WHAT IS ARISTOTLE’S “THIRD MAN” ARGUMENT AGAINST THE FORMS?

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Among Aristotle’s criticisms of the Forms, the argument labelled ‘the Third Man’ is commonly viewed as one of the most significant. Unfortunately, it is also one of the most obscure. Although the argument is mentioned several times in the Metaphysics and discussed once in the Sophistical Refutations, it is not fully explained in either work. At best, Aristotle offers several clues as to its proper interpretation.

Things seem better if one looks to the tradition of ancient commentary, since the Third Man is treated explicitly by Alexander in his detailed exposition of the anti-Platonic arguments of Metaphysics A 9. Alexander’s treatment is not without ambiguities of its own; but apart from its comparative level of detail, it has recently held a special attraction for scholars. For it readily accommodates, even encourages, an interpretation whereby the Third Man turns on the ascription of a “self-predication” thesis to Plato. And since a number of scholars have become convinced that Plato fell victim to self-predication, they have been quick to accord Aristotle the honour of being the first to diagnose that confusion.

Unfortunately, that interpretation is quite misguided—or so I am convinced. The only reason Alexander’s text may be said to support it is that Alexander seriously misinterprets Aristotle’s argument. For although the Third Man does involve a self-predication thesis as part of its machinery, it does not ascribe the thesis to Plato as an assumption that, either explicitly or implicitly, guides Plato’s thinking about the Forms. Indeed, the argument is not properly understood as a direct criticism of anything in Plato’s theory. It serves instead as a way of showing that Plato’s talk of Forms makes no sense when translated into Aristotle’s own categories of substance.

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and attribute. Rather than comment on Plato’s views as might a contemporary critic, Aristotle simply presupposes the truth of his own way of thinking and uses the Third Man as a means of highlighting some of the crucial differences between his thought and Plato’s.

In what follows, I make a case for that view in several stages. First, I briefly set out my interpretation of the Third Man and contrast it with what I take to be the more standard one. Then I take up Alexander’s account of the argument and point out that although the account can be made to fit either interpretation, some of Alexander’s remarks in the surrounding context demonstrate a clear preference for the more standard reading. None the less, I argue, there are good reasons for convicting Alexander of unintentionally distorting Aristotle’s meaning. After exploring those reasons, I turn to the Sophistical Refutations and argue that the proper reading of Aristotle’s remarks at 178b36–179b30 supports my own account of the Third Man. I close with some suggestions as to why I think Aristotle feels justified in pressing the argument against the Forms.

1

In discussing the theory of Forms, Aristotle frequently charges Plato with confusing this and such (τάδε τι and τοιόντο ει or τοιόν), substance and attribute.¹ In Metaphysics Z 13 he describes the Third Man as a result of that confusion:

it is clear that no universal is a substance and that what is predicated of several things has the character of a such, not a this [οὐδὲν σημαίνει τῶν κοινῶν κατηγορομένων τάδε τι, ἀλλὰ τοιόντο]. Otherwise, a host of difficulties result, particularly the Third Man. (1038b35–1039a3)

As I shall eventually point out, Aristotle offers a similar diagnosis in the Sophistical Refutations. Yet, apart from those all too brief

¹ For relevant uses of the this–such distinction, see e.g. Metaph. 1003b8–9, 1038b23–7, and 1038a34–1039a3. In using the terms ‘substance’ and ‘attribute’ to mark the same distinction, I intend ‘substance’ to be limited to what in the Categories Aristotle calls ‘primary substance’. Likewise, I intend ‘attribute’ to be understood broadly, so as to designate any entity predicated of another. That includes entities in non-substance categories as well as what in the Categories Aristotle calls ‘secondary substance’ (on which see n. 28).
Aristotle's "Third Man" Argument against the Forms

remarks, he offers no explanation of how the Third Man actually works.

I take him to be thinking as follows. Plato often writes as if a Form were an Aristotelian attribute, an entity "predicated of" several others. At times, however, he uses locutions suggesting that a Form is not in fact predicated of any other entity and therefore has a crucial categorial feature of an Aristotelian substance. The roles of substance and attribute are of course incompatible; and so, to the extent that Plato treats a Form as if it were a substance, he is committed to supposing that there is in fact another entity that plays the role of the attribute. In other words, he is committed to positing a new entity besides the substances of this world and the Form-quaint-substance. But given Plato's way of thinking, that new entity would itself be labelled a Form—and once again, what is initially conceived of as an attribute may in due course be deemed a substance. Hence the need to posit yet another entity, and so on, ad infinitum.

That way of describing the regress leaves it an open question whether Aristotle thinks of the argument as incorporating a "self-predication" thesis—a thesis that the general term referring to a Form is also predicated of it. 2 I presume that Aristotle does think in some such fashion: for him the term 'man' is predicated of the Form Manhood as well as of the various particular men. The reason is that the "second" man fails to qualify as an attribute precisely because it must be considered a substance; and thus, it effectively becomes one of the many men—one of the substances to which 'man' applies and which cannot be said to explain the term's application to other entities.

I shall eventually make some suggestions as to why Aristotle might think that Plato treats a Form as if it were not predicated of any other entity and were therefore a substance. As I shall explain, I take such a judgement to be at issue in the famous accusation that Plato makes the Forms “separate”, χωριστά or κεχωρισμένα. For the moment, let me emphasize that as I am proposing to understand the regress, Aristotle does not maintain that Plato himself makes a self-predication assumption, either in full consciousness or in the dim light of half-awareness. For Aristotle, the thesis that ‘man’ is predicated of Manhood is a consequence of the claim that Manhood is a substance; and the latter claim is essentially a polemical device, a way of pointing out that the talk of Forms is hopelessly confused if one tries to make sense of it in terms of Aristotle’s own ontological categories.

I shall elaborate that point in due course, when I discuss the basis for Aristotle’s insistence that a Form is a substance. Here, let me underscore what I have said by remarking on the difference between my interpretation and what I am calling the standard one. According to the latter, it is Plato himself who gives voice to a self-predication assumption, at least in some implicit fashion. Aristotle in turn recognizes the commitment and is concerned to document the absurdity of it (when accepted in conjunction with a version of what is generally labelled a “non-identity” assumption). For Aristotle, in other words, it is because Plato holds that the Form Manhood “is a man”, and because he allows the analysis of that to be the same as the analysis of a particular’s being a man, that the Form may be taken to exemplify an attribute to which ‘man’ refers. And in so far as that new attribute, that third man, itself “is a man”, there will be need for a fourth, and so on ad infinitum.

When Aristotle maintains in Metaphysics Z 13 that the Third Man results from treating a universal as a substance, I take him to be offering a straightforward report of the central difficulty on which the regress turns. But for the standard interpretation, he must be doing something rather different. He must be explaining a consequence of his ascription of self-predication (and non-identity)

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3 For the accusation, see esp. Metaph. 1040b27 ff. and 1086a32 ff.
4 Several versions of such an interpretation have been proposed. My characterization is quite rough and is intended only to supply a contrast with my own account of the regress. For a more detailed discussion, see e.g. G. Fine, On Ideas: Aristotle’s Criticism of Plato’s Theory of Forms [On Ideas] (Oxford, 1993), chs. 14 and 15.
Aristotle’s "Third Man" Argument against the Forms

to Plato: since Plato considers the Form Manhood to be an entity of which 'man' is predicated, and since he would explain that predication relation by speaking of the Form’s participation in another entity, one may deem the Form to be a substance that exemplifies another Form as attribute.

I find that unlikely as a reading of so brief and programmatic a comment. But the matter cannot rest there: any attempt to decide which interpretation is correct must take account of the testimony given by Alexander in his discussion of Metaphysics A 9. So let me turn to Alexander’s discussion.

II

Alexander reports several versions of the Third Man and identifies one of them as deriving from Aristotle’s lost On Forms as well as from a passage in the Metaphysics. What he says is:

If what is predicated truly of many things is also something else apart from the things of which it is predicated, separated from them—for this is what those positing the ideas think they demonstrate: according to them, there is a man-by-itself because man is predicated truly of the many particular men and is something other than the particular men—but if that is so, there will be a third man.

For if the man being predicated is something other than the entities of which it is predicated and subsists on its own, and man is predicated of both the particulars and the Form, there will be a third man besides the particular and the Form. Likewise, there will be a fourth man predicated of this [third] one and the [original] Form and the particulars; and likewise, a fifth, and so on to infinity.

* See 85. 12–13 of Hayduck’s edition (Alexandri Aphrodisiensis in Aristotelis Metaphysica commentary (Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca, 1; Berlin, 1891)). Alexander’s commentary actually records four versions of a “Third Man” argument, only the last of which is attributed to Aristotle. The first, presented at 83. 34–84. 7, is said to have been used by Aristotle’s student Eudemus, among others (see 85. 10–12). The second, at 84. 7–16, is ascribed to “the sophists” generally; and the third, at 84. 16–21, to the sophist Polyxenus in particular. Both of the latter are obviously quite different from the argument reported as Aristotle’s and may well be later insertions into the text of Alexander’s commentary. (On the issue, see H. F. Cherniss, Aristotle’s Criticism of Plato and the Academy [Criticism] (Baltimore, 1944), 500–5.) The ancient commentator on the Sophistical Refutations apparently assumes that the discussion of the Third Man in that work must have “the sophists” as its target. Accordingly, he copies the second version of the argument from Alexander’s commentary and ascribes it to Aristotle.
Ravi Sharma

ei το κατηγορούμενον των πλειώναν ἀληθώς καὶ ἐστὶν ἄλλο παρά τὰ δὲν κατηγορεῖται, κεχωρισμένον αὐτῶν (τοῦτο γὰρ ἡγούνται δεικνύουσιν τὰ τὰς ἰδέας τιθέμεναι διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶ τι αὐτονθρωπὸς κατ’ αὐτὸς, ὅτι ὁ ἄνθρωπος κατὰ τῶν καθ’ ἐκαστὰ ἄνθρωπων πλειώνων ἄλλων ἀληθῶς κατηγορεῖται καὶ ἄλλος τῶν καθ’ ἐκαστὰ ἄνθρωπων ἐστὶν)—ἀλλ’ εἰ τοῦτο, ἐστὶ τις τρίτος ἄνθρωπος.

ei γὰρ ἄλλος ὁ κατηγορούμενον δὲν κατηγορεῖται, καὶ κατ’ ἰδίαν ἑφηστῶς, κατηγορεῖται δὲ κατὰ τὰ τῶν καθ’ ἐκαστὰ καὶ κατὰ τῆς ἰδέας ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ἐστιν τις τρίτος ἄνθρωπος παρά τε τὸν καθ’ ἐκαστὰ καὶ τὴν ἰδέαν. οὕτως δὲ καὶ τέταρτος ὁ κατὰ τὸ τούτον καὶ τῆς ἰδέας καὶ τῶν καθ’ ἐκαστὰ κατηγορούμενος, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ πέμπτος, καὶ τοῦτο ἐπ’ ἀπειρον. (84. 22–85 3)  

I shall return later to the first sentence of the passage, which I print as a separate paragraph. In it, Alexander summarizes the Platonist position and asserts that it results in a “third man”.

It is in the second sentence (my second paragraph) that Alexander actually explains the regress. Unfortunately, his explanation leaves it quite indeterminate which account of the regress he favours. The first clause emphasizes that the Platonists treat the Forms as entities “subsisting on their own”, as substances no less than attributes. The second, underlined clause is the troublesome one, since the loose connecting particle (δὲ) leaves unclear its precise relation to what is said in the first clause.

Were I to read the passage in the light of my account of the Third Man, I would take the second clause to explain a consequence of the first. If indeed a Form is a substance and if, as a result, what plays the role of a one-over-many is some other entity—something that will be predicated not merely of the many particular men but also of the Form, which is now treated as yet another substance to which the term ‘man’ applies—then there will be a “third man”, a

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6 The best text of the passage is by D. Harfinger, ‘Edizione critica del testo del “De Ideis” di Aristotele’, in W. Leszl, Il ‘De Ideis’ di Aristotele e la teoria platonica delle idee (Florence, 1975). As his title indicates, Harfinger collects those portions of Alexander’s commentary that he takes to derive from Aristotle’s On Forms. For other passages from Alexander, I rely on Hayduck’s edition. (Since Harfinger records Hayduck’s page- and line-numbering, all my references are to the latter.) The text I am concerned with is everywhere that of the “recessio vulgata” (MSS OAC) as opposed to the “recessio altera” (MSS LF); for details, see Hayduck’s preface (vii–x). For an excellent annotated translation of the commentary on Metaphysics A, see W. E. Dooley, Alexander of Aphrodisias on Aristotle’s Metaphysics 1 (Ithaca, NY, 1989).

new Form “of Manhood” besides the particulars and the original Form. And so forth.

Yet, the second clause might just as easily be read quite differently, along the lines of the standard interpretation. To do so, one need only construe the clause as reporting a new assumption that Plato makes concerning the Forms. Interpreted that way, Alexander would be maintaining that the Form Manhood is not merely a separately subsisting entity but also an entity of which ‘man’ is predicated. And since the general term is thus predicated of the Form as well as of the particular men, another Form will be needed to account for the term’s relation to the members of that new multiplicity. (At least, so long as one supposes that Plato is committed to a suitably strong version of the “non-identity” assumption, which one might take to be at work in the first sentence of the passage: “If what is predicated truly of many things is also something else apart from the things of which it is predicated . . .” (ll. 23–4).) And so forth.

Although his report of the Third Man is thus ambiguous, Alexander appears to favour one of the two accounts, and it is the standard one.¹ Immediately after giving the report, he insists that it is the same as another argument he has already recounted under the heading ‘Third Man’. He attributes that earlier argument to various authors, among them Aristotle’s student Eudemus (see 85. 10–11); and he sums up both arguments by saying, “[The Platonists] held that similar things are similar by participation in some same thing. For particular men and the Forms are similar” (ἐθεντο τὰ ὁμοια τοι τῶν πιστῶν ὑμών ὁμοια εἶναι: ὁμοίων γὰρ ὁ τε ἄνθρωποι καὶ αἱ ἰδέαι, 85. 4–5). Thus, Alexander considers Aristotle’s argument no less than Eudemus’ to turn on a similarity claim; and while such a claim does not figure directly in Alexander’s report of the Third Man, the most ready way of finding a place for it would be to suppose that Alexander considers the underlined clause of the argument to mark

¹ I might note here that I am not inclined to consider Alexander’s report as a quotation from Aristotle’s lost work. Some commentators have taken it to be just that, but I think it much more likely to be Alexander’s own summary of an Aristotelian argument. Hence my practice of speaking as if Alexander is the author. In any event, because I think the text of the report is in fact ambiguous, nothing much hinges on the question of authorship: what is crucial is how Alexander goes on to interpret the report. Except for one or two relatively minor details, my argument would remain unchanged if one were to insist that what we have are Aristotle’s own words.
a distinct premiss, one justified by the idea that the Form Manhood is itself a man.

I must say that I find such an interpretation a curious one. Had Aristotle’s argument really turned on a similarity claim, one would have expected the claim to have been set out more explicitly and developed more fully. What is more, assuming that Alexander’s summary is roughly accurate as regards the content of Aristotle’s argument, the thesis that a Form “subsists on its own” plays a prominent role in Aristotle’s reasoning; yet it is at best incidental to the regress as Eudemus describes it.⁹ I shall say more about that point shortly. Before doing so, I want to discuss Alexander’s reason for assimilating Aristotle’s account of the Third Man to Eudemus’. For I am convinced that Alexander does have a reason: he is driven by an interpretative problem in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*.

When Aristotle begins attacking the theory of Forms in *Metaphysics A* 9, he refers cryptically to several arguments for the existence of Forms as well as to several of his own criticisms of those arguments. He introduces the Third Man by saying, “of the more accurate accounts [οἱ ἀκριβέστεροι τῶν λόγων], some produce ideas of relations, of which we say there is no independent class, while others announce the third man [οἷς δὲ τὸν τρίτον ἀνθρώπων λέγουσιν]” (990b15–17).¹⁰ In explaining that remark, Alexander is faced with the task of clarifying what Aristotle means by calling certain accounts “more accurate”. Unfortunately, Aristotle does not explain the phrase in the *Metaphysics*, and apparently never did so in his *On Forms* (the probable source for his remarks at 990b9–17).¹¹ Alexander is thus left to guess Aristotle’s meaning. In discussing the first

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⁹ For a detailed attempt to reconcile the two arguments, see Fine, *On Ideas*, 215–23. Alexander’s report of Eudemus’ argument is quoted in n. 12 below.

¹⁰ Most scholars take the λόγοι at issue in the phrase οἱ ἀκριβέστεροι τῶν λόγων to be Platonic arguments for the Forms, but I am attracted to the idea that they are Aristotelian arguments against the Forms (“the more accurate criticisms”). Cherniss explicitly rejected that idea (see *Criticism*, 276 n. 184), but I remain unconvinced by his arguments. For my present purposes, however, the issue is of incidental importance: my remarks on the passage could be made to fit either interpretation, and so I translate λόγοι vaguely as ‘accounts’. If indeed the term refers to Platonic arguments for the Forms, then the subsequent λέγουσιν (which I translate ‘announce’) is best taken to have the force of ‘imply’, on which see Cherniss, loc. cit.

¹¹ Despite what Fine suggests in *On Ideas*, 326–7 n. 69, I persist in agreeing with P. Wilpert (‘Reste verlorenen Aristotelesschriften bei Alexander von Aphrodisias’, *Hermes*, 75 (1946), 369–96 at 383) and Cherniss (*Criticism*, 275–7) that the passage is most plausibly taken to report Alexander’s interpretation of Aristotle rather than Aristotle’s own pronouncement regarding the meaning of ἀκριβέστεροι.
group of "more accurate" accounts, the ones producing Forms of relations (τῶν πρὸς τι ποιοῦσαι ἰδέαις), Alexander focuses on a particular Aristotelian argument and observes that it "seems to aim more carefully and more accurately and more directly at a proof for the Forms" (διὸ καὶ ἀκριβέστερον καὶ προσεχότερον ἀπεσθανῇ τὴς δεῖξεως τῶν ἰδεῶν, 83. 18–19). He explains by noting that the argument turns on the idea that a Form is a "model" or "paradigm": "unlike those that preceded it, this argument seems to show not merely that the common thing is something apart from [παρά] particular things, but also that there is a model of the things in this realm, [a model] that is unqualifiedly [τὸ παράδειγμα τι ἐίναι τῶν ἑνταῦθα ὑπὸ τούτων κυρίως ὑπαρχον] This most of all seems to be characteristic of the Forms" (83. 20–2).

That explanation works well for the argument at hand (for which see 82. 11–83. 17), but it is quite implausible when it comes to the Third Man. In Alexander's account of the latter, there is simply no mention of a Form's role as a paradigm. As I suspect, Alexander is well aware of the difficulty, and that is why he bothers to mention another "Third Man", the one deriving from Eudemos and other sources. The latter argument is essentially a resemblance regress; and as Alexander makes clear with his mention of the thesis that a Form is an unqualified instance of a certain character (δ κυρίως ἐστὶ τούτῳ), what grounds the resemblance claim is precisely the idea that a Form is what Alexander calls "a model that is unqualifiedly". The suspicion that Eudemos' argument is the one playing the crucial interpretative role becomes all the more compelling once one observes that when Alexander assimilates Aristotle's argument to Eudemos' at 85. 4–5, his remark is derived almost word for word from his report of Eudemos' view (see 84. 1–2).12

Unfortunately, Alexander's interpretation of the phrase 'more

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12 Alexander describes Eudemos' argument thus (83. 34–84. 7): "[The Platonists] maintain that the things predicated in common of substances have those characters unqualifiedly [κυρίως τε ἐίναι τοις] and are Forms. Again, [they say,] similar things are similar by participation in some same thing, which is that unqualifiedly [τὰ ὅμως ἄλλως τοῦ αὐτοῦ τινος μετουσία ὅμως ἄλλος ἐίναι, ὃ κυρίως ἐστὶ τούτῳ]; and this is the Form. But if this is so, and what is predicated in common of certain things, if it is not the same as any of the things of which it is predicated, is something else apart from it (after all, this is why man-itself is a genus: it is predicated of particulars but not the same as any of them), there will be a third man besides the particular, such as Socrates or Plato, and the Form; and this will itself be one in number." Compare the underlined phrase with Alexander's summary at 85. 4–5 (quoted earlier): ἐκείνῳ τὰ ὅμως τοῦ αὐτοῦ τινὸς μετουσία ὅμως ἐίναι: ὅμως γὰρ ὃ τε ἀνθρώπου καὶ αἱ ἰδέαι.
accurate’ must be deemed an unlikely one, even ignoring the indirect way in which Alexander seeks to justify it. The accounts that Aristotle characterizes as “more accurate” are not the only ones involving the claim that a Form is a model; the previously mentioned arguments “from the sciences” do so as well.\textsuperscript{13} What is more, the references to the Third Man in the *Metaphysics* and *Sophistical Refutations* make no mention at all of the idea that a Form is a model. As I pointed out earlier, they say only that Plato confuses *this* and *such*; and it would be reading an enormous amount into the text to suppose that Aristotle has in mind as the source of confusion a conjunction of self-predication and non-identity assumptions and, as their partial source, the thesis that a Form serves as a model. As I shall argue later, there is a much more straightforward interpretation that renders unnecessary any such contortions.

What I find striking about Alexander’s interpretation is that it is quite close to what I believe is the correct one. However, I suspect, Alexander is prevented from seeing the correct interpretation because he fails to give proper weight to a crucial feature of Aristotle’s argument. Specifically, Alexander is right to assert that the “more accurate” accounts treat the theory of Forms “more carefully and more accurately and more directly”—at least if one takes him to mean that such accounts attend closely to the way in which Plato elaborates his theory and may thus be said to treat the Forms specifically, as distinct from universals or general concepts.\textsuperscript{14} In the

\textsuperscript{13} Cf. Cherniss, *Criticism*, 275–7. In the arguments “from the sciences”, the paradigm is not described as *κυρίως δὲ* (see 79. 5–8). That is significant for my interpretation, as I explain below.

\textsuperscript{14} Cherniss takes *ἀκριβέστερος* to mean ‘more abstractly logical’ (*Criticism*, 276) and cites as support Ross’s comment on the phrase *λογικῶτερον καὶ ἀκριβέστερον* at *Metaph.* 1086\textsuperscript{10} 10 (see Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (2 vols.; Oxford, 1924), ii. 424). Yet Ross’s interpretation of *λογικῶτερον* is out of keeping with Aristotle’s normal usage (as Ross himself acknowledges), and my interpretation makes better sense of Aristotle’s remark: *ἀκριβέστερος* refers to an account that captures more precisely than others the details of Plato’s theory, while *λογικῶτερον* emphasizes that the account is more verbally exact as regards Plato’s own usage. (In commenting on 990\textsuperscript{15}, Ross gives a somewhat modified interpretation of *ἀκριβέστερος*. See Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, i. 194, and note the remarks by Cherniss, *Criticism*, 276–8 n. 184.)

Fine has proposed understanding *ἀκριβέστερος* to refer to valid arguments for the existence of Forms, as opposed to the invalid ones that she thinks are discussed at *Metaph.* 990\textsuperscript{11} 11–15 and explicated by Alexander at 79. 3–32. 7. (See On Ideas, 26–7, with nn. 38–44 (pp. 251–3); and compare Fine’s argument in ‘Aristotle and the More Accurate Arguments’, in M. Schofield and M. C. Nussbaum (eds.), *Language and Logos: Studies in Ancient Greek Philosophy Presented to G. E. L. Owen* (Cambridge, 1982), 155–77.) Fine’s position has some similarities to my own, but I am not
Aristotle’s “Third Man” Argument against the Forms

argument producing Forms of relations, what warrants the label ‘more accurate’ is the contention (which is central to the argument) that a Form exhibits “fully and properly” (κυρίως καὶ ἀληθῶς, 83. 14) the meaning of a general term, whereas sensible objects are quite incapable of doing so (83. 6 ff.). If that were what Alexander had in mind in speaking of “a model . . . that is unqualified”, then he would be quite correct. But he would still have gone wrong in generalizing that explanation to the Third Man. In the latter case, what Aristotle attacks is a different feature of Plato’s theory, namely the idea that the Forms are “separated” (κεχωρισμένον) and hence substances. For as I have already noted and shall explain later, Aristotle considers separation to be a mark of substantiality.11 Alexander fails to see the polemical significance of Aristotle’s claim that Forms are separate or “subsist on their own” (κατ’ ἰδιὰν υφεστῶς, 84. 28), and so he is led to suppose that, like the earlier argument, the Third Man turns on the idea that a Form is a model or paradigm.

To support my contention that Alexander fails to appreciate the significance of the separation-claim, let me point out the weak way in which he incorporates it into his summary of the Third Man.16

ultimately convinced that ‘more accurate’ is meant to convey a notion of formal validity. Unfortunately, I cannot discuss her elaborate interpretation here. (For her reading of 83. 18–22, discussed above, see On Ideas, 27, 157–9, with nn. 69–71 (pp. 326–7).)

11 Thus, at Metaph. 1086b16–19 he warns: “If one does not allow that substances are separate in precisely the way in which particulars are said to exist, one will destroy substance as we mean to speak of it” (εἴ μὲν γάρ τις μὴ θήσῃ τὰς οὐσίας εἶναι κεχωρισμένας, καὶ τὸν ῥήτον τοῦτον ὡς λέγεται τὰ καθ’ ἐκαστὰ τῶν ὁμοίων, ἀναιρήσει τῶν οὐσιῶν ὡς βουλήμεθα λέγειν). I translate ὡς λέγεται τὰ καθ’ ἐκαστὰ τῶν ὁμοίων with an understood ἐνω: “in precisely the way in which particulars are said to be existents” (cf. Metaph. 1088a22–5). Others translate as if κεχωρισμέναι εἶναι were understood: “in precisely the way in which particular beings are said to be separate.” See also 1076b36–1077a1: “Some things are separate and some not. The former are substances” (ἐπεὶ δ’ ἐστὶ τὰ μὲν χωριστά τὰ δ’ οὐ χωριστά, οὐσίαι ἐκείνα). Cf. 1029a27–8, 1087a21–4.

I might remark that the argument for the Forms figuring in Alexander’s account of the Third Man is a version of the “one-over-many” argument, which Alexander reports earlier, at 80. 8–15. That earlier report likewise mentions the claim that the Forms are “separated” (κεχωρισμένον); but no argumentative work is done by the latter attribute, which is mentioned only as part of the argument’s conclusion. Thus, Alexander can go on to object that the argument establishes the existence only of Aristotelian universals: δὴ λόγῳ δὲ δὴ οὐδὲ οὕτως ο λόγος οὐδές εἶναι συλλογίζεται, ἀλλὰ διεκπείναι βούλεται καὶ οὕτως ἄλλο εἶναι τὸ κοινὸς κατηγορόμενον τῶν καθ’ ἐκαστὰ ὑπὸ καταγωγοῖς (81. 7–10).

16 If one insists that 84. 22–85. 3 records Aristotle’s own words (compare n. 8), the following remarks are otiose. One would have to acknowledge merely that the
Although Alexander notes that Forms are "separated" from particulars, he apparently takes Aristotle to mean no more than that the Forms are distinct entities from the things that participate in them. Thus, he glosses the claim that the Forms are "separated" with the statement that what is predicated "is also something else apart [ἄλλο παρά] from the things of which it is predicated" (84. 23). Now, the preposition παρά could imply more than mere distinctness, as it does at one point in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* (77*ο*5–7, with which contrast 100*ο*6–8); but shortly before Alexander explains the Third Man, he explicitly distances himself from any such usage. In evaluating the so-called "arguments from the sciences", he says:

Such arguments do not prove the thesis in question, that there are Forms, but prove instead that there are certain things besides [παρά] sensible particulars. It is not at all the case that if there are things besides [παρά] particulars, these are Forms: besides [παρά] particulars there are things held in common [τὰ κοινά], which we say are also the objects of the sciences. (79. 15–19)\(^7\)

Given such an explicit remark, I can conclude only that in explaining the Third Man, Alexander associates the phrases ἄλλο παρά and κεχωρισμένον because, although a separation claim was in fact made by Aristotle, Alexander does not see its significance for the argument. That is confirmed, I think, by Alexander's subsequent use of the bare ἄλλος to express the same idea (cf. 84. 26: καὶ ἄλλος τῶν καθ' ἐκαστὰ ἀνθρώπων ἐστὶν, and 84. 28: ἄλλος ὁ κατηγορούμενος ὁμ κατηγορεῖται, καὶ κατ' ἰδίαν ὑφεστόσως).

Such a judgement can further be supported by looking at another passage in Alexander's commentary, one to which interpreters of the Third Man have paid little attention. I mentioned earlier that, as his source for the Third Man, Alexander cites not only Aristotle's *On Forms* but also a passage from the *Metaphysics*. The one he has in mind comes from A 9 and almost immediately follows Aristotle's mention of the Third Man. If one compares Alexander's discussion with the text of Aristotle's argument, it is clear that Alexander completely distorts the argument and that his distortion stems from a failure to give due weight to Aristotle's charge that Plato treats

idea of separation is not set out with sufficient clarity in Aristotle's discussion of the Third Man.

\(^7\) See also Alexander's report of Eudemus' Third Man argument, where the phrase ἄλλο τὶ ἐστι παρ' ἐκεῖνο is glossed oδδενι αὐτῶν [τῶν καθ' ἐκαστα] ἢν ὁ αὐτός.
Forms as substances. I shall address this issue in the following section.

III

Let me begin by quoting the passage and commenting briefly on it.¹⁸ I shall then remark on Alexander’s interpretation. The passage is 990b22–991a8 (compare 1079a19–b3):

Furthermore, according to the supposition by which we say there are Forms, there will be Forms not merely of substances but of many other things as well. . . . But according to what is necessary and the doctrines about them, if the Forms are objects of participation, there must be Forms only of substances [εἰ ἐστὶ μεθεκτά τὰ εἴδη, τῶν οὐσιῶν ἀναγκαίον ἰδέας εἶναι μόνον]. After all, things do not participate in them accidentally; rather, a thing must participate in a Form as in something not predicated of a subject [οὐ γὰρ κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς μετέχονται ἄλλα δεῖ ταύτῃ ἐκάστου μετέχειν ἢ μὴ καθ’ ἅποκειμένου λέγεται]. (I mean, for instance, that if something participates in the double-by-itself, that same thing also participates in the eternal, but only accidentally. For being eternal is an accident of the double.) Hence, the Forms will be substance. And the very same terms must designate substance both here and there [in the realm of Forms]. Otherwise, what would it mean to say that there is something besides the particulars, the one-over-many?

But on the one hand, if Forms and participants have the same nature [ταὐτὸ εἴδος], there will be something common to them [τις κοινόν]. (For why should twoness be one and the same thing in the perishable twos, and likewise in those that are many but eternal, yet different when the two by itself is compared with the particular?) And on the other hand, if [Forms and participants] did not have the same nature, they would have only a name in common and would be alike only in the sense in which one might call Callias and a piece of sculpted wood a man, although one observes no community between them.

¹⁸ My account is closest to those of Cherniss (Criticism, 305–8) and Vlastos (‘The “Two-Level Paradoxes” in Aristotle’, in PS, 323–34 at 326 ff.). A different interpretation has been proposed by G. E. L. Owen, ‘Dialectic and Erotic in the Treatment of the Forms’, in id. (ed.), Aristotle on Dialectic: The Topics (Papers of the Third Symposium Aristotellicum; Oxford, 1968), 103–25 (repr. in id., Logic, 221–38), and then developed with some revisions by J. Annas, ‘Aristotle on Substance, Accident and Plato’s Forms’ [‘Substance’], Phronesis, 22 (1977), 146–60. (See also Annas, Aristotle’s Metaphysics Books M and N (Oxford, 1976) 156–9.) I do not find those readings compelling, but I shall not argue the point here, since a proper treatment would involve me in a broad discussion of Aristotle’s characteristic practices in attacking the Forms.
Aristotle begins by maintaining that for the Platonists there are Forms "of substances" as well as "of many other things". I take him to mean that there are Forms corresponding to terms like 'man' and 'animal' as well as, say, 'equal' and 'beautiful'. None the less, Aristotle goes on to object, there can be Forms "only of substances".

He explains by describing a view he thinks the Platonists must reject. It is that something can participate in a Form "accidentally", in so far as the Form is an attribute of some other entity. That is nonsense, as the Platonists themselves are convinced: to allow as much would be to suppose, for instance, that whatever participates in the double likewise participates in the eternal simply in virtue of the fact that the double is itself eternal. To avoid such a view, Aristotle thinks, one must insist that, qua objects of participation, the Forms are not predicated of any other entities. That is to say, one must grant that the Forms are substances. And if that is the case, it makes sense to suppose that there are Forms corresponding only to substance terms ('man', 'animal', etc.). Indeed, it would be futile to resist that conclusion by maintaining that what is a substance in the realm of Forms bears no relation to what is a substance here. If in fact a Form is to serve as a "one-over-many", it must share a nature with its participants and so must be of the same ontological kind as them—or so Aristotle insists.

Apart from resulting in a severely restricted domain of Forms, that conclusion raises a further problem, which Aristotle goes on to

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19 By 'substance' Aristotle is thus thinking of what he called "secondary substance" in the Categories. For dialectical purposes, he is here ignoring the idea of "primary substance".

20 I take it that such absurdities are what Aristotle has in mind when he enlists the Platonists in support of his argument with the phrase τὰς δοξὰς τὰς πρὶς αἰῶνος, 990a28.

21 Annas objects to this interpretation as follows: "The Platonists could defend themselves by denying that what applies to 'eternal' carried over to all, or even most, other non-substance predicates. To do this . . . [t]hey could simply point out that eternity is a very special kind of attribute; it attaches to its subject necessarily" ('Substance', 151). Yet, even leaving aside the question whether that would provide a way of distinguishing 'the double is eternal' from, say, 'the double is even' (where "accidental participation" might conceivably occur), it is not at all clear that Aristotle would think of the Platonists as having the resources to distinguish between various sorts of "necessary" and "contingent" predication (as Annas herself discusses, p. 156). And even if he did, the burden would surely be on the Platonists to make a case for the relevance of the proposed distinction; one might well contend, for instance, that "accidental participation" is even more likely for a "necessary" predicate of a Form than for a "contingent" one.
explain in the following lines. Since the general terms that designate substances here do so as well in the realm of Forms, one may ask whether a given term is univocal in its various applications. One would expect so, given the above line of reasoning. But in that case, Aristotle argues, "there will be something common" to Forms and particulars. In other words, in so far as a Form is a substance, it effectively becomes one of the many entities to which the term applies: *qua* substance, Manhood is one of the many men. And thus, the Form must be taken to exemplify a further entity, an attribute, in virtue of which the general term applies to it as well as to the particulars. That is of course incoherent: to allow as much is to begin on the regress of the Third Man (as I have described it). Yet, if one were to try escaping that conclusion by embracing the contrary position, that the general term is not in fact univocal in its different applications, then the Form would not bear any special relation to the particulars—and presumably, there would no longer be any reason to posit Forms.

On that reading, the first part of Aristotle's argument announces an unwelcome limitation to the domain of Forms: there are Forms corresponding only to substance terms. The second part neatly collapses the domain of Forms altogether by means of a dilemma, the first horn of which is the Third Man argument.

Alexander, of course, has a different reading of the Third Man; and thus one might well expect him to interpret the passage differently. He tries to do so, but he has a great deal of difficulty making sense of Aristotle's argument: his convoluted exposition of it occupies a good seven pages of his commentary. Alexander's central problem is a failure to understand the significance of Aristotle's claim that Forms are substances. Instead of seeing that claim as part of an attack on Plato's theory, Alexander takes it for granted as orthodox Platonic doctrine: "[The Forms] are substances. After all, [the Platonists] certainly would not maintain that the principles are *not* substances, since what is not substance would then be prior to substance" (89. 16–18). Given such a remark, one would imagine that Alexander is hesitant to read the first part of the passage as concerned to *argue* that Forms are substances and, consequently, that there are Forms corresponding only to substance terms. That is indeed the case. When faced with the task of explaining Aristotle's early claim that there are Forms "only of substances", Alexander makes a peculiar move. He takes Aristotle to be maintaining that
what participates in a Form must be a substance and never an accident: "hence, those things that have their being by participation in the Forms as causes must likewise be substances. So for [the Platonists] there will be Forms of substances only" (89. 18–20; see further ll. 20–4).\(^{22}\)

That this is a misinterpretation is undeniable. To cite only the most obvious difficulty, it makes no sense of Aristotle’s explicit inference at 990\(^b\)34 that the Forms are substances. Alexander’s gloss on that inference is tellingly weak: "In saying ‘so that the Forms will be substance’, he means ‘so that if the Forms exist, they are substance’ or ‘so that the Forms will be only substance’—in fact, this latter point has been assumed” (91. 11–12).\(^{23}\)

When it comes to explaining Aristotle’s subsequent objection that a Form and its participants have the same nature and are thus related to a common entity (τι κοινόν), Alexander does not think to appeal to the idea that a Form, qua substance, is not predicated of any subject and so must be taken to exemplify another entity as attribute. Instead, he introduces the thesis that in so far as a Form is a cause, it must share a nature with what is caused by it. He then argues that because Form and participants have a common nature, there will have to be a new Form—"a Form of the Form", and so on, ad infinitum. (See 93. 2–6; and concerning the claim that the Forms are causes, cf. 89. 9 ff.) Alexander of course recognizes the similarity of that interpretation to the way he has sought to explain the Third Man; and so he asserts that the present argument is just another version of the one he reported earlier at 84. 22–85. 3 (see 93. 6–7).\(^{24}\)

\(^{22}\) In what follows in his commentary, Alexander interprets Aristotle’s statement ἀλλὰ δεῖ ταῦτα ἐκάστου μετέχειν ἃ μὴ καθ’ ὑποκειμένου λέγεται as a claim that things participating in a Form are not predicated of a subject. He then concludes: "The things that have their being in relation to the Forms are substances, since they participate per se and not per accident in the substances [i.e. the Forms]" (90. 10–11). See also 90. 21–91. 5.

\(^{23}\) Bonitz proposes emending the text of *Metaph.* 991\(^b\)54 so that instead of reading ὡστ’ ἐσται οὐσία τὰ εἶδη it will read ὡστ’ ἐσται οὐσίων [or οὐσίας] τὰ εἶδη. But that is precisely because he assumes Alexander’s interpretation of the argument to be correct and realizes that there is no way to make Aristotle’s words fit Alexander’s interpretation. See H. Bonitz, *Aristotelis Metaphysica* (2 vols.; Bonn, 1848–9), ii. 114; and contrast Ross, *Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, i. 197.

\(^{24}\) In *Metaph.* 93. 1–7: "Either the nature and account of the Forms and of the things participating in them are the same, or else they are not. If they are in fact the same, then just as there is something common to the participants (since they have the same nature), so there will be something common to and predicated of the
Unfortunately, it is utterly unclear how that interpretation may be squared with Alexander’s attempt to read the preceding lines as mounting an argument that what participates in a Form is a substance. At best, one might say that the idea of a Form as a cause is a common theme underlying both phases of the overall argument. First, that idea serves to secure the claim that, like the Forms, participants must be substances; and next, it helps motivate the resemblance regress. But on that reading, the passage becomes undeniably awkward, since the crucial idea is nowhere made explicit and since the later phase of the argument really has no direct bearing on the conclusion of the earlier phase. That is apparent from Alexander’s fumbling attempt at a summary (93. 10–14), where he contents himself with suggesting that the argument’s later phase simply provides additional support for the earlier conclusion that participants are substances.25

As I have said, Alexander’s fundamental problem is his inability to see the thesis that Forms are substances as a weapon Aristotle uses to attack Plato’s theory. Given his misunderstanding here, it is only to be expected that in reporting the Third Man, he would likewise neglect the significance of the remark that Forms are separate, κεχωρισμένα: failing to see any role for the thesis that Forms are substances, Alexander takes Aristotle to have in mind merely that Forms are different from their participants; and lacking any other explanation of the regress, he convinces himself that it is due to some idea of a resemblance between Forms and participants.

Instead of confirming his interpretation of the Third Man, Alexander’s reading of Metaphysics 990b22–991a8 thus supplies a telling indictment of his attempt to seek an Aristotelian warrant for the interpretation. Alexander is quite right that the latter passage draws on the Third Man, but contrary to what he suggests, the argument has nothing to do with the idea that a Form imparts its nature

participants and the Form from which they are. After all, the Form has the same nature as those things. But in that case, what is predicated in common of them will be a Form, and so there would be a Form of a Form, and this would go on to infinity. What Aristotle says here is the second argument we gave to explain the Third Man.”

25 In Metaph. 93. 10–14: “If the Forms and their participants have the same nature, as has been proven, there will be something common to each Form and to the things that are by reference to it. But in this manner, the things here, having as they do the same nature as the Forms, will be substances just because the Forms, with reference to which they are, are substances; and so there would be Forms only of substances.”
to its participants and therefore resembles them. Instead, it turns directly on the claim that Plato mistakenly treats a Form as both this and such, both substance and attribute.

IV

Further support for that judgement can be drawn from the one extended discussion of the Third Man in Aristotle’s surviving works—namely, *Sophistical Refutations* 178b36—179a10. Unfortunately, the discussion is a complicated one: rather than explain the Third Man directly, Aristotle proceeds by comparing it to another argument, one whose precise details are themselves somewhat unclear. None the less, I shall argue, Aristotle’s remarks can be given a cogent interpretation, and it is one that supports my account of the Third Man rather than the standard one. What is more, a correct understanding of Aristotle’s reasoning provides a good deal of insight into why Aristotle might think Plato is vulnerable to the Third Man in the first place. In the present section, I shall offer a general interpretation of the structure of Aristotle’s argument. In the next, I take up Aristotle’s diagnosis of Plato’s mistake.

In chapter 22 of the *Sophistical Refutations*, Aristotle is concerned to provide examples of fallacies resulting from “expressing in like fashion things that are not the same” (τὸ ὠσαύτως λέγεσθαι τὰ μὴ ταὐτά, 178a4—5). He observes that the fallacies are to be exposed by carefully heeding the differences between various types of predication (γένη τῶν κατηγορίων). In other words, each of the fallacies stems either from a failure to observe that an utterance is ambiguous and may be understood in several ways, with reference to several such types, or else from a misleading grammatical analogy, whereby an utterance belonging to one type is mistakenly associated with another.

At 178b36—179a10 Aristotle classes the Third Man among those fallacies. As in *Metaphysics* Z 13, he maintains that the commitment to a “third man” arises from a failure to distinguish adequately the roles of this and such.

Let me begin with a translation, divided into numbered sections for ease of reference.26 Since Aristotle’s language is highly elliptical,

26 The Greek text is that of Ross’s OCT edition, except for two cases in which I prefer the unanimous reading of the manuscripts to an emendation made by
especially when it comes to connecting particles and transitional phrases, I shall fill out the translation with some interpretative expansions (in brackets). Following the translation, I shall further elaborate and defend my interpretation.

(1) [178b36-9] There is also the idea that there exists a third man besides manhood and the particular men. [That idea represents a confusion,] since 'man', and indeed every common term, indicates not a this but rather a quality or quantity or relation or some such entity.

(2) [178b39-179a3] Something similar is also at work in the question "Are Coriscus and educated Coriscus the same or not?" [The same, one might answer.] on the grounds that the one [word, 'Coriscus'] indicates a this, the other [word, 'educated'] a such, so that the latter [entity, the such] cannot be set apart.

(3) [179a3-5] Yet, what creates the third man is not the setting-apart but, rather, the avowal that there exists a this [as the referent of 'man']. For [if one clearly distinguishes a such from a this,] it will not be possible that there is [a single kind of entity,] a this[,] that includes both Callias and man.

(4) [179a5-10] Indeed, it will not make any difference [towards the possibility of setting apart an entity] if one should maintain that what is being set apart is not a this but a such, since [in the latter case] there will be the one thing—namely manhood—over against the many men. Plainly, one must not allow that a this is predicated in common of many things; instead [what is predicated in common] has the character of either a quality or a relation or a quantity or some such entity.

(1) [178b36-9] καὶ ὅτι ἔστι τις τρίτος ἀνθρώπος παρ’ αὐτῶν καὶ τούς; καθ’ ἐκαστον’ τὸ γὰρ ἀνθρώπος καὶ ἀπαν τὸ κοινὸν οὗ τόδε τι ἀλλὰ τοιόνδε τι ἡ ποσινὴ η πρός τι ή τῶν τοιούτων η σημαινει.

(2) [178b39-179a3] ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ Κορίσκου καὶ Κορίσκου μονοικός, πότερον ταῦταν’ ἢ ἐτέρου; τὸ μὲν γὰρ τόδε τι, τὸ δὲ τοιόνδε σημαίνει, ὡστ’ οὐκ ἔστι αὐτὸ ἐκθέσθαι.

(3) [179a3-5] οὗ τὸ ἐκτίθεσθαι δὲ ποιεῖ τὸν τρίτον ἀνθρώπον, ἀλλὰ τὸ ὅπερ τόδε τι εἶναι αὐξημένων οὗ γὰρ ἔσται τόδε τι εἶναι ὅπερ Καλλίας καὶ ὅπερ ἀνθρώπος ἔστιν.

(4) [179a5-10] οὐδ’ ε’ τις τὸ ἐκτίθεμένον μὴ ὅπερ τόδε τι εἶναι λέγα σ’ ἄλλ’ ὅπερ ποιούν, οὐδὲν διόιτος ἐστιν γὰρ τὸ παρὰ τούς πολλὸς οὐ πετ’ οἷον τὸ ἀνθρώπος. φανερὸν οὖν ὅτι οὐ δοκεῖν τόδε τι εἶναι τὸ κοινὸ κατηγορούμενον ἐπὶ πάσον, ἀλλ’ ἔτους ποιοῦν η πρός τι ή ποσινὴ η τῶν τοιούτων τι σημαίνειν.

Ross. (The first case is 179a4, where I read ἔστιν instead of Ross’s ἔστι. The second is 179a5, where I read ὅπερ Καλλίας καὶ ὅπερ ἀνθρώπος ἔστιν, while Ross prints οὕσπερ Καλλίας καὶ ὅπερ ἀνθρώπος ἔστιν. See further n. 34.
In (1), Aristotle brings up the Third Man and observes that it is to be avoided by refusing to allow that a general term refers to a *this*. In other words, the argument that there is a “third man” turns on a failure to respect the type distinction between singular and general expressions and hence to understand the difference between *thises* and *suches*.

As the translation makes clear, I am presuming that the expression τὸ κοινὸν at 178b38 denotes a *word or phrase* predicated commonly of several entities. The expression might be interpreted otherwise, as denoting an *entity* predicated of several others—κοινὸν κατηγορούμενον. There is nothing in the passage that would decide between the two interpretations, but I prefer the “linguistic” one because it makes for a neater presentation of the account I want to develop and because it fits with the overall theme of chapter 22—which has to do with the misinterpretation of certain pieces of language. However, I shall point out below that my reading could be made to work even if τὸ κοινὸν were interpreted non-linguistically. (See further nn. 31, 33.)

Aristotle does not go on to explain the Third Man directly. Instead, at the outset of (2) he introduces another argument, one that

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27 As the translation makes clear, the use of γάρ at 178b38 is elliptical for a phrase explaining that the following remark supplies Aristotle’s reason for rejecting the idea of a “third man”. For a similar use of the particle in the immediate context, see 178b27.

28 That manhood is unequivocally described as a *such* should come as no surprise. Aristotle has not yet articulated the notion of a *form* and thus has not yet begun to worry about the relationship of form to substance. For comments on the *this*-such distinction and an explicit description of manhood as a *such*, see Cat. 3a10–21, along with my ‘A New Defense of Tropes? On Categories 3b10–18’, Ancient Philosophy, 17 (1997), 309–15. (But note also the opposing interpretation by D. T. Devereux, ‘Inherence and Primary Substance in Aristotle’s Categories’, Ancient Philosophy, 12 (1992), 113–31, and cf. Devereux’s ‘Aristotle’s Categories 3b10–21: A Reply to Sharma’, Ancient Philosophy, 18 (1998), 341–52.)

29 My interpretation might be supported by the phrase τὸ ἀνθρώπως, where the neuter article could be understood to signal a mention of the word ἀνθρώπως. Yet the neuter could also be explained differently: Aristotle may use it simply in order to link the word ἀνθρώπως closely to the phrase τὸ κοινὸν. (A similar use occurs in (q)—in the phrase τὸ παρὰ τούτος πολλοὶ ἐν τι, οὗ τὸ ἀνθρώπος—where the neuter before ἀνθρώπος effectively stresses that man is an entity (ἐν τι), albeit not a *this*.) The use of *σημαίνει* at 178b39 is unfortunately likewise ambiguous. Although Aristotle sometimes uses the word for the relationship between a linguistic item and an extralinguistic one (as at Cat. 1a26), the construction ‘κ εἰς σημαίνει γ’ frequently expresses that an entity (or kind of entity) κ is to be classed as (a) γ, as at Cat. 3a10 ff.: πᾶσα δὲ οὐδεὶς δοκεῖ τὸς ἢ σημαίνει. (See also 179a10 of the present passage and Metaph. 103b35–1039a3, quoted in sect. 1.)
bears some relation to his understanding of the Third Man. What precisely he considers the relation to be is unfortunately unclear. He might mean that this new argument rests on a confusion similar to the one that generates talk of a “third man”. Yet I do not think so. Aristotle will indeed go on to reject the new argument as confused; but I believe he introduces it here because it supplies a diagnosis of the Third Man that is similar to his own. In other words, he regards the argument sketched in (2) as affording an interesting response to the Third Man, albeit a mistaken one; and he wants to use that response as a foil by means of which to clarify and recommend his own position.

The similarity the argument of (2) has to Aristotle’s position is that it insists on the importance of recognizing a type distinction between singular and common terms. The crucial difference is that the argument of (2) refuses to take that distinction in type as indicative of a difference in kind among entities.

Aristotle introduces the argument with the question “Are Coriscus and educated Coriscus the same or not?” What I think he has in mind is the question whether the term ‘educated’ refers to an entity different from the referent of ‘Coriscus’. The position he goes on to discuss—namely that “Coriscus” and “educated Coriscus” are in fact “the same”—may be characterized as the nominalistic one that a general term does not refer to anything apart from a particular, a substance. For as I take Aristotle to be thinking, the temptation to say that educated Coriscus is identical with Coriscus amounts to a supposition that the term ‘educated’ does not refer to anything in its own right. Rather than introduce a new ontological commitment, the general term merely supplies another way of “naming” or “designating” what is likewise designated by a proper name: whereas ‘Coriscus’ names an individual “properly”, ‘educated’ may be said to name the very same individual, this time “commonly.”

30 Compare Metaph. 1026b12–18: “The attributive τα ἄθανατα is virtually just a name. For that reason, Plato was in a sense right to classify the sophist as dealing with that which is not. The arguments of the sophists deal, so to speak, with the attributive more than anything—whether educated and lettered are different or the same, and whether educated Coriscus and Coriscus are the same…” Cf. 1015b17–26 (on which see n. 42 below), 1017a27–1018a4, 1024b29–31.

31 That interpretation is clearer if one gives a “linguistic” interpretation to the expressions Κορίκος and Κορίκος μουνετος, and likewise to the τα μεν and τα δε of the following sentence. Should one resist that interpretation, the second sentence of (2) would have to be translated somehow thus: “[The same, one might answer], on the grounds that the one [thing, Coriscus] has the character of a this and the other
Aristotle himself describes the nominalistic view by means of the claim that a *such* cannot “be set apart” (ἐκθέσθαι). By the latter verb, I take it, he means to convey the idea that a so-called *such* is not really anything distinct from a *this.* Unfortunately, if that is indeed how he is thinking, it must be acknowledged that he expresses himself rather awkwardly. Rather than say that the nominalist acknowledges but refuses to set apart a *such,* he should say simply that the nominalist refuses to set apart *anything at all*—refuses, in other words, to allow that there are entities other than *thises.* (After all, what is crucial is that the nominalist refuses to think in terms of *suches* in the first place.) I suspect, though, that Aristotle is hampered here by a limitation of his technical vocabulary. He has no term by means of which to discuss a difference of linguistic type other than the terms (τὸδὲ τι and τοιώδε) he uses to signal a difference in kind among entities. Thus, he is forced to explain the difference between ‘Coriscus’ and ‘educated’ as if those words referred to entities of different kinds; and so he ends up speaking as if the nominalist were maintaining that there is a *such* which cannot be “set apart” rather than simply that there is no *such* at all.  

[thing, *educated*] of a *such,* so that the latter cannot be set apart." Such a translation could still allow for a reading whereby nominalism is what is at issue: upon observing that *being* *educated* is not a *this,* a particular, the philosopher in question concludes that it is not in fact an entity in its own right. Instead, *being* *educated* is merely one “aspect” of the particular. (See further n. 33.)

22 The verb was explained thus by T. Waitz, *Aristotelis Organon Graecie* (2 vols.; Leipzig, 1844–6), ii, 570: "ἐκθέσθαι est aliquud ita ponere, ut seorsum considerari debat." In a later, comprehensive analysis of the meaning of ἐκθέσθαι/ἐκθέσθαι, H. Maier argued that the verb is used in certain passages of the *Metaphysics* to describe the movement of thought whereby the Platonists come to consider the Forms as "individually" ("zum Konkret-individuellen setzen"). Yet, in our passage from the *Sophistical Refutations,* Aristotle expressly contrasted ἐκθέσθαι with τὸ δὲ τι ἐκτὸς ὑπύπτων (see 179β3–4). Taking note of that, Maier offered the following qualification: "ἐκθέσθαι is hier = ein τοιώδε heraussetzen, von der Substanz loslösen und verselbständigen (ohne dass damit die Substantialisierung verbunden wäre)" (Die *Syllogistik des Aristoteles* (2 vols.; Tübingen; 1896–1900), ii/2. 142 n. 1). Unfortunately, the distinction between "rendering independent" and "treating as a substance" was left otherwise unexplained. More recent interpreters have returned to something like Waitz’s explanation, though with an even more strongly mentalistic colouring. Thus, Ross, *Aristotle’s Metaphysics,* i, 208: "to isolate in thought"; Cherniss, *Criticism,* 288: "abstracts in thought". I have avoided importing any such colouring into my discussion because I find it unhelpful for explicating the passage.

23 Had I adopted the alternative translation mentioned in n. 31, the phrase τὸ δὲ τοιώδει σημαινεῖ would still have been awkward. In that case as well, Aristotle would be maintaining that there exists something—namely, a *such*—that none the less cannot be “set apart”. As I indicated earlier, the best way to make sense of that
Aristotle’s “Third Man” Argument against the Forms

I mentioned that the nominalistic view resembles Aristotle’s response to the Third Man in so far as it insists on a type distinction between singular and general expressions. To that extent, nominalism would offer an easy way out of the Third Man, which involves illicitly treating a general expression as if it were analogous to a singular one and hence referred to a *this*—named it “properly”. However, Aristotle is not willing to escape the Third Man by denying that a general term introduces a distinct ontological commitment. He mentions the nominalistic view in order to contrast it with his own response. Thus in (3), he goes on to stress that the existence of a third man does not result merely from “setting apart” a *such*. It results instead from taking a general term to refer to an entity of the same kind as the referent of a proper name. One can therefore avoid the Third Man by denying that ‘man’ refers to a *this*, an individual: “For [if one clearly distinguishes a *such* from a *this*,] it will not be possible that there is [a single kind of entity,] a *this*, that includes both Callias and man” (179"4–5).

I shall say more shortly about Aristotle’s rejection of nominalism.

would be to downplay any suggestion that Aristotle is talking about an entity of a certain kind: the term ‘such’ would have to be taken to denote a “mere aspect” of a *this* rather than a distinct entity. (That way of speaking may be motivated as follows. The nominalist feels pressed to acknowledge that there is indeed an ontological basis for applying a certain general term to a thing—say, for applying ‘red’ rather than ‘green’ to a “red thing”. Yet, he also wants to avoid analysing particulars as complex entities; and thus he ends up speaking of “aspects” or “features” of the thing.)

The text of 179"4–5 reads οὐ γάρ έστιν τάδε τι εἶναι ὁπερ Καλλίας καὶ ὁπερ ἄνθρωπός ἐστιν. Ross seems to think Aristotle’s statement is best interpreted “What man is cannot be a *this*, as Callias is.” Accordingly, he changes ὁπερ Καλλίας to ὁπερ Καλλίασ and alters ἐστι (which would not make sense on his reading) to ἐστι: οὐ γάρ ἐστι τάδε τι εἶναι, ὁπερ Καλλίας, καὶ ὁπερ ἄνθρωπος ἐστιν. Those changes are unnecessary. The future ἐστι can readily be understood if one considers the statement to be, in effect, the apodosis of a “more vivid” future condition, the protasis of which is expressed elliptically by the explanatory γάρ. “So long as one clearly distinguishes a *such* from a *this*,” as Aristotle has indicated one must, “it will not be possible that Callias and man are both *thises*.”

Commentators have had trouble with the phrase ὁπερ Καλλίας καὶ ὁπερ ἄνθρωπος ἐστιν, partly because in the lines that immediately precede (179"4) and follow (179"6) Aristotle uses the ὁπερ *X* construction quite differently from the way he uses it here. In those lines, Aristotle speaks of ὁπερ τάδε τι ὦ ὁπερ ποιον and means “that which is a *this*” or “that which is a *such*”. That is, he considers the expression following the ὁπερ to designate the kind or class under which the pronoun’s antecedent falls. By contrast, at 179"5 the expressions following the ὁπερ—Καλλίας and ἄνθρωπος—are being considered as members of a kind, while the antecedent—τάδε τι—designates the kind to which those entities cannot both be said to belong. The gloss provided by pseudo-Alexander is thus correct, though his comment is too loose to serve as an adequate explanation: δηλούσιν: οὐ γάρ, εἰ ἐστιν ὁ Καλλίας τάδε τι, καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος τάδε
Before doing so, let me pause to remark explicitly on my reasons for interpreting the passage as I do. For, some commentators have been tempted to interpret the structure of Aristotle’s argument quite differently, as if Aristotle actually agrees with the claim in (2) that one cannot “set apart” (ἐκθέσθαι) a such.\textsuperscript{35}

The problem with the latter is that it makes little sense of what follows, since just afterwards, in (3), Aristotle goes on to reject the idea that “setting apart” is responsible for the existence of a third man: οὗ τὸ ἐκτίθεσθαι δὲ ποιεῖ τὸν τρίτον ἄνθρωπον, ἄλλα τὸ ὅπερ τόδε τι εἶναι συγχωρεῖν. The only way to explain away what is said in (3) would be to insist that it does not represent Aristotle’s view at all. Rather, one would have to maintain, it describes an objection to Aristotle’s view, one that Aristotle goes on to rebut in (4). To make a case for that, one would need to read the first sentence of (4) quite differently from the way I did. I interpreted the phrase ὅποτε διότι at 179\textsuperscript{5}–6 as meaning: “it will not make any difference towards the possibility of setting apart an entity [if one should maintain that what is being set apart is not a this but a

τι ἐσται (In Soph. El. 159. 14–15 Wallies). (On pseudo-Alexander’s overall reading of the passage, see above, n. 5.)

That the ὅπερ ἄνθρωπος construction is used in different ways is noted explicitly by C. Arpe, who proposes to translate 179\textsuperscript{5}–6 as “Denn nicht kann ein τὸ ἄλλο τι sein, was Kallias seinem genus nach und was der Mensch seinem genus nach ist:” (‘Das Argument τρίτου ἄνθρωπου’ ['Argument'], Hermes, 76 (1941), 171–207 at 174). The problem with importing the idea of a genus-species relation into the passage is that Aristotle must then be taken to be concerned not only with the genus of Callias (namely, man) but also with that of man (namely, animal). Yet any mention of the latter genus seems irrelevant to Aristotle’s larger concern.

As Cherniss would have it, the phrase in question “means that without the individualization of the common predicate [that is, of manhood] it would not follow that the predicate common to Callias and to ‘man’ is an individual” (Criticism, 288–9 n. 193, emphasis added). That, too, is rather implausible. As Cherniss himself supposes, Aristotle’s stance is that there is no “third man”—no predicate ‘man’ common to both Callias and manhood. But in that case, it would be quite misleading for Aristotle to express himself by saying simply that the “third man” (the predicate purportedly common to Callias and man) will not be an individual—as if it were an entity of some other kind.

\textsuperscript{35} See e.g. S. Mansio, ‘Notes sur la doctrine des catégories dans les Topiques’ ['Notes'], in G. E. L. Owen (ed.), Aristotle on Dialectic: The Topics (Papers of the Third Symposium Aristotelicum) (Oxford, 1968), 189–201 at 195–6: ‘Aristote veut montrer comment on peut échapper à l’argument du troisième homme. . . . Le problème, remarque-t-il, est au fond le même que celui de savoir si ‘Coriscus’ et ‘Coriscus musicien’ sont ou non identiques. . . . La solution consiste à apercevoir que ‘musicien’, étant un attribut de la substance de Coriscus, n’a pas de réalité à part de cette substance, mais fait un avec elle.’
Aristotle's "Third Man" Argument against the Forms 147

such). One would instead have to interpret: "it will not make any difference towards the attempt to avoid the Third Man . . .". That way, Aristotle would be insisting that to "set apart" a such is indeed effectively to consider it a this; and therefore, despite the objection mentioned in (3), the act of ekthesis may still be blamed for the Third Man. Fortunately for a proponent of that reading, it must be considered rather implausible. First of all, it is utterly unclear what interpretation of ἐκθέονται/ἐκτόθεον might serve to motivate the charge that what is really a such is mistakenly being treated as if it were a this. Certainly, the common idea that the verb refers to a process of abstraction is poorly suited to such a charge. Second, the opening sentence of (4) now becomes extremely awkward. To see that, consider how one might interpret the word ὀφεῖ at the

26 The interpretation I adopt is also that of pseudo-Alexander, In Soph. El. 159. 15–18 Wallis: ἐν γὰρ καὶ μὴ ἐστὶ τὸ ἐκθέονται καὶ κοινὸν τὸ ἐκθέονται καὶ νοεῖ ποιόν ἐναὶ ἐναὶ ἐκθέονται ἐστὶ τῶν καθ' ἔκκαμα, ἐν αὐτοῖς δὲ διόμεν ὀν καὶ ὀφεῖ ἀυτὸ. That such an interpretation is the correct one was argued forcibly by N. P. White, 'A Note on Ἐκκαμον', Phronesis, 16 (1971), 164–8, and has more recently been endorsed by L.-A. Dorion, Aristotle: Les Réfutations sophistiques (Paris, 1995), 361–4 nn. 337–8, 340–1. See also the remarks in Arpe, 'Argument', 177–9 (though Arpe's overall interpretation is none the less mistaken).

Compare Mansion, 'Notes', 197: "Ce n'est pas le fait de poser à part (de considérer à part) qui entraîne le troisième homme, mais c'est de conférer un être substantiel (τὸ ἔκκαμα) à ce qui a été posé à part, faisant ainsi de l'abstrait une substance à côté de la seule réalité substantielle vraie . . . Mais, insiste Aristote, il ne servirait à rien de prétendre que l'être posé à part n'est pas une substance, que c'est une qualité, car on en a fait une unité existant en dehors des multiples, ce qui revient en fait à le constituer en substance. Séparer l'universel des particuliers, considérer comme réelle l'unité du concept, c'est donc, qu'on le reconnaisse ou non, le poser comme être subsistant." In order to make that interpretation work, one will have to interpret the preposition παρά at 179ε7 (ἔσται γὰρ τὸ παρά τοῦ πολλοῦ ἐν τί, δὲν τὸ ἄνθρωπος) to imply thisness, subsistency. (See Post. An. 77ε5–7, mentioned in sect. 11 above.)

28 See n. 32 above. In commenting on 179ε5–6, Cherniss ignores the difficulty by gratuitously supplying a remark to the effect that what has been "isolated" (his interpretation of ἐκθέονται) must not be "individualized": "Nor will it make any difference if the isolated term be called not "substance" but "quality": the "third man" will follow so long as the isolated factor is individualized, for that which is apart from the many particulars will be "one thing" (Criticism, 288–9). In the passage quoted in the previous note, Mansion effectively describes Aristotle as an advocate of nominalism: any attempt to isolate a such inevitably results in producing yet another this. That sits awkwardly with her general thesis that the doctrine of categories in the Topics and Sophistical Refutations has a "signification ontologique", in the sense that it is meant to represent a distinction between different kinds of being ('Notes', 192, 194, 198 ff.). (In discussing the relevance of SE 178ε–179ε to that thesis, she comments: "le problème débatu ici est ontologique et . . . la solution proposée par Aristote suppose une conception des catégories comme genres d'êtres de niveaux différents, tous rattachés à la substance" (197, emphasis added).)
beginning of (4). It cannot readily be understood as a conjunction—
"but not". In prose, the use of oiôde as a conjunction tends to be
limited to cases in which the word joins a negative clause to another
clause that is itself negative. Yet on the above interpretation, there is
no preceding negative to which oiôde might respond: the ó at 179"3
introduces the idea that is ostensibly corrected in (4), while the
one at 179"4 merely serves to explain what has just been said. One
might therefore be tempted to claim that the oiôde is to be interpreted
adverbially—"not even". But in that case, it would not clearly set
up a contrast with what precedes. The construction really needed
for the above interpretation would be a negative clause beginning
with an adversative expression—dallá, or something similar.

For those reasons, I think it best to understand what is said in (2)
as a position Aristotle is critical of rather than as one he endorses.
Then, what is said in (3) and (4) can be understood much more
straightforwardly, as explaining what is wrong with the position in
(2) and what really leads to the Third Man. And, I submit, once one
interprets the passage in that manner, it becomes quite compelling
to see the position in (2) as a nominalistic one. For one can readily
understand why Aristotle would think to bring up such a position:
he wants to present his own view as occupying a middle ground
between the extremes of nominalism and Platonism; and he does
so by insisting that, while a general term does indeed refer to a
distinct entity, the entity in question is always predicated of a this
and never exists "on its own", in the manner of an ultimate subject
of predication.

That way of understanding Aristotle's line of reasoning fits quite
well with the account of the Third Man I argued for earlier. On that
account, Plato's fundamental mistake is a failure to respect the type
distinction between this and such; and it is perfectly intelligible not
only that Aristotle would choose to mention that failure in a chapter
of the Sophistical Refutations treating the problem of "expressing
in like fashion things that are not the same"39 but, in addition, that
Aristotle would discuss the Third Man in the specific way he does

39 H. Schmitz maintains that other interpretations have failed to explain why
Aristotle would consider the Third Man a fallacy para to schéma ths légeos (cf. SE
166a10-19), and so he attempts to rehabilitate pseudo-Alexander's reading of the
passage as an attack on the sophistical argument reported at Alexander's In Metaph.
8a. 7-16 (see n. 5 above and Schmitz, Die Ideenlehre des Aristoteles (2 vols.; Bonn,
1985), ii. 200 ff.). I hope to have shown that such a move is quite unnecessary.
here—by explaining why he thinks it an overreaction to try escaping it with a denial that a such qualifies as an entity at all.

Notice that if the Third Man were to be understood in the traditional way—as turning on the ascription of self-predication and non-identity assumptions to Plato—Aristotle’s remarks would have much less point. First, it would be rather misleading for him to claim that treating “man” as a this is what gives rise to the Third Man. As I noted (Section I), that way of speaking might be understood as a way of referring to the outcome of a self-predication and a non-identity assumption. Yet it is difficult to see why Aristotle would simply ignore those assumptions and present the Third Man as if it were but one more example of a failure to respect the distinction between items falling into different categories. What is more, Aristotle’s mention of the nominalistic alternative would be completely beside the point, since it neither sheds light on Plato’s philosophical errors nor plays any positive role in elaborating Aristotle’s position.

I thus consider the Sophistical Refutations to support my earlier judgement that Alexander’s interpretation of the Third Man is thoroughly misguided. In what remains, I want to suggest that the present passage does even more; it provides an important clue to Aristotle’s reasons for being convinced that Plato is committed to treating a Form as a substance.

V

What is important about the passage is the way in which Aristotle understands the type distinction between singular and general expressions and, correspondingly, the distinction in kind between thises and suches. In order to bring Aristotle’s way of thinking clearly into view, let me return to his rejection of the nominalistic response to Plato.

Aristotle does not, of course, mount an argument against the nominalistic position. Still, his remarks suggest an interesting diagnosis of what might inspire the position—a diagnosis whereby it is animated by a fundamental confusion. In (2), Aristotle speaks as if the nominalist begins by making a type distinction between singular and general expressions. As I understand it, the distinction is formulated relative to subject-predicate statements and turns on
the idea that a singular expression—a proper name, say—occurs only as the subject of such statements, whereas a general expression occurs at least once as predicate.\footnote{A general expression might of course be complex and contain a singular one as a component—e.g. ‘taller than Cebes’.} Upon drawing that distinction, the nominalist goes on to infer that \textit{only a singular expression has a referent} or, to put the point somewhat differently, \textit{a general expression does not refer to anything different from the referent of a singular one}. The inference is groundless: understood that way, the nominalistic position trades on a confusion, one that can best be exhibited by distinguishing two senses of ‘independent’:\footnote{This way of putting the issue was suggested to me by the remarks in E. B. Allaire, ‘Existence, Independence, and Universals’, \textit{Philosophical Review}, 69 (1960), 485–96.}

(S$_1$) Every simple entity is independent.

(S$_2$) Substances are independent, attributes dependent.

In (S$_1$), ‘independent’ is used to signal that every simple entity—every referent of an “undefined” term—has a “nature” of its own: no such entity is constituted by its relations to others. So understood, (S$_1$) asserts the basic thesis of a pluralistic ontology. The linguistic analogue of the relevant notion of independence would be the view that each “undefined” expression is meaningful on its own: meaning is not a function of the true statements in which an expression occurs.

To assert (S$_1$) is not, of course, to say that entities exist by themselves, uncombined with others, or even that they \textit{can} so exist. Whether or not they can is a further issue, about which I shall say more shortly.

In (S$_2$), ‘independent’ is used to signal the distinction between substance and attribute. A substance is \textit{independent} in the sense of being an ultimate subject of predication and hence of “needing no support” from other entities. By contrast, what is \textit{dependent} cannot exist “on its own”, without being “exemplified” by another entity.

To deem an attribute \textit{dependent} in that sense is not, of course, to deny that it can serve as a subject of predication relative to certain other, “higher-order” attributes. It is merely to assert that the attribute in question cannot exist apart from any relation to an ultimate subject—a substance—of which it is predicated. Similarly, to call a substance \textit{independent} is to point out that the substance is just such an ultimate subject of predication; but it is not to maintain
that the substance can exist by itself, apart from any relation to another entity. Whether a substance needs attributes is a question about which \( S_1 \) says nothing.

The way Aristotle introduces the nominalistic position in (2) suggests the following explanation of the nominalist's mistake. Struck by \( S_1 \), the nominalist insists that whatever exists is independent. However, he conflates that sense of 'independent' with the one at issue in \( S_2 \). He reasons, in other words, that because only thises need no support, only thises exist. Or to put the confusion another way, he reasons that because (so-called) suches must be exemplified by thises, they are what they are only in virtue of their relation to thises; and he uses that as a basis for concluding that suches do not exist in their own right. Instead, they are merely “aspects” of substances—where the word in scare-quotes, if it can be explicated at all, is to be understood in purely epistemic fashion, with reference to what one might perceive or judge regarding a this.

What leads me to think that Aristotle has in mind some such explanation in (2) is that he is at pains to stress the nominalist's acknowledgement of the type distinction between singular and general expressions. Yet as I described it above, the type distinction is simply the linguistic counterpart of the notions of dependence and independence in \( S_2 \); and thus, it would seem, what the nominalist has in mind is some idea of the relative independence of what is referred to by a singular expression. When the nominalist goes on to maintain that the referents of predicate expressions are nothing in their own right (cannot be “set apart”), it must be because he is confused regarding the significance of the type distinction. As Aristotle effectively points out in (3) and (4), dependence in the sense of \( S_1 \) need not be taken to imply a lack of independence in the sense of \( S_1 \).

I should note that in attributing the foregoing to Aristotle, I do not mean to claim that he would explain the nominalist's confusion precisely as I did. Specifically, I am not maintaining that Aristotle would necessarily think to use καθ' αφότό, or some other expression that might correspond to my 'independent'. I chose 'independent' and 'dependent' because they make for the neatest explanation in English, but I suspect that Aristotle would more likely be inclined to say that the nominalist confuses different senses of 'one' (ὅ): upon recognizing that an attribute is 'one' with a substance in the sense of being predicated of it, the nominalist supposes that the
attribute, the *such*, could not in fact be “one thing”—supposes, in other words, that the *such* is not an entity in its own right.\(^{42}\) Thus, in (4) Aristotle counters the nominalist by stressing that the referent of the term *man* is indeed a single thing, albeit a thing predicable of other entities: τὸ παρὰ τοῦς πολλῶς ἐν τῷ. He does not think to stress that the referent of *man* is in some sense καθ’ αὐτό, independent. Still, Aristotle’s point is the one explained above: he is objecting to the nominalist’s conflation of what it is to be an entity with what it is to be a *this*, a *substance*.

What is the significance of that diagnosis for the Third Man? As I submit, it is that in dismissing the nominalistic alternative, Aristotle never thinks to reject the nominalist’s understanding of the type distinction. When I explained the distinction above, I remarked that a singular expression occurs only as the subject of a subject–predicate statement, whereas a general expression occurs at least once as predicate. However, I might well have formulated the distinction differently: I might have said that, while a singular expression occurs only as subject, a general expression *may* (but need not) occur as predicate. That would have left open the possibility that a statement like ‘Red is a colour’ may be true without any statement of the form ‘This, is red’ being true.

When (in \(S_2\)) I explained the ontological counterpart of the type distinction, I said that *thises* are not predicated of anything else and that *suches* are so predicated. Had I adopted the alternative formulation of the distinction, I would have said that a *this* is not, and indeed cannot be, predicated of anything; and I would have gone on to say that a *such* may, though need not, be so predicated.

I explained the *this–such* distinction as I did because I am convinced that Aristotle relies on it in the passage. As I suggested earlier, Aristotle brings up the nominalistic view precisely because he regards it as offering a possible alternative to his own response to Plato. The nominalist fastens on the type distinction as Aristotle conceives it and thereby avoids the Third Man; but he interprets

\(^{42}\) In this connection, compare *Metaph.* \(\Delta\) 6 (1015\(b\)17–26), where Aristotle illustrates the “accidental” sense of ἐν using the very same example he uses at *SE* 178\(b\)–179\(b\): “Things that are accidentally one are, for instance, Coriscus and (being) educated, . . . and (being) educated and (being) just. . . . All of these are called “one” accidentally—(being) just and (being) educated because they are accidents of one substance, (being) educated and Coriscus because the one is an accident of the other. And similarly, there is a sense in which educated Coriscus is one with Coriscus, because one of the parts in the formula is an accident of the other, namely (being) educated of Coriscus.”
the ontological significance of the distinction differently from Aristotle, and he thus arrives at the view that *thises* are the only things that exist. Had Aristotle been thinking in terms of the alternative formulation given above, he would have had no reason even to mention nominalism. It is only because *suches* are dependent on *thises* (in the sense of always being exemplified by them) that it ever becomes tempting to suppose that *suches* are nothing in their own right.

If one looks elsewhere in Aristotle's writings, there is good support for thinking that he subscribes to the version of the substance–attribute distinction whereby attributes cannot exist apart. His acceptance of it is already evident from a well-known statement in the *Categories*, where he remarks "all other entities are either said of primary substances as subjects or present in them as subjects. Hence, if there were no primary substances, there could not be any other entities" (2b3–6). Aristotle does not say that all other entities are of a nature to be predicated of (said of or present in) primary substance. He insists that they are so predicated; and that is why he thinks that without primary substances nothing else could exist. His view remains essentially unchanged in the central books of the *Metaphysics*: "Furthermore, substance is spoken of as what is not predicated of a substratum, while a universal is always predicated of some substratum" (1038b15–16; cf. also ll. 9–12).

Aristotle seems to adopt without question the view that attributes are always predicated of—exemplified by—substances. Some philosophers have followed him in considering it obvious, but I submit that there is nothing obvious about it. As I suspect, Aristotle's unhesitating acceptance of the Principle of Exemplification (as I shall call it) is due merely to the loose way in which he formulates the substance–attribute distinction. Given that he describes the nature of substance by saying that it is not predicated of anything else (cf. Cat. 2a11–14), he does not think to allow that an attribute too may exist without being predicated of another entity. For him, it is the very nature of an attribute to depend on an entity of another sort—a substance.

In order to have been able to entertain denying the Principle of Exemplification, Aristotle would have had to renounce the whole idea of elaborating the substance–attribute distinction by speaking as if one kind of entity is "basic" relative to the other. Instead, he would have had to content himself with setting out the combinatorial possibilities of the different kinds: a substance may exemplify
an attribute; an attribute may be exemplified by a substance; and so forth. To proceed thus would of course be to take a significant step away from the notion that substances are ontologically primary; and, I imagine, such a step is one that Aristotle would not be prepared to take, given the broad explanatory significance he would ascribe to the concept of substance.

Be that as it may, I want to defend a version of the thesis, common enough in general form, that Aristotle’s adherence to the Principle of Exemplification is precisely what underlies his charge that Plato illicitly treats the Forms as substances. As Aristotle recognizes, Plato speaks at points as though a Form is capable of existing on its own, without being exemplified by any sensible object. But to speak that way is tantamount to giving the Form a crucial categorial feature of an Aristotelian substance.

I have already noted that Aristotle’s assertion that Forms are substances is tied to his contention that Plato treats the Forms as if they were “separate” (see n. 15). Unfortunately, the precise meaning of the latter term has been a matter for some dispute.\(^{43}\) One proposal that has long been found attractive is that by his use of ‘separate’ Aristotle means to signal some form of existential independence. In what is perhaps the most fully developed version of that interpretation, Gail Fine has argued that for one entity to be separate from another is for the first to be able to exist whether or not the second does. On this view, a substance is “separate” in the sense that it can exist independently of its relation to any given entity, be it an accident or another substance.\(^{44}\)

A difficulty with such an account is that it fails to explain why Aristotle characterizes substances alone as separate. Certain attributes can surely exist independently of their relation to any given substance; but Aristotle never thinks to call those attributes “separate” from substances.\(^{45}\) I see no way to modify the independence


\(^{44}\) To say as much is not to maintain that a substance can ever exist alone, apart from any relations whatsoever. For discussion, see Fine’s ‘Reply’, 163, and ‘Separation’, passim. Cf. also her *On Ideas*, 51.

\(^{45}\) The same observation has been made by D. T. Devereux, ‘Separation and
interpretation so as to account plausibly for the idea that only substances are separate. Rather than argue the point here, however, I would like to recommend another interpretation and show how it may be used to understand Aristotle’s claim that Plato treats the Forms as separate and hence as substances.

As I submit, when Aristotle uses the term ‘separate’ in connection with substances, he has in mind precisely that a substance is not predicated of any other entity. I imagine that he uses the term ‘separate’ for that idea because he thinks of what is not predicated of other entities as needing no “support” from them and hence as not being “bound up” with them. A neat example of that use of χωριστῶν may be said to occur at Physics 1. 2, where Aristotle attacks the view that whatever exists is either a quality or a quantity by insisting that there must be substances, because “nothing other than substance is separate, since everything else is said of substance as a substratum”.

The key question is why Aristotle might maintain that Plato treats the Forms as if they were not predicated of any other entities. It would certainly be odd for Plato to think that way if in fact he subscribed to a version of Aristotle’s substance–attribute distinction and regarded the Forms as attributes. I am persuaded that Plato has nothing like Aristotle’s distinction and its corresponding notion of predication; but a discussion of the matter would take me too far afield and is in any case unnecessary. For I do not think that Aristotle considers the view in question to be directly in evidence in the dialogues. Instead, he infers that Plato is so committed from certain locutions Plato uses in speaking about the Forms. A record

Immanence in Plato’s Theory of Forms’ ['Separation and Immanence'], Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy, 12 (1994), 63–90 at 79–80. Fine of course recognizes the need to explain separation in such a way that only substances are separate. Yet the formulation she gives in her ‘Separation’ is ambiguous between the claim that (i) a substance can exist without any attributes at all and (ii) a substance can exist without any given attribute (at least, for a certain range of attributes) (cf. pp. 35–9). When she clarifies her view at ‘Reply’, 163, by adopting a version of (ii), she neglects to explain how it avoids making some attributes separate as well.

46 Versions of the interpretation have been defended by others; see e.g. M. L. Gill, Aristotle on Substance: The Paradox of Unity (Princeton, 1989), 34–8, and Devereux, ‘Separation and Immanence’, 78–83.

47 185a31–2: οὐδὲν γὰρ τῶν ἄλλων χωριστῶν ἐστὶ παρὰ τὴν οὐσίαν πάντα γὰρ καθ’ ὑποκειμένου λέγεται τῆς οὐσίας. (Here, I take it, a substance is considered “separate” from all other entities: to be separate is not to be dependent on any other entity as subject.) See also Metaph. 1087a1–2: πάντα τὰ ἑναντία καθ’ ὑποκειμένου καὶ οὐδέν χωριστὸν. Cf. MM 1182a10–16.
of the inference is preserved in several of Aristotle’s remarks on the Platonic theory.

In support of his judgement that Forms are “separate”, Aristotle at several points cites Plato’s use of the expressions αὐτό and αὑτῷ καθ’ αὑτῷ in connection with the Forms. Thus, at Eudemian Ethics 1218a10–12 Aristotle connects Plato’s claim that a Form exists αὑτῷ with the idea that it is χωριστῶν: “So, [the Platonists] say, there is a Good by itself [αὑτῷ τι ἀγαθόν], adding ‘by itself’ [αὑτῷ] to the general account. What could this mean but that [the Good] is eternal and separate [ἄδηλων καὶ χωριστῶν]? And at Magna Moralia 1182b13–16, he uses ‘separate’ in close conjunction with αὑτῷ καθ’ αὑτῷ:

The Form [of the Good] is something separate, alone and by itself [χωριστῶν καὶ αὑτῷ καθ’ αὑτῷ]. Yet the common good dwells in everything [that is good] and so cannot be identical with the separate Good [τῷ χωριστῷ]. For it is impossible that what is separate and naturally alone and by itself [τῷ χωριστῷ καὶ τῷ περὶ καθ’ αὑτῷ αὑτῷ] might dwell in all things.

The vast majority of translators and commentators now speak as if Plato uses αὑτῷ simply as the intensive pronoun ‘itself’. Similarly, αὑτῷ καθ’ αὑτῷ is usually translated ‘itself by itself’ and is generally taken to signal existential independence. Yet I agree with Burnet and others in considering that interpretation to be incorrect. As the above translations make clear, I believe αὑτῷ means ‘by itself’, ‘alone’, while the more emphatic αὑτῷ καθ’ αὑτῷ may be translated ‘alone and by itself’ and signals that a Form has a “pure” nature, one unmixed with that of any other entity.

When Aristotle appeals to Plato’s use of αὑτῷ and αὑτῷ καθ’ αὑτῷ as evidence that the Forms are “separate”, I submit that he is thinking as follows. Implicit in Plato’s way of speaking is a thesis that the Forms, being “pure” natures, are likewise simple and therefore

48 Compare J. Burnet on Phaedo 65 A 5: “αὑτῷ ‘by itself.’ In this technical sense, αὑτῷ is a development of αὑτός, ‘alone.’ It has become almost adverbial, as we see from such expressions as αὑτῷ ἡ ἄρετη, αὑτῷ δικαιοσύνη (Riddell, Dig. sec. 47). We come nearest the meaning by rendering it ‘just’ ” (Plato’s Phaedo (Oxford, 1911), 33). Cf. G. F. Else, ‘The Terminology of the Ideas’, Harvard Studies in Classical Philology, 47 (1936), 17–55 at 39 ff. For several clear instances of that use in a neutral context, see Phaedo 65 E 8, 66 E 1. (And Phaedo 65 D 4–5 and 74 A 9 ff., Plato’s Socrates uses expressions like ‘the just by itself’ and ‘the equal by itself’. I take it he is referring to the epistemological standard for applying the terms ‘just’ or ‘equal’, where the standard is thought of as “nothing but just”, “nothing but equal”.

49 I hope to defend that interpretation at length elsewhere.
indestructible, eternal. Accordingly, they can continue to exist even if nothing is participating in them. Thus far, Aristotle’s reasoning is well supported by the dialogues. For at Phaedo 78b–d, Plato’s Socrates proposes to explain destruction as the dissolution of a complex thing and accordingly supposes that what is simple is indestructible. He then uses the observation that the Forms are αὐτά καθ’ αὐτά as a means for inferring that they are immune to change of any sort—including, of course, destruction. Aristotle may well have that passage in mind in the Eudemian Ethics when he links the observation that the Good exists “by itself” to the idea that the Good is “eternal”. His crucial move is his immediate addition of the claim that the Good is “separate”. I suspect he says as much because he takes the eternity of the Form to indicate that it is existentially independent of its participants and, thus, that it is not bound by the Principle of Exemplification. For if that is the case, the Good cannot be considered an attribute, an entity that does not exist apart from its relation to substances. Instead, it and other Forms must really be χωριστά, not predicated of anything at all, and so must be substances.

That might seem a strange conclusion for Aristotle to draw. Surely, one might think, the Forms are predicated of sensible objects—at least at times. Yet it is important to keep in mind that Aristotle does not consider Plato to have any clear understanding of the predication relation. Plato, of course, speaks of participation, not predication; and Aristotle famously dismisses that way of speaking as lacking any clear explanation (Metaph. 987b10–14) and, ultimately, as being nothing more than “empty speech” and

50 In that judgement, Aristotle is surely correct. One might think to object that the Forms could be eternal but dependent if (i) the sensible world were likewise eternal and (ii) there were always some particular participating in a given Form. (Cf. Fine, ‘Separation’, 73–4.) However, I take it that the only motivation for (ii) would be an antecedent commitment to the thesis that Forms are not “ontologically basic” and thus cannot exist independently of their relationship to particulars. Such a thesis is nowhere in evidence in the Phaedo and would be difficult to supply in the light of Socrates’ emphatic contrast between the respective natures of Forms and sensibles (cf. 78d–e) and his analogy between the Forms and the soul (which can exist apart from any relation to a body).

51 In this connection, compare Metaph. 1031b15–18, where Aristotle links the idea that the Forms are not predicated of any other entity to the claim that they are substances rather than attributes: “clearly if there are Forms such as some maintain, substratum will not be substance. For these Forms must be substances that are not predicated of any substratum; otherwise, they would exist only by being participated in” (καθ’ ἐνθέκα, on which see Ross’s note on 1031b18, Aristotle’s Metaphysics, ii. 178).
poetic metaphor" (Metaph. 1079b24–6; cf. 992*26–8). The reason a Form may at points be regarded as an attribute is that Plato intends it to serve as what Aristotle calls a "one-over-many". But that characterization should not be taken to imply that Plato clearly understands the nature of an attribute or, what comes to the same thing, that he grasps the sort of dependence at issue in Aristotle's talk of predication.

If that is correct as an account of Aristotle's attitude towards Plato's theory, it makes sense that Aristotle would charge Plato with treating the Forms as substances no less than as attributes. And, I submit, it makes sense that Aristotle would attempt to draw out the absurdity of that way of thinking by dramatizing it in terms of a regress.

That being said, let me reiterate that the absurdity is one which arises only when Plato's talk of Forms is translated into the categories of Aristotle's own thought. Aristotle is not concerned to attack the theory of Forms on its own terms; he simply presupposes his substance-attribute scheme as the proper framework for sorting the details of Plato's thought. Although the Third Man is a fascinating document of Aristotle's reaction to the theory of Forms, it does not give us any insight into the philosophical assumptions that lead Plato to the theory. And thus, just as it would be a mistake to view the Third Man as offering a window into the early Aristotle—a disappointed Platonist supposedly lashing out at Plato's theory from the inside—it is likewise mistaken to appeal to the Third Man in order to legitimate a modern diagnosis of Plato's philosophical errors, as some proponents of the standard interpretation have sought to do.52

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52 Throughout my discussion, I have deliberately ignored the much-discussed regress argument of Plato, Parm. 132a1–b. Let me note simply that my emphasis on the distance between Aristotle's Third Man and what may be found in the Platonic dialogues should not be considered a tacit endorsement of a reading of the Parmenides whereby the regress turns directly on some conjunction of self-predication and non-identity assumptions. In fact, I am convinced that the talk of self-predication is inappropriate for interpreting the Parmenides and, indeed, the Platonic corpus generally. But that is obviously a topic for another discussion.
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