Platonism and the Invention of the Problem of Universals

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§1. The Original Problem

In contemporary literature, the philosophical problem of universals is frequently framed as a problem about the ontological status of properties.[1] When considering the historical background to the problem, one typically reads of the opposition of Plato and Aristotle with regard to this ontological status. For example, it is a commonplace that Plato 'reified' or 'hypostasized' universals. The problem of universals is thus in part viewed as the opposition between two alternative theories: universals are or are not to be posited as existing on their own. According to this way of framing the problem, Plato's theory of Forms is taken to be a theory of *ante rem* universals which is the alternative to a theory of *post rem* or *in re* universals.[2]

Evidently, the origin of this observation is to be located in Aristotle's frequent criticism that Plato, in positing Forms, made universals into individual substances.[3] Making them individual substances is what reifying them or hypostasizing them is supposed to amount to. The word used by Aristotle that is always translated as 'universal' is to kaqolou, which is a nominalized form of the adverb kaqolou. But neither the nominalized form of the word nor even the adverb appear in Plato's writings. This fact alone should at least lead us to wonder whether Plato himself thought that he was 'reifying' universals or that in positing Forms he was solving a problem that universals are supposed to solve.

It is reasonably clear that when Aristotle accuses Plato of wrongly making universals into individual substances, he is not thereby denying the existence of universals. Aristotle never gives as the reason why universals are not individual substances that universals do not exist, though if universals did not exist, it would, of course, be true that they are not individual substances. In fact, Aristotle explicitly

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[1] See, e. g., Moreland 2001, 1.

[2] See, e. g., Landesman 1971, 'The Problem of Universals' 15, who assumes that the dispute between Aristotle and Plato is a dispute over whether universals can exist independently of particulars. See also Quine, 1961, 224 and Wolterstorff 1970, 263-81, especially 278, where Forms are identified as universals. Sometimes, the Aristotelian theory of universals is characterized as holding that the universal is *in re* rather than *post rem.* But this seems to me to be at least misleading. For however we construe the issue, there is a category confusion between that which is *post rem* (a word or a concept, etc.) and that which is *in re* (some item the theory's ontology).

[3] See *Metaphysics* B 6, 1003a7-13 where the problem of the relationship between individuality and universality is raised as needing treatment. For Aristotle, a substance (ousia) is an individual (tode ti, to kaq ekaston). The argument is made against the Platonic approach at Z 13, 1038b35-1039a3; Z 16, 1040b25-30; M 9, 1086a32-5. The Aristotelian principle that an individual is not a universal is already stated at *Sophistici Elenchi* 22, 178b37-9, 179a8-10.

mentions the existence of universals, though translators sometimes appear to evince some embarrassment in this regard.[4]

Aristotle wants to claim that:

(1) Universals exist

(2) Universals are not individual substances.

Thus, Aristotle seems committed to saying that

(3) Universals exist somehow but not as individual substances.[5]

This should occasion no difficulty since Aristotle does, of course, recognize the existence of things other than individual substances. In *Categories*, besides (a) individual substances, he recognizes the existence of (b) individual accidents and of (c) the genera and species of individual substances and of (d) the genera and species of the individual accidents of individual substances.[6] So, the story typically goes, Aristotle's rejection of universals as individual substances ('reified' universals) is replaced by his acceptance of the universals implicitly identified in (c) and (d).

The problem with this story is this. As Aristotle goes on to explain what universals in the sense of (c) and (d) are supposed to do, it turns out that they do not seem to function at all as Plato says Forms function. A universal, according to Aristotle, is 'that which is predicated in common' (to koinh kathgoroumenon).[7] But Forms are never described by Plato in this way.[8] Nor does Plato say anything that would suggest

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[4] See *Metaphysics* Z 13, 1038b35: faneron oti ouden twn kaqolou uparcontwn ousia esti which is, for example, translated in the Oxford Aristotle as 'it is plain that no universal attribute is a substance'. This translation both ignores the implication of the words twn uparcontwn and the adverbial sense of kaqolou. Cf. 13, 1038b11-12: touto gar legetai kaqolou o pleiosin uparcein pefuken. The word uparcein, when it is translated, is usually rendered 'to belong to' or 'to exist in'. *Metaphysics* G 2, 1005a12-16; E 2, 1027a17-18; Z 17, 1041a11 provide particularly clear examples of the existential implication in 'x uparcei (tini)'. See *De Interpretatione* 17a38-39: ßEpei de esti ta men kaqolou twn pragmatwn ta de kaqß ekaston, There are thus some things (pragmatwn) that exist 'universally'. One aspect of the problem of universals is a traditional refusal to take this claim as in any way a concession to Platonism, that is, a concession to the view that nominalism is false.

[5] See Tweedale 1988, who argues that Aristotle 'viewed universals as real entities but lacking numerical oneness' (501). Tweedale calls this Aristotle's 'tenuous realism'.

[6] See *Categories* 2, 1a20-b8. For this reading of the fourfold distinction which takes (b) as non-recurrent individuals, see Wedin 2000, ch.2.

[7] See, e.g., *Metaphysics* B 6, 1003a11; *Eudemian Ethics* A 8, 1218a7; *On Interpretation* 17a39. At *Metaphysics* D 26, 10232b29ff, Aristotle clearly associates the universal (to kaqolou) with 'that which is said as a whole' (to olw" legomenon). See also *Physics* A 1, 184a24-25: 'the universal is a kind of whole' and A 5, 189a5-8.

[8] At *Meno* 77A5-6, Socrates urges Meno to say what the 'whole' (kata olou), that is, all the already offered examples of virtue have in common. And at *Laches* 199E2-3, these examples are called 'parts' of the whole. It is thus not unreasonable to understand Socrates' search as a search for a universal. But the Form is more than either 'what they all have in common' or 'the name for all they have in common', for neither of these explain anything. Nor can it be the thought of what is common that leads us to predicate something of the examples. See *Parmenides* 132B-C. I have argued elsewhere that the term ta koina

that treating Forms as predicates is a legitimate interpretation of what he is trying to do. To claim that Forms are not, indeed, cannot be, universals, when universals are supposed to have a function that Forms are not held to have, is, one might suppose, to miss the point. Relying on Aristotle's testimony, the traditional 'problem of universals' is usually cast as in part a problem pitting two conflicting accounts of universals (the Platonic and Aristotelian ones). It appears that the problem has been badly formulated.[9]

It will be useful to try to pin down more precisely what I claim is a mismatch between the function of a Platonic Form and an Aristotelian universal. Both in the dialogues and according to Aristotle's testimony, Plato offers a number of reasons for positing Forms. Some, like the reason that without Forms knowledge would not be possible or that there would be no objective basis for ethics, are blatantly question-begging. The one reason given that is not question-begging and does, on independent grounds, seem to express the core of his view appears in *Parmenides*. There Parmenides offers the young Socrates a summary of the basis for the theory that he, Socrates, is offering in reply to Zeno's defense of Eleaticism.

> I think that you think that each Form is one for this reason: whenever it appears to you that there is some given number of large things, it perhaps appears to you that in looking at all of these, there is some one Idea whence you think that Largeness is one thing.[10]

Parmenides' reason for attributing to Socrates the view that 'each Form is one' must be seen in the context of the discussion at 129D-E where Socrates is replying to Zeno that his paradoxical insistence that one thing can be shown to be many does not apply to the 'ones' that Forms are if these are 'distinguished separately in themselves', that is, apart from the sensible world.

It is clear enough from the argument offered to Socrates that it does not matter how many large things there are but rather that ***anything*** can be correctly said to be large.[11] If a Form of Largeness is for some reason needed to explain the correctness of calling many things large, then it is also needed for the possibility of there being many

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used at *Theaetetus* 185E1 is not to be understood as reference specifically to universals but to any objective characteristic of things. See Gerson 2003, 206-207.

[9] See de Libera 1996, 29-34, for some useful remarks on some of the historical confusions in formulating the problem of universals. Malcolm 1991, 54-63, argues that Forms are supposed by Plato to be both paradigms (that is, self-exemplifying) and universals. Malcolm appeals to a contemporary account of universals for his understanding of Plato: 'a universal is an ontological basis for the application of the predicate term' (54). But this ontological basis – whatever it might be – is distinct from the universality itself, at least in Platonism.

[10] *Parmenides* 132A1-4: Oimai se ek tou toioude en ekaston eido~ oiesqai einai: otan poll& atta megala soi doxh einai, mia ti~ isw~ dokei idea h auth einai epi panta idonti, oqen en to mega hgh einai. What Parmenides attributes to Socrates in our passage is evidently equivalent to the so-called 'one over many' argument. That is an argument alluded to in *Republic* X (596a6-7): 'We are, I suppose, in the habit of positing some one Form for each group of many things to which we apply the same name'.

[11] Cf. *Cratylus* 388B6-C1. The correctness of names here has nothing to do with the *appropriateness* of one name rather than another based on the thing's nature. The question about correctness is prior.

large things even if there is, now, only one, or even none.[12] A Form of F is needed for the possibility of x being f, though no Form is needed for the possibility of x being x, that is, identical with the particular that it is. This is because, as the statement of the theory suggests, there is one 'thing' that is the same among the numerically different, namely, largeness. Forms are somehow supposed to account for the possibility that things that are numerically different can nevertheless be the same.

Let us for the moment leave aside the crucial question of exactly how a Platonic Form is actually supposed to provide an explanation for sameness in difference and ask instead whether an Aristotelian universal is supposed to perform the same role. The answer is obviously no. Universals do not explain anything actual much less the possibility of anything being actualized. For when a universal is predicated of many, this is not done so in order to explain how these many can be the same; rather, the predication amounts to the recognition or acknowledgement of their sameness. Predication is without exception assumed by Aristotle to be an extra-ontological category of activity.[13] When I say, 'Socrates is a man', what I predicate of Socrates does not explain the possibility of his being one among potentially many all with the same property, namely, being a man. What explains the truth of 'Socrates is a man' and hence the possibility of there being men is the nature or form or essence 'man' with which Socrates is somehow identified.[14] He is not identified with a predicate. Therefore, it is at least puzzling why one should suppose that an Aristotelian theory of universals is somehow an *alternative* to a Platonic theory of Forms.

Perhaps this way of framing the putative alternatives will be thought to be captious. The genuine alternative, it may be held, is between reifying and refusing to reify universals. Whatever Plato's reasons for positing Forms may have been, by positing them, that is, by making them separate, he *ipso facto* reified universals. For, the objection continues, if Forms are *not* universals, they are then, as Aristotle himself said,

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[12] *Pace* Fine 1984, 34-5, who argues against uninstantiated Forms. But see Devereaux 1994, 76-7, for a criticism of this view. That the logical or conceptual 'cut' is between possibility and impossibility of instantiation and *not* between possibility and actuality follows from the fact that the non-existence of certain Forms (e. g., of adventitious or impossible objects) is a necessary and sufficient condition for the impossibility of instantiation. If the impossibility of the existence of a Form of Square-Circle is a necessary and sufficient condition for the impossibility of there being instances of square-circles, then the existence of a Form F is a necessary and sufficient condition for the possibility of there being instances of it. And since there can be one and only one Form F (see *Republic* 597C-D), then the existence of this Form is equally the necessary and sufficient condition for the actuality that is something being correctly said to be f. A necessary and sufficient condition for a possibility is logically prior to a necessary and sufficient condition for an actuality since the actual is only one among many possibilities.

[13] See *Metaphysics* Z 1, 1028a10-13: To on legetai pollacw~, kaqaper dieilomeqa proteron en toi~ peri tou posacw~: shmainei gar to men ti esti kai tode ti, to de poion h poson h twn allwn ekaston twn outw kathgoroumenwn. A claim such as this might be supposed to indicate that predication can be an ontological category, as in 'white' is a predicate of Socrates. But this is Aristotle's typical shorthand way of saying: because Socrates is white, 'white' is predicated of Socrates. The principal argument for this interpretation is that predicates, as universals, are said 'in common' (koinon) whereas an attribute of an individual substance is unique to (idion, the contradictory of koinon) that individual. Cf. *De Anima* B 5, 417b22-23:…h d' episthmh twn kaqolou: tauta d' en auth pw~ esti th yuch and *Posterior Analytics* B 19, 100a6-7.

[14] See *Metaphysics* Z 6 where Aristotle struggles to say how an individual substance can be identical with its essence. Cf. Z 11, 1037b1-7; Z 15, 1039b28-31; H 3, 1043b2.

merely useless duplications of individual substances.[15] If they are not to be useless duplications, then they must be universals, thoroughly and unambiguously reified owing to their separation.

This objection imagines Plato supposing that 'what is predicated in common', say, 'large', must be a concept or word representing or referring to something other than the individual accidental attribute found in one or another large things. This 'something' is supposedly the Form of Largeness. But in the passage from *Parmenides* cited above, it is not the universal word or concept which is supposed to 'refer' as if the argument went from universal to Form. It is the phenomenon of sameness in difference or of the possibility of sameness in difference that leads to the hypothesis of Forms. What is predicated in common – the universal – has no part to play in the argument.[16] Yet, this hypothesis of Forms is offered to explain a phenomenon that a believer in universals, such as Aristotle, also recognizes. To suppose that universals are a substitute for Forms is to make the mistake of supposing that what follows from the phenomenon of sameness in difference – the legitimacy of universal predication – is an explanation of it. But the explanatory theory that the theory of Forms is cannot, it seems, be an explanatory alternative to what is not offered as an explanation at all.

Further, Plato in *Parmenides* seems to reject implicitly the possibility that if there are universals, then Forms are unnecessary. For he has Parmenides show Socrates that Forms cannot be 'concepts' (nohmata) 'in the mind' (en th yuch).[17] This rejection of Forms as concepts is not, of course, equivalent to the rejection of the legitimate use of universal concepts.[18] These concepts would be, for Plato, justified on exactly the same basis that would justify their use according to Aristotle, namely, sameness in difference.

One might, then, grant both that universals are not adduced as an alternative to Forms and that positing Forms does not amount to the rejection of universals. But in that case, we would like to know why there is thought to be a *problem* of universals at all. The problem only persists if we acknowledge that sameness in difference requires an explanation and if we suppose that a Platonic solution to this problem is going to involve doing something weird with universals, e.g., positing them as existing on their own. Then, and only then, the 'problem of universals' mutates into the question of whether a universal is *ante rem* or *post rem*.

There is a passage later in *Metaphysics* where Aristotle seems to suggest the strategy of denying that the sameness among numerically different particulars requires an explanation.

> Now, if, as in the case of the elements of speech, nothing prevents the existence of many 'A's' and 'B's' even if there is no 'A Itself' and 'B Itself' over and above the many 'A's' and

[15] See *Metaphysics* A 9, 990a34-b8. Cf. *Posterior Analytics* A 22, 83a33-4.
[16] This is evident from the passage in *Statesman* 262C10-E3 where Plato's point is that the existence of a common noun, predicable of many, in this case, 'barbarian', does not entail the existence of a Form of Barbarian. Thus, it is a mistake, to think, as do Brandt, 1957, 529, and Sellars, 1960, 517, that Plato held that every predicate is a name, that is, names a Form. The mistake is in supposing that the reason for positing Forms is that a name must name *some thing*.
[17] *Parmenides* 132 B-C. Allen 1983, 154-8, has a good discussion of the passage. Cf. *Phaedo* 96B on Plato's rejection of 'abstractionism'.
[18] See for conceptualism in Platonism Gerson 1999.

> "B's', then, for this reason, there will be an indefinite number of syllables that are like (omoiai).[19]

This sort of argument may be a perfectly reasonable one for a nominalist to make. It is hard to see how it is available to someone, such as Aristotle, who wants to insist that, to employ his own example, the many 'A's' are so called *because* they share the same form. That form is a 'this' (tode ti) and prior to sensible composites.[20] If there were no form, there could be no fact that consisted in something having a particular property. If there were no eternal Form, then there could be no eternal possibility of something having one sort of property rather than another. Nor will it do to say that the possibility is only real with the initial instantiation of the form. For that initial instantiation only demonstrates an eternal possibility. To maintain otherwise would be to confuse the conditions for the initial instantiation ('it is only now possible that x is f because such and such conditions exist') with the possibility of instantiation of one Form rather than another ('given such and such conditions, it is now possible that Fness be instantiated').

It seems clear enough that in general Aristotle wants to insist that insofar as sameness in difference requires an explanation at all, this can be completely provided within his own fourfold schema of explanation. The problem of universals – a least insofar as the Platonic and Aristotelian positions are thought to be relevant to its solution – is obscured by assuming that the former involves making a 'useless paradigm' out of the universal.

Another way one might suppose that a theory of Forms usurps the role of universals is if predication becomes participation when separate Forms exist. Aristotle himself briefly and somewhat obscurely recognizes this option in one of his arguments against Forms. He argues that if something participates in the properties that belong to a Form's nature, it must by that very fact participate in the properties that belong to the Form.[21] For example, if something participates in a putative Form of Doubleness, it must participate in eternity since eternity is an attribute of the Form. Since the Platonists agree that it is false that anything that is double is thereby eternal, Forms must be substances, not properties. Aristotle then adds: 'it is necessary for a thing to participate in a Form as in something not predicated of its subject'.[22] In other words, Aristotle seems to recognize that Forms are not predicates and participation in a Form is not predication.[23] But this

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[19] See *Metaphysics* M 10, 1087a7-10. See Annas 1976, 190, who interprets Aristotle thus: 'It is wrong to assume that things cannot share a common form without there being another thing to explain this'.

[20] See *Metaphysics*, D 8, 1017b25; H 1, 1042a29; Q 7, 1049a35; L 3, 1070a11, 13-15 for form as 'this something'. The form is prior because it is that by which the composite is known. See Owens 1948, 386-95, on the 'thisness' and separability of forms.

[21] See *Metaphysics* A 9, 990b27-34. See Ross 1924, v.1, 197, on the interpretation of this obscure argument. See also Owen 1968, 122. Owen thinks the argument invalid and takes it as trying to show that there are only Forms of substances, not that Forms are only substances. But the point I wish to emphasize and with which Owen agrees is that Aristotle recognizes but does not allow Plato to employ the distinction between a Form and its nature.

[22] *Metaphysics* A 9, 990b30-32: alla dei tauth ekastou metecein h mh kaq upokeimenou legetai.

[23] See *On Interpretation* 17a39 and *Metaphysics* B 6, 1003a11. See also *Posterior Analytics* A 11, 77a5-9 which explicitly distinguishes universals from forms in demonstration. What belongs to many and is hence the subject of demonstration cannot be a substitute for an explanation for the possibility of there being *this* many. See Kahn 1992, 369, for his apt remarks on the 'myth of abstraction' as explanation.

recognition is, it appears, easily lost in the rush to see a theory of Forms as an alternative solution to a problem of universals – a problem which, I claim, is badly formulated if Forms are not universals at all.

§2. The Problem Mutated

It is generally recognized that the actual twin historical sources of the modern problem of universals are Alexander of Aphrodisias (2nd – early 3rd c. C.E.) and Porphyry (234 – c. 305 C.E.). Porphyry's contribution is manifest, for he seems to be the first to announce 'the problem'. Alexander's contribution is not so direct. It is only when Boethius (c. 480 – 524/6 C.E.) came to comment on Porphyry's *Isagoge* where the problem is announced and then appeals to Alexander for a solution to the problem that we can see the role that Alexander plays. But lurking beneath this apparently clear picture are a number of puzzles, ultimately and naturally related to the reading of Plato by Aristotle. Most puzzling is the fact that, to put it simply, Alexander is assumed to have rejected Plato's reification of universals in favor of Aristotle's account of universals, as Alexander understands that. But Boethius, who appeals to Alexander's solution, is rightly regarded as a Platonist, or Christian Platonist, one who is very far from rejecting the basis for Plato's theory of Forms, again as *he* understands this. Thus, not only does the understanding of the problem of universals get off on the wrong track by supposing that Plato's theory of Forms is a theory of reified universals, but this misunderstanding is, as I will try to show, reinforced by the mistake of taking Alexander's solution to constitute a rejection of Plato's theory. Boethius thought it was no such thing.

I begin with some remarks about Alexander's account of universals.[24] This account is frequently and, I believe, unfairly dismissed as incoherent.[25] As perhaps the first state sponsored 'professor' of Peripatetic philosophy, Alexander was no doubt in some sense a committed Aristotelian partisan. That would presumably suggest a rejection by Alexander of a theory of Forms taken as a theory of universals. However, Alexander's consideration of this matter is far from being exhausted by this peremptory characterization.

Alexander in his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* endorses the Aristotelian position that everything that is separate is an individual.[26] Yet, he acknowledges that a plurality of individuals may possess the same 'nature' (fusi").[27] This nature is *neither* an individual *nor* a universal, for the universal is just this nature only insofar as it is conceived.[28] The universality is accidental to the nature.[29] This nature is prior to any individual that possesses it.[30] It is also prior to the universal.[31]

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[24] See Moraux 1942, 61-2; Tweedale 1984; Sharples 1987; Moraux 2001.

[25] See, e. g., Tweedale 1993, 79-81: 'I think it must be confessed that Alexander's theory borders on incoherence' (81). But see Lloyd 1981 for a defense of the coherence of Alexander's account.

[26] See *In Met.* 210, 13-21 Hayduck.

[27] See *Quaestiones* I 3, p.8, 12-17 Bruns.

[28] See *Quaestiones* I 11b, p.21, 22-26:…alla dei ti einai pragma, w to kaqolou sumbebhken, kai estin ekeino men pragma ti w to kaqolou sumbebhken, to de kaqolou ou pragma ti kuriw~, alla sumbebhko~ ti allw. oion to zwon pragma ti esti kai fusew~ tino~ dhlwtikon, shmainei

If one does not keep the nature distinct from the universal, it is easy to fall into two mistakes. First, there is the mistake of supposing that Alexander means to hold that when no universal thinking or predicating is occurring, then things do not have the natures they have. But clearly, Alexander wants to hold nothing of the sort. Second, there is the more subtle mistake of holding the disappearance of the basis for universal predication, namely, the presence of a plurality with the same nature, indicates the absence or disappearance of the nature. This, however, is not necessarily the case if the nature is prior to the universal. Though Alexander believes that if there is only one individual with a given nature, there is no basis for universal predication, he obviously does not maintain the contradictory position that the nature that the individual possesses would therefore not exist.

The distinction between nature and universal is clear if we consider that if there is only one individual possessing the nature, then, though the genus or universal does not exist, the nature does.[32] But what if there are *no* individuals possessing the nature? Does the nature no longer exist? Certainly, the genus would no longer exist, since the universal disappears. From the above, it seems that Alexander only wants to reject Forms if they are taken as separate universals, that is, if universality is not understood as accidental to their natures.[33] In addition, he seems to recognize that the natures in which individuals share serve an explanatory function that is quite distinct from the role that universals fulfill. The nature animal is distinct from and prior to the genus or universal animal which is predicated of many individual animals that share this nature. It is distinct from the genus or species taken universally.

We may, however, wonder whether the priority possessed by the nature is ontological priority, that is, whether Alexander is implicitly endorsing a version of a theory of Forms shorn of the burden of being a theory of universals. Indeed, it is difficult to see how, if ontological priority is not what the nature has, that nature would not be reduced to the universal. Fortunately, speculation on this matter is unnecessary. For Alexander in his *De Anima* distinguishes enmattered forms (ta enula eidh) from the forms that are completely separate from matter.[34] These two types of form are objects of

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gar ousian emyucon aisqhtikhn, o kata men thn autou fusin ouk esti kaqolou. Cf. I 3, p.7, 27 – 8, 6. See Lloyd 1981, 155, on Alexander's conceptualism.

[29] See Tweedale 1984, 285ff.

[30] See *Quaestiones* I 11b, p.23, 30-32: uparcei [the nature] de autw onti toioutw en pleiosin einai kai katæ eido~ allhlwn diaferousin. sumbebhken oun autw touto [universality]. See Cherniss 1944. 348, n.256.

[31] See ibid., p.24, 7-8: dei gar einai prwton to pragma [the nature] tou sumbebhkoto~ autw. oti dæ usteron [the genus or universal] tou pragmato~, dhlon. See Sharples 1987, 1202, with n. 72.

[32] See *Quaestiones* I 11a, p.21, 19 – 22, 20 (= 11b, p.23, 21 – 24, 22).

[33] Alexander *In Met.* 199, 34-35, says that scientific knowledge is about the 'universal that is eternal' (kaqolou o estin aidion). This is apparently an allusion to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* E 1, 1026a30 where Aristotle says that first philosophy is universal science. Alexander's language evidently did add to the confusion. For example, Dexippus (early 4th c. C.E.) identifies universals as simple causes and as having their being in themselves (ta kaq auta par autwn econta to einai). See Ammonius (c. 440 – after 517), *In Cat.* 25, 9 where he introduces the term 'universal substances' (τὰ καθόλου οὐσίαι), which Ammonius takes to be the ontological correlates of the generic and specific and 'concepts' (τὰ ἐννοιηματικά, 9, 9).

[34] See *De Anima* 87, 5-16 Bruns, which is concerned with enmattered forms. At 87, 25-28, Alexander refers to forms completely separate from matter. The question is whether or not these have any relation to the former. If they do not, the causal role of the enmattered form is exiguous. See n. 36.

two different types of thought.[35] The latter are just the natures previously distinguished from universals. For example, bronze is distinct from 'what it is to be bronze' (to einai calkw). And it is the latter that is causally responsible for the former.[36]

Alexander does not offer an argument for the postulation of separate natures. Nor does he offer an argument for his subsequent claim that these separate natures are eternally thought by an eternal mind and in being thought are, of course, thought universally.[37] I cannot here enter into the complex and fascinating issue of how this latter claim is related to Platonists' treatment of Forms as thoughts in the divine mind of the Demiurge or to Alexander's identification of the eternal mind that eternally thinks the separate natures with the mind of the unmoved mover ***and*** the agent intellect in Aristotle's *De Anima*. I only wish to emphasize here that Alexander, in offering an account of universals which he presumably takes to be in line with his master Aristotle, does not contradict the underlying reason for postulating Forms. In fact, he seems to rely on it. And his denial of a theory of Forms ***only*** applies to a theory which incorrectly takes Forms to be universals.

The specific claim that there is a problem of universals, that is, that there is a problem of the ontological status of universals, appears to make its most portentous appearance in Porphyry's *Isagoge*. What makes this claim somewhat puzzling is that Porphyry, like virtually all Platonists from the middle of the 3rd c. C.E. to the middle of the 5th, believed that the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato were essentially harmonious.[38] The first concrete indication we possess that Platonists in this period were prepared to argue for the harmony of Aristotle and Plato is contained in a reference in Photius' *Bibliography* to the Platonist Hierocles of Alexandria's statement that Ammonius of Alexandria, the teacher of Plotinus, attempted to resolve the conflict between the disciples of Plato and Aristotle, showing that they were in fact of one and the same mind (ἕνα καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν νοῦν).[39] The second indication of an effort to display harmony is found in the *Suda* where it is stated that Porphyry himself, Plotinus' disciple, produced a work in six books titled *On Plato and Aristotle Being Adherents of the Same School* (Peri tou mian einai thn Platwno" kai Aristotelou" αἵρεσιν).[40] We know nothing of this work apart from the title and what we can infer from what Porphyry actually says in the extant works. It seems reasonably clear, however, that a work of such length was attempting to provide a substantial argument, one which was evidently in opposition to at least some prevailing views.

Whatever one wishes to make of the postulate of harmony, it is beyond dispute that the Platonic commentators on Aristotle (and Platonists in general) after Alexander of Aphrodisias looked very closely at Aristotle's arguments against Forms, not so much with

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[35] See ibid., 87, 24 – 88, 3; 89, 13-15; 90, 2-11.

[36] See ibid., 87, 10-11: o~ en th upokeimenh ulh genomeno~ epoihsen calkon authn. Cf. Plato *Phaedo* 100D7-8, E5-6 on the instrumental causality of the nature whose name is a Form.

[37] See ibid., 90, 11-13: en oi~ de to nooumenon kata thn autou fusin esti toiouton, oion noeitai (esti de toiouton on kai afqarton), en toutoi~ kai cwrisqen tou noeisqai afqarton menei...

[38] I have suggested that a certain degree of harmony is already present in Alexander.

[39] See Photius *Bibliotheca,* 173a18-32; 171b33ff; Porphyry *On the Return of the Soul* fr. 302F, 6 Smith. See Düring 1957, 332-6, for a compilation of the texts from the Neoplatonists relating to harmony.

[40] See *Suda* Π 2098, 8-9 (= fr. 239T Smith). On the meaning of the term αἵρεσις in this period see Glucker 1978, 166-93. After discussing a large amount of evidence, Glucker concludes that airesi is never used of a 'school' in an institutional or organizational sense but always of a way of thinking or set of beliefs.

a view to rebutting these as with the intention of showing both that Aristotle himself, finally, did not reject the real reason for positing Forms in the first place and that Plato did not reject the functionality of universals.[41] In short, participation and predication are not exclusive alternatives. The real opposition was not between Plato and Aristotle but between Plato and Aristotle on one side and nominalists and materialists on the other side. Thus, one who accepts universals, as does Aristotle, is not only in principle open to there be an *explanans* doing what a Form does, but he is actually thereby ultimately committed to the existence of such an *explanans*. And one who posits Forms, as does Plato, is thereby committed to the existence of data (possible cases of sameness in difference) that justify us in making universal judgments and in applying predicates universally.

At the beginning of his introduction to Aristotle's *Categories* called *Isagoge*, Porphyry famously presaged what came to be called 'the problem of universals' when he declined to investigate certain deep questions concerning the ontological status of species and genera. These questions are: (1) whether genera and species exist extra-mentally or only in bare concepts; (2) whether, if they exist extra-mentally, they are corporeal or incorporeal; (3) whether, if they exist extra-mentally, they exists separate from sensibles or are dependent on them.[42] There is a certain irony in the fact that, though this passage became the *fons et origo* of the problem of universals, the word 'universal' (to kaqolou) does not appear here. In fact, it does not appear as a technical term at all in this work. In wondering about the ontological status of species and genera, Porphyry was indeed harkening back to the conflict between Aristotle and Plato. When Aristotle raises the problem of whether species and genera are principles, he does characterize them as 'universals'.[43] And, following him, Alexander identifies the genus as a universal. But it should not be supposed that Porphyry, in explicating the Aristotelian text, is simply implicitly following Aristotle's criticism of Plato. For one thing, if he were, he would not find the status either of genera and species or universals any more problematic than Aristotle ultimately does. For another, Porphyry is, through Alexander and Plotinus, the inheritor of a distinction between natures and universals. It is the former, not the latter, whose ontological status is worrisome.[44] Stated otherwise, the 'problem of universals' is only a problem if a universal is by definition unable to exist separately yet is at the same

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[41] See my forthcoming book *Aristotle and Other Platonists* (Cornell University Press, 2004), especially ch.7.

[42] See *Isagoge* 1, 9-14: autika peri twn genwn te kai eidwn to men eite ufesthken eite kai en monai~ yilai~ epinoiai~ keitai eite kai ufesthkota swmata estin h aswmata kai poteron cwrista h en toi~ aisqhtoi~ kai peri tauta ufestwta, paraithsomai legein baqutath~ oush~ th~ toiauth~ pragmateia~ kai allh~ meizono~ deomenh~ exetasew~. Cf. *In Cat*. 75, 26.

[43] See *Metaphysics* B 3, 998b14-18. In Z 3, 1028b33-36, Aristotle announces four candidates for substance: (a) essence, (b) genus, (c) universal, and (d) substrate. It is generally assumed that the refutation of the (supposedly Platonic) claim that (c) is substance in chapter 13 and 14 constitutes a refutation of the (supposedly Platonic) claim that (b) is a substance. See, e.g., Ross 1924, 164. However, the problems with taking Forms as universals are mirrored in problems with taking Forms as Aristotelian genera.

[44] The medieval distinction between universals (a) *ante rem*; (b) *in re*; *and* (c) *post rem* (see *infra* n.66) does indeed have its origin in the Neoplatonic understanding of the dispute. See Proclus *In. Euc. I* 50, 16 – 51, 13; Ammonius *In Isag.* 41, 17-2; 42, 10-21. However, particularly in the latter passages, where Ammonius is referring to Porphyry's problem explicitly, it is evident that the question of an *ante rem* universal is bound up with the dispute, instigated by Porphyry in opposition to Plotinus, regarding the question of whether or not the Forms were in the divine intellect. The *ante rem* universal is here being conflated with the nature itself which is none of (a) or (b) or (c) above.

time supposed to fulfill an explanatory role that only a separate principle could fulfill. The 'deep questions' Porphyry raises are not obviously conflatable with a 'problem' whose solution is, by stipulation, impossible.

It is not I think entirely clear that later medieval philosophers were correct to suppose that Porphyry was in *Isagoge* pondering the ontological status of universals as such, as opposed to the ontological status of that which makes possible the universal predication or conceptualization of a genus or species. For Porphyry believed that the subject of Aristotle's *Categories* is 'the primary imposition of expressions' and that 'to predicate is to utter a significant expression about things'.[45] The ontological status of 'significant expressions' (fwnai shmantikai) is not at issue. Porphyry was not asking, in effect, was Plato *or* Aristotle right about universals. What Porphyry was announcing as a deep matter was how that to which a significant universal expression refers expresses the identity or nature of an individual substance. How, for example, can the nature of animality identify more than one individual substance. He was recurring to the problem that Aristotle says was posed by Antisthenes who asked how any expression can identify an individual besides its proper name.[46]

One could argue that Aristotle's doctrine of essentialism addresses this problem. And one could also argue that this essentialism is a response to Plato's refusal to allow that sensibles have essences, since the essence of man is not in Socrates but in the Form.[47] But this 'deep' problem is manifestly not a problem to which a theory of universals and a theory of Forms are alternative solutions. For the universal which is 'said of many' does not identify anything. If it did, it would not be said of many. But is it not the case that the Aristotelian essentialist wants to maintain that Socrates and Plato are both men and so Socrates and Plato have the same essence? Aristotle's answer to this question is not so easy to divine. But the point here is that Aristotle's answer is an answer to a problem that is logically posterior to the problem of how to account for the phenomenon of sameness in difference. For if it is the case that Socrates and Plato are indeed the same insofar as they are men, and if it is also the case that they could not be the same unless the nature of man is separate from and ontologically prior to those individuals that participate in it, then Aristotelian essentialism is a doctrine intended to account for what is in fact not the case, namely, that individual substances have essences that identify them.[48] Thus, saying that reifying universals undermines essentialism is blatantly question-begging. This is especially so once we realize that the so-called 'reified universal' is no such thing but rather the nature, e.g., 'man' in which individuals participate.

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[45] See *In Cat.* 58, 4-21.

[46] See Aristotle *Metaphysics* D 29, 1024b32-33.

[47] See Plotinus *Enneads* VI 3. 4, 17, who argues that the form of a man and man are the same thing, which means that the form of a man is identical with what it means to be a man. Consequently, *this* man Socrates is not identical with what it means to be a man. Plotinus is here defending his interpretation of Plato's account against Aristotelian essentialism. Plotinus wants to argue against Aristotle that no essence could identify an individual. If it did, the essence could not be shared.

[48] Briefly, if A is ontologically prior to B, then A can exist if B does not, but not *vice versa*. If A and B are neither ontological prior nor posterior one to the other, then they are ontologically independent, in which case either A or B could exist without the other existing. See Aristotle *Metaphysics* Δ 11, 1019a2-4; Z 15, 1040a21-2, who attributes the distinction between ontological priority and posteriority to Plato.

Iamblichus (c. 245 – 325 C.E.), who may or may not have been a pupil of Porphyry, and most of whose works are unfortunately lost, was convinced that predication and the implicit commitment of predication to universals should not be seen as a tool to pry apart Aristotelianism and Platonism. He thought this because, as Proclus (412 – 485 C.E.) much later reports, Iamblichus, like Alexander of Aphrodisias, could see that a theory of universals was not an alternative to a theory of Forms. This is because Plato wanted to distinguish between (1) 'that which participates' (τὸ μετέχον), (2) 'that which is participated in' (τὸ μετεχόμενον), and (3) 'that which is unparticipated' (τὸ ἀμέθεκτον).[49] Stated otherwise, this is a distinction between, say, (1) a large thing, (2) the largeness in the large thing, and (3) Largeness, that which the Form is. It is a distinction that is well founded on claims made in the dialogues.[50] The ancillary question of whether Forms are transcendent or immanent is thus answered by a distinction between the paradigmatic nature which is transcendent or unparticipated and its image or inferior version which is immanent or participated. Iamblichus, like Alexander, calls the latter an 'enmattered form' (ἔνυλον εἶδος).[51]

The 'enmattered form' is, when present in the intellect, the Aristotelian universal.[52] But this form is not identical with the separate nature. Were it so, then its presence in one individual would necessarily preclude its presence in another. In addition, the enmattered form stands to the separate nature in the relation of image to model. Clearly, this separate nature is also not identical with the universal.[53] For the universal is just the enmattered form as it exists in the intellect, whereas the separate nature is what accounts for sameness in difference, that is, for the presence of the same form in things materially distinct. Making the separate nature identical with the universal would be just one small step removed from making the ***explanandum*** into the ***explanans***.

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[49] See Proclus *Elements of Theology* Props. 23 and 24 with the commentary by Dodds 1963, 210-12; *In Tim.* II 105, 15ff; 240, 4-7; 313, 15-24, where the reference to Iamblichus is to be found; *In Parm.* 1069, 23ff; *In Remp.* I 259, 2-17; Asclepius *In Met.* 34-36.

[50] The distinction is implicit in the combination of claims made in five passages: (1) *Phaedo* (100D4-8) where the question of how Forms are present is left aside, though it is insisted that the Forms are the instrumental cause of things having the properties they have; (2) *Phaedo* (102D6-8) where Plato distinguishes between Largeness and largeness in us; (3) *Parmenides* (129A3-4) where it is said that things that are like are so because they partake in likeness. Here, likeness is distinguished from a Form of Likeness (129A1); (4) *Parmenides* (130B3-4) where Parmenides offers Socrates the distinction between separate (χωρίς) Likeness and the likeness we possess and (5) *Timaeus* (52A1-3) where the Forms are said never to enter into anything.

[51] See Proclus *In Parm.* 839, 33-4; 863, 3. The term is also used by Iamblichus, *On the Egyptian Mysteries* VII 2. 251, 1. Syrianus *In Met.*105, 30-35, criticizes Aristotle for thinking that 'Socrates' (i.e., Plato) confuses the enmattered form with the transcendent Form.

[52] The enmattered form was in Latin dubbed *universale in re*; the abstracted enmattered form in the intellect was the *universale post rem*. The former is manifestly not the same thing as the latter and so the recognition of it does not constitute a solution to the problem of universals.

[53] See Simplicius *In Cat.* 82, 35 – 83, 10, who says that that which is common (τὸ κοινόν) must be understood in three senses: (1) that which transcends the particulars and is the cause of what is common in them owing to its nature; (2) that which is common in particulars; and (3) that which exists in our concepts owing to abstraction. (2) and (3) refer to the 'enmattered form' and the universal. According to Simplicius, when Aristotle is in *Categories* speaking about (2) and (3), he is simply ignoring, not rejecting, (1). Also, see Asclepius *In Met.* 193, 9; 433, 9 – 436, 6, who cites Syrianus as making a similar distinction. See also Porphyry *In Cat.* 90, 30 – 91, 18; Ammonius *In Isag.* 41, 1– 42, 26 and 68, 25 – 69, 2; and his *In Cat.* 41, 8-11, where a distinction between intelligible and sensible genera and species is assumed; Proclus *Elements of Theology* Prop. 67.

The main reason for claiming that the separate form is in reality nothing other than the enmattered form is the view that one enmattered form cannot be the same form as another. This is nominalism. It is certainly the alternative to the Platonic view. But it is also the alternative to the Aristotelian view.[54] Among the unfortunate sequelae of the misconceiving of a problem of universals is that when it is acknowledged that Platonism and nominalism are exhaustive alternatives, it is then assumed that since Aristotle is an anti-Platonist, he must be a nominalist. But this, at least exegetically speaking, is a very, very hard row to hoe.

One may object that conceptualism is the *tertium quid* between realism and nominalism. Thus, in the Middle Ages the problem of universals was viewed as having *three* possible solutions. But conceptualism is not a genuine alternative, as Plato clearly saw. For the recognition of universal concepts goes equally well with realism and nominalism. To insist that the concept 'man' applies to all men does not even hint at an answer to the question of whether or not there is a single nature 'man' that is the same in all men. The meaning of the 'applicability' of a concept is ambiguous, much like the meaning of a 'justified' belief where justification may or may not have something to do with truth.

Ammonius (c. 440 – after 517 C.E.), in his *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* (transcribed by his disciple Asclepius), preserves for us the arguments of Syrianus (died c. 437 C.E.) who was, among other things, the master of Proclus.[55] Syrianus understood this point with the utmost clarity. In defense of Plato against Aristotle's attacks, Syrianus is assuming the distinction made by Iamblichus. Once we make this threefold distinction, then two points in particular emerge. First, the nature, universal only in the sense that many things can possess it, is not identical with the Form. A real internal distinction between Form and nature follows from the recognition that something can participate in that nature, albeit in a derivative imagistic manner, without participating in the separate Form. What participating in the nature amounts to is this: A participates in nature f, if and only if it is true that A is f. Since a nature is nothing but what its name names, that is, since it is not in itself an individual or particular, participating in the nature absolutely does not preclude something else, say, B from participating in the identical nature. Aristotle does not himself want to deny that there are natures such that true predicative judgments of this sort can be made. Thus, Aristotle's argument in *Metaphysics* Z 13 against Forms that 'nothing that is predicated in common is a 'this something'' misfires. For the Platonist *agrees* with this claim. It is the Form that is a 'this something'. But the Form is not a universal in the sense in which its separate existence would be impossible.[56]

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[54] See, e.g., *Metaphysics* Z 8, 1034a5-8: to dὲ apan hdh, to toionde eido~ en taisde tai~ sarxi kai ostoi~, Kallia~ kai Swkrath~: kai eteron men dia thn ulhn (etera gar), tauto de tw eidei (atomon gar to eido~). Cf. *Topics* E 4, 133b9.

[55] See *In Met.* 433, 9 – 436, 6 where Asclepius is citing the arguments of Syrianus. See de Libera 1996, 84-92, for a summary of Syrianus' arguments. Also, Cardullo 1993.

[56] See especially *In Met.* 433, 30 - 434, 5, where Asclepius refers to Syrianus as using the term 'universal' in two senses: (a) that which is posterior and in the mind and (b) that which is substance (ousia), even if it be predicated of [a subject] (ei ge kathgoreitai autwn). The two senses of 'universal' are paralleled by two senses of 'predication'. In the first sense, that which is predicated does not have an independent existence; in the second sense, that which is predicated is the independent existent in which individuals participate.

The second point is that the claim that universals are concepts or words is rendered irrelevant by the threefold distinction. For what is said or thought of many in common is distinct from and posterior to the nature whose separate existence as a Form makes universal predication and judgment possible.[57] In the light of the threefold distinction, posing the problem of universals as equivalent to the question of whether what is properly predicable of many exists separately is at least to obscure the matter. For Syrianus, Asclepius, Proclus and other Platonists will insist that it is no part of a defensible theory of Forms to maintain that what is predicable of many so exists. What exists separately is the Form which is really distinct from its nature.

Recurring to the passage in *Parmenides* where Parmenides offers the young Socrates a principle for positing Forms, we saw that Forms explain the possibility of predication. It is easy to slide from 'Forms explain the possibility of predication' to 'Forms are predicates' since it is difficult to see how else they could provide explanations. There is, however, a significant difference between 'the nature of largeness is a Form' and 'there is a Form of Largeness'. This difference is reflected in the Neoplatonic threefold distinction. The nature of largeness is participated or shared in by a large thing. But the Form of Largeness is unparticipated. This difference is possible only if there is a distinction within the Form between it and its nature, a distinction that enables its proponents to say that the nature is itself neither a particular nor a universal. Why is it that this distinction, developed at some length by the Neoplatonists and based upon a number of central Platonic texts, is ignored by Aristotle in this argument?

In order to make the distinction between the nature of largeness and the Form whose name is 'Largeness', the latter has to be sufficiently complex so that we distinguish between the Form and its nature. We need such a distinction in order to be able to maintain that a large thing can participate in largeness without the transcendence of the Form being compromised.

Aristotle in *Topics* makes mention of the relevant distinction. In the matter of testing whether a property does or does not belong to a subject, he asks us to consider, 'for destructive dialectical purposes' (ἀνασκευάζοντα) to be sure, whether a predicate belongs to a Form as subject in virtue of being a Form or in virtue of its nature.[58] For example, 'since being motionless does not belong to Man Himself (αὐτοανθρώπῳ) insofar as it is man but insofar as it is an Idea, being motionless is not a property of man'. But then Aristotle adds that 'for constructive dialectical purposes' (κατασκευάζοντα) one can do the opposite, namely, show that a property belongs to a Form because it belongs to the nature. The dialectical context of this passage suggests that Aristotle is here talking about conceptual distinctions that one can avail oneself of in arguing a case.[59] A real distinction between Form and nature is, however, more than this. It is a distinction ***within***

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[57] On the universal as posterior (usterogene) see Syrianus *In Met.* 53, 9; Asclepius *In Met.* 145, 30; Simplicius, *In Cat.* 83, 9. Remarkably, Aristotle himself explicitly acknowledges this posteriority at *De Anima* A 1, 402b7-8: …to de zwon to kaqolou htoi ouqen estin h usteron.

[58] See *Topics* E 8, 137b3-13; Z 10, 148a14-22. Owen 1968, 108ff, distinguishing what he calls 'A predicates' and 'B predicates', argues in effect that Aristotle is correct to hold that the distinction is purely conceptual and that it does not help Plato from avoiding such conclusions as that the Form of Man is both immortal (as Form) and mortal (as man). Vlastos 1973, 323-5, responding to Owen, does not think that Aristotle ever allows the distinction to Plato.

[59] Similar to the sophistical use of conceptual distinctions mentioned by Socrates at *Parmenides* 129C-E, e. g., showing that the same thing is both many and one.

one entity which is as real as a distinction *among* entities.[60] Evidently, Aristotle wants to deny that such a distinction is available to the Platonist owing to a denial of the possibility of immaterial complexity.

Mention should briefly be made here of Boethius. In his second commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge*, Boethius repeats Porphyry's problems about genera and species.[61] He goes on to appeal to Alexander of Aphrodisias for a solution, even though, as we have seen, Alexander is not exactly offering a solution to the problem of universals. In answer to Porphyry's question (1), whether genera and species exist extra-mentally, Porphyry says (following Alexander) that they exist extra-mentally in individuals, but universally in the mind. In answer to question (2), he replies that they are in themselves incorporeal but exist corporeally in sensibles. He adds, that 'they are understood in truth as existing in themselves, and not as having their being in others'.[62] This last point would seem to contradict the answer to (2). But Boethius has already argued that the genera and species are *either* universal when thought *or* particular when found in individuals. In themselves, they are neither.[63] Thus, the nature that is 'universalized' is the genus or species in the mind or 'particularized' when instantiated in the individual.

In reply to (3), Boethius notes that 'Plato thinks that genera and species are not only understood as universals but also in truth both exist extra-mentally and exist on their own apart from bodies'.[64] Aristotle, however, denies this. Boethius declines to adjudicate this last question, since the answer belongs to a 'higher philosophy'. In Boethius' contribution elsewhere to this 'higher philosophy', he makes a distinction between form as it exists eternally in the divine mind and form distinct from any ontological status, that is, from its existence in the divine mind, in particulars, and in our minds as abstracted universals.[65] Alexander himself seems to have implied as much when he identified the activity of the agent intellect with that of the prime unmoved mover.[66] That activity consists in being eternally cognitively identical with all that is intelligible.

The distinction between the divine mind as 'pure form' and forms distinct from any ontological status appears to rest on a *theological* assumption, namely, divine simplicity.[67] The claim by Boethius that 'pure' forms do not exist independently is exactly what the entire Platonic tradition took Plato to hold as well. For Platonic Forms are independent neither of the mind of the Demiurge, nor of each other, nor of the superordinate Form of the Good.[68] The Alexanderian solution adopted by Boethius is not,

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[60] Aristotle's own distinction between substance and accidental attribute is another example of the same real distinction. 'White Socrates' is one entity, though his attribute 'white' is really distinct from the substance Socrates. The real composition within a sensible substance of matter and form is another example.

[61] See *In Isag.* I 10, 159, 3 – 167, 20 Brandt.

[62] Ibid., 167, 10-12: intelleguntur vero ut per semet ipsa subsistentia ac non in aliis esse suum habentia.

[63] Ibid., 166, 14 – 167, 7.

[64] Ibid., 167, 12-14: sed Plato genera et species ceteraque non modo intellegi universalia, verum etiam esse atque praeter corpora subsistere putat…

[65] See *De Philosophiae Consolatione* V, proem 4 Bieler. Cf. *De Trinitate* II p. 6, 1 - p. 10, 58 in Elsässer 1988. See Nash-Marshall 2000, 271-73, on these passages.

[66] See Alexander *De Anima* 88, 17 – 91, 6.

[67] See *De Trinitate* II p. 10, 56-58: nulla igitur in eo [God] diversitas, nulla ex diversitate pluralitas, nulla ex accidentibus multitudo atque idcirco nec numerus.

[68] See Asclepius *In Met.* 69, 17-28, on the Platonic position denying the independence of Forms in all three respects . See also 433, 9 – 436, 6 where Asclepius cites Syrianus as countering Aristotle in the same way.

according to him, a solution to a problem that pits two views of the ontological status of universals against each other. Unfortunately, however, this is how it was taken by later medieval philosophers who identified these forms or natures with *universalia ante rem*. [69]

§3. The Problem Reformulated

As I have already suggested, one way of formulating the problem of universals is to express it as the question of whether or not two different things can, nevertheless, be the same. Although this way of formulating the problem is not in fact outside of Plato's ken, it generally belongs to later periods in the history of philosophy when a negative answer to the question is regarded as a live option.[70] Aristotle, however, is one with Plato in acknowledging the data of sameness in difference. Thus, the real problem of universals for anti-nominalists may be formulated as the following two questions: (1) does the fact of sameness in difference (or its possibility) requires an explanation? and (2) if the answer to (1) is yes, does a theory of separate Forms provide that explanation?[71]

Ammonius, on the testimony of Asclepius, addresses the criticism that calling Forms 'paradigms' is 'empty words and poetic metaphors'.[72] He replies that Forms are paradigms for the Demiurge just as the physician looks to the rules of medicine within him as paradigms for treatment. What are paradigms in the intelligible world are 'images' (εἰκόνες) here below. Asclepius goes on to point out, in agreement with Aristotle, that it is a horse that produces a horse and a man that produces a man, not the Forms of Horseness and Humanity.[73] In other words, paradigms are not part of the explanatory framework of particular events or things. That, says Asclepius, is why we hold that Ideas of particulars do not exist; there are only Ideas of things considered universally.[74]

See de Libera 1996, 84-92, for a summary of Syrianus' response to ten arguments of Aristotle for the claim that a separate Form cannot perform the function of a universal. See Perl 1998, 84, and n.5, who has a good discussion and criticism of the view that the internalization of Forms in the intellect of the Demiurge could not be Platonic because it is an Aristotelian doctrine.

[69] Someone like Thomas Aquinas, who rejects Platonic Forms as *universalia ante rem*, actually indirectly endorses the *reason* for positing Forms in the first place, namely, the explanation of the intelligibility of the sensible world (sameness in difference). For Aquinas holds that the explanation for this is to be found in divine ideas or exemplars. Aquinas is in part relying on the analysis of Avicenna. See Marmura 1979. Avicenna takes over the Alexandrian distinction between nature and universal but claims that Platonic Forms do not exist because they are identified with the latter. However, Avicenna insists that these natures exist in the divine and angelic minds.

[70] See Allen 1983, 79, '…Zeno's paradox [in *Parmenides*] follows from a primitive nominalism that identifies meaning and naming in such a way that the *meaning* of a term is identified with the subject *it is true of*. Plurality implies that the same things must be both like and unlike; if the same things are both like and unlike, the opposites likeness and unlikeness are identical; this is impossible; therefore, there is no plurality'. Also, see Proclus *In Parm.* 708, 1-7; 731, 8-23. In the latter passage, Proclus distinguishes the separate Form from the instance of it in the individual member of the many.

[71] The first question may be compared to the question of whether the existence of contingent things requires an explanation. One who aims to counter a proffered explanation must show either that the explanation does not work or that no explanation is possible. The latter would seem to be exceedingly difficult to do.

[72] See Asclepius *In Met.* 87, 34 – 88, 18.

[73] Ibid., 88, 37 – 89, 4.

[74] Ibid., 89, 6-7.

The point that is being made here is a shrewd one. The explanatory role that Forms are postulated to fulfill is not part of the Aristotelian explanatory framework. A Form is the explanation for the eternal possibility of intelligible real predication among sensibles. The explanation for an actual predicate is addressed exhaustively within the Aristotelian framework and acknowledged by the Platonist. The 'enmattered form' is part of that framework. Asclepius takes Aristotle to be objecting to someone who would adduce the unparticipated paradigm as part of an Aristotelian explanation.

Still, distinguishing this unparticipated paradigm from a universal hardly seems an adequate reason for postulating the former's separate existence. What Ammonius and other Neoplatonists want to insist on is, however, that this paradigm provides an explanation irreducible to, though compatible with, the Aristotelian explanatory framework.[75] In addition, they want to insist that someone such as Aristotle who is committed to an anti-nominalist position, will be led, perhaps *malgré lui*, to recognize the necessary existence of this paradigm.

The crucial distinction required to reorient the problem of universals to a more perspicuous setting is between what is universally predicable, on the one hand, and the nature, on the other, whose eternal existence as a Form is thought to be the necessary condition fore the possibility of sameness in difference. Since Neoplatonists believed that a Platonic commitment to the latter was not incompatible with an Aristotelian commitment to the former, they did not propose the harmony of Aristotle and Plato ironically. To suppose that there is an antagonism between Plato and Aristotle with regard to universals is to buy into the confusion that has bedeviled the discussion of this problem for more than a millennium.

[75] See Proclus *In Parm.* 883, 37 – 884, 3, who argues that identifying that which is common in things still leaves the question of the explanation of the origin of that which is common. In other words, identifying the fact that many things are large does not explain how many things can be large. Cf. 885, 1-2.

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