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ARTIGO | ARTICLE

Thought, Memory, and Being in Plato's *Sophist*

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PASQUALONI, A. (2023). Thought, Memory, and Being in Plato's *Sophist*. *Archai* 33, e-03323.

Abstract: Thinking as described in Plato's *Sophist* undergoes two basic changes: it progresses by shifting from one to many and it regresses by shifting from many to one. The change from one to many is generative; the change from many to one is reductive. These opposing changes provide a tension for thinking, and like Heraclitus' bow string, this tension gives thinking its efficacy. Thinking would wander and accumulate endlessly unless it regresses from many to one. Yet, thinking would stagnate if it could not progress from one to

many. Both changes are essential characteristics of thinking, and both rest on memory. Memory constitutes the foundation of thought.

Keywords: Plato, thinking, λόγος, memory, recollection.

1. Introduction

Thinking as described in Plato's *Sophist* undergoes two basic changes: on the one hand, it progresses by shifting from one to many; on the other, it regresses by shifting from many to one. When thinking changes from one to many, difference is emphasized. When it shifts from many to one, a commonality — the common whole or family — is brought to light. The middle of the *Sophist* shows how both movements of thought rest on Being. Even when we say, for example, that **x** is not **y**, we are stating, even if indirectly, that both **x** and **y** *are*. This is one of the key claims of the *Sophist*.

To restate the above using a musical analogy, thinking operates by means of retrograde progression; i.e., while thinking moves “forward” toward a conclusion, it also moves “backward” toward fundamental concepts. In other words, while thinking is productive and generative on the one hand, there is a counter-movement in which the intellect joins many seemingly unrelated concepts into foundational ideas that are remembered. In this way, thinking progresses toward a conclusion by means of memory; thinking moves forward by moving backward.

Below I will argue that ἀριθμός — *number, arithmetic, counting* — provides the key for understanding thinking. In arithmetical terms, thinking is a series of shifts between many and one and vice versa. The shift from one to many is generative (Section 2), the shift from many to one is reductive (Section 3). These changes provide tension for thinking, and like Heraclitus' proverbial bow string, this tension

gives thinking its efficacy.¹ Thinking would wander and accumulate endlessly unless it regresses from many to one. Yet, thinking would stagnate if it could not move from one to many. Both are essential characteristics of thinking, and both rest on memory. In Section 4, I argue that memory is the foundation of thought. In the final section I raise questions that may be productive for future research.

While this article focuses on thinking as exhibited and discussed in the *Sophist*, it relies heavily on the *Meno* as well. These two dialogues are complementary — each highlights different features of thinking and memory. The *Meno* reveals aspects of memory that the *Sophist* overlooks. Just as two characters within the same dialogue may present different perspectives on the same issue, two dialogues may serve the same purpose. In the *Sophist*, the Eleatic Stranger discusses Parmenides — by doing so, he joins the past with the present. Though written by the same author, the *Meno* and the *Sophist* are diverse enough to complement each other. As such, they reveal a commonality that lies beneath the apparent differences of earlier and later dialogues.

2. From one to many

In the *Sophist*, the Stranger defines thought (διάνοια) as λόγος that is born (γίγνομαι) in the soul:

ΞΕ. Οὐκοῦν διάνοια μὲν καὶ λόγος ταῦτόν· πλὴν ὁ μὲν ἐντὸς τῆς ψυχῆς πρὸς αὐτὴν διάλογος ἄνευ φωνῆς γινόμενος τοῦτ' αὐτὸ ἡμῖν ἐπωνομάσθη, διάνοια;

ΘΕΑΙ: Πάνυ μὲν οὖν.

Stranger: Aren't thought and speech the same, except that what we call thought is speech that occurs without the voice, inside the soul in conversation with itself?

¹ In Fragment 51 (DK), Heraclitus states: “They do not comprehend how a thing agrees at variance with itself: <it is> an attunement (or ‘fitting together’, *harmonīē*) turning back <on itself>, like that of the bow and the lyre” (Khan, 1981, p. 195).

Theaetetus: Of course. (263e3-6) (Trans. White apud Cooper, 1997)

As speech, λόγος is a *stream* or *flow* (ῥεῦμα) that moves from the soul outward through the mouth (263e7-8). This is one of many images of λόγος presented in the *Sophist*. For example, just after the Stranger decides to revisit Parmenides' claims and states that he will begin a new argument, he refers to λόγος as a road or path:

ΞΕ. Φέρε δὴ, τίνα ἀρχὴν τις ἂν ἄρξαιτο παρακινδυνευτικοῦ λόγου; δοκῶ μὲν γὰρ τήνδ', ὧ παῖ, τὴν ὁδὸν ἀναγκαιοτάτην ἡμῖν εἶναι τρέπεσθαι.

Stranger: Well then, how shall I begin this perilous argument? The path we must turn onto,² my boy, is this. (Soph. 242b6-8) (Trans. White apud Cooper, 1997, modified)

Thinking is also likened to an arrow or, more generally, a projectile that hits a target (*Sph.* 228c1-d2). Taken together, these images of thinking are contradictory — streams naturally flow and meander, roads are stationary, projectiles move in a straight line. Arguably, these images conceal more than they reveal. Below I will argue that thinking is best defined in arithmetical terms — i.e., in terms of one and many. This section will focus on the generative aspect of thinking — the change *from* one *to* many.

Thinking aims for unity — i.e., it aims for one coherent concept, belief, or judgment. But unity is only one aspect of the aim of thinking. A basic premise for Plato is that thinking that aims for the truth aims to know *that which is*, or Being. For Plato, Being is one, so any definition that does not capture the whole of Being is partial. However, given the limitations of human knowledge, no definition

² The image of λόγος as a road (ὁδός) — or, more generally, as something in motion — is not uncommon in Plato's work. E. E. Pender writes: When people engage in a dialectical debate in Plato they are often described as undertaking a particular journey in thought and speech. The image of interlocutors travelling along the road of inquiry or discussion is very familiar. But at times the *logos* itself is also said to progress, to move forward. (Pender, 1999, p. 76-77)

can capture the entirety of all that is. For this reason, thinking, even when it arrives at one definition — e.g., of the angler — generates more lines of thought; each part of the definition is related to countless other concepts.

For example, angling is an art (*Sph.* 219d1-3). Hence, the relation of angling to art can be explored. In turn, art's relation to beauty can be investigated. Similarly, we can investigate the relation of sophistry to image-making — another activity that is not fully known. In turn, the relation of image-making to Being, and Being's relation to not-Being, can be discussed.

In one sense, a definition that allows us to grasp the concept being defined — a definition that ends an inquiry and puts to rest our questions — is conclusive. It is “complete” in the sense that we can cease questioning the concept. However, given the concept's relation to all that is and given our incomplete knowledge of each part of the definition, the definition is in fact incomplete. In general, when a coherent definition is reached, thinking converges into a conceptual unit, but when the definition's incompleteness comes to light, additional thinking is generated, and divergence begins. Convergence leads to divergence, and vice versa.

In the midst of their search for a conclusive definition of the sophist, Theaetetus states: “It seems an end (πέρας) will never appear” (*Sph.* 261b1-2). There is no end in sight, no limit to the λόγος — it is not as if there is movement from point A to B, where one knows clearly both the start and end points of thinking before one reaches a conclusion. Rather, before a conclusion is reached, there appears to be an unbounded space that one could search in vain, never reaching an end to the inquiry.³ There is the risk of endless searching

³ It should be noted that ‘λόγος’ can mean *statement* as well as *discourse, thinking, or reasoning*. According to the Stranger, a statement is complete (*Sph.* 262d2-4) — it allows one to draw a conclusion (περαίνω). But λόγος as *reasoning*, on the other hand, is a task which may or may not be successful in reaching a conclusion. The failure to reach a conclusion is especially a risk when there is the possibility that a dialogue will end in aporia. This risk is present throughout the *Sophist*. In many ways, the participants of the *Sophist* are engaged in trial and error. The final resting

and endless digressions into what may or may not be relevant to the λόγος — i.e., to the dialogue or the present line of thought. This is the opposite of bringing many into one; it is to start with one concept — sophistry, or image-making, for example — and extend λόγος and thinking perpetually, diffusing thought and scattering it in many directions until one forgets even the original question.⁴

As stated above, the Stranger states that thought (διάνοια) is a silent λόγος in the soul (263e3-6). Furthermore, thought, belief (δόξα) and appearance (φαντασία) all arise (ἐγγίγνομαι — *to be born in, spring up, come in; intervene*; Liddell; Scott; Jones, 1968, p. 467) in the soul (*Sph.* 263d6-8). Hence, λόγος is *generated* in the soul, and with generation comes accumulation.

Even in the first steps of defining the angler, thinking is profuse; it generates definitions of *art, acquisition, production, coercion*, etc. While the example of the angler is introduced as being “well known and small” (“εὖγνωστον μὲν καὶ μικρόν”; 218e1-2), the articulation of his definition is elaborate — even the seemingly simple concept of angling is complex. For example, soon after beginning to define the angler, the Stranger illustrates the concept of production as follows:

Ξένος: Ἄλλὰ μὴν τῶν γε τεχνῶν πασῶν σχεδὸν εἶδη δύο.

Θεαίτητος: Πῶς;

Ξένος: Γεωργία μὲν καὶ ὄση περὶ τὸ θνητὸν πᾶν σῶμα θεραπεία, τό τε αὖ περὶ τὸ σύνθετον καὶ πλαστόν, ὃ δὲ

point of λόγος — if any — remains unknown until reasoning threads its way to a conclusion.

⁴ Even when the original question is pursued, there is the possibility that the dialogue will end in aporia, as is the case with the *Meno*. Indeed, some scholars, such as David Ambuel, argue that the *Sophist* also ends in aporia (Ambuel, 2007, p. 175). But even if we disagree with this interpretation, at the very least, the *Sophist* leaves many questions — questions about Being, not-Being, truth, etc. — unanswered.

σκεῦος ὠνομάκαμεν, ἢ τε μιμητική, σύμπαντα ταῦτα
δικαιότατ' ἂν ἐνὶ προσαγορεύοιτ' ἂν ὀνόματι.

Θεαίτητος: Πῶς καὶ τίνοι;

Ξένος: Πᾶν ὅπερ ἂν μὴ πρότερόν τις ὄν ὕστερον εἰς
οὐσίαν ἄγη, τὸν μὲν ἄγοντα ποιεῖν, τὸ δὲ ἀγόμενον
ποιεῖσθαί πού φαμεν. (219a8-b6)

Stranger: But the arts as a whole, generally speaking,
fall into two types.

Theaetetus: How?

Stranger: There's farming, or any sort of caring for any
mortal body; and there's also caring for things that are
put together or fabricated, which we call equipment;
and there's imitation. The right thing would be to call
all those things by a single name.

Theaetetus: How? What name?

Stranger: When you bring anything into being that
wasn't in being before, we say you're a producer and
that the thing you've brought into being is produced.
(Trans. White apud Cooper, 1997, modified)

Thus, the concept of production is illustrated with the following
examples:

Farming (“Γεωργία”)

Caring for any mortal body (“τὸ θνητὸν πᾶν σῶμα θεραπεία”)

Equipment (“τό τε αὖ περὶ τὸ σύνθετον καὶ πλαστόν”)

Imitation (“μιμητική”)

The examples listed for the concept of acquisition at 219c2-7, the
kind in which the angler falls, are just as puzzling:

Learning (“μαθηματικὸν”)

Money-making (“χρηματιστικός”)

Combat (“ἀγωνιστικός”)

Hunting (“θηρευτικός”)

It is not evident what learning has to do with combat and money-making, and at first glance the differences seem to outweigh the similarities. The above passages show that very surprising discoveries can be made when one thinks about even seemingly simple concepts – discoveries that cross the boundaries between established domains of inquiry. Reflection on the examples used to illustrate the concept of production motivates us to question what the concept comprises – i.e., reflection brings to light a different perspective on production and it widens its scope. In other words, there are aspects of the concept that are hidden from us, and these aspects (or “parts” of the concept) come to light by means of λόγος.

The Stranger states that Being and the other pervade all that is; the Forms commune (συμμίγνυμι) with one another (259a4-5). Moreover, thought is not even possible without the interweaving of Forms (259e4-6). The sophist himself is a demonstration of this. His definition is of many parts, and he is “akin” (συγγενής) to the angler (221d10-13). After formulating the first definition of the sophist, the Stranger states that the sophist is many-sided (ποικίλος — *intricate, complex; manifold*; Liddell; Scott; Jones, 1968, p. 1430) and so they must look at him differently (*Sph.* 223c1-2, 226a6-7).

Thinking unveils a manifold complexity; in the *Sophist*, λόγος branches out even after the first definition is stated. Apparently simple concepts can serve as starting points for unlimited inquiry. For example, the claim that the sophist is a disputer (ἀντιλογικός, 232b6) is not as simple as it seems. It raises many questions. What exactly is a disputer? One can bring the concept of disputation in many directions. One can investigate the disputation of law, or rhetoric, or one can focus on the claims of a specific sophist. One may enter into new intellectual territory and perhaps discover something new and surprising about law or rhetoric. One can even, over many years, develop new branches and subfields of these fields. But then the original question — *What are the sophists?* — would be forgotten. The treatises or dialogues on rhetoric and disputation would conceal the first questions, and they would distract us from related questions

concerning Being and appearance. One can discuss rhetoric without discussing philosophy. The more “progress” is made in discussing rhetoric or law — indeed, the more money is made — the more the original, primary questions recede into the past; they may be utterly forgotten.

The Stranger states that there are many things that are, and many that are *not* in respect to each of everything (“πολλὰ μὲν γὰρ ἔφαμεν ὄντα περὶ ἕκαστον εἶναί που, πολλὰ δὲ οὐκ ὄντα.”; *Sph.* 263b11-12). For example, while *Theaetetus sits* is true, *Theaetetus flies*, *Theaetetus walks*, and *Theaetetus runs* are not. In addition, the Stranger states that “in respect to each of the Forms, Being is many, while not-being is an unbounded multiplicity” (“Περὶ ἕκαστον ἄρα τῶν εἰδῶν πολὺ μὲν ἐστὶ τὸ ὄν, ἄπειρον δὲ πλήθει τὸ μὴ ὄν.”; *Sph.* 256e5-6). Given this, there are myriad subjects of knowledge, each of which differs from the rest. Both *x* and *y* may be arts, for example, but *x* is not *y* in at least one respect, and vice versa, given that *x* is different from *y*. To use an example from the *Sophist*, angling is an art that is acquisitive, while other forms of art are not (219b8-c7). This is one reason why thinking is generative; on the one hand *that which is* participates (μετέχω; 256a7) in Being — a unified reality — on the other hand, each part of *what is* is not the same as all the rest. Even with the simplest concepts, thinking has much to think about, given that all are joined into one — to *what is* — and given the countless number of other entities that are joined together in Being. In short, similarity unifies, difference multiplies. Thought moves between these two poles.

Given the above, to the extent that thinking branches out in countless ways, it is additive. The Stranger states: “to that which is may be added (προσγίνομαι) some other which is.” (“Τῷ μὲν ὄντι που προσγένοιτ’ ἂν τι τῶν ὄντων ἕτερον”; *Sph.* 238a5). In addition, the Stranger states that through λόγος, what is one is said to be many — e.g., one may say that man is just, ignorant, strong, weak, etc. (“καὶ τᾶλλα δὴ κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον οὕτως ἐν ἕκαστον ὑποθέμενοι πάλιν αὐτὸ πολλὰ καὶ πολλοῖς ὀνόμασι λέγομεν”; *Sph.* 251b2-3).

With the above claims we have the ideas of *accrual* and *accumulation*. Contrariwise, we can imagine thinking that is purely circular — thinking that never makes progress, but repeatedly returns to the same points. Circular thinking is an example of thinking that is *not* additive. But because thinking is additive, it makes progress into undiscovered territory. A clear example of this is seen in the *Meno*, where the concept of the diagonal (διάμετρος) is added to the discussion by Socrates; this concept is what allows the solution to the geometry problem to be discovered. Similarly, in the *Sophist*, when concepts like *disputation*, *not-Being*, and *other* are added to the discussion, the dialogue moves forward to a conclusion. Often, thinking is circular, but essentially it is accumulative — without the capacity to add and interrelate concepts, it would stagnate.

3. From many to one

Etymologically, ‘λόγος’ derives from ‘λέγω’ — *to collect, gather, count, recount* (Beekes, 2010, p. 841). Thus, ‘λόγος’ derives from a word that indicates unification and convergence; to collect or gather is to bring together into one; to count is to bring a series of numbers into a single total.

This sense of λόγος is shown at 223b6 in the *Sophist*: at this point in the dialogue, a λόγος “comes together” (συμβαίνω) into a definition of the sophist. Another example of unification is the synopsis that is presented at 231c8-e6. What is a synopsis but an overview of many as one? A synopsis provides a chance to consider everything at once, as if one has a bird’s eye view. The many, though seemingly disconnected and scattered, are brought together into one list. The series of claims that precedes the synopsis, and the scattered diversions and questions and introductions, are compacted into the space of a few moments to recite the list. With the synopsis, initially a sense of oneness and completion is present. The many definitions are wrapped into a single collection.

Yet, on closer look the synopsis does not reveal the common thread that runs through the list of definitions; the Stranger and

Theaetetus are blind to the unifying principle that defines the sophist (232a1-6). As stated above, to be *one* in the true sense of the word means to be *complete* — i.e., to be one is to be whole. Hence, the winding that precedes the final definition of the dialogue (268c5-6) must be from beginning to end (a beginning that stretches back to Parmenides) — this gives a sense of both unity and completion.

To know the truth, one must know the structure of that which is. To restate this in different terms: to know something, one must know how it relates to other beings — e.g., one must know what an image or appearance is to know the sophist. It is as if there is *depth* to knowledge; i.e., one knows the internal structure of a concept when one captures it with λόγος — when one defines it.

There are many passages in the *Sophist* that exemplify the change from many to one. For example, at 226b5-c6, many activities of weaving are defined as one kind of activity — according to the “λόγος” there is one (εἷς) art in the all. So it is λόγος that reveals the one in all, the commonality. Bringing many into one gives us the ability to see a whole, it gives clarity with a bird’s eye view (226d1-11). This in turn gives a sense of completeness, if one can “see” the whole at once.

There are several other passages in the *Sophist* where thinking shifts from many to one, such as the following:

1. At 222c9-d1, the art of law courts, of the public platform, and of conversation are brought under one name, *persuasion* — one kind of hunting. In addition, each of the two kinds of persuasion “come into” or “become” (γίγνομαι) a single kind (εἶδος).

2. At 227c2-6, the method unites many purifications under one name, and separates everything else.

3. At 232a1-6, a single common principle is seen to underlie the six definitions of the sophist: the sophist is a disputer.

Thinking shifts from one to many, but since it aims for the truth, or Being, it shifts toward the one as well. As explained in Section 2, thinking is generative and additive. But since thinking aims for the

truth, and the truth is *that which is* (*Sph.* 240b3-4), and *that which is* converges into one reality, then thinking has within itself a counter-motion that aims toward unity. In its search for the truth, it both progresses and regresses.

The Stranger and Theaetetus agree that the true is “that which actually is” (“τὸ ἀληθινὸν ὄντως ὄν λέγων;” *Sph.* 240b3).⁵ Similarly, the Stranger states that Being and the other pass through (διέρχομαι) all that is and each other: “... τὸ τε ὄν καὶ θάτερον διὰ πάντων καὶ δι’ ἀλλήλων διεληλυθότε ...” (*Sph.* 259a5-6). Given that (1) thinking aims for the truth, (2) truth is *that which is*, or Being, and (3) Being passes through all and is one, it follows that thinking aims for that which is one. This is why at 231b9-c2 something appears to be wrong when there are so many definitions of the sophist; it is as if the definitions are scattered and unordered — they are many and not one — and progress cannot be made if their commonality is not seen.⁶

There is oneness even in the birth of λόγος. The Stranger states that λόγος becomes (γίγνομαι) through the intertwining (συμπλοκή) of εἶδη with one another: “... διὰ γὰρ τὴν ἀλλήλων τῶν εἰδῶν συμπλοκὴν ὁ λόγος γέγονεν ἡμῖν” (*Sph.* 259e5-6). In his commentary on the *Sophist*, Guthrie writes:

⁵ Cf. *Prm.* 161e5-6, which states that if we speak truly, we say things that are. In fact, the *Sophist* presents two perspectives on the nature of truth. As stated above, truth may be understood as *that which actually is* (ὄντως ὄν); on the other hand, it is described as a λόγος that *states* that which is (“Λέγει δὲ αὐτῶν ὁ μὲν ἀληθῆς τὰ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν περὶ σοῦ.”; *Sph.* 263b4-5). However, in either case, thinking must aim for unity. It must bring many into one before it can *attain* or even *state* the truth. The unity of *that which is* determines the course of thinking insofar as thinking seeks a true conclusion.

⁶ Arguably, the intellectual shift from many to one is a pattern in the history of philosophy. The effort to reduce the cosmos to a number of basic principles (e.g., hot and cold), as we see in the Stranger’s discussion of presocratic thought (*Sph.* 242c4-243e9), is an attempt to bring many scattered phenomena into a coherent and comprehensible system of thought. Empedocles, Parmenides, and the others mentioned by the Stranger are attempting to bring many into one, or at least a small number — even in the latter case, there is a *reduction* from many to a few, and this implies reduction from many to one (e.g., many kinds of heat are reduced to a single concept of heat). This mirrors the *Sophist* as a whole: many definitions and appearances are reduced to just one definition in the end.

... the visitor says that those who deny any combination of Forms annihilate all *logos*, 'for the *Logos* owes its birth to the weaving together of Forms with each other'. (Guthrie, 1978, p. 155)

In addition, the Stranger states that he who speaks must say that which is *one* (εἷς) (*Sph.* 237d6-7). Hence, to even say something is to say a one — this applies to thinking as well, given that thinking is a silent inner λόγος of the soul.

Dialectic itself involves bringing many into one. The Stranger states that dialectic is the perception of one Form or idea in the many (“δρᾶν μίαν ιδέαν διὰ πολλῶν”; *Sph.* 253d5-6). However, the movement from many to one in thought is not limited to dialectic. Thinking in general — regardless of whether it is dialectical — exhibits the same pattern. This point is brought home in the *Theaetetus*: one can simply list the many parts of a wagon, for example, without gaining knowledge of what a wagon is. It is only when the parts are seen as a structure, an ordered whole, that thinking progresses toward knowledge (*Tht.* 207a3-c4). It is the interrelation of seemingly isolated truths that compels thinking to converge from many to one. As will be explained below, even arithmetical thinking exhibits this pattern.

In the *Sophist*, plurality (πληθος) is equated with number (ἀριθμός) (238b10-c1). Therefore, ἀριθμός applies to the changes of thinking, whether from many to one or from one to many. Even when there are “many” in thought, the underlying basis is one. A concept (e.g., *angling*) may have many parts, but it is still one concept; sophistry, though multi-sided, is one concept. Similarly, any given claim is a single claim. The arithmetical parallel is this: an integer may be a quantity, but it is one number.

When Theaetetus states that he is at a loss because of the many appearances of the sophist (*Sph.* 231b9-c2), the Stranger pauses by *counting* the number of appearances — in other words, he counts the defining λόγοι that had been formulated. Counting assures at least some kind of ordering, even if an arithmetical one. In addition,

counting yields a unit — i.e., every total is a quantity that is one; every integer is a unit (*Prm.* 143d1-8).

Even negation can join many into one. For example, the square of production described in the *Sophist* (265e3-266a11) indicates that human production is not divine production. The lines in this case divide, but they also bring both parts of the square together into one figure. Is it not the same with the sophist? The sophist is *not* wise, *not* virtuous, *not* a philosopher — but together these negations define (at least in part) a single λόγος, a single whole. In general, λόγος operates with both kinds of negation: the kind that divides, and the kind that joins.

The Stranger himself, being from Elea, is divided from Athens — he is *not* Athenian; yet, their differences, which drive the dialogue forward, unite them. Given that he is Greek, he has a kinship with his interlocutors, but on the other hand he hails from another land. He is not unlike a distant relative that one rarely sees: a member of the family, but at the same time someone who is not familiar. In this way, the Stranger is both same and different. In the beginning of the *Sophist*, his differences are evident, but their reasoning together unites the discussants. Their long-sought agreement on the answer to their question, which gradually unfolds during the course of their inquiry, mirrors one of the key ideas of the dialogue: that which appears unrelated is, in fact, related; a commonality underlies apparent differences.

The Stranger states that the negation of Being, not-Being, can shed light on Being, and vice versa; by knowing one we can learn about the other (250e5-251a3). The more clearly one is seen, the more clearly the other is; they are intimately connected. This shows how negation not only clarifies by allowing us to make distinctions (as with the angler and the sophist), it also shows how negation establishes relations; when we know that something is *not* x (e.g., not beautiful), we know its relation to another. For example, the sophist *appears* to know, but he does *not* know — this is a key part of his definition. To know how x relates to others is to know its place within the family of cognate truths.

For a given concept x , to negate x is to clarify what x is in relation to something else; a relation or connection is formed. In addition, each term of a negation (x and $\sim x$) is more sharply defined. The negated concept becomes an “other,” but the other and the same are both unified by Being. Being is always the background of any division — it is a whole in which the products of a division subsist; for this reason even a division has one as its basis. This background is like the surface of a tablet on which geometric divisions are made, or like the sand in the *Meno* in which figures are drawn.

To illustrate the above, consider the relation between the sophist and the angler. Sophistry is not angling, but they are akin (*Sph.* 221d10-13) — i.e., they are both arts. Hence, though not the same, they belong to the same family of artistry, and the latter, like everything else that is, is a part of *that which is*; in the end everything belongs to the family of Being.

Given the above, negation not only divides, it also joins or binds — both x and $\sim x$ are, just as the beautiful and the not-beautiful are (*Sph.* 257e9-11). And this indeed is how ἀριθμός is structured: clearly three is not two, four is not three, and so on, but they are parts of a single whole, ἀριθμός. Each number has one as its basis — each number is one number. Contrariwise, Plato could have argued that all is in flux, and all is disordered — fundamentally all is like the chaos or chasm (χάος) at the beginning of the cosmos in the *Theogony* (Most, 2006, p. 116). But for Plato, negation binds just as much as it separates. The same and the other are two sides of the same coin. Being joins everything into one; negation is only a relation that articulates parts of Being. For example, just as an even number is not odd, and vice versa, both even and odd combine into one whole, ἀριθμός. Thinking, insofar as it aims for the truth, reflects this unity.

4. Memory is the foundation of thought

Thinking is not an isolated activity within the soul; it interacts with memory. Memory, insofar as it allows the soul to recollect the

truth, rests on Being. Therefore, memory and thinking are both related to Being: Being, as truth, is remembered, and it is that for which λόγος strives.

To use an analogy, memory is a path within thinking that moves against the current of thought, toward “home” or a “beginning” — the soul in its prenatal state (*Men.* 85e9-86a10), or the claims of those who had lived in the past. Thinking is interwoven with memory: to the extent that it “moves,” thought is both retrograde and progressive; it regresses to the past and by doing so it progresses toward its conclusion. In this sense, memory is a path within the path of thinking.

To return to the synopsis and the preceding discussion in the *Sophist* (231c8-e6; see Section 3), the many definitions of the sophist had concealed the common principle, *disputation*, that tied them into one. When thinking is extended and rushes ahead to reach a conclusion, it generates many claims and arguments, and the one idea, Form, or principle that underlies them all, if it is there, is overlooked — and perhaps in time it is forgotten. But by *going back* and reviewing the many definitions and looking for a one in the many, the Stranger gets back on track, and (ironically) advances toward a conclusion by means of reviewing. Since thinking tends to move from one to many, a counter-motion from many to one is needed. Contraction — a re-view or re-vision, a re-call of what was said before, but in a new light — is needed. This is not a forward motion, as the word πρόειμι (*Sph.* 218b5) connotes, but rather a retrograde or backward motion. What was said in the past may be the key to solving the present difficulty; indeed, the present difficulty may be merely a different aspect of the same basic problem, or a different way of wording the same problem — perhaps it is a different name for the same underlying concept. The problem faced by Parmenides is intimately related to the problem that the Stranger and **Theaetetus** face. The present problem may be one part of a whole, another part of which has been articulated.

The oldest meanings of the word λόγος connote the idea of retrograde movement. In “The Logos of Heraclitus,” Edwin Minar writes:

It will be seen from this brief survey that the fundamental idea of λόγος is that of *an accounting*, and that this idea is retained throughout the early history of the word at least as an undertone. At an early period ‘account’ in the sense related to ‘count’ passes into the sense related to ‘recount’ (“explain, narrate”) ... (Minar, 1939 , p. 326)

To re-count is to re-tell; in this sense, to explain by λόγος is to re-count or re-visit a concept, claim, or argument.

Reconsideration of that which was said before occurs frequently in the *Sophist*. The dialogue even starts with a glance toward the past: at the beginning, Theodorus states that the Stranger has heard the issue of the sophist, statesman, and philosopher thoroughly discussed, and he has not forgotten (“οὐκ ἀμνημονεῖν”) what he had heard (*Sph.* 217b8). Hence, the *Sophist* continues, or retells, a discussion made some time ago, in another land, Elea. Soon after, the Stranger warns that he is about to make an extended speech (217d8-e5) — he is not presenting an entirely new set of claims; rather, he is extending a λόγος that was previously wrought.

In the *Sophist*, there are many instances in which past claims are revisited. The following is but a partial list:

1. The Stranger states: “First, let us recollect one of the things we said about the sophist before ...” (“ἀλλ’ ἀναλάβωμεν <ἐν> πρῶτον τῶν περὶ τὸν σοφιστὴν εἰρημένων”; 232b1-2) (Trans. White *apud* Cooper, 1997, modified) — ‘ἀναλαμβάνω’ means *to take up, retrieve, resume, recollect; regain, recover* (Liddell; Scott; Jones, 1968, p. 110).

2. At 236d9-237a1, there is a sudden switch back to the thoughts of Parmenides when the Stranger explains how perplexing sophistry and falsehood are. This perplexity (ἀπορία) in the midst of the dialogue yields the memory of an old question — this is also what we see in the geometry lesson in the *Meno*.

3. At 243c1-5, there is a reconsideration of what was said and thought: the Stranger tells **Theaetetus** that they need to re-think the nature of Being and not-Being and review the arguments of the past.

4. The Stranger makes a good “beginning” (ἀρχή) of a λόγος by reviewing what has already been stated by Parmenides (242b6-c6). Here we see both the generative aspect of λόγος as well as its propensity to go back to revisit past thinkers and past claims.

5. At 264c1, the Stranger states that he and **Theaetetus** must “remember” or “revert to” (ἀναμνήσκω) previous divisions.

The above passages show that memory operates on different scales. Within the same dialogue, one may bring back, or weave into a single claim, words spoken previously. In addition, a claim or question stated long ago may also be revived. The “winding” (σμπλέκω) of the beginning (ἀρχή) and the end (τελευτή) that precedes the final definition of the sophist (268c8-d4) is not a winding that begins with the start of the dialogue; rather, it goes back to assertions made long ago. The λόγοι of many philosophers are combined into one conclusion — this requires memory on small and large scales. Parmenides would appear to be separate and isolated from the Stranger and his interlocutors, given the gap in time between them; yet it is through λόγος that he is brought into the same dialogue with them; it is as if a λόγος that extends into the deep past is defining a whole that bridges past and present. Past thought “passes through” and permeates the *Sophist* just as Being “passes through” (διέρχομαι; 259a2-b6) all that is.

However, images and metaphors of thinking suggest that thinking cannot progress toward the truth. The images of thinking described in Section 2 lead us to believe that thinking cannot attain the truth for two reasons. First, one may assume that the truth is “outside” the soul. For example, the claim that Theaetetus is sitting and not walking is confirmed simply by looking at him. Conversely, the claim that he is walking would be falsified by perceiving that he is sitting. Second, as explained in Section 2, thinking is in the realm of becoming and change: it is generated or born in the soul. The

images of thinking as a stream or projectile (Section 2) convey the image of constant motion. Given the above, thinking appears to be (1) separate from the truth, (2) generated, and (3) in flux. Together these claims characterize λόγος as scattered and in constant motion, far removed from the timeless realities that Plato claims are the basis of truth and knowledge.

In other dialogues such as the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, and *Phaedrus*, Plato argues against the thesis that the truth is to be sought outside the soul. True knowledge lies in the depths of the soul and it is accessed via recollection. Thinking, insofar as it aims for the truth, is shaped by memory. Memory, insofar as it is truthful, is not disorganized and scattered, but structured.⁷ This, I argue, is Plato's response to the problem of how thinking aims for what it is not — i.e., how something that is changing and diffuse can grasp that which is timeless and one.

In the *Sophist*, the Stranger discusses two fundamental aspects of thinking: change and rest. The mind is both still and in motion, as argued below:

1. Thinking and knowledge are not possible without change (κίνησις) — knowledge requires activity. If there is no motion, there is no mind (248e6-249b6).

2. But mind also requires stasis (στάσις): its nature is always the same; i.e., it is always mind. If nothing about mind were the same, it would be in constant flux, and it would not be mind, or anything at all (249b12-c2).

3. Hence, without both stasis and change, mind cannot exist or come to be.

The key to deciphering this argument is stated by the Stranger:

⁷ Socrates in the *Meno* argues that all truths are akin and that one truth leads to another (81c9-d5). More specifically, what appears to be a multiplicity is in fact a unity. In other words, πάντα χρήματα — all things — are joined together; i.e., they are “συγγενής” (akin; cognate).

... if we admit that all is in flux and motion, we shall remove thinking (λόγος) itself from that which is ...

... ἐὰν αὖ φερόμενα καὶ κινούμενα πάντ' εἶναι συγχωρῶμεν, καὶ τούτῳ τῷ λόγῳ ταῦτόν τοῦτο ἐκ τῶν ὄντων ἐξαιρήσομεν ...; (*Sph.* 249b8-10).

The issue concerns the existence of λόγος itself rather than the nature of that which the mind contemplates. Thinking is an activity and as such it involves *motion*; mind would not be possible without it. Similarly, thinking is *static* since its essential nature is constant; in general, it operates in the same ways and toward the same ends. Another interpretation, nonetheless, is viable: the Stranger is referring not to mind, but to the objects of knowledge. For example, in his comments on this passage of the *Sophist*, Guthrie states: “if *everything* were in motion, intelligence would ... be excluded, since its operation necessitates unchanging objects” (Guthrie, 1978, p. 142). If, as Guthrie indicates, the Stranger states that stasis follows from the nature of the *objects* that mind apprehends, and not mind itself, the point stated above still stands. Given that mind and λόγος are themselves objects of thought, one cannot possibly grasp them if they are in constant flux. If their *essential* nature, by which we recognize them, were not a constant, we would not be able to comprehend them or coherently discuss them.

Given the above, thinking and the intellect involve a tension between stasis and change. On the one hand, there is change, motion, and difference — that which changes is not what it was before. For example, the soul, by gaining knowledge, becomes other than what it was — it changes from *not knowing* to *knowing*. On the other hand, the mind must have continuity; it is essentially always mind — in this sense, it is essentially changeless. If it is constantly in flux it will become not-mind — something not capable of thinking, and something that cannot be known.

But how exactly is the mind static? I argue below that memory is one means by which continuity and stasis are achieved by the intellect.

To arrive at the truth by means of λόγος is to re-order what is in memory. To the extent that the Stranger and his interlocutors attain knowledge, or attain the truth, they do so through re-ordering and clarifying what is already known. One knows, for example, that there are such things as sculptures, reflections, and paintings. The soul may out of ignorance understand these phenomena as unrelated, or only remotely related. But by re-ordering these concepts and joining them together under a single εἶδος, *image* (εἶδωλον; *Sph.* 239d4), one has made a discovery. And it is this discovery that is the key to gaining insight into many other ideas. Consider one of the first questions asked at the beginning of the dialogue: is a sophist a philosopher, or is he different? One can easily imagine going through life with the assumption that sophistry and philosophy are one and the same, or that sophistry is a species of philosophy. But the truth is attained by (1) differentiating sophistry and philosophy, and (2) bringing the conceptual parts of sophistry — e.g., *image, art, disputation, etc.* — into a unified concept that captures the essential features. Both (1) and (2) involve a re-ordering and clarification of what one already conceives.

Re-ordering — regardless of whether it is through collection and division, dialectic, or reasoning in general — can also involve discovery.⁸ The act of searching memory to retrieve that which was forgotten is an attempt to unveil that which lies concealed. Hence, the slave boy in the *Meno* not only recollects, he *discovers* the solution to the geometry problem: his memory is stirred up by Socrates' questioning, and when he sees how the pieces of the puzzle — the points, lines, and figures — fit together, he is discovering a solution. Collection and division, dialectic, and thinking in general reveal

⁸ Do collection and division, which play an important role in the *Sophist*, constitute a method of discovery? This issue is widely debated. Cristina Ionescu argues that collection and division constitute “a method of discovery and not of demonstration” (Ionescu, 2013, p. 51). She points out that verbs designating searching and discovery occur throughout the *Sophist* (Ionescu, 2013, p. 51-52). For the reasons given above, I argue that discovery takes place when concepts are re-ordered and clarified — this process is a feature of collection and division and of thinking in general.

patterns and interrelationships that would otherwise remain hidden. In the *Sophist*, the fact that the sophist is not a philosopher had to be discovered, given that this fact was concealed at the beginning of the dialogue (217a6-8). This discovery requires a complex re-ordering and clarification of the concepts of *sophist*, *image*, *production*, and so forth.

To progress toward a conclusion is to advance into one's memory. Thinking that progresses toward the truth is thinking that reverts, contracts, retrogrades, and regresses — the soul accesses the truth by remembering the fundamental units of reality and their interrelations.⁹ Memory is a binding power — it joins two into one and it closes the gap between past and present. In turn, λόγος is also a binding power — it joins many into one. The Stranger describes λόγος as follows:

... and therefore we gave to this combination (πλέγμα)
the name of discourse

... καὶ δὴ καὶ τῷ πλέγματι τούτῳ τὸ ὄνομα
ἐφθελξάμεθα λόγον; (*Sph.* 262d6-7, trans. Fowler,
1921).

Given that the word πλέγμα means *wicker-work*, *combination*, or *complex* (Liddell; Scott; Jones, 1968, p. 1414), it is a construction — i.e., units are recombined, or woven together, into a λόγος. For example, the statement 'man learns' ('ἄνθρωπος μανθάνει'; *Sph.* 262c9) combines the εἶδη of *man* and *learning* into a whole. When each part of a λόγος is understood as an εἶδος — i.e., as a unified reality apart from its appearances in time — then thinking undergoes retrograde motion. By way of memory, λόγος unveils that which the soul already knows — it unveils an underlying structure in which all truths are interwoven.

⁹ See *Tht.* 186b6-9: when the soul reasons or compares, it must *revert* or *regress* (ἐπάνειμι) to Being (οὐσία).

In response to the above, one may argue that λόγος is a combination not of εἶδη, but of names. In his article, “Why Is the *Sophist* a Sequel to the *Theaetetus*?”, Kahn writes:

In the context of the *Theaetetus*, *logos* can be analyzed only as a *symplokê onomatôn*, a weaving-together of words (202b). But the *Sophist*, with its broader metaphysical horizon, can point out that *logos* is given to us by a *symplokê eidôn*, a weaving-together of Forms. (Kahn, 2007, p. 42)

This view can be contrasted with Cornford's claim that λόγος, as described in the *Sophist*, does not always involve Forms. In some cases, λόγος expresses a complex fact or event which comprises “heterogeneous elements ... which fit together in a coherent structure” (Cornford, 1935, p. 308).

Regardless of whether λόγος weaves names or Forms, thinking brings many into one. Let us assume for the moment that λογος is a *symploke onomaton* that expresses complex facts which do not involve εἶδη. The key point is that a complex fact is *a* fact — i.e., it is *a* truth. A “coherent structure” may have many parts, but it is a whole nonetheless. For example, even if we assume that geometric points, lines, and figures are not εἶδη, a plane figure is a structure; it is a complex that is articulated by means of λόγος. Moreover, the figure's relations to other geometric figures and mathematical truths also constitute a structure; in turn, the latter structure is reflected in another ordered whole, the cosmos.

5. Conclusion

When λόγος returns to a one — a single concept or statement — retrograde thinking occurs. This, paradoxically, is how thinking progresses. However, oneness and truth are not the same. A conjunction of claims may be unitary and consistent but erroneous. Unity is a prerequisite for truth, but it does not *guarantee* truth. Hence, that which appears to be a bona fide definition may in fact be a false or misleading statement. Consider the claim that the human race is divided into two kinds: Greek and barbarian (*Plt.* 262c10-

262d6). For some, this division may appear to be a definition; in reality, however, it merely conceals the actual divisions —i.e., it obscures the concept instead of clarifying it. The actual kinds — male and female — remain concealed (*Plt.* 262e3-5). One can carve reality not along the joints, but along fictional lines, to borrow a metaphor from *Phaedrus*.

Memory, like thought, is a mixture of truth and falsehood; in the *Sophist*, what appears to be coherent and true may not be. For example, consider the final definition of the dialogue; we are led to believe that the sophist engages in “the juggling part” (“τὸ θαυμαστοπικὸν μόριον”) of production (ποίησις; 268d1-2) — but do we really know what this means? Have we actually obtained clarity and the assurance of truth? Or does the dialogue end not with a definition, but with politically-motivated obfuscation?

With the geometry lesson in the *Meno*, the means by which the double square is constructed are clarified. But is such clarity possible with the sophist? Given that the sophist is multi-sided (ποικίλος; *Sph.* 223c1-2), there are two difficulties. First, we may not be able to see all the sides of him — i.e., all the defining features — in which case, we extrapolate from a subset of his known or postulated characteristics. This allows for error. Second, a deeper and more subtle problem is this: the sides or aspects that we postulate may be purely fantastic; e.g., there may not really be a “juggling part of production” outside of our imaginations. If there are erroneous divisions in our claims about the sophist, these divisions are carving reality not along the joints, but in a way that is false and distorted.

The key to adequately addressing the above difficulties may lie in the origin of λόγος — its being “born” (γίγνομαι; *Sph.* 263e3-5) in the soul. If we ask the right questions, the origin of λόγος may reveal hidden features of thinking. How is λόγος “born”? What happens at the moment of its becoming? What is the ground from which it springs? Is the ground an εἶδος, or the soul itself, or memory? The

ground from which λόγος originates may determine, in whole or in part, its conclusion.¹⁰

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¹⁰ I am grateful to Natalie Mai Vitetti for her guidance. I would also like to thank Seth Godfrey of the New Haven Free Public Library for his donation of research materials as well as Thomas Craig Smith and the anonymous reviewers of *Archai* for their comments on the first draft of this essay.

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Submitted in 23/05/2022 and accepted for publication 05/10/2022



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