



The Aristotelian Form Particular or Universal?

Karsten Friis Johansen

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The Aristotelian Form

Particular or Universal?

Abstract

According to the traditional interpretation of Aristotle there is a plurality of numerically distinct, but essentially identical particular forms in the external world, and what is 'common' to these particulars is *one* universal form, knowable to the human mind. Hence form is an ontological as well as an epistemological concept. By and large, this view is certainly correct, but it has been intensely discussed whether it implies that form 'in itself' is particular or universal. The present study argues that this question is a 'category mistake'. A form is not a 'something in itself' – it is a structure or principle of one or many 'things'. A structure is not a thing, and intension precedes extension – which could explain why Aristotle himself never explicitly defines form as particular *or* universal. In his detailed argumentation he often attacks what he takes to be the Platonic position vehemently. But in a postscript to this study it is claimed that deep similarities connect the two essentialists, Plato and Aristotle – the Aristotelian view should be seen as an innovation within a Platonic frame.

In a wider perspective, what is discussed is Aristotle's conception of a 'concept'.

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The Aristotelian Form. Particular or Universal?

Is the Aristotelian form particular or universal? To say the least, this problem has been much debated in recent years, especially since Albritton's article from 1957.¹ Traditionally, one would say that, whereas in the external world there is a plurality of numerically distinct, but essentially identical particular forms, what is "common" to these particulars is one form or universal which is what is knowable in the strict sense. But this creates problems. Of course, Aristotle was not a conceptualist. So, he could not very well maintain that the universal form only resides in the mind; it has objective existence, and there is an inner connection between concepts and reality. How, then, should the connection be understood? How can it be that form is both one and many? Is it particular or universal? What is Form "in itself"?

Among scholars from the last decades opinions differ considerably. There seems to be about as many partisans of particularity as there are of universality.² The reason for this seems to be that each party can refer to Aristotelian passages, apparently implying forms as particular or universal, respectively. But there is no Aristotelian text defining form explicitly as particular or universal. Hence, some interpreters have maintained that Aristotle followed a "dialectical" strategy, without expressing a definite opinion of his own, perhaps because he did not have a sufficient conceptual apparatus at his disposal.³

The fourth option is that form is neither particular nor universal. To some extent that interpretation goes as far back as Thomas Aquinas,

1. Rogers Albritton: 'Forms of Particular Substances in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*', *Journal of Philosophy* 54, 1957, p. 699-708.
2. Prominent adherents of particularity are e.g. Michael Frede/ Günther Patzig: *Aristoteles 'Metaphysik Z'*, I-II, München 1988; Terence Irwin: *Aristotle's First Principles*, Oxford 1988; A.C. Lloyd: *Form and Universal in Aristotle*, Liverpool 1981. Among universalists one could mention Michael J. Loux: *Primary Ousia, An Essay on Aristotle's Metaphysics Z and H*, Ithaca/London 1991; Mary Louise Gill: *Aristotle on Substance: The Paradox of Unity*, Princeton 1989; Montgomery Furth: *Substance, Form and Psyche: an Aristotelean Metaphysics*, Cambridge 1988.
3. Myles Burnyeat et alii: *Notes on Book Z of Aristotle's Metaphysics*, Oxford 1979; David Bostock: *Aristotle's Metaphysics, Books Z and H*, Oxford 1994; G.E.L. Owen: 'Particular and General', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 79, 1978-9, repr. in: *Logic, Science and Dialectic*, London 1986, p. 279 ff.

but in modern times it has been advocated independently by Joseph Owens.¹ In principle, I endorse that approach, not, however, the corollary that form “itself” (Owens’ ‘separate entity’) is self-sufficient, prior to both. In the following I shall argue that – apart from the prime mover – Aristotle does not discuss the question of what form might be in its own right. He is following what elsewhere² I have called ‘the Aristotelian principle of economy’ – otherwise he would end up in a Platonic mess. In this world we find forms as structuring principles of things, knowable to human minds. These are basic facts not allowing for further questions, and the definition of ‘man’ is the same for individual men and ‘man’ in general,³ what is defined – the essential form of ‘man’ – being indifferent to particularity or universality. A particular is a particular “this”, but the structure of a thing is neither a thing alongside other things nor a particular within a particular – as effectively pointed out by Th. Scaltsas.⁴ To ask whether an Aristotelian form is particular or universal is, so far as I can see, a ‘category mistake’.⁵

B 4, Problem 8

Although Aristotle, as mentioned, does not come up with a definition proper of the status of form, he is familiar with the problem particularity versus universality. That appears from *Metaphysics*, book B. As is well known, in B Aristotle presents a series of aporiae, and for each problem he states pros and cons. The two answers are stated as equally unsatisfactory contrasts, and no solution is offered. The fact that Aristotle never offers an unambiguous answer to the problem whether form is particular or universal in spite of the fact that it is well known to him, may be an indication that we should approach the problem in another way.

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1. Joseph Owens: *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, 3.ed., Toronto 1978 (1951); cf. Harold Cherniss: *Aristotle’s Criticism of Plato and the Academy*, Baltimore 1944, p. 348 ff.
 2. Karsten Friis Johansen: *A History of Ancient Philosophy*, London/New York 1998, p. 360.
 3. Aristot. *Eth.Nic.* 1095a35 ff.
 4. Theodore Scaltsas: *Substances and Universals in Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, Ithaca/London 1994.
 5. One might recall Gilbert Ryle’s notorious story of the visitor who having been shown various buildings of a university asks: “But where is the university”?, Gilbert Ryle: *The Concept of Mind*, London 1949, p. 17.

Aporia 8¹ asks whether anything exists apart from particulars. Aristotle tells us that this aporia is “most difficult of all”. The pros and cons are presented in two rounds.² If something exists alongside particulars it is taken for granted that this something must be the lowest or highest kinds (*infimae species* or *summa genera*) in the Platonic sense, but in aporia 7³ it has been proved that that is impossible. No house exists alongside particular houses and besides, no universal can exist as a substance apart from things; for “all things whose substance is one are one thing”. This last point is elaborated further in aporia 15⁴: if principles are universal, they will not be substances. For what is predicated in common is a ‘such’ (τοῖόνδε), not a this (τὸδε τι).

The arguments against particularity are especially illuminating. If nothing exists alongside particulars, knowledge would be impossible. For things are infinite, and a plurality of things is only intelligible if subsumed under some one thing. All things would only be perceptible, it being implied that perception is not knowledge. And as perceptible things are in constant flux, nothing eternal and unchangeable would exist.

But: That is not the case. An individual⁵ is not a mere fluctuating particular. It changes from one definite state to another one, from being something to being something else, from matter to essence,⁶ and as an infinite regress is not possible, in the last resort matter and essence must be eternal, otherwise nothing would be intelligible.⁷

Still, if something exists apart from particulars, is this ‘something’ one or many substances? Thus we are back to the last argument against universality, and the chapter ends up in an impasse.

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1. Aristot. *Met.* 999a24 ff. The translations and paraphrases in the following are based on *Aristotle’s Metaphysics, Books B and K 1-2, Translated with a Commentary* by Arthur Madigan, Oxford 1999. Madigan’s commentary is not least helpful as to the relation to books Z and H (p. 89 ff.). Concerning the structure of the argument, cf. *Aristotle’s Metaphysics, a Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary* by W.D. Ross, I, Oxford 1924, p. 238.
 2. Against particularity 999a24-29 and 999b1-16; against universality 999a29-b1 and 999b17-24.
 3. 998b14 ff.
 4. 1003a5 ff, in Ross, p. 250, labelled problem 12.
 5. I use the word ‘individual’ in order to distinguish from a mere fluctuating particular. In both cases Aristotle has τὰ καθ’ ἑκάστω.
 6. I am following Madigan’s translation of οὐσία. Elsewhere, of course, he has ‘substance’.
 7. I take it that the so-called ‘prime matter’ is not involved. Matter is eternal in the sense that there will always be something from which a ‘this’ comes into existence.

There are several points of interest in the text. A strict either-or is taken for granted: *either* only particulars exist, *or* other entities exist παρά (on the same level or superior, as Platonic ideas). Surely, this is deliberate strategy. A middle course is carefully avoided. Nevertheless, in the beginning of the chapter¹ Aristotle, having asked how we attain knowledge of an infinite number of things, answers: “it is in so far as they are one and the same thing, and in so far that something universal belongs to them, that we understand all things”. Certainly, the question is not whether this is so, but how it can be so.

On the whole, the passage is imbued with Aristotelian orthodoxy, most conspicuously in the argumentation against particularity.² Things are infinite, they come into existence and pass away; but they are not merely fluctuating, they undergo a process towards an end, and this end is something fixed, eternal, and intelligible, the essential form. Aristotelian patterns of thought, and the ordinary Aristotelian vocabulary – substance, σύνολον, form, matter, universal, particular, τόδε/τοίόνδε – are presupposed. Likewise, the intimate connection between knowledge and thing is taken as a matter of fact – there is, indeed, knowledge of the external world. But how are we to account for particularity and universality?

Aristotelian Terminology

Books Z and H of the *Metaphysics* present a constant search for a strict determination of the concept of substance. Some preliminary remarks concerning Aristotelian terminology may not be inappropriate. Aristotle’s conceptual apparatus is, in principle, flexible and dependent on context. This makes it a suitable tool for a pluralistic description of the world, but on the other hand, the fact that a simple term is only formally defined, may make things baffling. Form is always form for something, matter always matter of something. Form and essence may – as in Z – coincide, but in principle form denotes the structure of a thing, the constant in change, whereas essence signifies what something is, the answer to a ‘what is x’-question.³ Furthermore, εἶδος is traditionally rendered as ‘form’ in an ontological, ‘species’ in a more logical context.

1. *Met.* 999a24.

2. 999b5 ff.

3. For the term τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι cf. e.g. Morten Hansen: ‘The Theses of Identity in Z₆ and H₆ of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*’, *Danish Yearbook of Philosophy* 38, 2003, p. 9 ff.

But it is important to bear in mind that it is really *one* term, the only one in Aristotle's technical vocabulary that is not a tailor-made Aristotelian creation; it goes back to Plato and the Academy – a fact which may be of some significance. Substance is confronted with accident as something independent, separate and self-sufficient. This purely formal definition calls naturally for fillings in special contexts. In the *Categories* substance is a physical thing (primary substance), determined by a concept (secondary substance); in the *Physics* it denotes a σύνολον, i.e. a composite of form and matter, a moving or changing thing; in the *Metaphysics*, finally, it is the essential form, determining the thing – and in the *Metaphysics* this is called a primary substance. The notions τὸδε τι ('a this') and τοῦτον ('a thus') demands special attention. A 'this' may signify a σύνολον or 'thing', but it may also signify 'form'¹ – the precise filling is dependent on what is in focus. Again, a formal definition (never explicitly given) would be that 'a this' is something individual and determinate, something one could 'point out'. One must, however, be careful: 'a this' is not *either* a composite particular or singular *or* a particular form.²

What is in so far as it is

There is a science which investigates what is in so far as it is,³ Aristotle declares emphatically, and the science in question is, of course, metaphysics. It is a presupposition underlying the whole project that 'being' and 'unity' are predicates, not, as a Platonist would have it, substances.⁴ It is also presupposed that 'being' or 'what is' is "said with several meanings."⁵ 'Being' is not univocal, it is not a *summum genus*, superordinated to mutually exclusive *species* – in that case it would be a substance. But the other various uses – in the secondary categories – are accidental, having reference to one central thing, substance⁶ (α πρὸς

1. For references, see Owens, p. 386 ff.; Frede/Patzig I, p. 52 ff.

2. Thus Owens. Often, 'this' and particular (thing) are equalled.

3. Aristot. *Met.* 1003a21; cf. 1025b3ff. Formerly the translation 'being as being' (τὸ ὄν ἢ ὄν) was in current use. Rightly, it is now generally abandoned (cf. e.g. *Aristotle's Metaphysics, Books Γ, Δ, Ε*, by C. Kirwan, Oxford 1971, p. 76 ff. 'Being' in Aristotle is not an abstract term, to be always means to be something.

4. Cf. *Met.* 1053b16.

5. Cf. 1003a33; 1026a33 ff.; 1028a10 ff. 1017a7 ff. enumerates the various senses of 'to be'.

6. 1003a33; cf. 1030b3; 1043a37.

ἔν-structure or since Owen ‘focal meaning’¹). This is not an innovation; already in the *Categories* the accidental categories have reference to the category of substance.

Z 3

What, then, is substance? The famous chapter 3 of *Metaphysics Z* introduces the question.² Just as ‘being’, ‘substance’ may have several meanings, at least, Aristotle tells us somewhat loosely, there are four candidates: essence, universal, genus, substratum. Essence and universal (including genus) are reserved for later treatments in *Z*, the focus of chapter 3 being on substratum. Formally substratum is defined as that of which other things are predicated, while it itself is not predicated of anything else. Three senses of substratum are mentioned: matter, form or sensible shape, and the compound of them. The compound, however, is conceptually secondary; hence it is left out in the present context. *Prima facie* matter seems to satisfy the definition beautifully, as it is not predicated of anything, whereas other things are predicated of matter. So far, so good. But if every attribute is taken away from a thing nothing remains, unless there is something determined by the attributes – i.e. matter is what underlies the attributes, but without attributes it is nothing. So matter, taken isolated, cannot be substance. For substance is something independent and definable. Whatever substance may turn out to be it must fulfil the criteria of being separable and being a this something.³

Clearly the point of departure is the *Categories* – a primary substance (a thing) is the subject of predication, itself not being predicated of anything else. But if every attribute is stripped away what remains would be unspecified matter, that is to say a queer something that is not anything, and a something which is not anything is neither separable nor a this something, it is nothing. So in a metaphysical context, the position of the *Categories* is defective. In a logical connection it is not necessary to analyze further what a subject is, but it is of paramount importance

1. G.E.L. Owen: ‘Logic and Metaphysics in Some Earlier Works of Aristotle’, *Aristotle and Plato in the Midfourth Century*, ed. I. Düring/G.E.L. Owen, Göteborg 1960, p. 169 ff.; ; repr. in *Articles on Aristotle*, ed. J. Barnes/M. Schofield/R. Sorabji, III, London 1979, p. 13 ff.

2. *Met.* 1028b33 ff.

3. 1029a28.

for a metaphysician to do so. That does not mean that the passage constitutes a complete break with the *Categories*, not more than the *Physics* marks a break in concentrating on a subject undergoing change. A shift of focus is not a break.¹

But how should we understand a something which is not *some* something, and hence is nothing? Is it the so-called prime matter? In the traditional view prime matter does not exist isolated, but it must be presupposed as a constituent of the elements. This view, however, has been contested – we can do without assuming something underlying the primary qualities, it is claimed.² The reason for the controversy seems clear: on the one hand Aristotle presumes that there is always a ‘something’ underlying any predication, on the other it is difficult to conceive of a subject which is not anything definite in its own right.³ Now, even if there is such a thing as prime matter, it should not be read into our passage.⁴ Our text is concerned with so-called secondary matter, i.e. what underlies the attributes of a concrete thing. Furthermore, the whole argument is a thought experiment: if everything is stripped away nothing remains – “unless there is something which is determined by these [i.e. the attributes]”. But the alleged ‘prime matter’ is not a mere nothing.⁵ It is something which potentially is this or that, and it is, at least, spatially extended. I believe that it is more fruitful to distinguish between a relative and an absolute sense of ‘matter’. From the lowest to the highest level of existence matter exists potentially, in relation or with reference to something determinating. The point of the thought experiment, then,

1. According to Loux, however, Z 3 turns the “Unanalyzability Thesis” of the *Categories* upside down, cf. Loux, p. 34ff.; 62 ff.; 91 ff. Without drawing definite chronological consequences Furth, p. 38, talks of a “transformation”. To Irwin the alleged change from the *Categories* is mainly based on methodological reflections (the transition from pure to ‘strong’ dialectic, cf. Irwin, *passim*).

2. A fine exposition of the traditional view is to be found in David Ross: *Aristotle*, repr. London/New York 1966 (orig. 1923), p. 168 ff. The view defended in W.K.C. Guthrie: *A History of Greek Philosophy* VI, Cambridge 1981, p. 227 ff; Bostock, p. 73 ff. (including a summary of other interpretations). Challenged in *Aristotle’s Physics, Books I and II*, by W. Charlton, Oxford 1970, p. 129 ff.; Furth, p. 221 ff.; Gill, p. 20 ff.; 42 ff.; Scaltsas, p. 22 ff.

3. Cf. Loux’s reflections (p. 239 ff.) on the ambiguities in the Aristotelian concept of matter.

4. Cf. Frede/Patzig II, p. 46.

5. Perhaps *Met.* 1049a24 can be taken to mean that ‘prime matter’ is contextually dependent: *if* fire as a primary element is not made out of another material, *then* it is prime matter, but it is not nothing – it is, of course, still fire (cf. Ross’ commentary on the passage, *Met.*, ed. Ross, II, p. 256).

is that if one abstracts matter from what it is matter for, it is a nothing, which of course would be absurd.¹

Inevitably, this raises serious doubts about Aristotle's supposed doctrine of matter as 'principle of individuation'.² The term is medieval, not Aristotelian, and it is doubtful whether Aristotle in fact ascribed the act of individuation to matter. If an individual is not just a characterless piece of matter, but matter informed by a determining factor, matter cannot very well in its own right perform the act of individuation. In a passage sometimes quoted as a key witness we are told that a thing whose matter is one, is one,³ i.e. a plurality of things would demand several pieces of matter. But that will not do as an explanation of individuation, if individuation is taken to mean the act of creating a unified whole, an individual.⁴ I should prefer to talk about matter as a principle of plurality, nothing more.⁵ A metaphysical analysis will show that Callias and Socrates as human beings share the same form. But so far as I can see, matter can not be held responsible for the fact that Callias and Socrates are different persons, nor for their qualitative differences or personal peculiarities.⁶

Aristotle concludes that now we must consider the most puzzling candidate, form. Whereupon he embarks on an investigation of essence – one of the charming oddities in the text, as it has been transmitted to us.

The Method of Exclusion (Z)

This is, however, not a serious slip. In chapters 4-12 of book Z substance is identified with form and essence. These concepts converge and fulfil the conditions of being a 'this' and being separate – conceptually (λόγω).⁷ Form and matter are eternal, a compound (σύνολον) is

1. For this view, cf. Malcolm Schofield: 'Metaphysics Z 3, Some Suggestions', *Phronesis* 17, 1972, p. 97 ff.

2. Cf. Ross's sensible remarks, *Aristotle*, p. 169.

3. Aristot. *Met.* 1016b32.

4. In his informative article, 'Aristotle and Individuation', *Canadian Studies of Philosophy*, Suppl. Vol. X, 1984, p. 41 ff., S. Marc Cohen distinguishes between the unity of an individual and its distinctness from other individuals.

5. Cf. Loux, p. 235.

6. Apparently, the schoolmen felt that as a deficiency, cf. the concepts of *materia signata* in Thomas Aquinas, *haecceitas* in Duns Scotus.

7. Cf. Aristot. *Met.* 1042a29.

not. The arrangement of the more special topics is not crystal-clear, but roughly speaking the text can be divided thus: 4-6 treat of essence, 7-9 of form,¹ 10-12 of definition.

The procedure in these chapters is a method of exclusion. In the primary sense substance (πρώτη οὐσία) equals essence. It is true that in a derivative sense there are essences of secondary categories (e.g. 'white') or even of compounds such as 'white man'.² But these are secondary uses, what is at stake is the 'focal meaning' of οὐσία.

Scattered around in the text you will find some concise theses, serving as conclusions of an argument or as inserted reminders of general Aristotelian tenets. I mention:

- 1) 1030a12: Only species will have an essence (in an unqualified sense).
- 2) 1031a13: Essence belongs to substances alone ... and without qualification.
- 3) 1031b18: The essence of a thing (ἕκαστον) is the same as the thing itself.
- 4) 1032b1: Form is the essence of each thing (ἕκαστον) and its primary substance.
- 5) 1038a19: *Differentia specifica* is the substance and the definition of an object (πρᾶγμα).
- 6) 1039b27: There is no definition or demonstration of a particular.

2) and 4) express the general outcome of the method of exclusion. This is further specified in 1) and 5): Strictly, essence belongs only to species (1). In 1) as well as in 5) the concept of essence (or *differentia specifica*) is entirely bound up with definition, the formula which tells us what the essence is. Of course, that eliminates both matter and the compound of matter and form as primary substances, but it also excludes genera. 5) is part of an anti-Platonic argument,³ demonstrating that genus is only matter for species. So, a special status is reserved for the essence of species.

At first sight there seems to be a startling contradiction between 3) and 6): 'A thing is the same as its essence' and: 'There is no definition

1. It has often been suggested that 7-9 may be insertions, but they fit in rather well with the general scheme.

2. Aristot. *Met.* 1030a23; cf. b12.

3. 1037b27 ff.

of a particular'. However, the difficulty can be resolved: essence is the primary substance of a thing, but regarded as a mere particular, a thing cannot be defined.

But, on another level, there are more crucial difficulties. If the thing is the same as its essence, the essence seems to be particular. On the other hand, the definition of anything is universal. Is form/essence, then, particular or universal?

It seems that this is not the right way to pose the question. Is there any house apart from the bricks?¹ Aristotle asks. No, the thing or σύνολον (the house) comes into being, but the form does not. What comes into being (the particular house) is not simply a 'this' (a mere particular), but a 'this-such' (τόδε τοιόνδε), and this is true for particulars as well as in general.

The point of view, hitherto adopted in Z, is not whether form/essence is particular or universal. The point is that form/essence is the primary substance of a thing, and that it, so to speak, is built into thing/things. This is an effective answer to the aporia of B: the world is not a multitude of fluctuating particulars, but form/essence, on the other hand, is neither a particular alongside particulars nor a particular within a particular. It is an significant achievement and it is the most important Aristotelian point of criticism against Plato. Strictly speaking, essence is not something a thing has, but something it is. If goodness itself and the essence of a good thing are different, there will be some unifying form over and above,² and so on *ad infinitum*.

That does not mean that Aristotle does not touch on the problem of universality. Each thing, we are told,³ may be said to be the form or the thing as having form, but not in its own right the material element. Further,⁴ 'man' and 'horse' and other terms applied to particulars, but universally, are not substance, but a compound of this formula (λόγος) and this matter, treated as universal. In agreement with this, it is stated⁵ that soul and body (form and matter), taken individually, are analogous to soul and body, taken universally.⁶

So far, universals are said to be derived from particulars. But: definitions concern the universal and the form (εἶδος); if they are unknown,

1. 1033b19.

2. 1031a28 ff.; cf. b31.

3. 1035a7.

4. a27.

5. 1037a5 ff.

6. Cf. 1033b19, referred to above.

the formula (λόγος) of the object (πράγμα) will not be clear. If form is a universal, it is secondary to the thing, but that is in open conflict with the whole tenor of Z: Form/essence is the primary substance of a σύνολον. Thesis 2) claimed that essence belongs to substance without qualification, thesis 4) that form is the essence of each thing. Is form/essence then particular? After all, thesis 3) holds that the essence of the thing is the same as the thing. But neither will that do. For according to thesis 1) only species will have an essence.

What I shall suggest is that form/essence ‘in itself’ is neither particular nor universal. In modern parlance: *intension* precedes *extension*. That implies that what Aristotle calls a universal (what is predicable of many) is a special case. Aristotle is always careful to mark a universal off as “that which is said about many”.¹ If he had been equally anxious to specify whether a form/essence is particular or universal, he would certainly have expressed himself more clearly. The form/essence of a thing is the same as the form/essence of a species (cf. thesis 1), 3) and 4)). To Plato – as Aristotle understands him – the formula ‘in itself’ denotes the universal essence, a one over a many. To Aristotle form/essence ‘in itself’ is neither one nor many – or more precisely: it appears as one and many.

‘Official’ Summaries

At this point it may not be out of place to take a look at two passages in which Aristotle offers what could be called official summaries of the various ‘senses’ of substance:

De an. 412a6 reads: “Now we speak of one kind of things that are as substance, and under this heading we so speak of one thing *qua* matter which in itself is not a ‘this’, another *qua* shape and form in virtue of which it is then spoken of as a ‘this’, and a third *qua* the product of these two. And matter is potentiality, while form is actuality” (tr. D.W. Hamlyn, with alterations).

Met. 1042a26 (on perceptible substances): “What underlies is a substance, and in one way this is the matter (by which I mean that which is not a this in actuality, but is a this potentially), though in another way it is the formula (λόγος) and the shape (which is

1. Cf. *De int.* 17a39; *Met.* 1038b11.

a this and is separable in formula), and in a third way it is what is compounded from these (and this alone can come to be and cease to be, and is separable without qualification)” (tr. Bostock).

The passages agree with each other, although they differ slightly in formulation. Both texts take matter as only potentially a this (clearly matter in the ‘relative’ sense). Concerning form the second text is the more informative. Both texts agree that form or shape is a cause, that by which a sensible substance or a thing is a unity (a this). The second passage, however, equals form and formula (λόγος) without distinguishing between an ontological and a logical aspect, but it underlines that form is a this only in formula (λόγος). That does not contradict the general line of thought in Z: a form is the primary substance of a thing, i.e. it is the constituent factor of a thing (not a particular within a particular), and, although not separable in the same way as a thing, it matches the demands of Z 3 of being a this and separable (in formula), well. Obviously, the apparent variance with Z 3 is due to the fact that what is in focus in our two passages is the sensible substance or thing, whereas the thing as a compound of matter and form is conceptually secondary in Z 3. The two passages do not mention universals – or universality versus particularity.

Z 13

Z 13, perhaps the most controversial and disputed chapter of Z, deals with universals (including genera) – and thus it fulfils the program of Z 3. The thesis is clear enough: nothing predicated universally can be a substance,¹ and conversely: no substance is a universal. According to Z form equals substance; hence it is no wonder that it has been maintained that form must be particular. Nevertheless, the chapter ends up in an aporia: definitions are of universals, but everybody agrees that only or chiefly substances can be defined.² The text consists of a series of ill connected separate arguments. Apart from the fact that the main thesis seems to stand – whatever the precise meaning of ‘universal’ may be –, there are striking points of similarity with B 4, problem 8: the individual arguments reduce the opponents’ views *ad absurdum*, apparent

1. 1038b8.

2. 1039a14.

contradictions are exposed, and there seems only to be room for a rough either-or: either universals are substances or they are not. Some arguments simply reproduce the aporiae of B, some are rather superficial¹ or “dialectical” and may easily be refuted or disputed from an ‘orthodox’ Aristotelian point of view. Finally, some genuinely Aristotelian doctrines are embodied in the course of argument.

The chapter starts with a recapitulation of the previous chapters of Z:² We have, Aristotle tells us, discussed essence and substratum.³ What remains is the universal – for “some” people (the Platonists) regard the universal as cause and principle in the highest degree.

The argument proper may be divided thus:

- a) 1038b8-15⁴ claims that nothing predicated universally can be a substance, because a substance of a thing is peculiar to it and does not belong to anything else (cf. thesis 3) above), whereas a universal belongs to many things (the standard definition of a universal). – An opponent is supposed to concede to these definitions, and that makes the refutation easy: if the universal is a substance it cannot be the substance of one thing nor of all. It is concluded that things whose substance and essence are one are one themselves (cf. theses 2) and 4) above).
- b) 1038b15-6. A substance is not predicable of a substratum, a universal is always predicated of some substratum. – This is the old main idea of the *Categories*, but at any rate on the face of it, it is refuted in Z 3.
- c) 1038b16-33. This is the most intriguing passage, but also the most illuminating. As a whole the section is a typical anti-Platonic show. Aristotle constructs what a Platonist may mean if he insists that a universal is inherent in without being identical with the essence and/or if it exists apart from particular substances. Probably, it is not worth while to ponder whether a genuine Platonist ever held the doctrines under attack or not. Plato himself probably did not. Based on Aristotelian premisses the section

1. Cf. Loux, p. 200.

2. Aristot. *Met.* 1038b1-8.

3. The wording is not exactly in accordance with Z 3, cf. Bostock, p. 190; Frede/Patzig II, p. 242.

4. For detailed analyses cf. e.g. Loux, p. 197 ff.; Alan Code: ‘No Universal is a Substance, an Interpretation of Metaphysics Z 13, 1038b8-15’, *Paideia, Special Aristotle Issue*, 1978, p. 65 ff.

offers a proof that there are no substances within substances or alongside particular substances, e.g. an ‘animal’ apart from some animal – one is immediately reminded of B.

The passage starts thus: “But perhaps the universal, though it cannot be substance in the same way as the what-being-is [i.e. the essence], can yet be present in the what-being-is, as for instance animal is present in man and horse” (tr. Bostock). The refutation spells out that that implies that there are one or many substances within a substance which contradicts theses 2) and 4), and the result seems already anticipated in argument a). It would be even worse to assume that a substance consisted of qualities, for attributes cannot be prior to substances.

The *reductio* in itself is not so interesting as the fact that from the very start the ‘Platonist’s’ view is opposed to the (Aristotelian) notion of essence, which obviously is not a “thing” within a “thing”. In the course of argument it is twice¹ hinted that e.g. ‘man’ (a genuine Aristotelian essence), as opposed to ‘animal’ is a real substance. Hence, many commentators have – rightly – concluded that what is proved in the section is that a *genus* is not a substance – ‘animal’ is not a substance within the substance, but ‘man’ is what a man ‘is’. This is in perfect agreement with the results of the previous chapters, and it is orthodox Aristotelianism that *genus* only exists as matter for species.² Further it must be noted that what is proved is that there cannot be many substances within a substance. That does not prevent that several substances can be not numerically, but formally identical.³

- d) 1038b33-1039a3. A universal does not signify a ‘this’, but a ‘such’. If that were not the case, many difficulties would follow, especially ‘the third man’ – that is to say: if the universal ‘man’ is regarded as a ‘this’, it will be on a par with the several particular ‘men’, and that would require a ‘third man’, a universal,

1. Aristot. *Met.* 1038b21; 31.

2. 1024b8; 1038a6; cf. my commentary on thesis 5) above, p. 15.

3. So already Albritton, p. 706.

prior to both, and so on *ad infinitum*.¹ Hence, a universal is not a substance.

Of course a universal is a 'such', but that does not mean – as it seems to be implied – that a sensible substance is only a 'this'; according to Aristotelian orthodoxy it is a 'this-such'.²

- e) 1039a3-14 makes clear that a substance cannot in actuality be composed of substances; potentially, however, one substance can be two – as a line may be divided into two. Therefore Democritus was right that one substance (atom in Democritus) cannot be made of two or two of one. – This paragraph may serve as a preliminary conclusion of the section. At any rate it is important that a new point is introduced: the relation between potentiality and actuality. A genus, e.g., may be divided into species.

Still, the rest of the chapter³ proclaims that an aporia is involved. If no substance consists of actual substances – or universals –, then a substance is incomposite and indefinable. But it has been agreed (cf. thesis 5) that definitions are of substances. Yet, the final words of the section hint that the aporia may be resolved. Obviously, the concepts of actuality and potentiality, introduced in argument e), can do the job. What that implies will be clearer in the following. So the passage ends. What is referred to must be Z 17 and H 6. At any rate, the thesis of the chapter remains undisputed: "It is now clear that nothing at all that is predicated universally is a substance, and that no substance whatever is composed of substances" (tr. Bostock).⁴

1. The argument goes back to Plato's *Parmenides*, Plat. *Parm.* 131 E ff., only in the *Parmenides* exemplified by largeness/large things, not 'universal man'/'particular man'. In our passage and elsewhere (Aristot. *Soph.El.* 178b36; *Met.* 990b17; 1059b8; Alex. Aphr. *In Met.* 82, Hayduck; cf. Aristot. *Met.* 1031a28, here, p. 16). Aristotle probably takes it that the argument is valid against Plato. I believe that this is not the case. In the *Parmenides* the argument is part of Parmenides' critique of Socrates' youthful version of the theory of ideas, but Plato cannot very well have endorsed the critique. The sentences 'large things are large' and 'largeness is large' have the same linguistic form, but the former is a predication, the latter a statement of identity, cf. Friis Johansen: *History of Ancient Philosophy*, p. 215; Constance C. Meinwald: *Plato's Parmenides*, New York/Oxford 1991, p. 155. That could mean that there are points of resemblance with essential predication in Aristotle behind the surface, cf. below. Cf. also Vasilis Politis: *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Aristotle and the Metaphysics*, London/New York 2004, p. 323 ff.

2. Cf. Loux, p. 200.

3. Cf. Aristot. *Met.* 1039a14-23.

4. 1041a3.

Z 13 – Interpretations in Conflict, and where we are so far

What, then, does the chapter tell us about the status of a form-essence? Is it particular or universal? Either of the two views, of course, has its partisans, and in both cases serious points of criticism can be raised.¹ *If* arguments a), b) and d) are taken to mean that form is particular, and *if* argument c) means that form is the same as species and species is a universal, then the text is self-contradictory in spite of the fact that it seems to presuppose that a fully understandable conclusion has been reached.²

The thesis of the chapter claims that nothing predicated universally is a substance. Hence, it seems natural to infer that form is particular.³ But there are weighty objections against that view. An adherent of particularity will face difficulties concerning argument c). He has to insist that a species form is particular for a particular substance – but does that not imply that form is a particular within a particular, and how account for the fact that particular forms are similar? Further, how does the particularist's position square with the status of species (cf. thesis 1) and 5)?

On the other hand: it cannot very well be denied that there *are* forms of individuals. It is stated in theses 3) and 4), and most notably in Λ^4 . There are passages which most probably imply particular form-essences.⁵ Direct indications, however, are scarce. That does not mean that it is not part of Aristotelian orthodoxy, only that, whereas Aristotle in Z is eager to mark universals off as special cases, he is not much engaged in the question of particularity versus universality of form-essences in general.

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1. Bostock, e.g., offers well balanced assessments of the arguments for particularity (p. 187 ff.) and universality (p. 189 ff.), respectively.
 2. Cf. 1039a14 ff.; 1041a3. This is the view of Bostock. His answer to the aporia is that it is insoluble (Bostock, p. 204 ff.), and he conjectures that the two views, reflecting different stages in Aristotle's development, have been combined. But this is mere conjecture, and it does not seem probable that a compiler (Aristotle?) did not notice the alleged incompatibility of the arguments.
 3. The most outstanding representatives of the particularity view are Frede/Patzig, cf. I 48 ff.; II 241 ff.; and e.g. II 103. Cf. the criticisms in Loux, p. 187 ff.; Scaltsas, p. 191 ff. Earlier Albritton held that according to Λ and M forms are particular, but as to Z 13 he has serious doubts (Albritton, p. 704 ff.).
 4. Aristot. *Met.* 1071a28, see below, p. 37.
 5. Cf. e.g. Bostock, p. 187. Some of the examples in Frede/ Patzig, p. 52, seem rather doubtful.

Advocates of universality focus on the role of form- essence in Z 13 and on the precise meaning of ‘universal’. M.J. Woods¹ rightly points out that universal predication is a special case. He distinguishes between ‘universal’ and ‘what is predicated universally’- that is to say that something may be a universal without being predicated universally, which would imply that there may be universals which are substances. This latter point is hardly tenable² – Aristotle never mentions a distinction on these lines, and there are counter-examples that, what is called universal is always something predicated universally. But, it is correct that something which might function as a universal, may also be regarded as an essential form and hence a substance (λόγῳ).

Christopher Kirwan has attacked the problem of predication from another angle.³ According to him the sentence ‘Socrates is a man’ is an essential predication or a statement of identity, whereas it is a coincidental predication if a secondary category (e.g. a quality) is predicated of a subject (‘Socrates is white’). This means that nothing can have more than one essential predication (‘man’ is what Socrates ‘is’). This is an important contribution. In our connection it is a weighty commentary on theses 1), 2) and 4). And in my opinion it is a corroboration of the suggestion that Aristotle *malgré lui* comes rather close to Plato.⁴

In his substantial contribution to the London Symposium on Z⁵ Gerald J. Hughes starts from an apparent dilemma: on the one hand Aristotle holds that only individuals are substances in actuality, on the other their forms are prior in time, knowledge and definition. Hughes offers the following solution: What Aristotle denies in our passage is the claim that a universal is a substance, if it is regarded as ‘a one over many’ (in the Platonic sense) or is predicated of individuals.⁶ Otherwise – in the case of the substantial form of an individual – it is not denied. Apart from the fact that Aristotle always seems to label ‘universal’ as ‘that which is predicated of many’, Hughes’ point seems to me correct. According to him ‘essence’ is an ambiguous term. If ‘Man’ is predicated of Socrates, it is a universal, only potentially an actual substance; the

1. M.J. Woods: ‘Problems in *Metaphysics Z*, Chapter 13’, in J.M.V. Moravcsik (ed.): *Aristotle, a Collection of Critical Essays*, London/Melbourne 1968, p. 215 ff.

2. Cf. the criticisms in Code, p. 66; Gerald J. Hughes in Burnyeat: *Notes...*, p. 107; 123; Lloyd, p. 30.

3. Kirwan, p. 100.

4. Cf. here, p. 21, note 1.

5. In Burnyeat: *Notes...*, p. 107 ff.

6. Hughes, p. 111 ff.

sentence ‘Socrates is a man’ (‘man’ with a lower case letter), however, is not a predication, but a statement of identity.¹ The distinction between ‘Man’ (capital) and ‘man’ (lower case letter) is of course rather far-fetched. But the emphasis on the concepts actuality and potentiality is relevant; it finds support in argument e).²

In his large-scale and sophisticated book *Primary Ousia* Michael J. Loux likewise concentrates on two forms of predication.³ We may ask *what* things are, and *how* they are. The answer to the former question is a *species-predication*, i.e. a species is predicated of its various members, the answer to the second one is a *form-predication*, where form is predicated, not of the ‘thing’, but of matter. In order to classify something as *what it is* (its essence), you must know *how it is* what it is, i.e. a form-predication is prior to the corresponding species-predication, form has a ‘τόδε τι- forming function’.⁴ Roughly, this may be compared to the distinction outlined above between intension and extension, but not quite; according to thesis 4) form is equal to essence for every object, and according to Z as a whole form and essence converge without regard for types of predication. In his complicated treatment of Z 13⁵ Loux argues for the view that it does not establish the existence of particular forms. Even if arguments b) and d) are regarded with suspicion, this runs counter to Aristotle’s general conclusion.⁶

Theodore Scaltsas’ important book *Substances and Universals in Aristotle’s Metaphysics*⁷ strongly advocates the view that the particular or individual is the ultimate subject, existing independently, but uni-

1. P. 125 ff.

2. The role played by actuality and potentiality is further developed in H 6. As far as knowledge is concerned, these concepts are treated in the notorious chapter 10 of M (1087a10 ff.) – but in a cruder (earlier?) version than in Z. According to M universal knowledge is potential, whereas knowledge of individuals is actual (cf. *Anal.post.* 71a17 ff.). There is no hint of the subtle doctrine of Z that knowledge of an individual, regarded as a mere particular – as opposed to the primary substance of an individual – is impossible (cf. theses 5) and 6)). Julia Annas: *Aristotle’s Metaphysics, Books M and N*, Oxford 1976, p. 189 ff., takes it that the M account implies the existence of particular forms. This has been vigorously and so far as I can see, rightly denied in Scaltsas, p. 252 ff. – Cf. also *Aristot. Met.* 1035b27, here p. 16, note 4.

3. Loux, p. 147 ff.; cf. the special treatment of Z 13, p. 197 ff.

4. P. 146. According to Loux, strictly speaking the term τόδε τι signifies a particular. But in fact, form is also called a ‘this’ in its own right; cf. 1029a27; 1049a35; Owens, here, p. 11, note 2.

5. Loux, p. 197 ff.

6. Cf. here, p. 21.

7. See especially p. 3 ff.; 97 ff.; 191 ff.

fied by the substantial form, and this substantial form is not just one component of the subject alongside other ones. It is the unifying principle of the subject, making the subject a whole and not a cluster of properties; hence the substantial form *is* the subject, and there is no difference between substance and essence. By a process of abstraction the substantial form can be regarded as a universal. That means that a universal does not exist independently, it is a potentiality which can be actualized in its various instantiations.¹ Now, ‘abstraction’ is a slippery term.² More often than not it is used by Aristotle in connection with mathematical objects which are seen as ‘abstractions’ from physical bodies. Clearly, universals in the Aristotelian sense of the word can be regarded as abstractions. That is the case e.g. in *Anal.post.*, in book A of the *Metaphysics*, and in the sections on universal in Z.³ But is a substantial form or form-essence, dissociated from a particular, always a universal? According to *Metaphysics* H⁴ ‘substance may mean a ‘this’, λόγῳ. That must imply that substance in this sense is really existent, not a potentiality as matter. The ‘method of exclusion’, carried through in Z, eliminates all accessories in order to pin down the primary substance, and ‘primary substance’ in that context seems to be used indiscriminately of particular and non-particular entities⁵ – of intension, not of extension. If one would, nevertheless, apply the term ‘abstraction’ to the method of exclusion (as Aristotle never does), the focus would be not on what is abstracted, but on what would remain after a process of abstraction.

Scaltsas’ special treatment of Z 13, the best detailed interpretation known to me, is an application of his general view.⁶ His own summary runs thus: “No universal can be substance in complete actuality, either as a *distinct* component within substances or as a *separate* substance”. A substance, on the other hand, is a distinct and actualized whole, unified by the substantial form.

‘Theory of abstraction’ is the label traditionally affixed to the medieval interpretation of Aristotelian epistemological ontology. The theory, which dominated the understanding of Aristotle for centuries, was

1. Cf. Hughes, but see Scaltsas’ commentary, p. 115.

2. Cf. Hermannus Bonitz: *Index Aristotelicus*, Berlin 1870, p. 126, on the various uses of ἀφαίρεσις in Aristotle, see also Owens, p. 382 ff.

3. Cf. *Anal.post.* 100a3; *Met.* 980b25 ff.; 1035b27 and 1037a5, here p. 16.

4. Aristot. *Met.* 1042a26, here, p. 17.

5. Compare theses 1), 2) and 4).

6. Scaltsas, p. 181 ff.

surely instigated by a desire to remedy what was felt as loose ends and obscurities in Aristotle himself. According to the theory universals are due to a mental abstraction from embodied forms. It goes back to Alexander of Aphrodisias and was transmitted to the west by Boëthius in his commentary on the famous introduction to Porphyry's *Isagoge*.¹

The classical theory of abstraction was conceived by Thomas Aquinas. The active part (or rather: capacity) of the intellect (*intellectus agens*) abstracts the universal from the *phantasmata* and impresses it on the passive part (*intellectus possibilis*) which on its part produces the concept proper.² From the point of view, adopted in these pages, it is an ingenious conception that the object of cognition – the *natura* or essence – is the same the whole way from perception to intellection, that is to say: in the external world it is a plurality, as a universal it is one, in itself it is neither one nor many, and individual and universal are not different entities, they differ in their mode of apprehension.³

Thomas' version of the theory of abstraction is a coherent and perspicacious construction. But as an interpretation of Aristotle proper it is hardy tenable. The only Aristotelian basis is the notoriously cryptic passage in *De anima*,⁴ where Aristotle distinguishes between an intellect which becomes all things (*intellectus possibilis*) and another one (*intellectus agens*) which produces all things by illuminating them. Admittedly, the Aristotelian passage is not crystal clear. But presumably Aristotle regards the active intellect as something primarily superindividual, only secondarily pertaining to human beings.⁵ Unlike e.g. Au-

1. Cf. Alex.Aphr. *De an.* 90, 2 ff.; 106, 19 ff., Bruns; *Quaest.* 7, 20 ff.; 59, 1 ff., Bruns; Boëth *In Isag.Porph.*, ed.sec., 10-11, Brandt. As pointed out by A.C. Lloyd his interpretation comes close to the tradition originated by Alexander. In Lloyd's formulation, Aristotle held a *post rem* theory of universals and an *in re* theory of forms (Lloyd, p. 3).

2. Thomas Aquinas: *Summa theologiae* I, 1, 79, art.4; 85, art.1.

3. *De ente et essentia* III, Roland-Gosselin. – It seems confusing that Thomas distinguishes between two senses of universal: on the one hand the universal, abstracted from particulars (as species or genera), on the other hand the universal (common) nature in particulars, cf. *ST* I 1, art.3, ad 1; *Commentaria in Metaphysicam* 1570 (Marietti (in *Aristot. Met.* Z 13, 1038b8 ff.)).

4. *Aristot. De an.* 430a14 ff.

5. Cf. the sober remarks in Guthrie VI, p. 324 ff. with references; Horst Seidl: *Der Begriff des Intellekts (νοῦς) bei Aristoteles*, Meisenheim am Glan, 1971, p. 113 ff., is a thorough and well documented treatment, but it might give rise to some doubt that Aristotle should in fact operate with one superindividual *intellectus agens* and another one combined with *intellectus possibilis* in individuals; rather, human beings in happy moments have access to the one *intellectus agens*.

gustine Thomas is in no doubt that *intellectus agens* is a capacity belonging to individuals; furthermore, there is no counterpart in Aristotle to the sophisticated Thomistic path leading from perception to intellectual cognition. Aristotle is not occupied with the formation of concepts, what interests him is the “grasping” of essences and actualities that are already at hand¹ – and these are not universal.

The most prominent modern representative of the view that form “in itself” is neither universal nor particular is Joseph Owens. In his learned work *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, which should not be seen as a continuation of the Thomistic approach, he argues that form cannot be a singular because it is knowable and definable, and it cannot be a universal because it is a substance (“entity”).² It manifests itself both as a universal and as a particular, in itself it is neither. This is in perfect agreement with the view I am advocating. Owens’ further reconstruction, however, seems more problematic to me. With the cautious reservation that any reconstruction of the relation between “ontology” (a term which Owens repudiates because he does not see a gap between *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis* in traditional terminology) and the “separate entity” – the prime mover – has to be hazardous,³ because in the texts we have Aristotle nowhere treats of this crucial point explicitly, Owens’ tentative attempt to reconstruct the underlying systematic scheme is based upon the notion of $\pi\rho\delta\varsigma\ \acute{\epsilon}\nu$.⁴ Just as the secondary categories have reference to the category of substance, the separate entities (form-essences) have reference to and are causally dependent on the first separate entity (the prime mover). A form is first of all act, and the prime mover is the first act imparting its essence to the subordinated essences. It is certainly true that there is a $\pi\rho\delta\varsigma\ \acute{\epsilon}\nu$ -relation between forms in the perceptible world and the prime mover which essentially is form without matter. But precisely here the problems come up. Book Z treats of the sensible world consisting of perishable material objects, ordered by structuring forms that are only separable in notion. In this world, form/essences are permanent actualities, their actuality ultimately depending on the prime mover. According to Owens these actualities are separately existing entities in the supranatural world,⁵ but, so far as I can see, there is no unambiguous Aristotelian warrant for this

1. Aristot. *Met.* 1051b22 ff. On the “grasping” of essences, see below, p. 34 ff.

2. Owens, p. 389, cf. p. 431.

3. P. 454.

4. P. 454 ff.

5. Cf. Owens’ interpretation of Θ 10, 1051b27 ff., Owens, p. 413.

suggestion. Besides, the actualities in this world differ in content, but that cannot very well be explained by the prime mover.¹ In my view, the unity of the Aristotelian *Metaphysics* is not established by means of a hierarchy of ideas or concepts, culminating in God. God gives energy and life to the world. One should not ask why there is a world, but how things in the world change and develop as they do.²

What, then, is the outcome of this survey of various approaches to book Z in general and Z 13 in particular? There is, indeed something to learn from each of the scholars taken into account above, but there is anything but agreement among them. I think, however, that the view has been corroborated that an Aristotelian form-essence is not exclusively particular or universal. To be sure, there is a particular form for a particular object. But what does ‘form’ mean in the composite form-matter? A form is not a substance within a substance, and it is not a substance alongside substances. What, then, is it? Is form-essence a universal? It cannot very well be – according to Z 13 and according to the general tenor of Z, where universal predication is emphatically marked off as a special case. A crucial point in the discussion is the status of a species-essence. Thesis 1) above takes it that only species will have an essence in an unqualified sense, 2) that essence belongs to substances alone and without qualification, 4) that form is the essence of a thing and its primary substance. Further, argument c) of Z 13 states a difference between universal and essence; ‘animal’ (genus) is a universal, the essence of ‘man’ (species) is not. Of course, a species may be predicated of individuals – and in that case it behaves like a universal. But the species-essence is not a universal. It goes without saying that this has been noticed by several commentators (Kirwan: essential predication versus coincidental predication, Hughes: universal predication versus statement of identity, Loux: species-predication versus form-predication). That does not mean that ‘species’ has two “senses”, only that it may occur in different contexts. The solution seems to be that intension is prior to extension.

Still, serious problems remain unsolved. So far Aristotle’s strategy has been to isolate form-essence as primary substance. But how is the

1. On actualities, different in content, see Owens, p. 464; 470.

2. In his competent recent introduction to Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* Vasilis Politis (Politis, p. 251 ff.) argues that the Aristotelian form-essence is primarily particular. As a consequence of that, however, it is also universal, because form/essence gives the same universal explanation for any number of particulars.

relation between form and matter, what is a “thing”? This problem is dealt with in Z 17 and H 6. And has it, after all, a meaning to ask what a form-essence is “in itself”? Probably, Θ 10 gives an answer.

Z 17

Having scrutinized the concept of substance over 16 chapters Aristotle indefatigably begins Z 17¹ with the declaration that now we must say what kind of thing substance should be said to be. The problem of what substance is is now approached from a new angle. What is dealt with is the form of sensible substances, regarded as principle and cause, i.e. form in relation to matter, and as the ordering principle of things. However, the preceding chapters of Z are presupposed; εἶδος is identified with primary substance and essence.

The question ‘why’ a thing is this or that, presupposes ‘that’ it is this or that – as it was already emphasized in A.² The fact that A is B, e.g. that a man is musical, is given; what calls for an explanation is why one thing belongs to another or is predicated of another. This more exact formulation of the question in Aristotle’s view leaves out of consideration that a thing is – that is an evident fact – or that it is the same as itself, for that is common to all things. That means that Aristotle – at least here – dissociates himself from an inquiry into what in later terminology was called *transcendentalia*. He also – consciously or not – dissociates himself from Plato’s *Sophist*;³ that is significant, revealing one major difference between Plato and Aristotle: What occupies Plato is precisely what is common to all things – that they are the same as themselves and different from other things, i.e. the precondition for saying anything at all. Aristotle’s interest is what characterizes one object as *this* object.

With a short reference to his official theory of different causes⁴ Aristotle says that from an abstract point of view the essential cause – the cause we are seeking – is superior.⁵ Strictly speaking,⁶ it is misleading

1. Aristot. *Met.* 1041a6.

2. 981a28 ff.

3. Cf. especially Plat. *Soph.* 254 D ff.

4. Aristot. *Met.* 1041a27ff.

5. Λογικῶς should probably be rendered ‘abstractly’ or ‘formally’ (cf. Ross ad loc., II, p. 223; Frede/Patzig II p. 313), perhaps ‘conceptually’, not ‘logically’ (so Bostock, p. 30).

6. Aristot. *Met.* 1041a32 ff.

to ask e.g. what (a) man is – that question does not distinguish between subject and predicate, and the existence of ‘man’ must be given beforehand. We must ask why one thing is predicated of another. Why are these bricks a house? Because the essence of a house is present. So, form-essence – or the primary substance – is predicated not of the thing, but of matter (cf. Loux). It is the ordering principle of matter, making matter into a “thing”.

A thing is composed of form and matter,¹ not like a heap, but like a syllable.² A syllable is not just the sum of its letters, it is something more than the sum of its parts. In the same way form is not a new element in addition to the material elements – in that case we would again be in need of an organizing principle and so on *ad infinitum*. Form is not a thing within a thing, but a structuring principle constituting the thing.³ This is a definite corroboration of the main thesis of Th. Scaltsas⁴ and of the view adopted in these pages.

There are two side issues or parentheses in Z 17. They are, both of them, short remarks, but they remind us that the topic of the chapter is restricted – confined to the role of form in a perceptible substance. The first remark⁵ tells us that an investigation of the role of forms in perceptible substances may illuminate separated substances. In view of the state of the text of the *Metaphysics*, this must remain a puzzle.

The second parenthesis⁶ concerns ‘simple things’ (τὰ ἀπλᾶ). The chapter as a whole discusses why one thing is predicated of another.

1. 1041b11 ff.

2. The syllable image is taken over from Plato. As in Aristotle Plato’s point is that a whole is more than the sum of the elements, cf. Plat. *Soph.* 253 A ff.; 261 D; *Pol.* 277 E ff.; *Tim.* 48 B. *Theaet.* 204 A ff. seems to hold the view that a whole simply equals the sum of its elements – but this passage is part of an indirect refutation. *Parm.* 146 B gives the theoretical foundation of Plato’s theory of the whole-part relation. Cf. Gilbert Ryle: ‘Letters and Syllables in Plato’, *Philosophical Review* 1960, p. 431 ff.

3. As in Plato the Aristotelian doctrine of the whole-part relation is not restricted to one part of philosophy – metaphysics. Happiness e.g. is not just one good among others, it is something final and self-sufficient making the various goods good, Aristot. *Eth.Nic.* 1097a18 ff., cf. pleasure as a ‘complete motion’, 1174a13 ff.

4. See especially Scaltsas, p. 59 ff.; cf. Loux ‘τὸδε τι-forming function.’ In spite of this similarity it is interesting to observe that to Scaltsas forms are abstractions, whereas to Loux the substantial form is a predicable universal. The insight that forms are principles, not things, does not solve the question what forms are “in themselves”.

5. Aristot. *Met.* 1041 a7.

6. 1041b9.

But what about the ‘simple’ elements of a predication?¹ If form is predicated of matter, what is form ‘in itself’? It is generally agreed that this is a reference to Θ 10.

H 6

Book H is devoted to the concepts of actuality and potentiality, a discussion to be continued in Θ . Thus, the focus is slightly different from the main body of Z, but books Z and H make up a coherent whole; there are special connections backwards to the end of Z 13 and to the line of thought in Z 17.

The last chapter (H 6) brings up the question what constitutes the unity of a definition.² Aristotle starts with an attack on the Platonic view that ‘man’ e.g. is the sum of ‘animal’ and ‘two-footed’.³ But ‘man’ is not two things, it is not like a heap,⁴ it is a unity – by the way it should be noticed that Aristotle here and in the following as a matter of course moves from definition proper to the thing defined. If the entity in question, ‘man’ e.g., is not just the sum of material parts, there must be something over and above the parts acting as a cause, and this something is the form – we are directly reminded of Z 17. Now, ‘man’ is not ‘animal’+‘two-footed’, man is a two-footed animal; the genus ‘animal’ does not exist in its own right, or if it exists, it exists as matter, the *differentia*, ‘two-footed’, is what constitutes *infima species*, man. So we are told in Z 12.⁵ Hence, what is defined is – indiscriminately – the *infima species* or the ‘thing’.⁶ Further, matter and form are equaled to potentiality and actuality, and it is emphasized that the essence – and hence the definition – is the same for the potential and the actual, potentiality and actuality are only different modes of existence.⁷

Aristotle adds⁸ that this is true for every compound of actuality and matter, whether intelligible or perceptible matter. In a further attack on

1. Characteristically, Aristotle does not distinguish between a term and a thing, cf. Bostock, p. 244.

2. Aristot. *Met.* 1045a7 ff.

3. cf. Z 12, 1037b8 ff.

4. A clear reference to Z 17, 1041b12 ff.

5. 1038a5 ff.

6. Cf. theses 4) and 5) above.

7. Aristot. *Met.* 1045a30.

8. 33.

the Platonic position he makes clear that technical terms like a ‘this’, a quality or a quantity do not stand for a compound, and, as we know, unity and being are not special entities, they are predicates. A given thing is always some unity or some being.

The fact that potentiality and actuality only differ in their mode of existence implies that one should not seek for a connecting link – be it participation (Plato), ‘communion’ or something else.¹ The only thing needed is a *causa efficiens*. This leads to the important conclusion that the proximate matter (ἡ ἐσχάτη ὕλη) and the form or shape are one and the same thing, one potentially, the other actually.

Obviously, the text does not distinguish between universality and particularity – what is true for one thing is true for everything of the same species, as in Z 17. A ‘thing’ – actual or potential – equals *infima species*, the essence of a thing is the same as the thing itself, as thesis 3) has it. On further reflection the argument as a whole seems to say that a ‘thing’ has matter in two directions: genus is matter for *infima species*, perceptible matter is matter ‘below’. There is no difference between species and thing.

Z 17 and H 6 treat of the role of form-essence in a compound of form and matter. In Z 17 the focus is on form as cause, in H 6 on form as act. These points of view are clearly complementary. And they do not contradict the general point of view in Z, in which form-essence is marked off as ‘primary substance’. One thing is form as primary substance, another one is form as structuring principle in a compound.²

1. 1045b7 ff.

2. Cf. Aristotle’s ‘official’ survey of the various senses of ‘substance’, 1042a26, above, p. 17. To Bostock (Bostock, p. 287 ff.) H 6 does not square with Z 4-11: Aristotle has changed his mind; he no longer maintains that form is primary and non-composite, now he regards form as cause (Z 17) and act (H 6) in a compound. But a change of focus is not a change of mind. There is no contradiction. Bostock also finds the assimilation of matter to potentiality and of form to actuality entirely bogus and confused (p. 283). Why? To take Bostock’s own example (p. 224 ff.): an arm is only an arm if it can fulfil the function of an arm, i.e. as part of a real man. The matter of course is flesh and bones, it is an arm, if functioning as an arm. Bostock’s point seems to be that a piece of matter may be formed in one or another way. But an arm is always dependent on the man, hence potentiality and actuality coincide. However, nothing prevents us from regarding the arm as detached from or isolated from the man; in that case a certain piece of matter is potentially an arm. Another example of Bostock’s is puzzling (p. 284): if a piece of bronze is round, it is actually round – but, of course, without the form round the bronze may have any other shape whatsoever. Bostock seems to misunderstand the role of form as a structuring principle. The confusion is not on Aristotle’s part.

Θ 10.

At first sight Θ 10 seems somewhat isolated from the context. But there are, in fact, good reasons to regard the chapter as an appropriate conclusion of the sequence of the books on substance, and there are references to special points in the preceding.¹ Having treated of the concept of substance and the relation between actuality and potentiality Aristotle now turns to ‘being as truth’. In his programmatic presentation of the various senses of ‘to be’ in E² Aristotle has laid down that being true and being false are dependent on what is combined or separated in reality: if A and B are really combined it is true to say that A is B, if not it is false. Hence true and false in this sense are secondary, they are not in things, but in thought. In E Aristotle dismisses accidental being and the truth of τὰ ἀπλᾶ, the treatment of the latter being reserved for a later consideration (Θ 10). For the present he is occupied with truth and falsity in predicative judgements, he is not committed to maintain that truth and falsity of τὰ ἀπλᾶ is secondary.

Θ 10 starts³ with a recapitulation of the official Aristotelian distinction between the various senses of ‘what is’ – but with the omission of accidental being. The being of truth and falsity are introduced as the most important sense.⁴

First the truth of predicative judgements is considered.⁵ As in E this type of truth/falsity depends on the real state of affairs. It is not because we truly think that you are pale, that you *are* pale. It is the other way round. The decisive point is the correspondance or missing correspondance with facts. Now, some predicative sentences, stating one thing of another, are always true because the corresponding things always and necessarily are combined or separated. To quote Γ 7:⁶ To say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true; to say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false. However, there are sentences

1. Cf. Klaus Oehler: *Die Lehre vom noetischen und dianoetischen Denken bei Platon und Aristoteles*, *Zetemata* 29, München 1962, p. 170; 236.

2. Aristot. *Met.* 1027b17 ff.; cf. 1011b25 ff.

3. 1051a34.

4. The manuscripts unanimously have κυριώτατα ὄν. Usually this has been athetized with reference to E 4. But E 4 only regards truth/falsity in predicative judgements or dianoetical thought. In Θ 10 τὰ ἀπλᾶ – and accordingly the ‘truth’ of τὰ ἀπλᾶ – emerge as building stones in ontology as well as in epistemology. Perhaps the reading should be retained?

5. Aristot. *Met.* 1051b1 ff.

6. 1011b26.

that are sometimes true, some other time false. These are sentences referring to contingent, changing facts.

This theory of truth, which for convenience could be called a ‘correspondance theory’, is in a way plain sailing, and it is attested in several Aristotelian passages.¹ But it cannot stand alone, it has its preconditions. We know that in general a *why* presupposes a *what*,² and we know that demonstrative knowledge depends on pre-existing knowledge, which on its part depends on experience or on insight into ‘first principles’.³

So much in general, but let us return to Θ 10. Here, at a deeper level, another conception of truth emerges as a precondition for the ‘correspondance’ view. The passage is very compact, and often it has more or less been left out of consideration as “rather mystifying”.⁴ In his book on dianoetical and noetical thinking in Plato and Aristotle, however, Klaus Oehler has demonstrated a coherent and important line of thought.

Consider the proposition ‘the wood is white’.⁵ In accordance with the ‘correspondance theory’ this, of course, is a true or false proposition. But what about the single terms? Is ‘wood’ true? Is ‘white’ true? The single terms have no truth value.⁶ They are simply present as something which can be grasped by ‘touch’ and which merely can be ‘said’.⁷ Here, the opposite of truth is not error, but ignorance or ‘non-touch’ – error is only possible in an accidental sense;⁸ you cannot be in doubt concerning a ‘what’. What started as a consideration of simple logical terms (τὰ ἀσύνθετα) has gradually changed into a consideration of the underlying ontological facts. This line of thought is pursued and restricted in a short section on non-composite substances (μὴ συνθετὰ ἰούσια)⁹ – that is to say: what holds good for simple terms or ‘things’ *a fortiori* holds good for form-essences, pure essences without matter, or sub-

1. Cf. *De int.* 16a9 ff.; 17a26 ff.; *Met.* 1011b26; 1027b18 ff.

2. Cf. *Met.* 981b10.

3. Cf. *Anal.post.* 71a1; 99b20 ff.

4. Bostock, p. 244.

5. *Aristot. Met.* 1051b18 ff.

6. Cf. *Cat.* 1a16.

7. Φάσις in 1051b24 does not here – as in Ross’s translation, *The Works of Aristotle, Translated into English*, VIII, Oxford 1966 (1908) – mean ‘assertion’; cf. Oehler, p. 215.

8. I.e. if e.g. a colour is misperceived.

9. Klaus Oehler (p. 183 ff.) should be credited for the important distinction between τὰ ἀσύνθετα and αἱ μὴ συνθετὰ ἰούσια. But note that the transition to “ontology” already takes place in 1051b25. Ross’s interpretation and his subdivisions of the passage, *Aristotle’s Metaphysics II*, p. 274 ff., are misleading.

stantial forms;¹ they are eternal and exist actually, not potentially; and it is not possible to be in error about them, only to know them or fail to know them. But² we do inquire their ‘what’ – one thing is the immediate presence of an essence, another thing to search for the definition of a ‘what’; a definition says something *about* something, and it is true or false. The section as a whole fulfils the promise concerning ἀπλᾶ given in the parenthesis of Z 17.³

Some rather obscure traits of this theory of intuitive thought can be elucidated from the *De anima*. What does the ‘grasping’ in our passage mean? The human soul is able to receive forms, and thus it is potentially identified with the form;⁴ indeed, the rational soul has rightly been called the place of forms.⁵ When the forms are actually received, the identification is actualized. As to perception, this unification of subject, object and act is only partial – this mode of cognition depends on external perceptible composites of matter and form, and so the whole perceiving subject and the whole perceived object, of course, are not united. However, when the perceived form is actualized in the mind, form as subject and form as object are only conceptually, not really distinct: actual sound and actual hearing are the same, although “what it is for them to be such is not the same”.⁶ But in rational cognition or thinking the unification of subject, object and act is complete: the actual knowledge is identical with its object (form without matter).⁷

Discursive – or dianoetical – thought, expressible in subject-predicate sentences, may of course be true or false (cf. the ‘correspondance theory’). But the presupposition of discursive thought, the immediate presence of pure essences, is always true.⁸ A pure essence is undivided or considered so – a line e.g. can be transversed step by step, but in its totality it is grasped immediately.⁹ The fact that a pure essence is simply true is analogous to the immediate truth of a special sense object, and it establishes a certain criterion of truth for composite states of

1. ‘White’ and other terms belonging to the secondary categories have, of course, essences, but in a derived sense (cf. above, p. 15). What is meant in our passage is the essence of the πρώτη οὐσία.

2. Aristot. *Met.* 1051b32.

3. 1041b9, here, p. 30.

4. *De an.* 429a15 ff.; 21 ff.

5. 429a27.

6. 425b26, tr. D.W. Hamlyn (*Aristotle's De anima, Books II, III*, Oxford 1968, p. 48).

7. 429a13; 431a1.

8. 430a26; b27.

9. 430b6 ff.

affairs and the corresponding predicative judgements: this wine may be sweet, and it may not be sweet, but I know what 'sweet' is, and that gives me an objective criterion.¹ The Aristotelian confidence that the concept fundamentally is identical with the essence, inherent in the thing, allows him to grant the sceptic a certain amount of uncertainty. But: one may doubt whether this wine is sweet or not, but we know that 'sweet' is sweet. If the Aristotelian conceptual apparatus were solely derived from sense experience, things would have looked quite differently.

The formal identity between concept and thing is guaranteed by the pure form-essence. What, then, is 'form-essence' in itself? Aristotle never hypostasizes essence. An essence is not something *in* the mind, it is present *for* the mind and it is the structural principle *of* the thing. In the Aristotelian world there is no need to ask further. In his 'official' summary of the various meanings of 'substance'² he lays down that 'form' is a substance λόγῳ – and in this connection it is wise to remember that among the vast number of 'meanings' of the word λόγος one is '(structural) principle'.³ What holds the world together is the fact that in great or small it has a structure. And a structure is not a thing. The only substance 'above' is God.

When an essence is present for the mind, we are aware of this fact – that holds good for sense awareness as well as the awareness that I am thinking.⁴ Apparently Aristotle only regards this as an epiphenomenon to the very act of sensation or thought, it does not give him occasion to develop a 'theory of consciousness'.⁵ What interests him is the difference between man and God. To us external objects are occasions for, but not causes of sensation and thought, for God thinking is not occasioned from outside. We human beings are aware of the immediate presence of an essence, preceding the judgements of discursive thought. And this immediate experience cannot be *either* universal *or* particular. Intension precedes extension.

1. *Met.* 1010b22 ff.; cf. *Anal.post.* 71a26.

2. Cf. above, p. 17.

3. Cf. e.g. *Aristot. De an.* 424a24ff. And cf. the role of the concept in Stoicism.

4. Cf. *De an.* 425b12; cf. *Eth.Nic.* 1170a25 ff.

5. Cf. Oehler, p. 245 ff.

Λ 5

We can conclude with a much debated – and sometimes celebrated – passage from Λ.¹ What Aristotle is saying here is that whereas entities from different categories have different causes and elements – except in an analogous sense² –, entities in the same εἶδος differ, not εἶδει, but numerically. Hence your matter, εἶδος and moving cause are different from mine, though in their universal λόγος they are the same.

It is evident that, first, εἶδος is used in the sense of species (universal form), in the end in the sense of (particular) form. Λόγος must be taken in the broad sense, covering formula/definition as well as principle. As to εἶδος it seems misleading to distinguish sharply between two ‘meanings’, and it seems strange that Frede/Patzig³ take the passage as a key witness to their thesis that form in Aristotle is simply particular. Clearly, Aristotle consciously uses the same term in a universal and in a particular context. It is equally clear that he has no qualms about it. If εἶδος primarily denotes intension the difference between universal and particular is only secondary – dependent on the context; and in the end Aristotle states that particular and universal have the same λόγος. In principle, there is no difference between species and form. The definition of ‘man’ is the same for individual man and for ‘man’ in general. Species-form and individual form are forms, both of them.

Postscript. Plato and Aristotle

Plato and the Platonists are – indiscriminately – the constant target of Aristotle’s criticism, especially in B 4 and Z 13. According to Aristotle the theory of ideas implies *either* a superthing, an entity over and above sensible things, ‘a house besides particular houses’ – an interpretation with a disastrous afterlife. *Or* it means that the idea is inherent in things, ‘a thing within a thing’. In either case impossible consequences would follow, e.g. the alleged fallacy of ‘the third man’.⁴

Aristotle’s criticism here and elsewhere should be regarded in the light of his major metaphysical achievement: that an essence is not

1. Aristot. *Met.* 1071a24 ff.

2. Probably that means that form/matter, actuality/potentiality etc. can be applied in every category.

3. Frede/Patzig I, p. 52.

4. Cf. p. 21, note 1.

something a thing has, but something it is. Closely connected with this is Aristotle's insistence that being and unity are predicates, not separate substances.

Now, is Aristotle's criticism justified? As mentioned above Plato had Parmenides voice the notorious argument, in Aristotle labelled 'The third man', in the first part of the dialogue, bearing Parmenides' name. The inexperienced young Socrates is baffled. Is Plato? Does he record an 'honest perplexity', as the Plato veteran Gregory Vlastos has it in a much debated article?¹ Perhaps, he submits the resolution of the puzzle-ment to the benevolent reader? As already remarked, this view is hardly tenable.

But the problem must be seen in a wider perspective. In recent literature on the *Parmenides* there is widespread agreement that Plato did not subscribe to Parmenides' criticisms.² Step by step Parmenides demolishes the proposal that an idea is analogous to a material thing, existing alongside other material things,³ that it is a thought in the mind,⁴ that being separate it is unknowable by the human mind.⁵ Plato never held such views. The purpose of the criticisms seems to be a refutation of more or less current misunderstandings of the theory of ideas.⁶ In that case one would be justified to expect some sort of answer in the second part of the dialogue – be it ever so indirect.

Especially in earlier literature⁷ it has been a common assumption that the target of Parmenides' criticisms is Plato's *Phaedo*. In that case the Parmenidean critique would of course also be a Platonic self-critique. It is true that the *Phaedo* is the dialogue in which Plato most strongly

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1. Gregory Vlastos: 'The Third Man Argument in the *Parmenides*', *Philosophical Review* 1954, p. 319 ff. (repr. in R.E.Allen (ed.): *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, London 1965, p. 231 ff.). A comprehensive account of the discussions up to 1990 can be found in Mario Mignucci: 'Plato's Third Man Argument in the *Parmenides*', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 72, 1990, p. 143 ff.
 2. Cf. Meinwald; *Plato's Parmenides*, translated by Mary Louise Gill and Paul Ryan, Introduction by Mary Louise Gill, Indianapolis/Cambridge 1996; Samuel Scolnicov: *Plato's Parmenides*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 2003; Politis; Lloyd P. Gerson: *Aristotle and other Platonists*, Ithaca/London 2003.
 3. Plat. *Parm.* 130 E ff. 'The third man'-argument is an offshoot of this position.
 4. 132 B ff.
 5. 133 A ff.
 6. Apparently, such misunderstandings did circulate. Aristotle's criticisms of Plato and the 'Platonists' abound with them.
 7. Cf. e.g. F.M.Cornford's seminal commentary, *Plato and Parmenides*, London 1939, p. 69 ff.

advocates the transcendence of the ideas. An idea is not a universal,¹ it is a metaphysical substance, eternal, unchanging and incomposite,² it is not some thing equipped with properties, it *is* a property in itself – αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό.³ The phenomenon, on the other hand, is something having properties, it is composite, and it is dependent on the ideas, reflecting the idea-properties. But it is defective, constantly changing properties, and it is only knowable by means of its properties.⁴

The relation between idea and phenomenon – the so-called participation – only interests Plato in so far as he is eager to establish that phenomena reflect ideas – ‘by the beautiful all beautiful things are beautiful (τῷ καλῷ πάντα τὰ καλὰ καλὰ) as it is said in a slogan-like phrasing.⁵ More technical problems concerning participation are left out of consideration, e.g. what sort of reflection is meant or how the one idea is related to its many instantiations. Socrates declares that he is too naive to ponder over such quibbles.⁶

What is clear is that the phenomenon – the thing – belongs to a lower ontological level than the idea. But it is also clear that the property of the thing is essentially identical with the idea. Otherwise, the whole theory would be nonsense – ‘beautiful’ means ‘beautiful’, whether referring to the property of a thing or to the idea. The question of essence is superior to an inquiry into the relation between the idea and its instantiations. But the essential bond between idea and thing cannot be called into doubt – it is an obvious fact that there are beautiful things in the world.

The idea is not a material thing or analogous to a material thing, and there is no insurmountable gap between idea and thing. So, the

1. Cf. Julius Moravcsik: *Plato and Platonism*, Oxford/Cambridge Mass.1992, p. 56 ff.

2. Plat. *Phaedo* 78 B ff.

3. 74 A; 100 B.

4. 74 E ff.

5. 100 E.

6. Surely, we should not take Socrates' naiveté too seriously; it can not very well be inferred that Plato did not confront the ‘problem of participation’ before the first part of the *Parmenides*. Formerly it was assumed that the phrase ‘tallness in us’(102 D) should refer to a specific ontological entity between the idea and us. Cf. F.M.Cornford: *Plato's Cosmology*, London 1937, p. 184; R.S. Bluck: *Plato's Phaedo*, Cambridge 1955, p. 143; 153. This suggestion has been criticized by David Gallop: *Plato's Phaedo*, Cambridge 1975, p. 175 ff.; Moravcsik, p. 284; Dorothea Frede: *Platons 'Phaidon'*, Darmstadt 1999, p. 131; 136. The critique is justified. There is no mention of a third, middle entity in the text, and it would only make the alleged problem more complicated – it would create a problem of participation, not only concerning the relation between idea and ‘form-copy’, but also concerning the ‘form-copy’ and us.

Phaedo is not the target of the first part of the *Parmenides*. Nor does the *Phaedo* match with the ‘Platonist’ theory, attacked by Aristotle – an idea is not a ‘thing within a thing’ nor a ‘thing alongside other things’.

The line simile in the *Republic*¹ develops the double aspect of the theory further: On the one hand the world is divided into two major levels, the intelligible world and the visible one, the visible world being inferior and dependent on the intelligible world; and each main section is divided into two. In the visible world the lowest level, shadows and illusions, reflect the upper one, physical things. In the intelligible world the inferior level, mathematics (and other sciences?) depend on the upper section, the world of ideas, by using theories and deductions based on first principles, assumed hypothetically, but not accounted for. Thus this section images the superior one, the ideal world proper, in which the ideas are directly envisaged and known as principles and causes. Outside this system lies the unhypothetical first principle (ἀνυπόθετος ἀρχή),² endowing everything with meaning.

On the other hand there is a bond connecting the various ontological levels. The criterion for the ontological classification is said to be clarity or obscurity, in other words: the decisive point is how a given object appears to an observer.³ The three lower levels are images, representing the same original, the idea, more or less clearly, and recognizable in more or less veiled form. ‘Man’ in a picture is essentially identical with physical ‘man’, and on his part the physical ‘man’ reproduces the ideal ‘man’, the pure unveiled essence of ‘man’. ‘Man’ always means ‘man’, as ‘beautiful’ in the *Phaedo* always means ‘beautiful’. If that were not the case, any possibility of knowledge of the world would collapse. The ‘double aspect’ – different ontological levels and essential identity – is common to the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*.

1. Plat. *RP* VI 509 D ff.

2. 510 B.

3. One of the many questions posed in connection with the line simile is what it could mean that according to the informations we get about the proportions between the various sections the lowest intelligible sphere (‘mathematics’) has the same size as the upper visible one (the physical world). The explanation could very well be that the same class of objects could be grasped either by sensual perception or by means of a mathematical description. Cf. Moravcsik, p. 77.

The theory of ideas, advocated by the young Socrates in the *Parmenides* is not identical with Plato's classical theory. Even though he took up more sophisticated problems in his later dialogues he never changed the fundamentals of his philosophical position.¹ And the first part ends with Parmenides' solemn declaration that if someone should deny the existence of ideas he would have nowhere to fix his thought and thereby he would completely destroy the possibility of philosophical discourse² – an assertion hardly implying that he – or Plato – thinks his own points of criticism conclusive, or that he feels puzzled. It demands extrataordinary gifts, however, to see that for each thing there is some idea (γένεος) or essence (οὐσία), itself by itself, he says, and it will require a still more exceptional person to teach the lessons to others.³

In recent scholarship there is almost general agreement that the second part of the *Parmenides* is seriously meant, and that it is an answer to the first part. What the answer is, is of course a matter of dispute. In the light of Parmenides' words, just referred to, it is perhaps no wonder that the point of the text is not exactly obvious, but there is certainly a clue. The 'exercise' Parmenides is offering is not restricted to an examination of ideas, but he recalls with approval that Socrates had wanted to include ideas as well as 'visible things'⁴ – and that should be expected on the reasonable assumption that we were to learn something about participation.

Accordingly, he moves one step back and announces an examination of the abstract concepts 'unity' as opposed to 'plurality' without concrete fillings. He follows a strictly formal pattern of deductions. What has to be investigated, is the consequences of the thesis '(the) One is', but also, conversely, '(the) One is not'. In both cases the consequences for the One and the not-One (the Others or the Many) should be considered. Furthermore, one should take into account that the initial thesis could mean that 'unity' is the only thing applicable to the One, or that unity and being are connected – (the) One *is*. Altogether, that amounts to eight series of deductions or 'hypotheses'.⁵ In each section the One/the Many are confronted with the same stock of attributes, analysed in

1. It underlies all the later dialogues, cf. especially Plat. *Tim.* 52 A.

2. Plat. *Parm.* 135 B.

3. Cf. *Ep.* VII 340 B ff.

4. Cf. Gill, p. 53.

5. This scheme is only broken in one section (Plat. *Parm.* 155 E – 57 B, treating of being in time).

more or less detail, and comprising general, ‘non-material’ attributes and determinations of space and time as well. The first two hypotheses (hyp. 1: (the) One is exclusively one, and hyp. 2: (the) One *is* one) can be regarded as seminal in the sense that their general or partial conclusions seem to be presupposed in the following. Hyp. 1 concludes that if the One is exclusively one, it is not, hyp. 2 that if it *is* one, it is everything.

The baffling conclusion of the whole exercise, unifying all partial conclusions, runs:¹

“To this we may add the conclusion: it seems that, whether there is or is not a One, both that One and the Others alike are and are not, and appear and do not appear to be, all manner of things in all manner of ways, with respect to themselves and to one another” (tr. Cornford).

No wonder that this conclusion in earlier scholarship was often taken as an indication that ‘Parmenides’ exercise as a whole was meant as ‘anti-Eleatic’ polemics. But that will not do. Already Cornford labelled the conclusion ‘ostensible’.² One should only look one sentence before:³

“Thus, in sum, we may conclude: If there is no One, there is nothing at all” (tr. Cornford, conclusion of 8. hyp.).

It should be noticed that this conclusion states a fact, whereas the ‘ostensible’ conclusion suggests a faint doubt (“it seems that”).⁴

In fact, behind the formal structure – ‘anti-Eleatic’ or not – a structure of content is traceable. Let us recall that in his introductory remarks Parmenides stated that it would be extremely difficult – but necessary – to prove that ‘in each case’ there does exist an idea or essence, and that in his ‘valid’ conclusion he takes it as established that if there is no One, there is nothing at all. In other words: a One exists and everything else

1. 166 C.

2. F.M. Cornford: *Plato and Parmenides*, p. 244.

3. Plat. *Parm.* 166 B.

4. This has been acutely pointed out by Gill, p. 104.

(the Others) is dependent on the One. In the following I shall comment on certain aspects of the dialectic between the One and the Others.¹

The main opposition, underlying the whole exercise, is the opposition between the One which is simply and absolutely one (hyp. 1) and the One that has Being (hyp. 2). In my view Constance C. Meinwald has successfully shown that the distinction, based on this contrast, between predication πρὸς ἑαυτό and predication πρὸς τὰ ἄλλα does in fact resolve the alleged fallacies of the partial deductions, and it coincides with the distinction between statements of identity and predication proper, basic in the classical dialogues.

Hyp. 1² analyses the One, regarded as absolutely one. Naturally enough that implies that nothing else can be predicated of it. That, again, means that there cannot be knowledge *of* it, and that, in fact, it 'is' not in any sense – it is not even one. But that is in flat contradiction to the initial assumption: 'If the One is', and so the section seems to be a *reductio ad absurdum*. However, that does not necessarily follow. In the end of hyp. 1³ Parmenides himself discreetly hoists a warning sign. And he has every reason to do so: the ostensible conclusion of the hypothesis equals being and the inflectional forms of 'to be' ('was', 'is', 'will be'). At least, that is not Platonism. According to Plato⁴ time is "a moving likeness of eternity", and eternal being is forever in the same state: it was not, it will not be, and it is not in the state of becoming. Perhaps, the concept of pure Oneness has still a role to play?

1. For obvious reasons I shall refrain from an analysis of the second part of the dialogue as a whole. Many years ago I offered such an analysis in my doctoral dissertation: *Studier over Platons Parmenides i dens forhold til tidligere platoniske dialoger*, Copenhagen 1964, written in Danish and so not accessible to a wider public. I still stick to the main ideas developed there, and I have been glad to observe several important points of similarity with recent scholarship, although often expanded with more acumen there. In addition to the studies, mentioned p. 38, note 2, one could mention the following studies, published after Cornford's classical book: William F. Lynch: *An Approach to the Metaphysics of Plato through the Parmenides*, Georgetown 1959; Egil A. Wyller: *Platons Parmenides in seinem Zusammenhang mit Symposion und Politeia*, Oslo 1960 (repr. Würzburg 2007); Robert S. Brumbaugh: *Plato on the One*, New Haven 1961; R.E. Allen: *Plato's Parmenides*, Minneapolis 1983; Kenneth M. Sayre: *Plato's Later Ontology, a Riddle Resolved*, Princeton 1983.

2. Plat.*Parm.* 137 C ff.

3. 142 A. Cf. Gill, p. 64: "Parmenides casts doubt on the argument in Part II just this once, but once is enough to warn us that we are meant to beware".

4. Plat.*Tim.* 37 D.

The beginning of hyp. 2¹ is important. It lays down that the initial thesis, ‘If (a) One is’, implies two things, Oneness and Being. The One is not Being, but it partakes of Being. Likewise Being is the being *of* the One,² but it is not identical with the One. Oneness and Being are entirely bound up with each other, but the two ‘entities’ can be isolated as abstract entities – you can meaningfully speak about Oneness and Being as components of a whole. Nothing can ‘be’ an entity without being *one* entity – so Oneness acts as a principle for anything to be; a principle is not an entity, it precedes the existence of entities, but metaphysically it is meaningful.³ Taken isolated – as in hyp. 1 – Oneness is a principle without reference to what it is principle of. Being, on the other hand, would be mere possibility, in the terminology of the exercise: the others could be determined, but not be existent (essence without existence? – hyp. 5),⁴ or they would be only apparent (hyp. 7).⁵

If however Oneness and Being are seen as parts of the whole One-Being, it would be true of either part that it presupposes the other one. Any part would then consist of at least two parts, and so on *ad infinitum*; thus unity yields plurality.⁶ That this is crucial for the whole exercise appears from the fact that this point only is also displayed in another way:⁷ Oneness as part of the One-Being must at least be different from Being as part of the One-Being; hence, difference is a third fundamental term. But if the One-Being involves three elements, it is possible to combine numbers without restriction, that is to say that the

1. *Parm.* 142 B.

2. For Aristotle, too, everything that is, is one, cf. e.g. *Aristot. Met.* 1041 a 19.

3. This is the basis of the ‘Neoplatonic’ interpretation of hyp. 1. The Neoplatonists identified absolute Oneness with the ἀνυπόθετος ἀρχή of the *Republic* – in my opinion correctly. Cf. e.g. Plot. V 1, 8; Procl. *In Plat.theol.*, Portus, p. 30 ff; *In Platonis Parmenidem interprete Guillelmo de Moerbeka*, Klibansky/Labowsky, *Plato Latinus* III, p. 34: In one sense the One transcends being, in another it is coordinate with it. Further details of the Neoplatonic interpretation, offered by Plotinus or Proclus, seem to me more than doubtful. For the continuity from the Neo-Pythagorean Moderatus (perhaps from Speusippus) to the Neoplatonists, see E.R.Dodds: ‘The Parmenides of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic One’, *Classical Quarterly* 1928, p. 129-42.

4. *Plat. Parm.* 160 B–63 B.

5. 164 B-5 E. Cf. the chaotic world of extreme Heracliteanism, *Plat.Theaet.* 179 C ff.; and the pre-cosmic chaos in *Tim.* 52 D ff.

6. *Parm.* 142 D ff.

7. 143 A ff. Cf. the dialectics of ‘being the same’ and ‘being different’ in the *Sophist* (*Soph.* 255 E ff.). Without difficulty ‘sameness’ could be added in the *Parmenides*-context.

whole series of positive integers are implied, and the series of numbers is unlimited.¹

Now, if the One-Being is divisible it is a whole, consisting of parts,² unity implying plurality. It is divisible, and so it is unlimited; it is *one* whole, so it is limited.³ On this basis the One-Many of hyp. 2 is confronted with the fixed series of attributes, and it is proved that the attributes, including opposite predication, are all applicable to the One-Many or, as the conclusion of the hypothesis has it:⁴ everything pertaining to the Others also pertains to the One. Is this conclusion just as baffling as the ostensible conclusion of the whole exercise, and bearing in mind that the list of attributes comprises attributes of time and space, does it mean that the One-Many after all is material? Cornford's solution⁵ is that in some cases what is presented as logically necessary deductions, really means: 'It is possible that ...'. That does not seem immediately satisfactory. I should prefer to say that the conclusion only states indiscriminately that all the attributes belong to the One-Being. How it does so, is specified in the partial arguments, and more specifications are to follow.⁶

A crucial passage in the beginning of hyp. 2 deepens the understanding of the One-Many as a whole of parts.⁷ It looks like a general principle and claims that everything is related to everything in such a way that it is the same or different, or, if it is neither the same nor different, it is related as part to whole or as whole to part. On closer reflection and

1. As always in Plato number is a sign of intelligibility. Since Aristotle (cf. Aristot. *Met.* 987b34) it has often been questioned how this 'generation' of numbers should be understood (Cornford: *Plato and Parmenides*, p. 141, suggests that it takes place by means of an arbitrary combination of multiplication and addition). But (ideal) numbers in Plato are not something created or 'generated', they are something to be discovered (cf. Allen, p. 227; Moravcsik, p. 165). It has also been ventured (cf. Julius Stenzel: *Zahl und Gestalt bei Platon und Aristoteles* (1924), 3.ed., Darmstadt 1959, p. 24) to construct a 'Diairesis der Zahlen' with a definite numerical value ascribed to each step of the division. The main structure of the division of the original One is of course a διαίρεσις. But there is no trace of a specified diairetical scheme of numbers either in the *Parmenides*, or anywhere else in Plato.

2. Plat. *Parm.* 142 C.

3. 145 A.

4. 155 E.

5. Cornford: *Plato and Parmenides*, p. 115; cf. p. 150.

6. E.g. the appendix to hyp. 2 (Plat. *Parm.* 155 E ff., on shifting attributes of the One-Being, existing in time and space) and hyp. 3 (157 B ff., on the One-Being or One-Many from the side of 'the Others').

7. 146 B.

taking the basic opposition limited-unlimited into account one could say that in the One-Being, regarded as a limited structure, the whole as well as any part is related to itself – is ‘identical’ – or to the Others – is ‘different’; *qua* whole, however, the whole is more than its parts.¹ Regarded as unlimited the One may produce the Others, so it is potentially the Others. It may ‘become’ the Others – even fluctuating ‘others’ in time and space. Any One is or becomes essentially identical with or numerically different from any other.

The lessons to be drawn are probably that nothing can be without a forming principle, the One; that at the most general level the combination of Oneness and Being implies plurality; that this plurality is an ordered whole, comprising, but more than the sum of the parts; that this ordering whole extends to the world of becoming in space and time, thus creating a bond between eternal being and coming into existence. Now, the whole investigation is held in the abstract. On the other hand, Plato’s Parmenides expressly declared that the abstract exercise is necessary for solving the problems of participation which puzzled the young Socrates of the first part of the dialogue.

This must be taken as an invitation to transfer the abstract scheme to a Platonic world of specific ideas and specific particulars. Let us venture to take up the challenge. A Platonic idea is a finite One-Being, it is one and it is being (something); it orders a system of ideas, a διαίρεσις,² where each species stands in definite relations to a genus, to coordinated species, and to subspecies. Furthermore, the ideal world is bound up with the world of becoming in so far as the world of becoming is intelligible.³

All this elaborates, but is in agreement with the classical theory of ideas, especially with the line simile of the *Republic*, where you had to distinguish between levels of existence and essential identity.

We are now in a position to return to Aristotle. In his polemics against Plato or the Platonists (real or constructed for the purpose) Aristotle’s official stand is that an idea is a superthing, and that this involves devastating consequences. Certainly, this is a wrong interpretation. Does that mean that the most outstanding of Plato’s apprentices fundamentally misunderstood the master? I shall not go into a discussion proper

1. Cf. p. 30, note 2.

2. As is well known this point is especially developed in the *Sophist*.

3. In the light of the Parmenides-scheme ‘to become’ may mean for a subordinated idea to be produced from a superordinated one by a mental act; or for a particular it may mean to come into existence in the perceptible world.

of Aristotle's worth as a historian of philosophy,¹ just point to the well known fact that Aristotle uses historical material, not in order to behave like a 'historian' in the modern sense of the word, but in order to elucidate philosophical problems in his – Aristotle's – staging. Besides – and perhaps more importantly – he always displays a strong aversion to Platonic imagery, poetical metaphors, cunning irony, or myths. What does it mean e.g. that phenomena 'reflect' ideas? It seems that Aristotle deliberately chose to take Plato at his word – e.g., in the *Timaeus* Plato holds that the world was generated in time; so, that is what he 'meant'.²

But that is not all there is to say. In the preceding pages mention has been made of some single points where Aristotle without qualms follows Plato: e.g., a form does not come into being, the whole is more than the sum of its parts. More important is it that Plato and Aristotle share the deep confidence that the external world and human thought are isomorphic. They are – both of them – in constant search for stability behind seeming fluctuation and change. The formula 'x in itself' is common to both of them. And perhaps it is no coincidence that in spite of the fact that elsewhere he is an indefatigable creator of terminology Aristotle nevertheless retains the key-word εἶδος. To Aristotle as well as to Plato εἶδος is the independent factor creating stability in the world.

If my interpretation is correct, the similarity between Plato and his apprentice on the deepest level would be that (in the formulation used above) *intension* precedes *extension*. In Plato, 'beautiful' stands for 'beautiful', whether it refers to the idea or to the property of a thing. For Aristotle 'man' is the same for individual men and for 'man' in general. Plato holds that a thing is only knowable by its (essential) properties, Aristotle that a particular is undefinable *qua* particular, but what makes it 'this' thing is its essence – 'a thing is the same as its essence'.

Of course the main difference remains that Aristotle emphatically renounced the notion of an ideal world and transferred the philosophical focus to the thing, informed by the εἶδος. To Plato everything in this world indicated an independent metaphysical substance, to Aristotle this seemed to be a superfluous superstructure and so he never hypostasized the concept of essence. That determined his attitude to the

1. Cf. e.g. W.K.C. Guthrie: 'Aristotle as a Historian of Philosophy: Some Preliminaries', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* LXXVII, 1957, p. 35 ff.

2. Aristot. *De caelo* 280a30.

problem universality versus particularity. In the *Phaedo* Plato recognized the problem of participation, but did not go into detail. He did so in the *Parmenides*, perhaps instigated by discussions within the Academy. His answer, cryptical as it is, is that plurality is derived from Oneness. Apparently, Aristotle did not see any ‘problem of participation’ – in his view a universal *qua* universal is an abstraction from particulars.

The Aristotelian position is a logical consequence of his turning from idea to individual. But Plato and Aristotle were both essentialists: the world is a structured one, and the eternal structure is accessible to the human intellect. The Aristotelian innovation should be seen as an innovation within a Platonic frame.¹ It is no coincidence that the main stream of philosophy – roughly until the end of the 18th century – takes Plato and Aristotle as complementary, not as opponents.²

Often one would learn more about Aristotle’s relation to Plato indirectly. Thus, a passage, referred to above,³ would imply that if only Plato did not distinguish between goodness itself and the essence of a good thing, he would be a good Aristotelian. The passage is imbued with Aristotelian terminology; but if Plato had used Aristotle’s language, he would certainly not have made the distinction.

1. Cf. above, e.g.p. 23.

2. For the development in Antiquity, cf. e.g. Lloyd P. Gerson.

3. Aristot. *Met.* 1031a28 ff., here, p. 16, note 2.

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