Being or negation does not lack Being. In its negativity, it still retains a positive existence, that of a different kind of being, essence, etc. On account of this different meaning, Being itself changes scope and sense, and becomes the harmonious unity of itself and the Non-Being. So, just as Being on the whole cannot be just one side of the opposition, but the totality of that opposition (and it can be that only as the harmony of differences, of opposites), it also cannot be just one of the two, but the totality of their unity. In other words, if Being is neither of the contradicting ideas, it has to be their harmonious unity. Finally, such a "unifying" perspective is certainly more proper to philosophy in contrast to sophistic. Namely, Plato demands going all the way to Being in order to be able to define the philosopher, whereas it is the definition of the sophist that can satisfy itself with the exposition and emphasis on the limit that separates Being and Non-Being (254a)[17]; and this demand obviously aims at the positive approach to and determination of the relation between the two.

What immediately follows from the weaving together of ideas, just as it followed from the conception of μέθεξις, is the necessity of a hierarchy between ideas as well as between realms of being. Platonic logic is very simple and very Greek here: if there is a difference and a unity, then there must also be some kind of organization of the unified differences. This for Plato means that there must exist some order of things: they have to be parts of a κόσμος, if they are to be at all. For, the only (proper) way for an individual (thing, entity, being) to exist and endure is to participate in a community, to be a part of the collective, of an organized and ordered ensemble. And, since the collective itself is an entity of a kind, which is to say that it is an individual as well (only on a different level and in a different manner), an organism[18]; since it is such, the collective demands and imposes a division of labor, so to speak, or better a division and distribution of responsibilities and rights among its parts/members. Thus, the division itself – the same one that stems from the difference and preserves its form in itself and as itself – establishes a hierarchy. More precisely, the division (διαίρεσις) always already is a hierarchy, it means a hierarchy.[19]

So, hierarchy is the fundamental form of division and difference, and therefore equal to and same as themselves. As such, then, it is also the form of ideality, the inner fundamental structure of ideas, the pattern of their being and existence. Hierarchy is the way they relate to themselves and to others, be they other ideas or other kinds of reality. Most notably, the relationship between one and many is hierarchically marked and structured.

Therefrom emerges the ever-higher position of the one in relation to the many. This primacy and precedence is structural. It depends on the necessity established by the essence of ideas. Namely, ideas themselves and as such, being "one over many," or being the principle(s) of unity, impose exactly this type and character of hierarchy. Their own being is based on this hierarchy, they are in themselves organized in this way. Accordingly, the very condition of existence of any kind of organized unity posits the one on top of its edifice, with the many being subjected to it and striving towards it. The many have an inherent tendency to unite and become one. Unity and singularity are the innate determinations and goals of plurality. It is in the nature of every thing, being, entity, to strive towards a higher ground, which is always its unity with others, the One.

However totalitarian and authoritarian this hierarchy might seem to us today, it cannot be seriously taken as such. In its meaning and scope, it is far from any violent and forceful identification and uniformity. For, it remains as a significant Platonic insight that the only possible and true identity is the unity of differences. This insight unambiguously supposes a free union of the different many, which means that they are never forced to renounce their idiosyncrasies, not even after the completion of their unification. In all its uniqueness, the unity remains differential, even heterogeneous. And, its strongest cohesive force is exactly the completely free tendency of each part to join the union and stay in it for as long as it exists. And, exactly because participation (μέθεξις) and weaving together (συμπλοκή) are the essential attributes of each and every idea, thing, being and entity – that is, because the Difference is the foundation, the being (εἶναι) and essence (οὐσία), the truth (ἀλήθεια) of every possible unity and identity – because of that, unification is not imposed from the outside, but is an expression and a result of one's innermost desires and dispositions, a fundamental form and mode of its essence and being. The community created in this way is fundamentally free, because it is based on and enabled by intrinsic, innate needs and qualities of its members. It is autonomously determined and brought about from within, by the internal necessity of their very οὐσία; which is to say: freely, by and through their freedom. The only real, the only true community/collectivity is the unity of free individuals, and such a unity can only mean that they unite freely in order to realize and confirm their own, individual liberty – the liberty to be what they will, and thus also what they really are.[20] The individuals have to tend towards their union by sheer force of their innermost being. They strive towards unity because they are as they are; and being what they are implies their communing with others, their being incorporated in a community, being a member of the collective. The very notion of individuality imposes unification as its proper mode of being. Unification is, therefore, self-

realization and self-completion of the individual, an exercise of one's own liberty.

This is nowhere so obvious and emphasized as in the realm of ideas. Each and every idea in its individuality is an example, a paradigm of such a unity, community, collectivity. The whole structure of ideality amounts to liberty.

Thus, Plato manages to conceive liberty without disposing of necessity, an accomplishment that was rarely succeeded afterwards. The key to this lies, as we have seen, in the conception of μέθεξις, or rather in the theory of ideas and in the being and essence of its central and ultimate conception, *the idea of the Good.*

In light of the last few remarks and of the context they refer to, this idea of the Good still calls for further explanation. It is easily understood that and how the questioning about the relation between one and many pertains primarily to the idea of the Good and to the μέθεξις present in it (through it). Namely, Plato's understanding of this idea supposes not only that the good of something is its unity, organized and gathered around its true essence, purpose and meaning, but in that it also assumes that there is always only one real and true good for each thing, for each phenomenon or being. Thus, the question of unity (that is, the question of the possibility, of reasons and conditions of unity) is central for Plato's main task, the examination and cognition of the Good; and reversely, the questioning of the idea of unity is the fundamental condition and proof of the existence and truthfulness of the idea of the Good and of the whole hierarchy of beings founded upon it.

Of course, the questioning of the idea of unity supposes and means the investigation of the relationship between the individual and the collective. The inner logic of such questioning also demands that it pertains to the ideas of these entities: to the idea of the individual and the idea of the collective. Since something has already been said about the collective character of ideas, and since it is in fact rather unproblematic in Plato's work, particularly compared to the idea of the individual and the according character of ideas (especially of the idea of the Good), we shall now turn to the latter.

It is commonly admitted that there is no place for individuals in Plato's work and universe.[21] Given its holistic character, one can rightfully assume that, if true, such a conclusion must also apply to the very *idea of the individual.* Thus, it seems that we should infer that there is no room for such an idea in Plato, either. However, this is exactly the problem. For, it does not follow from the logic of Plato's thought. One could not find any reason for that. The idea of the individual is dismissed neither by the basic principles of the theory of ideas, nor by its letter. On the contrary, everything points at the necessary existence of a "class" of beings that possess individuality as their common denominator. Such a class should comprise all individual beings

and thus almost all beings, since almost all of them are individuals in one way or another.

However, as Plato implicitly shows, the independent status of such a "class" or idea is very ambiguous. On one hand, it seems to be equal with the idea of the collective, or with the idea of idea in the above mentioned sense, for it turns out that it is difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of such a thing as individual in the full sense – in the sense of the individual as a unique, singular being or entity purged of all plurality[22] – which wouldn't again be an idea, a pure form. Therefore, in the first place, individuality belongs exclusively to the realm of ideas, and, secondly, such individuality is always a collectivity in some sense. This springs not only from its ideal being, but also from its content, that is, from its specific form and meaning.

According to the latter, the individual is equal to the collective in the plain sense that individuals are always compounds, fabrics interwoven from different and yet elementary attributes and entities. Individuals are combinations of elements – of forms, essences, attributes, entities, even beings – just like *the paradigmatic individual* being: *the soul*.[23] The specific (individual) character of individuals is, therefore, due to the idea of individuality, which itself is nothing but a certain form of relationship between those elements/ingredients. The idea of the individual seems to be nothing else than the notion of a unity of elements, of their interweaving which is itself conceived as elementary, or as an individual (indivisible, integral) unity. As such, it also seems utterly paradoxical.

Therefore, the only real individual (one that can rightfully be called by that name) is the idea of the individual, which is to say that "individual" is always and only an idea. Particular individuality always returns to its ideal being, that is, returns to the collective by virtue of its being an idea, and its individuality is recognized as nothing but an ensemble of parts and elements, which are again of a collective nature. That is, individual relates to the collective not simply and not only by means of its being a unity of parts, aspects and attributes; but also because these parts, aspects and attributes are collective products, they are themselves products and creations of a community and as such fully originate from community and belong to it.

Thus, the individual is the collective *both* as a particular individual being *and* as the idea of such beings. It seems that they are not simply equal, but rather the same, identical, so one wonders whether there can be any valid, legitimate and necessary hierarchy (among ideas or anything else for that matter) whatsoever. But then – at least when it comes to the individual-collective relationship, or when it comes to the idea of the Good – there might not be any hierarchy at all, not in the usual sense of a vertically directed order. For, the idea of the Good – being the paramount idea, the idea of all ideas, and hence being the ultimate form of collectivity, the idea

of the collective as such – is at the same time one and only, unique and single, and thereby is also the ultimate individuality, the idea of the individual and individuality as such.

This counts for ideas in general as well, although to a somewhat lesser extent. For, ideas always denote and delineate some collectivity, so that being ideal always means being an ideal collective, ideal collectivity; and this is to say that ideas are thereby also ideal individuals.

This dialectic of the mutual μέθεξις of the individual and the collective is in keeping with Plato's own assumptions and assertions about the idea of the Good.[24] It particularly emphasizes its total, global and absolute character, and the fact that it is recognizable and understandable only within the theory of ideas; that is, only by and through the contemplation, θεωρεῖν, of ideas as such. In fact, the Good, the pure and absolute idea of the Good, *is* this very θεωρεῖν.

The recognition of the total character of the idea of the Good, therefore, resolves the problem of μέθεξις, i.e. the problem of individuality and collectivity of ideas, by (re)moving it from the realm of the relationships between ideas and things to the purely ideal sphere, to the level of ideality, into the realm of ideas. It moves the mechanism of μέθεξις to another sphere and makes it work there, thus exposing its nature and structure. But, as we have seen, by that same move, μέθεξις is turned into the principle of ideal hierarchy and eventually becomes that hierarchy. So, the question of the form, nature and structure of the idea of the Good and of ideas in general, is now not so much a problem of participation, as it is a problem of self-identity and self-contradiction (or better, of self-difference[25]) of ideas – of their uniqueness, unity and singularity, on one hand, and their difference and plurality, on the other. Therefore, in searching for the answers to questions like: "how can an idea (any idea) be one and many at the same time?", "how can it be a union of different things, entities or qualities?", "how can one explain such double nature of ideas?", we can no longer look simply at μέθεξις and ask about it. Rather, we have to ask about ideas as such, and examine their hierarchy, their infrastructure, their inter-relations and constellations.

And, from such a (ideal) perspective, we see clearly how μέθεξις becomes what it always genuinely was, a *dialectical technique and mechanism*, through which the idea of the Good is recognized in its totality, i.e. as the totality of relationships, and also recognized as the very form of dialectic, as its noumenal image and epitome. Since, furthermore, μέθεξις as such primarily aims at *differentiation* and *distinguishing* (between the degrees of reality, the kinds of being, kinds of thought, speech, conception and representation), and is thereby nothing else than the fundamental *unifying principle* of universe; since it must also be the organizational

principle of that (and every other possible) universe and of all its spheres and segments, a principle that posits the universe as an *organism*; we also see how μέθεξις reveals another important point, namely that universe is an organism, a living unity of being, exactly and only because it has *difference* standing at its very center as the ultimate foundation and principle. The truth of the world is the *dialectical unity of differences*.

Dialectic once again turns out to be the key to the problem of ideas, i.e. of their paradoxical status, both in relation to things and in relation to themselves. For, ideas are absolute forms of thought and language, and as such they are, in fact, nothing but *forms of relationships*. This means that they are, first, forms of relationships between absolute forms themselves, then between these forms and things that originate and participate in them, and finally between those things themselves. In other words, ideas are pure forms of συμπλοκή and μέθεξις, and the only science (or scientific method) that takes upon itself to explore and expose these relationships, the only science capable of understanding them in their totality and unity, is Dialectic. Also, thanks to its particular structure and the unique presuppositions with which it operates, dialectic can go where the common sense and its logic cannot.

This means, not only that dialectic is the crown science which provides solutions for the antinomies of common sense,[26] but also that ἀπορίαι of common sense and of reality on the whole – that is, the ἀπορίαι of the sensible world and of the nature of particulars belonging to it, as well as the ἀπορίαι of ideas themselves and of the ideal realm – cannot be thought properly, let alone resolved, by purely analytical means.[27] Simple symbolic (formal, mathematical, analytical) logic does not suffice when it comes to the totality of being. To understand this, we need exactly what Plato gives us: a dialectical logic, or simply dialectic. Dialectic is able to perform this task because it is not symbolic, nor just formal, but is also a material, essential and structural logic of the world, i.e. because it is an ontological doctrine. Dialectic is the proper dimension, proper attitude and way of dealing with paradoxical notions and entities, that is, exactly those ἀπορίαι that surpass the powers of ordinary reasoning and of what we usually call logic; because it is based upon the insight that – just as unity is founded upon its apparent opposite: difference – the foundations of rationality (and even the essence and origin of the rational) needn't be such themselves. They are most probably irrational and rationally inexplicable.

Endnotes

1. For an analysis of participation in Plato see: A. Zistakis, "Difference And Participation In Plato's *Parmenides*," in *Phronimon* vol. 5 [2], 2004.

2. For the record, although it will hopefully become completely clear in the course of the present discussion, let us note that this should not be understood as a statement of identity between μέθεξις and συμπλοκή, as was claimed, for example, by Cornford (cf. *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1935, esp. pp. 256-79). For an analytical refutation of such position see J. L. Ackrill, "Plato and the Copula: *Sophist* 251-259," in G. Vlastos, ed., *Plato – A Collection of Critical Essays*, Garden City, New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1971, vol. I, pp. 216-18.

3. The arguments that, for example, J. Annas presents in support of a separation of the ethical from the political and of the primacy of the former over the latter in Plato, and particularly in the *Republic* (cf. *Platonic Ethics Old and New*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999, ch. 4, esp. pp. 80-92), seem quite insufficient and unconvincing. Equally unconvincing would be a reciprocal reduction and assimilation of the ethical to the political. (Cf., for example, P. Aubenque, "Politique et éthique chez Aristote," in *Ktema* 5, 1980, p. 215, n. 14.)

4. This not the least because it is drawn from the analysis of the materialistic, i.e. empirical theory of being and reality, and thus directly connected to the phenomenal.

5. Cf. *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, p. 256 sq.

6. For this kind of reading see, among others, J. L. Ackrill, "ΣΥΜΠΛΟΚΗ ΕΙΔΩΝ" (in Vlastos I, 1971, pp. 201-9); W.J. Prior, *Unity and Development in Plato's Metaphysics* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985), pp. 56-7; L.P. Gerson, "A Distinction in Plato's *Sophist*" (in N.D. Smith, ed., *PLATO Critical Assessments*, vol. IV, London: Routledge, 1998, pp. 131-32); and M. McCabe, *Plato's Individuals* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1999), pp. 221-34.

7. Descartes echoes this later, both in his *Discourse on Method* and *The Meditations* (see *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*, trans. by F. E. Sutcliffe, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968). In *Discourse*, however, he not only repeatedly emphasizes the demand for *clear and distinct* insight into reality (cf., for example, the first rule of method, p. 41: "to include in my judgments nothing more than what presented itself so clearly and distinctly to my mind that I might have no occasion to place it in doubt"), but also incorporates some fundamental Platonic methodological principles in his own newly discovered method. Most notably, and despite the obviously different intentions, those characteristic of Platonic dialectic, such as division and hypothesis. The latter, for example, appear in and as the second and the third of the four basic rules in *Discourse 2*: "The second, to divide each of the difficulties that I was examining into as many parts as might be possible and necessary in order best to solve it. – The third, to conduct my thoughts in an orderly way, beginning with the simplest objects and the easiest to know, in order to climb gradually, as by degrees, as far as the knowledge of the most complex" (p. 41). Later on, in a similarly Platonic tone, Descartes leaves no doubt as to where his inspiration lies. For, quite dialectically, he explains that the reason why the majority of people do not realize the evident truth of Cogito, God and ideas in general, "is that they never lift their minds above tangible things, and that they are so accustomed not to think of anything except by imagining it, which is a mode of thinking peculiar to material objects, that everything which is not within the realm of imagination seems to them unintelligible" (Discourse 4, p. 57). Finally, in a passage strikingly resembling the *Sophist*, Descartes concludes about error and untruth: "if we often enough have ideas which contain errors, they can only be those which contain something confused and obscure, because in this they participate in nothingness, that is to say that they are in us in this

confused way only because we *are not completely perfect*" (pp. 58-9).

8. *Sophist* 253c4-5.

9. Cf. 254d13. The additional substantive is here indispensable because the two are ideas (which means they are entities of reality, real beings and determinations) of the Being itself and as such. On the general problem of the status of Being in the *Sophist* (particularly with respect to the "greatest kinds" [μέγιστα γένη] and to the distinction between forms *qua* forms and forms *qua* their nature) see, among other: G. E. M. Anscombe, "The New Theory of Forms" (*Monist* 50, 1966, pp. 403-20); M. Frede, *Prädikation und Existenzaussage: Platons Gebrauch von "ist" und "ist nicht" im Sophistes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek und Ruprecht, 1967); G.E.L. Owen, "Plato on Not-Being" (in Vlastos I, 1971, pp. 223-67); R. Ketchum, "Participation and Predication in the *Sophist* 251-260" (*Phronesis* 23, 1978, pp. 42-62); R. Heinaman, "Being in the Sophist" (*Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 65, 1983, pp. 1-17); L. P. Gerson, "A Distinction" (esp. pp. 132-34); and J. Roberts, "The Problem about Being in the *Sophist*" (*History of Philosophy Quarterly* 3, 1986 – reprinted in Smith 1998, esp. pp. 147-51). For a recent example of different approach to the *Sophist*, which understands and treats the whole middle part of the dialogue (236d-264b concerning Being and Not-Being, συμπλοκή and μέγιστα γένη) as "digression," see N. Notomi, *The Unity of Plato's Sophist: Between the Sophist and the Philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). The main goal of the dialogue, according to Notomi, is the elucidation of the interdependence of the definitions of the sophist and the philosopher, and the central unifying principle of the inquiry itself is neither Being nor Not-Being, but the notion of *appearing*. As much as one is inclined to appreciate Notomi's arguments – especially his interpretation of the structure/organization of the *Sophist* and the criticism of the standard approaches to the dialogue – I fail to see, however, why notion of appearing should be more fundamental than that of difference. On the contrary, the latter seems to establish the former, not the other way round.

10. Cf. 254c.

11. This is exemplified on the case of Motion and Rest at 255e8-256d10.

12. "So too, supposing motion itself did in any way participate in rest, there would be nothing outrageous in speaking of it as stationary [Οὐκοῦν κἂν εἴ πῃ μετελάμβανεν αὐτὴ κίνησις στάσεως οὐδὲν ἂν ἄτοπον ἦν στάσιμον αὐτὴν προσαγορεύειν;]" (256b6-7). But, as it soon becomes clear, this possibility can stem only from the dialectic of identity and difference, not from motion's real participation in rest (cf. 256b9-c3).

13. Cf. 256d11-e3: "Ἔστιν ἄρα ἐξ ἀνάγκης τὸ μὴ ὂν ἐπί τε κινήσεως εἶναι καὶ κατὰ πάντα τὰ γένη· κατὰ πάντα γὰρ ἡ θατέρου φύσις ἕτερον ἀπεργαζομένη τοῦ ὄντος ἕκαστον οὐκ ὂν ποιεῖ καὶ σύμπαντα δὴ κατὰ ταὐτὰ οὕτως οὐκ ὄντα ὀρθῶς ἐροῦμεν καὶ πάλιν ὅτι μετέχει τοῦ ὄντος εἶναί τε καὶ ὄντα.."

14. Cf. 258e6-259b6: "Μὴ τοίνυν ἡμᾶς εἴπῃ τις ὅτι τοὐναντίον τοῦ ὄντος τὸ μὴ ὂν ἀποφαινόμενοι τολμῶμεν λέγειν ὡς ἔστιν. ἡμεῖς γὰρ περὶ μὲν ἐναντίου τινὸς αὐτῷ χαίρειν πάλαι λέγομεν εἴτ' ἔστιν εἴτε μή λόγον ἔχον ἢ καὶ παντάπασιν ἄλογον· ὃ δὲ νῦν εἰρήκαμεν εἶναι τὸ μὴ ὄν ἢ πεισάτω τις ὡς οὐ καλῶς λέγομεν ἐλέγξας ἢ μέχριπερ ἂν ἀδυνατῇ λεκτέον καὶ ἐκείνῳ καθάπερ ἡμεῖς λέγομεν ὅτι συμμείγνυταί τε ἀλλήλοις τὰ γένη καὶ τό τε ὂν καὶ θάτερον διὰ πάντων καὶ δι' ἀλλήλων διεληλυθότε τὸ μὲν ἕτερον μετασχὸν τοῦ ὄντος ἔστι μὲν διὰ ταύτην τὴν μέθεξιν οὐ μὴν ἐκεῖνό γε οὗ μετέσχεν ἀλλ' ἕτερον ἕτερον δὲ τοῦ ὄντος ὂν ἔστι σαφέστατα ἐξ ἀνάγκης εἶναι μὴ ὄν· τὸ δὲ ὂν αὖ θατέρου μετειληφὸς ἕτερον τῶν ἄλλων ἂν εἴη γενῶν ἕτερον δ' ἐκείνων ἁπάντων ὂν οὐκ

ἔστιν ἕκαστον αὐτῶν οὐδὲ σύμπαντα τὰ ἄλλα πλὴν αὐτό ὥστε τὸ ὂν ἀναμφισβητήτως αὖ μυρία ἐπὶ μυρίοις οὐκ ἔστι καὶ ταῦλα δὴ καθ' ἕκαστον οὕτω καὶ σύμπαντα πολλαχῇ μὲν ἔστι πολλαχῇ δ' οὐκ ἔστιν."

15. It is definitely of utmost importance for discourse, because it enables συμπλοκή, which in turn enables relationship between ideas (and, therefore, also of things), which finally enables the being and the nature/essence (οὐσία) of discourse. (Cf. 259e4-260b1.)

16. Such as, for example, the one (in *Sophist* 250b7-c4) with respect to motion and rest, which posits it as "Τρίτον ἄρα τι παρὰ ταῦτα τὸ ὄν," which "οὐκ ἄρα κίνησις καὶ στάσις ἐστὶ συναμφότερον τὸ ὂν ἀλλ' ἕτερον δή τι τούτων."

17. See also V. Goldschmidt, *Les dialogues de Platon*, Paris: Vrin, 1963, p. 221.

18. Cf. *Republic* 462c-d.

19. Without it, there would be no context, and without this, many practices and values would lose their meaning and importance, which would make it impossible to understand why they are given any importance whatsoever. Goldschmidt (p. 148) expresses this quite correctly: "ni dans le monde des images, ni parmi les Formes, Platon n'entend abolir toute hiérarchie. La stratégie, 'précieuse et parente' de la politique (*Politicus* 303e 9-10), le législateur-philosophe, quoi qu'en dise le Sophiste, ne la tient pas pour l'égale de la chasse aux poux (*Sophiste* 227b1-5). Jugée et dirigée à partir de l'Essence, elle occupe, parmi les techniques pratiquée dans la Cité, une place privilégiée. Mais, érigée en Valeur indépendante, elle n'est que fausse valeur, en rien préférable à ses rivales – qu'elles s'appellent médecine, gymnastique ou art financier (*Gorgias* 452a)." The existence and importance of context, i.e. of hierarchy, therefore, seems to reflect the importance of the ideal realm for the (existence and meaning of) phenomenal one. It appears to serve as a sort of compass for those living, dwelling in the latter; as a blueprint of its organization without which we would be completely disoriented and hopeless.

20. As we have shown, the being of an entity is determined by its essence, which is noetic. It is from this noetic essence that springs the will to be what one is, as well. The importance of the will for being, therefore, originates in the difference between the given state of an entity, or of its temporary being, on one hand, and its noetic essence, or its rational notion and purpose, on the other. Hence, one could say that νοῦς establishes the difference and deference between the essence and the phenomena, whereas the *will* inserts itself in/within the hiatus that opens in the middle/center of being. From all this clearly follows that there cannot be any will prior to and without νοῦς, and that will is always essentially rational.

21. See M. McCabe, *Plato's Individuals*, esp. pp. 3-21.

22. Plato does not endorse nor does he accept τὰ ἄτομα in the Democritean or any other metaphysical sense than the formal one. He conceives their being only by and through positing them as forms, ideas. Only as ideas do they have ontological status and significance; and they are ideas only by virtue of their soulfulness. In other words, individuals are always men and the individual is primarily the human.

23. Cf. *Phaedrus* 246a-c. For a seemingly opposite determination of its being, see *Phaedo* 79e-80c. But, this latter passage, as well as the whole theory of the soul and its immortality developed in the *Phaedo*, does not really counter the individuality of the soul. On the contrary, it rather confirms its emphatically individual character, upholds and

fortifies it; especially by claiming that "The soul is most like that which is divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, and ever self-consistent and invariable [τῷ μὲν θείῳ καὶ ἀθανάτῳ καὶ νοητῷ καὶ μονοειδεῖ καὶ ἀδιαλύτῳ καὶ ἀεὶ ὡσαύτως κατὰ ταὐτὰ ἔχοντι ἑαυτῷ ὁμοιότατον εἶναι ψυχή]" (80b1-3). And, even though, for example, its insolubility clearly refers to its imperishability or immortality, one can still see that, in order to be such, the soul must retain its perfect unity and consistency, which are one and the same with its indivisibility. In other words, the assertion that the soul must be "quite or very nearly indissoluble [παράπαν ἀδιαλύτῳ εἶναι ἢ ἐγγύς τι τούτου]" (80b9-10) also points to the durability of its self-identity, which is nothing but its undividedness, or its individuality. (On the individuality of the soul as the origin of its being the principle and the guiding force of movement in general, see also R. Muller, *La doctrine platonicienne de la liberté*, Paris: Vrin, 1997, pp. 141-46.)

24. In *Republic* 510 sq., for example, he speaks about this idea as that to which all others aspire and in relation to which they only can and must be understood.

25. Or, as it has been technically named in the literature, the problem of self-predication of ideas. On the problem of self-predication much has been written, especially in the 1960's and the 1970's, and many authors got engaged in the long discussion about this concept, more precisely whether there is such a thing in Plato. For some of the best known texts regarding this problem see: G. Vlastos ("The Third Man Argument in the *Parmenides*," in *Philosophical Review* 63, 1954), R. E. Allen ("Participation and Predication in Plato's Middle Dialogues" in Vlastos I, 1971, pp. 167-83 – first published in *Philosophical Review* 69, 1960), G. E. L. Owen ("Dialectic and Eristic in the Treatment of the Forms," in Owen, ed., *Aristotle on Dialectic: The Topics*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), A. Nehamas ("Self-Predication and Plato's Theory of Forms," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16, 1979; and "Participation and Predication in Plato's Later Thought," *Review of Metaphysics* 36, 1982 – both reprinted in Nehamas, *Virtues of Authenticity: Essays on Plato and Socrates*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), F. C. White (*Plato's Theory of Particulars*, New York: Arno Press, 1981, pp. 151-61), J. Annas (*Introduction to Plato's Republic*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981, pp. 195-208), W. J. Prior (*Unity and Development in Plato's Metaphysics*, pp. 20-29, 33-45), R. Heinaman ("Self-Predication in the *Sophist*," *Phronesis* 26, 1981, pp. 55-60) and M. McCabe (*Plato's Individuals*, pp. 84-89), to name just a few. See also: H. P. Cherniss, "The Relation of the *Timaeus* to Plato's Later Dialogues" (in R. E. Allen, ed., *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965, pp. 369-74 – first published in 1957, in *American Journal of Philology* 78) and *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1944 – reprinted in 1962 by Russell & Russell, New York), esp. p. 293; G. Vlastos, "The Unity of the Virtues in the *Protagoras*," in *Platonic Studies*, Princeton 1981, pp. 259-64 (first published in 1972, in *Review of Metaphysics* 25). It is worth mentioning here that Cherniss differs from Vlastos and does not even accept the self-predication hypothesis in the first place, but rather understands the so-called self-predication as identity. The general problem with this whole discussion, however, is that, regardless of the position they take with respect to self-predication, the mentioned authors tend to suppose that the analysis and analytical method can do justice and provide a reliable interpretation of a genuinely dialectical position such as theory of ideas. So, whether they reject self-predication in Plato and use it as an argument against the theory of ideas (like Vlastos, Allen and McCabe, for example), or they think it can be plausibly solved by some auxiliary argumentation (as do Nehamas, Owen, White, Prior, Mignucci and Gerson), they all seem to neglect the genuinely dialectical concept and vehicle of the theory of ideas: that of difference and

differentiation. The fact that they are obviously influenced by Aristotle's critique of ideas (cf. *Metaphysics* XIII [M] 1078b30-1079a5, 1079b10-1080a10, 1086a30-1086b12) only further complicates things, because Aristotle has a different point of view and different goals in mind. So, either they do not realize that many of the problems they are occupied with (including the third man and separation of ideas and things) do not appear as unsurpassable to Plato, or are not posed as problems at all. Therefore, if it is a problem at all, self-predication is much more a problem for us than for Plato. For him, it seems, there was nothing outrageous or problematic in the statement of self-identity of Forms/Ideas. Ideas need no predicate(s), they are that which is allegedly predicated, or the predicates themselves; and this becomes obvious in and through the structure of participation, which posits them as such. As Prior notes, "Plato develops in the middle dialogues an account of participation [which] grounds properties in terms of relations to Forms, rather than basing the relation of an object to a Form on the possession by both of a property" (p. 22). Furthermore, it seems to emerge as a problem and an obstacle in a specific, analytical line of Plato interpretation, which is more visible in another vein of investigation. Namely, Vlastos, who coined the term, introduced it in his analysis of the Third Man Argument (see "The Third Man Argument in the *Parmenides*," op. cit; as well as his answer to Nehamas: "On a Proposed Redefinition of 'Self-Predication' in Plato," ibid., pp. 215-19), but its ontological background, which was called upon already there, reveals itself as primarily belonging and pertaining to another problem of Plato's dialectic: to the "two worlds" argument, and is given due attention and explanation in another Vlastos' essay (cf. "Degrees of Reality in Plato," in R. Bambrough, ed., *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle*, London: Routledge, 1965). However, there appeared the core of the difficulty: the fact that Vlastos and others who endorse such a position suppose *quantitative* differences where only *qualitative* ones are in place. All in all, given the voluminousness of the discussion, one must wander if it really was necessary to spend so much time and energy on a discussion that eventually bore little fruit, if any. For, all they managed to come to in that long dispute (and here one should also include Ackrill's discussions about identity and predication with R. Robinson and F. M. Cornford in "Plato and the Copula"), all they finally came up with was the recognition of the fact that every identification involves predication, and that therefore it involves difference and differentiation, for these manifest themselves as predication. Namely, as the bringing together of the different, predication necessarily supposes something common to both, i.e. something by virtue of which and in which the two are identical/same.

26. See *Republic* 533d. Goldschmidt rightfully points at this saying that it is "une science 'parfaite', [quelle] nous est présentée et promise comme l'aboutissement d'une étude compare des quatre modes" (p.8) He continues: "Il est donc possible d'arriver à une science parfaite de l'objet."(ibid.); and later on: "L'intelligence ... est associée à la sagesse et décrite comme une révélation qui couronne l'entretien dialectique. Car c'est bien une révélation, une lumière brusque, une vision à peine supportable. *L'essence échappe à la pensée discursive*, à la discussion où se succèdent questions et réponses" (ibid. – my italics). Further in the same vein, Goldschmidt emphasises the irrational, intuitive moment in the knowledge of truth, by saying that "à un certain moment de la discussion intervient cette lumière qui semble transcender, ou mieux, interrompre l'ordre discursif. Elle suppose l'exercice conjugué des quatre modes de connaissance, mais elle n'est aucun d'eux" (p. 9). Thus, according to him, we have "the discursive thought, which at a certain moment turns itself into intuition" (ibid.). However, and in accordance with the right insight into the importance of the downward path in Plato, Goldschmidt doesn't forget to emphasise how, after the ascent to the ultimate principle, "la recherche doit

's'attacher aux conséquences qui en dépendent jusqu'à descendre vers la conclusion dernière' (*Rep.* 511b7-9). Nous revenons donc à l'ordre discursif" (ibid.). That is how we come to the science, which "consécutive alors à la vision de l'essence, elle est science, non plus obscure, mais 'parfaite'" (ibid.).

27. The common problem with most interpretations of Plato is exactly their almost exclusively analytical character, which issues in grave disregard for the dialectical nature of his thought. Every disassembling of it into fixed analytical elements has to come across numerous paradoxes and aporias. Usually, the first appearance of such attitude is to be found in the chronological treatment of Dialogues. This, of course, does not mean that chronological division of Dialogues is something that should not or cannot be done, nor that it is totally irrelevant for their interpretation. However, it doesn't seem very productive to take chronology, as quite a few do, as an argument in substantial matters. One should leave aside the modern notion of progressive movement, either of investigation or of the investigated thing itself. Plato does not assume such progress in research and argument. It is not like he had a habit of changing his mind about things, just as he does not leave anything behind. On the contrary, everything (previous or later) actively participates in the final result, everything is included. Plato's dialectic is static here: it assumes/presumes the finished, wholly and completely articulated presence of Being from the very beginning, even before the beginning. It is just that the necessary successiveness of thought and language forced him to discover and expose different moments at different times. Truth is always given, it is one, unchanged and unchangeable, perfect and absolute, encompassing, containing and encircling everything from the time immemorial, once and forever; and, if it is to be relevant, if it is to pertain to Being, its comprehension must also aim at the absolute and eternal from the very start. Moreover, comprehension is a part of truth. The thought process, argumentation and discussion, any discourse that has even the slightest relation to it, belongs to truth. Discourse has to be truthful (in any degree) in order to be able to ever achieve its proper recognition and comprehension. The way to truth is itself an indispensable part of that same truth, and *vice versa*. Therefore, the true "description of the real" is only the whole corpus of dialogues and the whole story that they tell all together. Such, basically hermeneutic, principle seems much more appropriate to Plato's thought (and, consequently, to its interpretation) than the simple (we are tempted to say: simple-minded) logical-analytical procédé. A typical case of the latter we find in C. P. Bigger (*Participation – A Platonic Inquiry*, Baton Rouge: Univ. of Louisiana Press, 1968, p. 131) when he deals with *Sophist* 242d-246a, i.e. with the problem of Being, One and Many. There, all the weaknesses of strictly analytical approach become transparent, and all he manages to do is to retell the dialogue and displace the whole discussion by calling upon the abstract notion of participation, thus not resolving the aporia on the ground where it appeared. Such analysis does the same thing as the targets of Plato's critique (the monist metaphysicians), namely, it overlooks the fact that only the whole "triad" as a complex of relationships provides a true description of the real.