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## Separation

*Chōrismos* is the only doctrine we can with certainty attribute to Plato.  
(J. D. MABBOTT<sup>1</sup>)

### 1. Introduction

At *Metaphysics M* 4, 1078<sup>b</sup>30–1, and *M* 9, 1086<sup>b</sup>32–<sup>b</sup>5, Aristotle says that Plato, but not Socrates, separated (*echōrise*, 1086<sup>b</sup>4) forms<sup>2</sup> or universals; at 1086<sup>b</sup>6–7 he says that separation is responsible for the difficulties in Plato's theory of forms. What exactly is separation? Did Plato, but not Socrates, separate forms? And if so, is this for the reasons Aristotle suggests? Is Aristotle right to find separation so objectionable?

Answers to these questions are disputed. Some believe that to say that the form of F is separate is to say only that it is *different* from any or all F sensible particulars;<sup>3</sup> others believe it is to say that it *can exist independently* of any given F sensible particular;<sup>4</sup> yet others believe it is to say that it can exist independently of *all* F sensible particulars—the form of F can

<sup>1</sup> J. D. Mabbott, 'Aristotle and the *Chōrismos* of Plato', *Classical Quarterly*, 20 (1926), 72–9 at 72.

<sup>2</sup> [Here I delete a footnote concerning capitalization conventions, which is not relevant to the present edition. See Introduction, n. 62.]

<sup>3</sup> W. D. Ross, for example, in his *Aristotle's Metaphysics* (2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), vol. i, p. xliii, writes that 'to distinguish the universal from its particulars is in a sense to "separate" it. It is to think of it separately, and if the thought is not merely mistaken, this implies that the universal is a different entity from the particulars.' Ross goes on, however, to suggest that Aristotle has more in mind in saying that Plato separated forms. D. R. Morrison, 'Three Criteria of Substance in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: Unity, Definability, and Separation' (diss. Ph.D., Princeton, 1983), suggests that what Aristotle means by 'separation' (*chōristos*) is 'numerical distinctness'; see his ch. iv.

<sup>4</sup> R. E. Allen, *Plato's Euthyphro and the Earlier Theory of Forms* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 132. Allen believes that more than this sort of independent existence is involved in separation; he also believes, for example, that it is part of Aristotle's meaning that forms are particulars or individuals. However, although Aristotle seems to believe that particularity *follows* from separation, it is not part of what separation *consists in*.

exist whether or not any F sensible particulars ever do.<sup>5</sup> Others explicate separation spatially; the form of F is separate from F sensible particulars just in case it exists in a different place from them (or in no place).<sup>6</sup> Still others explicate separation in terms of a thesis about definability; forms are not definable in sensible terms alone.<sup>7</sup>

It is surprising and disheartening that the central term in the debate about separation is not fixed. But given that it is not, it is not surprising that there are different accounts of whether, and if so of why, Plato but not Socrates separated forms. Some argue that Aristotle is correct to say that Plato but not Socrates separated forms.<sup>8</sup> Others argue that Socrates and Plato both separate forms,<sup>9</sup> others claim that neither does.<sup>10</sup> There is genuine disagreement here, of course, only if the disputants use 'separation' univocally; but this is unfortunately far from clear.

Among those who believe Plato separates forms, accounts of his reasons vary. Some argue that he grounds separation on the flux of sensibles;<sup>11</sup> others point to the alleged facts that forms are paradigms,<sup>12</sup> or are non-

<sup>5</sup> W. F. R. Hardie, *A Study in Plato* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 73; T. H. Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 154. Actually, as Irwin defines separation there, it is a stronger notion, involving as well the claim that sensibles cannot exist independently of forms. This corresponds, not to Aristotle's notion of separation, but to his stronger notion of ontological priority; see below, sect. 2 and n. 19.

<sup>6</sup> G. F. Else, for example, in 'The Terminology of the Ideas', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 47 (1936), 17–55 at 55, writes: 'This exaltation of the true seat of the Ideas to a "place beyond heaven" is the transcendence of which Aristotle speaks.'

<sup>7</sup> Thus, Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory*, 154, speaks of two doctrines of separation; one involves independent existence, but one involves forms not being definable in sensible terms alone. This latter is the thesis Irwin calls 'non-reducibility' (NR); see further below, sect. 6. In an earlier article, 'Plato's Heracleiteanism', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 27 (1977), 1–13, Irwin seems to conceive of separation primarily in terms of a thesis about definability, although he occasionally slides into talk about independent existence (see e.g. p. 2).

<sup>8</sup> e.g. Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory*, ch. vi.

<sup>9</sup> e.g. Allen, *Plato's Euthyphro and the Earlier Theory of Forms*, 133–6.

<sup>10</sup> Thus A. E. Taylor, for example, under the mistaken impression that whatever a character called 'Socrates' in the dialogues says represents the thought of the historical Socrates, argues that in none of the early or middle dialogues are forms separated. Of course, he takes this partially to vindicate, rather than to undermine, Aristotle's claim that Socrates but not Plato separates forms. But if one believes that the middle dialogues represent Plato's thought, and that forms there are not separate, then the conclusion to draw is that Aristotle is wrong about Plato. See Taylor, *Varia Socratica* (Oxford: J. Parker & Co., 1911). That Plato did not separate forms is also argued by P. Natorp, *Platos Ideenlehre* (Leipzig: F. Meiner, 1903; 2nd edn., 1921), who is followed by J. A. Stewart, *Plato's Doctrine of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909).

<sup>11</sup> Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory*, 144–55; 'Plato's Heracleiteanism'.

<sup>12</sup> Mabbott, 'Aristotle and the *Chōrismos* of Plato', 74.

spatial and/or nontemporal;<sup>13</sup> yet others argue that Plato's doctrine of Anamnesis entails separation.<sup>14</sup>

Plato might, of course, offer more than one argument on behalf of separation. But not each of these arguments, or alleged features of forms, can be used to justify separation in each of its many guises; our estimate of how good a given argument for separation is is interdependent with our account of what separation is. (Plato might, of course, argue invalidly for separation; this, too, has been maintained.<sup>15</sup>)

Can any order be imposed on this chaos? Since Aristotle initiated the debate, the most reasonable procedure is to decide what *he* means in saying that Plato but not Socrates separated forms; we can then fix the sense of 'separation' accordingly, and proceed to evaluate his account of the basis and plausibility of separation. What *other* claims Plato and Socrates may, or may not, make about forms may well raise interesting questions; but they should not be confused with the question of separation.

I shall argue for the following claims:

(1) The separation (*chōrismos*) Aristotle typically has in mind in connection with forms is capacity for independent existence (IE); A is separate from B just in case A can exist without, independently of, B. To say that the form of F is separate is to say that it can exist without, independently of, F sensible particulars (1086<sup>b</sup>4) (Section 2).

(2) Aristotle is probably correct to say that at least some forms, in some dialogues, are separate. But he and others are incorrect to suggest that Plato, beginning with the *Phaedo*, heralds separation as a new feature of forms. On the contrary, so far from this being the case, Plato never even says that forms are separate; it proves surprisingly difficult to uncover any commitment to separation; and commitment to it emerges in unexpected ways and in unexpected cases (Sections 4–10).

(3) Aristotle's account of the basis of separation is incorrect. For he argues that Plato moves from the claim (that sensibles are in flux to the claim) that forms are substances to the conclusion that they are separate. But (although he may link flux to substantiality), Plato does not link substantiality and separation in the way required by Aristotle's argument. However, Aristotle avoids the popular mistake of thinking that Plato simply confuses, or moves fallaciously between, a difference and a separation claim. Further—

<sup>13</sup> e.g. W. D. Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 232.

<sup>14</sup> e.g. F. M. Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides: Parmenides' Way of Truth and Plato's Parmenides*, translated with an introduction and with a running commentary (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1939), 74; M. F. Burnyeat, review of Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory*, in *New York Review of Books* (27 Sept. 1979), 56–60. <sup>15</sup> See Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory*, 154–5.

though I shall not discuss this in detail—Aristotle also correctly avoids deriving separation from Anamnesis, or from the alleged paradigmaticism, nonspatiality, or nontemporality of forms (Section 3).

(4) Aristotle is probably correct to say that Socrates is uncommitted to separation. However, lack of commitment to separation in Socrates is as muted as is commitment to it in Plato (Section 11); neither Plato nor Socrates devotes the sort of attention to the issue of separation that Aristotle's account leads us to expect. Though Aristotle may well get their commitments on the question of separation correct, he is misleading to suggest that the issue is of explicit concern to them; it is not one about which they argue or to which they call attention.

(5) Finally, although this will receive considerably less attention, Aristotle ought not to view the doctrine of separation with such scorn. Although it is controversial, it has serious philosophical credentials; nor does it lead to all the difficulties Aristotle alleges.

## 2. Varieties of Separation

What does Aristotle mean when he says Plato separated (*echōrise*) forms? The question is not easy to answer; Aristotle uses '*chōris*' and its cognates in a variety of ways.

Thus, for example, at *Physics* 5. 3, 226<sup>b</sup>21–3, he writes that 'I call things together [*hama*] in place when they are in one primary place, and separate [*chōris*] when they are in different places'. Here A and B are separate from one another when they are in different places. I shall call this sort of separation *local separation*. Aristotle sometimes indicates that he has it in mind by speaking, not of separation *tout court*, but of separation in place (*topō(i)*).<sup>16</sup>

Aristotle also speaks of being separate in definition (*chōriston logō(i)*) (*Metaph. H* 1, 1042<sup>a</sup>29); A is definitionally separate from B just in case A can be defined without mention of (the definition of) B.<sup>17</sup>

Aristotle also uses '*chōris*' and its cognates to indicate capacity for inde-

<sup>16</sup> See e.g. *De An.* 413<sup>b</sup>14, 17; *Metaph.* 1016<sup>b</sup>2, 1052<sup>b</sup>17, 1068<sup>b</sup>26, 1092<sup>a</sup>19. This is, or is close to, the sort of separation Else, for example, associates with forms; see n. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Aristotle also speaks of definitional separation at e.g. *De An* 432<sup>a</sup>20, 433<sup>b</sup>25; *Metaph.* 1030<sup>b</sup>25, 1064<sup>a</sup>24. Sometimes he speaks instead of definitional priority; cf. e.g. *Metaph.* 1018<sup>b</sup>33, 1028<sup>a</sup>32, 1077<sup>b</sup>13. Definitional priority implies, but is not implied by, definitional separation. Notice that although definitional separation implies NR, the converse is not true. For NR leaves open the possibility that (definitions of) sensibles be mentioned in definitions of forms, so long as they do not exhaust such definitions; whereas definitional separation requires that no reference to (definitions of) sensibles be included in definitions of forms. See sect. 6, and nn. 7 and 37.

pendent existence (IE). At *Metaph. Z* 1, 1028<sup>a</sup>31–<sup>b</sup>2, for example, he says that substance is prior in three ways: in nature, definition, and knowledge.<sup>18</sup> He explains the natural priority of substance by saying that ‘of the other categories, none is separate [*chōriston*], but only it’ (1028<sup>a</sup>33–4). ‘Separate’ is not explained; but at *Metaph. Δ* 11, 1019<sup>a</sup>1–4, he writes that ‘a thing is prior in respect of its nature and substance when it is possible for it to be without other things, but not them without it; this division was used by Plato’ (trans. Kirwan). Here Aristotle says that A is naturally prior to B just in case A can exist without B but not conversely; in *Z* 1 he says that substance is naturally prior to other things because only it is separate. Assuming that ‘natural priority’ has the same sense in the two passages, it follows that A is separate from B just in case A can exist without, independently of, B. Another sort of separation, then, is *capacity for independent existence* (IE), or what I shall also sometimes call *ontological separation*.<sup>19</sup> This is the relevant sort of separation in connection with the natural priority of substance; it is associated with Plato (*Metaph. Δ* 4, 1019<sup>a</sup>4); and it is said to be the fundamental sort of priority (1019<sup>a</sup>11–12). Aristotle sometimes indicates that he has it in view by speaking of separation *haplōs*—separation without qualification. At *Metaph. H* 1, 1042<sup>a</sup>28–31, for example, he contrasts being *chōriston logō(i)* with being *chōriston haplōs*, where this latter indicates IE.

It is important to note that these three sorts of separation—local, definitional, and ontological—are independent of one another. At *Metaph.*

<sup>18</sup> At 1028<sup>a</sup>32–8 I read: *kai physei kai logō(i) kai gnōsei*—adding ‘*physei*’ to, and deleting ‘*chronō(i)*’ from, Jaeger’s text. This emendation is, however, unnecessary for my argument.

<sup>19</sup> IE matches Hardie’s account of separation; see sect. 1 and n. 5. Irwin also uses the acronym ‘IE’, though his account of it corresponds instead to Aristotle’s notion of natural priority; see *Plato’s Moral Theory*, 154, and n. 5. Morrison, ‘Three Criteria of Substance in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*’, objects to the claim that the sort of separation Aristotle especially associates with substance is IE; but his arguments are unconvincing. One argument he gives is that “‘*Chōristos*’ just does not mean “independent” in Greek; it means “separate”” (126). One might just as well object, on this ground, to his claim that ‘*chōristos*’, for Aristotle, means ‘numerical distinctness’ by claiming that no, it means ‘separate’. ‘Capacity for independent existence’ is an effort to give content to, to explain the force of, ‘separate’; and it certainly involves no mistranslation to suppose that that is its force. Morrison also argues that ‘capacity for independent existence’ would indicate separability, not actual separation; that ‘*chōristos*’ indicates actual separation; and so ‘*chōristos*’ cannot mean ‘capacity for independent existence’ (126). I agree that ‘*chōristos*’, at least in connection with forms, indicates actual separation. But I think that *actual* separation is a *modal* notion; I discuss this further below. Morrison also objects that Socrates, for example, is supposed to be separate from the sun; but since he cannot exist if it does not, separation cannot be IE (127). This objection rests on the view that each substance, for Aristotle, is supposed to be separate from every other substance. But I do not think this is Aristotle’s view; rather, his view is that each substance is separate from nonsubstances. This view may lead to difficulties in its turn—but they are difficulties, not for my account of separation, but for Aristotle. I discuss some of the difficulties arising here in ch. 15.

M 2, 1077<sup>a</sup>30–<sup>b</sup>11, Aristotle himself notes that definitional and ontological separation are independent of one another. White, he says, is definitionally prior to white man, since the definition of the former does not include that of the latter, though the converse is not true. But white is not ontologically prior to white man, since it cannot exist without it.<sup>20</sup> And though Aristotle does not explicitly address the question of the connection between ontological and local separation, they too are independent of one another. The quantity of matter that now constitutes me can exist independently of me; but it is not now locally separate from me. IE, then, does not imply local separation. Nor does local separation imply IE. My shadow and I are in different places; but it cannot exist independently of me.<sup>21</sup>

There may be other sorts of separation beyond our three;<sup>22</sup> but these are the ones of primary concern to us here. Which, if any, does Aristotle intend when he says Plato separated forms?

Separation, of course, is always separation *from* something. In the case of Platonic forms, Aristotle makes it clear that separation is separation from sensible particulars (*Metaph. M 9*, 1086<sup>b</sup>4).<sup>23</sup> Hence our question is really: what does Aristotle mean when he says forms are separate from sensible particulars? (None the less, I shall sometimes follow Aristotle's lead and speak simply of the separation of forms, without troubling to add 'from sensible particulars'.)

As we shall see, Aristotle may believe forms are separate in each of our three ways—locally, definitionally, and ontologically. But when he says that Plato separated forms—when he actually uses 'chōris' and its cognates of forms—he typically has IE in mind.

<sup>20</sup> Aristotle's remark is odd, however. For white surely can exist without white man, so long as something else is white. On the independence of definitional and ontological priority (separation), see also G. E. L. Owen, 'Logic and Metaphysics in Some Earlier Works of Aristotle', in I. Düring and G. E. L. Owen (eds.), *Aristotle and Plato in the Mid-Fourth Century: Papers of the Symposium Aristotelicum Held at Oxford in August, 1957* (Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia, 11; Göteborg: Elanders Bocktryckeri Aktienbolag, 1960), 163–90, esp. 170–3.

<sup>21</sup> Neither does either of definitional or local separation imply the other; but this need not concern us here.

<sup>22</sup> Thus, for example, Aristotle also speaks of priority (separation) in thought (at e.g. *Phys.* 2. 2, 193<sup>b</sup>34, on which see below, this section); in knowledge (*Metaph. Z 1*, 1028<sup>a</sup>31–3); in time (*De An.* 427<sup>a</sup>3); in extension (*De An.* 429<sup>a</sup>11, 430<sup>a</sup>20, 433<sup>b</sup>25). For other references, see H. Bonitz, *Index Aristotelicus* (Berlin: Reimer, 1870), 859<sup>b</sup>–860<sup>b</sup>. A new computer study of Aristotle's use of 'chōris' and its cognates may be found in Morrison, 'Three Criteria of Substance in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*'.

<sup>23</sup> J. Stenzel, *Zahl und Gestalt bei Platon and Aristoteles* (Berlin: Teubner, 1933), 133 ff., argues by contrast that in criticizing the Platonic separation, Aristotle is criticizing Plato's account of the relation of genera to *infimae species*. For some criticism, see H. F. Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1944), n. 122.

That IE is at least one sort of separation he associates with forms is strongly suggested by the passage quoted above from *Metaphysics*  $\Delta$  11. And there is more than a suggestion of IE in the following passage from the *Eudemian Ethics*:

For they say that the good-itself is the best thing of all, and the good-itself is that to which it belongs to be both first among goods, and the cause by its presence, for other things, of their being goods. For, they say that it is of *that* object, above all, that the good is truly predicated—other things being goods through sharing in it, and similarity to it; and it is first among goods—since, if the object in which things share were taken away, with it would go all the things that share in the form, and are called (what they are called) through sharing in it; and that is the way that the first stands in relation to what comes after. And indeed, like the other forms, the form of the good is separate from the things that share in it. (1. 8, 1217<sup>b</sup>2–16, trans. Woods)

Aristotle is explaining why the Platonists take the form of the good to be first among—naturally prior to—other goods. At 1217<sup>b</sup> he suggests they do so because they believe other goods depend on, cannot exist without, the form of the good. Now if the form of the good were similarly dependent on other goods, it would not be prior to them; there would be mutual dependence instead. Hence Aristotle must be assuming that for Plato the form of the good can exist without, independently of, other goods. Nor is this merely assumed. At 1217<sup>b</sup>15–16 Aristotle says that the form of the good, like other forms, is separate from (*chōriston*) its participants. It seems clear that ‘separation’ here indicates IE: at 1217<sup>b</sup>11–13 Aristotle says that other goods depend on the form of the good; at <sup>b</sup>15–16 he says that the form of the good (like other forms) is separate from—that is, can exist without—its participants; the conjunction of these two claims gives us the natural priority of the form of the good that Aristotle is explaining.

IE is also the relevant sort of separation in the crucial passage in *Metaphysics* *M* 9, to be explored in detail below (in Section 3), where Aristotle explains the original impetus of the theory of forms (1086<sup>a</sup>32–<sup>b</sup>13). He argues that the Platonists make forms both particulars and universals. They are particulars, he claims, because they are separate. For forms are substances; substances are separate; and whatever is separate is a particular. Whatever sort of separation is at issue here, then, must be implied by substantiality and imply particularity. 1E—and only IE—meets these conditions. This can be seen as follows.

In *Metaphysics* *Z* 1, as we have seen, Aristotle claims that all and only substance is separate; and separation, here, is IE. So substantiality implies IE.

Aristotle also believes that IE implies particularity. In *De Interpretatione* 7

he defines universals as follows: ‘by universal I mean that which by its nature is predicated of many things’ (17<sup>a</sup>39–40). One might think he means only that universals *can* be predicated of many things; but in fact he means that universals must *actually* be predicated of many things. Universals, then, cannot exist uninstantiated—cannot, that is, enjoy IE from particulars. Hence, if something enjoys IE from (other) particulars, it cannot be a universal and so is a particular. (Aristotle assumes, not unreasonably, that everything is either a particular or a universal.<sup>24</sup>) Correspondingly, Aristotle repeatedly insists that no universal is separate—and it is clear he has IE in mind.

IE, then, is implied by substantiality and implies particularity. This is not so, however, for local or definitional separation. Substantiality, first of all, does not imply local separation—does not, that is, imply local separation from all (other) sensible particulars, which, as we have seen, is what separation is separation from. My desk is in the same place as its constituent matter and as its nonsubstance property instances; some of these are sensible particulars. Hence my desk is not locally separate from all other sensible particulars; and so being a substance does not imply being locally separate in the relevant way. Local separation cannot, then, be the sort of separation at work in *M* 9.

Substantiality does, on the other hand, imply definitional separation. But definitional separation does not imply particularity. On the contrary, at *Metaph.*  $\Delta$  11, 1018<sup>b</sup>32–3, Aristotle claims that *universals* are definitionally prior; particulars, then, are presumably *not* definitionally prior, and so cannot be definitionally separate. And in *Metaphysics* *Z* 15, as well as elsewhere, Aristotle denies that particulars are definable;<sup>25</sup> in that case, they cannot be definitionally separate from anything. For if A is definitionally separate from B, A must, at the least, be definable. Hence definitional separation cannot be at issue in *M* 9 either.

If only IE explains the course of the argument in *M* 9, presumably it is the sort of separation to hand. Correspondingly, IE is also likely to be the relevant sort of separation in those many passages where Aristotle associates forms with separation, substantiality, and/or particularity. Given the prevalence of such passages, coupled with the centrality of *M* 9—it is Aristotle’s fullest account of separation—we are justified in assuming that IE is at least one central sort of separation.

This is not to say, however, that Aristotle does not also associate defini-

<sup>24</sup> This is not to say, of course, that Aristotle does not believe that there are different sorts of universals and particulars.

<sup>25</sup> See e.g. *Post. An.* 1. 8; contrast *Metaph.* *M* 10.



tional or local separation with forms. Although neither is in view in *M* 9, or in other passages concerned with particularity and/or substantiality, or in the *Eudemian Ethics* passage considered above, perhaps they are in view elsewhere. Let us see.

One might argue that Aristotle does *not* take forms to be locally separate from sensibles, on the following ground: for A and B to be locally separate from one another, they must be in different places. But Aristotle insists that forms are ‘nowhere’ (*Phys.* 3. 4, 203<sup>a</sup>8–9); hence they are not in a different place from, and so are not locally separate from, sensibles. However, one might resist this argument in turn. One might argue, for example, that Aristotle would allow us to broaden the notion of local separation so that A and B are locally separate from one another just in case they are not in the same place. Forms, not being in any place, are not in the same place as, and so are locally separate from, sensibles. Alternatively, one might note that Aristotle sometimes contrasts forms that are elsewhere (*ekei*) with sensibles that are here (*entautha*);<sup>26</sup> if he intends this contrast literally, perhaps he at least sometimes conceives of forms as being in a place, though in a different one from sensibles, so that they are locally separate from sensibles, even on the initial account of that notion.

Aristotle may believe that forms are locally separate from sensibles, then, although this is unclear. But even if he does, I know of no place where he uses ‘*chōris*’ or its cognates to indicate this. The passages most likely to do so are those few where Aristotle says that forms are not in (*en*) sensibles and then, in short compass, that they are separate (‘*chōris*’) from them.<sup>27</sup> It might be thought that the denial that forms are in sensibles indicates local separation, so that ‘*chōris*’, at least in these passages, indicates it too.

But this should not be too readily assumed. First, as a quick glance at *Physics* 4. 3 reveals, ‘in’ need not be used locally; it can be used, for example, to indicate dependence of some sort. If ‘in’ is so used in those few passages where forms are said not to be in sensibles, it does not indicate local separation; correspondingly, there is no presumption that near occurrences of ‘*chōris*’ do either. But even if ‘in’ is used locally, the ‘*chōris*’ that occurs near it need not be local too—and this for two reasons. First, Aristotle never, even here, directly opposes being in and being separate. He never says that because forms are not in things, they are separate from them; or that because they are separate, they are not in them. But second, even if there were this direct contrast, and even if ‘in’ were local, it would not follow that

<sup>26</sup> *Metaph.* *M* 4, 1079<sup>a</sup>31. For ‘*entautha*’, see also the *Peri Ideōn*, in Alexander, *In Metaph.* 83. 7 Hayduck (‘*ekei*’ is not used here).

<sup>27</sup> See especially *Metaph.* *M* 5, 1079<sup>b</sup>17, with 1079<sup>b</sup>35–1080<sup>a</sup>2.

‘*chōris*’ is local too. In *Metaphysics M* 1–2, for example, Aristotle considers two views of the relation between numbers and sensibles—that numbers are separate from, or are in, sensibles. Here ‘in’ seems to be local; but separation appears to be IE. So even where ‘in’ is used locally, and directly contrasted with being separate, separation need not be local too. And so far as I can see, in the very few passages where ‘*en*’ and ‘*chōris*’ appear in close proximity—though not in direct opposition—to one another, ‘*chōris*’ might well be IE.

So even if Aristotle believes forms are locally separate, he does not use ‘*chōris*’ to indicate this. Further, Aristotle never, in saying that forms are *chōris*, complements ‘*chōris*’ with ‘*topō(i)*’. Yet one might expect him to, at least once, were local separation in view. Moreover, local separation is symmetrical; if A is locally separate from B, B is locally separate from A. But in speaking of the separation of forms, Aristotle says only that they are separate from sensibles; he never suggests that sensibles are similarly separate from forms. Indeed, in the *Eudemian Ethics* this is denied. If the relevant sort of separation is nonsymmetrical, it cannot be local.

What, now, of definitional separation? In *Physics* 2. 1 Aristotle writes:

Both the student of nature and the mathematician deal with these things; but the mathematician does not consider them as boundaries of natural bodies. Nor does he consider things which supervene as supervening on such bodies. This is why he separates them; for they are separate in thought [*chōrista tō(i) noēsei*, 193<sup>b</sup>34] from change, and it makes no difference; no error results. Those who talk about ideas do not notice that they too are doing this: they separate physical things though they are less separate than the objects of mathematics. That becomes clear if you try to define the objects and the things which supervene in each class. Odd and even, straight and curved, number, line, and shape, can be defined without change but flesh, bone, and man cannot. (193<sup>b</sup>31–194<sup>a</sup>6, trans. Charlton with minor alterations)

Here Aristotle claims that forms are separate in thought from change. One might take this to show that forms are definitionally separate from sensibles;<sup>28</sup> and if so, then at least here Aristotle uses ‘*chōris*’ of forms to indicate definitional separation.

Still, three points must be borne in mind. First, this is, so far as I know, the only passage in which Aristotle uses ‘*chōris*’ and its cognates

<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, it is not entirely clear that one ought to take separation in thought either to be or to imply definitional separation; or separation from change to be or to imply separation from sensible particulars. If one does not, then this passage is no evidence that Aristotle takes forms to be definitionally separate from sensibles. Even so, however, it would, of course, show that Aristotle associates some sort of separation other than IE with forms.

of forms to indicate definitional separation. Second, notice that, in contrast to *M* 9—indeed, in contrast to every other passage in which Aristotle associates separation (*chōrismos*) with forms—an appropriate complement (*tē(i) noēsei*) is supplied, to make it clear that IE is not in view. Once again, then, if ‘separation’ occurs without a complement, the natural inference is that it indicates IE.

Third, Aristotle seems to believe that definitional separation is a mistake only for *some* forms, not for all. One cannot adequately define forms of natural things without reference to change; but one can—indeed, one should—define forms of mathematical without reference to change. Yet Aristotle typically inveighs against separation as such; it is a big mistake for *any* form. This is not so of definitional separation; but it is so, in Aristotle’s view, of IE.<sup>29</sup> Once again, then, IE, not definitional separation, is presumably in view in most of the discussions of forms, since separation is, there, taken to be a mistake for all forms.

I conclude, then, that although Aristotle may take forms to be locally and definitionally, no less than ontologically, separate, ontological separation (IE) is the central sort of separation he associates with forms.

I shall now, then, fix the sense of ‘separation’ in terms of IE. When I ask whether forms are separate, I mean: do they enjoy IE from, can they exist without, sensible particulars? This, at least, is the question Aristotle—in contrast, we have seen, to many other commentators—typically has in mind; and we shall have enough work to do to evaluate his answer.

Notice that Aristotle sometimes says that forms are *chōrista*, at other times that they are *chōris* (e.g. *Metaph. Z* 16, 1040<sup>b</sup>27–8). Does anything turn on this terminological difference? To say that forms are *chōris* is to say that they are *separate*. But *-ton* endings in Greek are ambiguous; to say that forms are *chōrista* might be to say either that they are (*a*) separate, or that they are (*b*) separable. Now as *Metaphysics A* 11 and *Z* 1 reveal, for A to be *chōriston* from B is for A to be *able* to exist without B—a modal claim. One might then suppose that for A to be *chōriston* from B is for A to be *separable* from B, where this means to be *able* to exist without B; and that to be *chōris* from B is to be separate from B, where this means *actually* to

<sup>29</sup> There is a problem here. Aristotle suggests that definitional separation is a mistake for some forms. Yet in *Metaph. Δ* 11, 1018<sup>b</sup>32–3, discussed above, he suggests that universals (of which forms are a subclass) are definitionally prior (and so definitionally separate). It is unclear, then, why he thinks definitional separation is *ever* a mistake; for if forms are universals, they are definitionally separate. Perhaps different sorts of definitional separation are in view in the two passages, or perhaps (see n. 28) separation in thought in our *Physics* passage is not the same as definitional separation. I am inclined to think there are deep problems (not for our account but) for Aristotle lurking here; see ch. 15.

exist without B. In the case of forms, this would be to say that forms are such that nothing sensible instantiates them. If this is right, then Aristotle attributes to Plato not only the claim that forms *can* exist without anything sensible instantiating them, but also the claim that forms do so exist.

But I do not think this is correct. Aristotle seems to use ‘*chōris*’ and ‘*chōriston*’ interchangeably in his accounts of forms, and to use both to mean capacity for independent existence, to indicate, that is, a modal claim. Since ‘*chōris*’ cannot easily mean ‘separable’, I take it that ‘*chōris*’ and ‘*chōriston*’ therefore both mean ‘separate’; to be separate from sensibles is to be able to exist without them.

Thus, for example, we have seen that in *Metaphysics Z 1* Aristotle says only that substance is *chōriston*; yet at *Metaph. Z 16*, 1040<sup>b</sup>27–9, he commends the Platonists for making forms to be *chōris*, given that they are substances—here ‘*chōris*’ conveys no more than capacity for independent existence. Further, a typical example of a form that is *chōris* is the form of man; but clearly this is not an example of a form that nothing sensible instantiates. Indeed, Aristotle seems to believe that the Platonists do not want forms for (sorts of) things that never exist (e.g. centaurs),<sup>30</sup> though he thinks they quite willingly countenance separation.

Separation, then, is a modal claim—forms can exist independently of sensible particulars. It follows that forms might be separate even if sensibles always instantiate them. If nothing sensible instantiates a given form, it follows that that form is separate; but this is only sufficient, and not also necessary, for separation. Correspondingly, to reject separation, one must reject not only the view that there are forms that nothing sensible instantiates, but also the view that it is *possible* for there to be any.<sup>31</sup>

At this point, if not before, a question naturally arises: why is separation so bad? If to say that forms are separate is just to say that they can exist independently of sensible particulars; and if, as Aristotle and I believe, forms are universals, then to say that forms are separate is just to say that (some) universals can exist uninstantiated (by sensible particulars). To be sure, the doctrine that universals can exist uninstantiated is a controversial one, and one Aristotle repeatedly rejects; but though controversial, it is unclear that it

<sup>30</sup> See e.g. the Object of Thought argument in the *Peri Ideōn*, recorded by Alexander, *In Metaph.* 81. 25–82. 7 Hayduck.

<sup>31</sup> Contrast M. D. Rohr, ‘Empty Forms in Plato’, in S. Knuutilla (ed.), *Reforging the Great Chain of Being* (Boston: Reidel, 1980), 19–56. Rohr takes it as obvious that some forms are at least temporarily uninstantiated; he takes the important question to be whether any forms are *always* uninstantiated, and so concludes that forms are not separate or, rather (I suppose, on the assumption that Aristotle must be correct on this score at least), that separation does not consist in independent existence.

merits the scorn Aristotle heaps on it. How could it be thought, for example, that countenancing the possibility of uninstantiated universals turns them into particulars? It might be thought that, since Aristotle believes separation is so bad, yet IE is relatively innocuous, another account of separation is needed.

But this thought should be resisted. For though ascribing IE to universals may seem innocuous to philosophers of certain persuasions, we have seen that it does *not* seem innocuous to Aristotle: *he* believes that if universals enjoy IE, they must be particulars. For as he defines universals, they *cannot* exist independently of particulars; if something can exist independently of (other) particulars, it must itself be a particular. It is not, then, a count against IE's credentials that Aristotle believes separation is absurd—though it may well be a count against *Aristotle* that he believes this. At least, he needs to provide plausible reasons for his definition of universals; he cannot simply stipulate that they cannot exist uninstantiated.

Even if Plato separates universals, then, it is unclear that this leads to the difficulties Aristotle docket. The real challenge may be to discover—not why or whether Plato separates universals, but—why Aristotle is so convinced that universals cannot exist uninstantiated. This is not to say, of course, that Plato's theory of forms is ultimately acceptable or even coherent; it is only to say that whatever flaws we find in it, it is not clear they stem from separation, from the claim, that is, that universals can exist uninstantiated (by sensible particulars).

Having seen what Aristotle means by 'separation', let us now see why, and with what justification, Aristotle believes Plato separates forms.

### 3. Aristotle's Account of the Basis of Separation

Aristotle describes the origins of the theory of forms in three passages in the *Metaphysics*: *A* 6, 987<sup>a</sup>32–<sup>b</sup>7; *M* 4, 1078<sup>b</sup>9–1079<sup>a</sup>4; and *M* 9, 1086<sup>a</sup>31–<sup>b</sup>11. These are not the only passages in which he records arguments for the existence of forms; but they are the central ones.<sup>32</sup> I shall examine each passage in turn.

First a general point. In none of our three passages does Aristotle mention Anamnesis, or claim that forms are nonspatial, nontemporal, or paradigms. This surely suggests that he does not take these doctrines, or (alleged)

<sup>32</sup> Aristotle records other arguments for the existence of forms in, for example, the *Peri Ideōn*; but unlike the *Metaphysics* passages, these arguments do not purport to represent Plato's original motivation for introducing forms.

features of forms, to be important in understanding the origins of the theory of forms. This suggestion is reinforced by other considerations. First, so far as I know, Aristotle never even claims that forms are nontemporal; so it is unclear that he even takes them to be nontemporal. Second, although he occasionally suggests they are nonspatial, he does not do so often. Third, although he does mention Anamnesis, he does not seem to believe it is important to the metaphysics (as opposed to the epistemology) of the theory of forms. In the Argument from Relatives in the *Peri Ideōn*, for example, he omits all reference to Anamnesis, although the argument is based on a passage in the *Phaedo* which closely links Anamnesis and forms.<sup>33</sup> Finally, although, as the Argument from Relatives and other passages attest, Aristotle takes paradigmaticism seriously, it is unclear he believes it grounds separation; separation is not mentioned in the Argument from Relatives, for example, although paradigmaticism is to the fore. I shall assume, then, that whatever may be true of Plato, Aristotle—again in contrast, as we have seen, to many other commentators—does not believe that the basis of separation consists in Anamnesis, nonspatiality, nontemporality, or paradigmaticism.

Flux, by contrast, is prominent in each of our three *Metaphysics* passages. This suggests that at least Aristotle takes flux to be important in understanding the origins of the theory of forms. The crucial question, correspondingly, and the one I shall focus on in this section, is what role, if any, he believes flux plays in the separation of forms.

On one familiar view, Aristotle believes Plato uses flux as an invalid argument for separation. In fact, flux only proves that forms are *different* from sensibles; but, according to Aristotle, Plato invalidly moves from their difference, to their separation, from sensibles.<sup>34</sup> In this section, I shall challenge some features of this view.

In *Metaph. A 6* Aristotle writes:

The philosophies discussed were succeeded by Plato's work, which followed these in most ways; but it had special features in contrast to the philosophy of the Italians. For in his youth he first became familiar with Cratylus and with the Heracleitean beliefs, that all sensibles are always flowing and that there is no knowledge of them; and he supposed these things later too. But Socrates was concerned with ethical things, and not at all with the whole of nature; he was seeking the universal in ethical things and was the first to turn his thought to definitions. Plato agreed with him; but because of <his Heracleitean beliefs> he supposed that this <defining>

<sup>33</sup> Alexander, *In Metaph.*, 82. 11–83. 17 Hayduck; cf. *Phd.* 73 A–77 A.

<sup>34</sup> For this view, see e.g. Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory*, esp. 144–55, and 'Plato's Heracleiticism'. Though he does not put the matter in just this way, I believe I correctly capture the central claim he wishes to make.

applied to different things [*heterōn*] and not to sensibles—for, he thought, it is impossible for the common definition to be of any of the sensibles, since they are always changing. These sorts of beings, then, he called ‘ideas’. (987<sup>a</sup>29–<sup>b</sup>8)

The argument may be schematized as follows:

- (1) (1) (x) (x is a sensible → x is always changing).
- (2) (x) (x is always changing → x is unknowable and undefinable).
- ∴ (3) (x) (x is a sensible → x is unknowable and undefinable).
- (4) There are definitions and knowledge.
- (5) Definitions and knowledge are of something.
- ∴ (6) There are objects different from (*heterōn*, 987<sup>b</sup>5) sensibles, that are the objects of knowledge and definition.
- (7) These are ideas.
- ∴ (8) There are ideas.

(1)–(3) rule out the possibility of knowing or defining sensibles, on the ground that they are always changing, are always in flux. I take it that sensibles (*aisthēta*) include not only sensible particulars, but also sensible properties; and that the relevant sort of flux includes not only real change through time but also relational change. It is not, or not only, that, for example, Theaetetus is constantly gaining or losing weight, but rather, or also, that, for example, three feet is both long and short—long for an ant, short for an elephant. Compresence, at least as much as succession, of opposites is relevant here, and it attaches to properties as well as to particulars.<sup>35</sup>

Since there are definitions and knowledge (4), however, and since they require objects (5), there must be nonsensible objects, objects different from (*heterōn*) sensibles, that are the objects of knowledge and definition (6). The Platonists called these objects ‘ideas’ (7)—or, as they are sometimes called, and as I shall generally call them, ‘forms’. And so there are ideas (8).

(1)–(6) do not make it clear whether forms are nonsensible universals or particulars. But in later passages it is made clear that they are intended, at least in the first instance, to be universals; and though (1)–(6) do not require this, it is the natural interpretation of the passage as a whole. For Aristotle claims that Socrates was seeking universals and definitions; the suggestion is that universals are the objects of definition (and so of knowledge). And Aristotle then remarks that Plato accepted Socrates’ teaching; it is just that

<sup>35</sup> See Irwin, ‘Plato’s Heracliteanism’, for a defence of this interpretation of Aristotle. Although I do not accept all of Irwin’s account of *A* 6, I agree with his account of what flux there involves.

he proposed different objects of definition—nonsensible (sc. universals), not sensible ones.

Forms, then, are nonsensible properties or universals, universals *different* from sensible particulars or properties. But are they also separate? It is striking that Aristotle does not say so explicitly; neither ‘*chōris*’ nor its cognates occur in the argument or, indeed, anywhere in book *A* until chapter 9 (991<sup>b</sup>1). Nor does (I) use ‘*para*’—which can but need not import separation—of forms.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, (1)–(5) only yield the claim that there are entities different from sensibles; and all (6) claims is that there are entities different from sensibles. Nor do (7)–(8) seem to license more than this; Aristotle simply remarks that Plato dubbed the entities generated by the flux argument ‘ideas’. To be sure, one might argue that (I) is an invalid argument for separation; but neither is invalidity mentioned. Perhaps, then, Aristotle believes that Plato uses flux to argue not for separation, but only for nonsensible universals, for universals different, but not necessarily separate, from sensibles.<sup>37</sup>

This may seem unsatisfactory: surely *A* 6 purports to explain what is distinctive about Plato’s theory of forms; surely separation is what is distinctive; flux is the only argument to hand; so surely (I) is meant to show that flux is the argument for separation?

We need not conclude this. First, separation is not *all* Aristotle takes to be distinctive of Plato’s theory of forms; he also takes countenancing nonsensible universals to be distinctive of it, and flux is relevant here (see Section 11). Second, we shall see later that Plato does not ground separation on flux. If our account of (I) so far is correct, Aristotle sees this; on the alternative account, he does not. I conclude for now, then, that (I) is not presented as an argument for separation, but only for universals different from sensibles. Later (see the discussion of *M* 9, below) we shall in fact need to modify this conclusion—although not in the way the alternative account suggests.

I now turn to *M* 4:

<sup>36</sup> See, however, the odd use of ‘*para*’ at 987<sup>b</sup>8, and Ross’s note ad loc.

<sup>37</sup> Does (I), however, validly show that forms are definitionally separate from sensibles? This is unclear. On the one hand, (I) involves the claim that sensibles are not definable; so definitions of them will not occur in definitions of forms. On the other hand, nothing in (I) precludes the possibility of sensibles being mentioned in definitions of forms; and if this possibility is actual, and incompatible with definitional separation, then (I) does not imply that forms are definitionally separate from sensibles. Whether or not (I) in fact implies that forms are definitionally separate from sensibles, it is not presented as an argument for definitional separation, any more than it is presented as an argument for IE. (I) does, on the other hand, show that forms enjoy NR; see above, nn. 7 and 17, and below, sect. 6.



The belief about forms came about to those who spoke about them because, as regards truth, they were persuaded by the Heraclitean arguments that all sensibles are always flowing, so that if knowledge and thought are to be of anything, there must, in their view, be some different natures, besides [*para*] sensibles, remaining; for there is no knowledge of flowing things . . . But Socrates did not make universals or definitions separate [*chōrista*]; but they (the Platonists) separated them, and they called these sorts of beings 'ideas'. (1078<sup>b</sup>12–17, 30–2)

The argument is the following:

- (II) (1) (x) (x is a sensible → x is always changing).  
 (2) (x) (x is always changing → x is unknowable).  
 ∴ (3) (x) (x is a sensible → x is unknowable).  
 (4) There is knowledge.  
 (5) Knowledge requires the existence of permanent natures, universals.  
 ∴ (6) There are nonsensible natures, universals, besides (*para*) sensibles.  
 (7) Nonsensible universals are separate.  
 (8) Nonsensible universals are ideas.  
 ∴ (9) There are separate ideas.

Aristotle first presents (II) (1)–(6) (1078<sup>b</sup>9–17). He then breaks off to discuss Socrates. Then, at 1078<sup>b</sup>30–2, he remarks that Socrates did not separate universals or definitions, whereas the Platonists did; and they called these separated universals 'ideas'. This gives us (7)–(9).

(II) (1)–(6) closely parallel (I) (1)–(6). Aristotle again begins from the Heraclitean claim that sensibles are always changing, and infers on Plato's behalf that this renders them unsuitable as objects of knowledge. Hence, since there is knowledge, there must be stable, nonsensible objects of knowledge. These, as 1078<sup>b</sup>30 makes clear, are universals the Platonists call 'ideas'.

(II) (1)–(6), like (I) (1)–(6), are a valid argument for entities different, but not separate, from sensibles. Correspondingly, Aristotle uses '*heteras*' (1078<sup>b</sup>15) but not '*chōris*' or its cognates. He also uses '*para*' (<sup>b</sup>16), which can but need not import separation. Since it is used in connection with '*heteras*' here, presumably it means 'difference', not 'separation', here.

Still, in (II) (7), in contrast to (I), the entities generated by the flux argument are said to be separate. Does not this suggest that the flux argument is the argument for separation after all?<sup>38</sup>

This is not the only possibility. Notice that Aristotle again describes

<sup>38</sup> One might suggest that (II), even more clearly than (I), is intended to argue for definitional separation; for does not Aristotle say that Plato but not Socrates separated

the flux argument ((1)–(6) = 1079<sup>b</sup>12–17) without mentioning separation; separation is not mentioned until *later*, at 1078<sup>b</sup>30. Nor is it there said to issue from flux; Aristotle says *that*, but not *why*, Plato separated universals. Perhaps Aristotle believes, then, that Plato separates the entities generated by the flux argument—not *because* of flux, but—for other reasons not here adduced.

Let us turn, finally, to *M* 9:<sup>39</sup>

For they make the ideas both universal and again, at the same time, as separate [*chōristas*] and as particulars. But it has been argued before that this is impossible. The reason those who said the substances were universal combined these things ⟨universality and particularity⟩ into the same thing is that they did not make them ⟨the substances⟩ the same as sensibles. They thought that the particulars in sensibles were flowing and that none of them remained, but that the universal is besides [*para*] these things and is something different [*heteron ti*] from them. Socrates motivated ⟨this view⟩ through definitions; but he at least did not separate ⟨universals⟩ from particulars. And he was right not to separate them. This is clear from the results. For it is not possible to acquire knowledge without the universal; but separating is the cause of the difficulties arising about the ideas. But they, on the assumption that it was necessary that, if there were to be any substances besides [*para*] the sensible and flowing ones, they be separate [*chōristas*], had no others, but they set apart the substances spoken of universally; so that it followed that universal and particular ⟨natures⟩ were almost the same natures. This in itself, then, would be one difficulty for the view discussed. (1086<sup>a</sup>31–<sup>b</sup>11)

I take the argument to be the following:

- (III) (1) Sensibles are in flux. (1086<sup>a</sup>37–<sup>b</sup>1)
- [(2) (x) (x) is in flux → x is unknowable and indefinable.]
- [(3) There is knowledge and definition.]
- (4) Knowledge and definition require universals. (1086<sup>b</sup>5–6)
- [∴] (5) There are nonsensible universals, universals different from (*para*, *heteron ti*) sensibles. (1086<sup>b</sup>1–2)
- (6) Nonsensible universals are forms.

definitions (1078<sup>b</sup>30–1), and is not this to say that Plato but not Socrates accepts definitional separation? But I take it that ‘definitions’, in 1078<sup>b</sup>30–1, means the *objects* of definition, i.e. universals; and to say that the objects of definition are separate is to say that they enjoy IE. I do not deny that forms are definitionally separate, or that Aristotle thought this; I deny only (i) that in (II), Aristotle uses ‘*chōris*’ to do duty for definitional separation, and (ii) that (II) is directed at definitional separation. Nor is it even clear (II) implies definitional separation; see n. 57.

<sup>39</sup> In the translation that follows, I use Jaeger’s text. In my schematization of the argument—(III)—I have put in brackets steps or inferences I take to be implicit, but not explicit, in the text.

- (7) There are nonsensible substances. (1086<sup>a</sup>36–7, <sup>b</sup>1–2)
- (8) The only candidates for nonsensible substances are nonsensible universals, the forms. (1086<sup>b</sup>7–10)
- (9) Nonsensible substances are separate. (1086<sup>b</sup>8–9)
- ∴ (10) Forms are separate.
- (11) (x) (x is separate → x is a particular). (1086<sup>a</sup>33–4, <sup>b</sup>9–11)
- ∴ (12) Forms are both universals and particulars. (1086<sup>a</sup>32–4, <sup>b</sup>10–11)

Aristotle is explaining why Platonic forms are both universals and particulars. The flux argument is adduced to explain why they are universals: knowledge and definition require the existence of stable, nonsensible universals, universals the Platonists call ‘forms’. But why are forms also particulars? The reason, Aristotle suggests, is that the Platonists believe, correctly, that there must be some nonsensible substances. But they don’t know what these nonsensible substances can be other than their forms (1086<sup>b</sup>9–10). Nonsensible substances, however, are separate (1086<sup>b</sup>8–9); and so forms are separate. But whatever is separate is a particular (1086<sup>a</sup>33–4, <sup>b</sup>9–11). Hence forms are not only universals, but also particulars.

We have already questioned part of this argument: it is not clear that separation implies particularity; perhaps universals can be separate—can exist independently of sensible particulars—without thereby being particulars. But our more immediate concern is that (III) contains a subargument—indeed, a valid subargument—for the separation of forms: (5)–(10) constitute such an argument. Only in *M* 9 is the question of the basis of separation explicitly addressed; once addressed, a valid argument is adduced on its behalf; and that argument is not (just) the flux argument.

To be sure, flux is part of the story: it is used to justify (5); it explains why there must be nonsensible universals, universals *different* from sensibles. But to get to the further conclusion that they are *separate*, further considerations—considerations not explicit in *A* 6 or *M* 4—are adduced: that these universals are substances, and that substances are separate. Once these considerations are added to the flux argument, separation validly results; but flux alone does not, and is not said by Aristotle to, license it. Perhaps separation is not mentioned in *A* 6, then, because it only considers flux, and flux does not get us to separation. And although separation is mentioned in *M* 4, Aristotle does not claim that flux is its basis—perhaps because he does not believe that that is its basis.

Notice that when Aristotle records the flux argument, he again uses only ‘*para*’ and ‘*heteron*’ (1086<sup>b</sup>1–2). It is only when he turns to forms as

substances, as at 1086<sup>b</sup>9, that he uses ‘*chōris*’ and its cognates. This is as it should be. For flux only yields a claim of difference; separation issues instead from the substantiality of forms.

I conclude so far, then, that, in contrast to the familiar view sketched at the beginning of this section, Aristotle does not suggest that Plato fallaciously slides from the fact, licensed by flux, that forms are different from sensibles, to the conclusion, seemingly not licensed by flux, that they are separate from them. Rather, he suggests that Plato uses flux as a valid argument for forms different from sensibles; their separation is then validly inferred by adding to this conclusion the twin claims that forms are substances and that substances are separate.

If all the evidence we had to hand were (I)–(III), our conclusion would, I think, be the right one to draw. There is, however, further evidence to consider; and it requires some modification in our account. We can approach this modification by noting that although (III) (5)–(10) are a valid argument for separation, Aristotle would of course deny that it is sound. To be sure, he accepts (5) and (7). He also accepts (9); indeed, as we have seen, he accepts the stronger claim that all substances are as such separate. Nor is (6) troubling; it simply tells us what forms are. Aristotle rejects (8), however. Although he agrees that there are both nonsensible substances and nonsensible universals, he resists identifying the two sorts of entities. For no universal, in his view, can be a substance, since none can be separate, yet substances must be. Aristotle’s alternative candidates for nonsensible substances are the prime and planetary movers which, being particulars, are, from his point of view, nonproblematically separate.

(8) is the culprit, then. But why does Aristotle believe Plato accepts it? In *M* 9, he seems to imagine Plato reasoning as follows: ‘There must be some nonsensible substances; nonsensible universals are at least nonsensible; and anyway, what other candidates are there?’ Obviously, this line of reasoning is unsatisfactory; and elsewhere Aristotle is more generous.

At *Metaph. H* 1, 1042<sup>a</sup>15–16, he says that forms are thought to be substances for the same reason genera and universals are. Although he does not say here what this reason is, he is presumably thinking of their key role in knowledge and definition. It is because universals (and so genera and forms) are thought to be basic to knowledge and definition that some take them to be substances. So Aristotle’s ultimate explanation of why Plato accepts (8)—or, at least, the weaker (8′) forms are substances—is that Plato infers it from the key role forms play in knowledge and definition.

Now Aristotle does not in fact believe that this inference is legitimate. To be sure, he concedes that priority in knowledge and definition are neces-

sary for substantiality; but he does not seem to believe they are sufficient. In addition, substances must be separate; and priority in knowledge and definition do not guarantee separation.<sup>40</sup> So although in *M*9 Aristotle gives Plato a valid argument for the separation of forms—(III) (5)–(10)—he in fact seems to believe that Plato’s argument on behalf of one of its key premisses—(8)—is invalid.

Not only that, but we can also see how this alleged invalidity is lurking in the flux argument. At least, as Aristotle records it, the flux argument involves the claim that forms are the only objects of knowledge and definition; and this guarantees what Aristotle takes to be the crucial premiss grounding the substantiality of forms.

We must, then, modify our initial account. Earlier I suggested that Aristotle claims only that flux is a valid argument for universals different from sensibles; their separation is then inferred from adding to this conclusion the twin claims, that universals are substances and that substances are separate. Now it emerges, however, that Aristotle believes that Plato derives the substantiality of forms (universals) from the flux argument; and he also believes that that derivation is invalid. For, in his view, all the flux argument shows is that universals are different from sensibles, and are basic to knowledge and definition; but this does not guarantee their substantiality. So the flux argument is, in Aristotle’s view, invalid after all—if its conclusion is taken to be that forms are (not only different from sensibles but are also) substances.

There are still three important differences between my account and the familiar one sketched at the outset. First, it is still true that Aristotle does not explicitly claim either that the flux argument is invalid or that it grounds the substantiality of forms. In order to find these further claims in Aristotle, we need to venture beyond *A* 6, *M* 4, and *M* 9, and piece together an account he nowhere himself explicitly presses. Our initial account is still the best reading of arguments (I)–(III), considered in isolation. Second, on the familiar account, the invalidity Aristotle docketed consists in the move from difference to separation—a crude mistake. On our alternative, the mistake Aristotle finds consists in the move from ‘basic to knowledge and

<sup>40</sup> Here I retract a claim made in my ‘Plato and Aristotle on Form and Substance’ (below, ch. 15), where I argued that Aristotle takes each of definitional and epistemic priority to be sufficient for substance. Notice that if the claim there is correct, Aristotle must concede that the flux argument is a valid argument for separation; for it ensures that forms are prior in knowledge and definition, and so are substances and so, since substances are separate, that they are separate. This result, however, is perhaps a good reason to deny that each of definitional and epistemic priority is sufficient for substance—although Aristotle could, of course, still argue that the flux argument is unsound.

definition' to 'substance'. Although Aristotle regards this move as invalid, it is also a move with which he has some sympathy; it is not simply a crude mistake. And third, it may be misleading to speak of invalidity here at all. To be sure, *Aristotle* believes the move is invalid, because he believes that priority in knowledge and definition are insufficient for substantiality. But as we shall see, it is far from clear that Plato agrees; he may believe that being basic to knowledge and definition in the way forms are *is* sufficient for substantiality. That is to say, what we have here may not be a case of Aristotle detecting an invalid move on Plato's part, but rather a confrontation between two competing conceptions of substance: Aristotle believes priority in knowledge and definition are not enough, but Plato disagrees.

To summarize my account of Aristotle on separation. If we look only at *Metaphysics A* 6, *M* 4, and *M* 9, it looks as though Aristotle suggests that Plato only uses flux as a valid argument for nonsensible universals; and that their separation is then validly derived from the addition of two premisses, that forms are substances and that substances are separate. So far, separation issues as the conclusion of a valid argument—in striking contrast to the familiar view.

If, however, we look further afield, we can see that Aristotle believes that Plato's argument for the claim that forms are substances is invalid. And, moreover, the seeds of the alleged invalidity are in the flux argument, though Aristotle does not himself point this out. Still, this is not to embrace the familiar view. For at the very least, the alleged invalidity is importantly different from the one the familiar view claims to detect. Indeed, as we have seen, it is unclear we should even speak of invalidity here. What we may have instead is a disagreement between Plato and Aristotle about the criteria for substance. This is a point I return to later, in looking at Plato's notion of substance.

Having seen what Aristotle means in saying that forms are separate, and having looked at his account of the basis of their separation, let us now turn to Plato. Does he separate forms? And if so, what are his reasons?

#### 4. Plato's Use of 'Chōris'

Aristotle claims that Plato, but not Socrates, separated forms or universals. Commentators have often accepted his verdict. Ross, for example, writes that it is in the *Phaedo*—allegedly the first thoroughly Platonic, as opposed to Socratic, dialogue—that Plato first expresses a clear belief in the separate

existence of the Ideas'.<sup>41</sup> Cornford claims that 'The separation (*chōrismos*) of the forms is explicitly effected in the *Phaedo*.'<sup>42</sup>

If by 'explicit' Cornford means—as his parenthetical use of '*chōrismos*' might lead us to expect—that in the *Phaedo* Plato applies '*chōris*' or its cognates to forms, his claim is false. Indeed, it is quite striking that *nowhere* in the middle dialogues, even allowing that the *Timaeus* is a middle dialogue, does Plato use '*chōris*' or its cognates of forms. The soul is often enough said to be *chōris* or *chōristē* from the body; and in the *Timaeus*, knowledge and belief are said to come to be *chōris* from one another (51 E 1–2). But '*chōris*' and its cognates are never, in the middle dialogues or *Timaeus*, used of forms. Given Aristotle's tendency to use '*chōris*' and its cognates for the allegedly distinctive Platonic claim, this is striking and suggestive.

It is true that in two later dialogues, the *Parmenides* and *Sophist*, Plato applies '*chōris*' to forms, or to form-like entities. But it is not clear this involves commitment to IE.

At *Sophist* 248 A, in the famous 'friends of the forms' passage, the Eleatic Stranger says: 'You speak of becoming [*genesis*], on the one hand, and of substance [*ousia*], on the other, dividing them separately [*chōris*], I suppose' (248 A 7). This one brief mention of '*chōris*' does not clearly convey the sense of 'capacity for independent existence'; it need mean no more than that *genesis* and *ousia* constitute disjoint classes. Indeed, it is unlikely that '*chōris*' does indicate IE here. For separation seems to be symmetrical: *genesis* and *ousia*—sensibles and forms—are separate from one another. But sensibles cannot exist independently of forms. To be sure, Socrates need not participate in the form of white; but he could not exist unless he had some complexion or other, and so he is not independent of colour forms generally. And if there is a form of man, as there clearly is at least by the time of the *Timaeus*, then Socrates is not independent of *that* form.

In any case, it is not even clear that Plato is committed to the views of the friends of the forms; certainly he is not speaking *in propria persona*. So even if '*chōris*' indicates IE here, we cannot assume that Plato accepts it.<sup>43</sup>

At *Parmenides* 129 D 6–8 Plato writes: 'but, as I said just now, if someone first distinguishes the forms separately [*chōris*], themselves by themselves [*auta kath' hauta*] . . .'. As in the *Sophist*, so here, '*chōris*' need indicate no more than difference; forms and sensibles are disjoint. This is reinforced by the fact that '*chōris*' is again used to indicate a symmetrical relationship (see e.g. 130 B 2–5). Since sensibles cannot exist independently of forms as

<sup>41</sup> Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, 125.

<sup>42</sup> Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides*, 74.

<sup>43</sup> See, most recently, J. Malcolm, 'Does Plato Revise his Ontology in *Sophist* 246c–249d?', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 65 (1983), 115–46.

such, 'chōris' should not be IE here.<sup>44</sup> (Or, if it is, it is not a thesis Plato ever accepted.)

Further, Plato goes on to raise various difficulties for the theory of forms just adumbrated; yet none of these difficulties seems to involve the assumption that forms are separate (enjoy IE). In 132 A–B, for example, he sets out a regress argument that came to be known as the Third Man Argument. Although a separation assumption figures prominently in Aristotle's version of the argument (though it is difficult to figure out why),<sup>45</sup> none occurs explicitly in, nor is any tacitly required by, Plato's version. This is unsurprising if the difficulties being aired here are not directed against a theory of separate forms; but if they are, then it is surprising.

But again, even if the difficulties aired do affect a theory of separate forms, we cannot assume Plato ever accepted such a theory. First, we cannot infer that whatever theory he accepts in the *Parmenides* is also in play elsewhere. And second, even if a theory of separate forms is in play in the *Parmenides*, it is unclear Plato accepts it, even there. The *Parmenides* is dialectical and aporetic; it explores objections to different positions and espouses no final views. Plato could as well be telling us what he does *not* believe, is not committed to, as setting out difficulties for a theory he ever accepted.

Of course, even if 'chōris' is not applied to forms in the middle dialogues or *Timaeus* (or when applied to them, or to entities like them, in later dialogues, does not indicate IE), this does not show that Plato is not committed to separation. It blocks one route to that destination; but there might be other routes to it.

## 5. Other Terminological Evidence of Separation

We might, for a start, look at other terminological evidence of separation. Cherniss, for example, cites various passages from the *Timaeus* (51 B–52 c), and remarks that they involve 'statements of the transcendence of

<sup>44</sup> Contrast R. E. Allen, *Plato's Parmenides: Translation and Analysis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), who takes 'chōris' here to indicate IE, and accepts the implication that here, in contrast to elsewhere, separation is symmetrical; much of his commentary on the first part of the *Parmenides* is predicated on this view. Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory*, 320 n. 37, also thinks 'chōris' here indicates IE, though the matter is not pursued.

<sup>45</sup> Aristotle's most detailed account of the Third Man Argument is in his *Peri Ideōn*, recorded by Alexander, in *Metaph.* 84. 22–85. 3 Hayduck. I discuss Plato and Aristotle on the Third Man Argument in 'Aristotle and the More Accurate Arguments', in M. Schofield and M. Nussbaum (eds.), *Language and Logos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 155–77; and in 'Owen, Aristotle, and the Third Man', *Phronesis*, 27 (1982), 13–33. See now also my *On Ideas: Aristotle's Criticisms of Plato's Theory of Forms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), chs. 15–16.



the ideas that no impartial judge could overlook or sophisticate away. It would have been impossible for the question to be put more concisely and unambiguously.<sup>46</sup> To highlight the allegedly unambiguous statements of ‘transcendence’, Cherniss underlines three key phrases: ‘*einai ti*’, ‘*para*’, and ‘*auto kath’ hautō*’. But in fact, none of these phrases unambiguously indicates separation.

‘*Einai ti*’ means ‘is something’. But forms could ‘be something’ without being separate from sensibles. At *Prt.* 330 c 1 Socrates asks Protagoras whether justice is something or nothing; Protagoras agrees that it is something. It is not usually supposed that he has agreed that justice is a separate form. Or again, at *Phd.* 64 c 2 Socrates asks Simmias ‘Do we suppose that death is something?’ Simmias agrees that we do; but he has not yet agreed to any analysis of *what* it is. As it turns out, death is agreed to involve the separation of the soul from the body. But this agreement goes beyond the agreement that death is something. ‘*Einai ti*’, then, is not unambiguous evidence of separation.

Nor is ‘*para*’, as Cherniss well knows. As he himself points out, Aristotle, for example, uses ‘*para*’ sometimes to indicate separation—but sometimes to indicate mere difference.<sup>47</sup> So the mere use of the word creates no presumption in favour of separation. Of course, we might discover that in a particular context, ‘*para*’ indicates separation, not difference. But this would have to be decided by close attention to the argument to hand; the use of the word, on its own, does not decide the issue, and in fact, later we shall find that the contexts in which ‘*para*’ is embedded do not require it to mean ‘separation’.

What of ‘*auto kath’ hautō*’? One might argue that in the *Phaedo*, Plato speaks interchangeably of the soul’s being *chōris* from the body, and its being *autē kath’ hautēn*, so that when he speaks of forms being *auta kath’ hauta*, this indicates separation. But I do not think this is right. To be sure, when the soul is *chōris* from the body, it exists without it; and it is also then *autē kath’ hautēn*. But although being *chōris* implies being *auto kath’ hautō*, the converse is not true. Thus, for example, Plato speaks of the soul of the philosopher trying to be *autē kath’ hautēn* so far as possible (65 c 7); I do not think he means that the philosopher is trying to exist without his body (even though, to be sure, he regards philosophy as a preparation for death). Rather, he means that the philosopher tries to be uninfluenced by the body so far as possible; he tries to reason without being influenced by sense perception, which is misleading in the search for truth. To be *auto kath’ hautō*, that is, is to be uninfluenced by, unmixed with, anything

<sup>46</sup> Cherniss, *Aristotle’s Criticism of Plato and the Academy*, 209.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 56.

alien. Given the ways of the world, it might be the case that the soul of the philosopher cannot be *autē kath' hautēn* while incarnate; but it does not follow that the two conditions—being *auto kath' hauto* and separate—are the same.

In the case of forms, to be *auta kath' hauta* is also to be uninfluenced by, unmixed with, anything alien. This involves two things. First, as Owen has argued, each form is *auto kath' hauto* in that each excludes its opposite; the form of equal, for example, is *auto kath' hauto* in that it is equal but not also unequal—in contrast to sensibles, which are commingled with their opposites.<sup>48</sup> But to say that forms exclude their opposites is not to say that they can exist independently of sensibles. So forms can be *auta kath' hauta* in this way, without being separate.

Second, forms are also *auta kath' hauta* in that each is unmixed with anything sensible. But neither does this require separation. All that is required is that forms be nonsensible; their nature involves nothing sensible. Consider, by way of analogy, the example of drink at *Rep. IV*, 437 A–438 E: in so far as one is thirsty, one desires drink, itself by itself—just drink, and not any particular sort of drink. It does not follow that there can be drinks that are not of any particular sort, but only that the sort of drink a drink is is irrelevant to it *qua* relatum of thirst. '*Auto kath' hauto*' serves to focus attention on the thing itself; it does not indicate that anything enjoys IE.

Turning to other terminological evidence, one might note that, in the middle dialogues, Plato speaks of sensibles participating in forms; and one might then argue that to say that A participates in (*metechei*) B 'does not imply the presence of B itself in A or rather would deny such a presence'.<sup>49</sup> But to say that A participates in B surely is *not* to deny that B is 'present in' A. As has often been noted, participation language as such implies 'nothing technical or metaphysical';<sup>50</sup> it can be used quite neutrally. Indeed, Ross, in his survey of the terminology of the theory of forms, counted participation language as evidence of *immanence*—not as evidence of separation.<sup>51</sup> Ross may well be wrong to have done so; but the fact remains that the use of such language does not by itself imply separation.

But does not Plato, unlike Socrates, deny that forms are in (*en*) sensibles,

<sup>48</sup> G. E. L. Owen, 'A Proof in the *Peri Ideōn*', *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 77 (1957), 301–11; repr. in R. E. Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), 293–312 (latter pagination), esp. 305–11.

<sup>49</sup> N. Fujisawa, 'Echein, Metechein, and Idioms of "Paradeigmatism" in Plato's Theory of Forms', *Phronesis*, 19 (1974), 30–58 at 32.

<sup>50</sup> R. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 143 n. 1 (cited by Fujisawa, 'Echein, Metechein, and Idioms of "Paradeigmatism" in Plato's Theory of Forms', 44).

<sup>51</sup> Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, ch. xvii.

and does not this imply that they are separate from them? It is not in fact entirely clear that Plato does—or does consistently—deny that forms are in sensibles. At *Phd.* 100 D (cf. *Rep.* 476 A), for example, he leaves open the possibility that forms are present in (*parousia*) or commune with (*koinōnia*) their participants. But in the *Timaeus*, Plato characterizes each form as being ‘ungenerated, indestructible, neither receiving anything else into itself from elsewhere nor itself going into anything else anywhere’, in contrast to sensibles, which ‘come to be in some place’ (52 A 1–6); so let us concede for the sake of argument that forms are not in sensibles.<sup>52</sup>

Still, what follows? It all depends on what ‘in’ means. As we saw in looking at Aristotle, ‘in’ is quite elastic; on some uses, to say that x is not in y is not to say that x can exist independently of y.

In the *Timaeus*, ‘in’ seems to be local; forms are not located where sensibles are. But it does not follow that forms are separate from—can exist independently of—sensible. My shadow does not exist where I do, but it cannot exist independently of, and so is not separate from, me. The denial that forms are in sensibles, then, does not imply that they can exist without them.

One might protest that Plato means to deny, not just that forms are where sensibles are, but also that they are in any place; they are not in sensibles, in the sense that they have no location at all. But anything that lacks location is separate from sensibles.

I am unsure what to say here; intuitions seem to vary. Some would deny that lack of location implies separation. Mental states, as the epiphenomenalist conceives of them, for example, might be held to have no location, but to be dependent on various physical states; if so, lack of location does not imply separation. But even if it does, we could at most infer that if forms lack location, they are in fact separate. We could not also infer that *Plato* would agree; perhaps he would deny that nonspatiality as such implies separation.

What of the alleged eternity of forms? I am unsure whether eternity implies separation; intuitions seem to vary here too. However, even if it does, this is of limited use to us. To be sure, forms may be eternal in the *Timaeus*; so if—if—eternity implies separation, forms are separate in the *Timaeus*. But it is important to be clear about two things. First, Plato never mentions any such inference; so even if we, looking at the *Timaeus*,

<sup>52</sup> It is not entirely clear one ought to concede this, even for this passage in the *Timaeus*. To say that forms ‘do not go into anything else anywhere’ need not be to say that forms are nowhere or are not in anything; they don’t ‘go into anything’ because they don’t move or change. But they might, for all that, *be* in something. I explore the possibility of forms being in things in ch. 12. Still, let us waive this possibility for the sake of argument.

would say that because forms there are eternal, they are separate, it is unclear Plato would agree. But second, and perhaps more important, even if forms are eternal in the *Timaeus*, it is unclear they are eternal elsewhere. To be sure, Plato often enough characterizes forms as being *aei onta*; but this need imply no more than that forms are everlasting, sempiternal—and sempiternality does not imply separation. Even if eternity implies separation, then, this will at best explain separation in the *Timaeus*—and perhaps not even there.<sup>53</sup>

What of the fact that forms are *aitiai*, causes or explanatory entities? Do not causes temporally precede their effects, so that forms, being the causes of sensibles, must have existed before, and so are separate from, them? If, as Aristotle believes, forms are efficient causes, this might seem reasonable. But Aristotle is wrong about that; and anyway, even on his view, efficient causes need not precede their effects.

What of the language of models and copies? It is important to note, first of all, that such language is not as prevalent as one might suppose. It is not, for example, used to describe the relation of forms to sensibles in the *Phaedo*, where separation is often thought first to occur. On the other hand, in the *Euthyphro* (6 E 3–6), where separation is thought *not* to occur, it is suggested that forms are models (*paradeigmata*). So the mere fact that ‘*paradeigma*’ is used of a form is insufficient to guarantee that it is separate; one needs to see precisely how the term is being used.

And even if—what I doubt—Plato means that forms are literally models of which sensibles are copies, separation does not ensue. To be sure, if A is a model for B, perhaps A needs to exist before B. But it does not follow that A existed, or could exist, in the absence of any copies of it. If time is infinite, and if each sensible is a copy of a model form, all that follows is that for any *given* sensible, its form existed before it.

Of course, if time is finite, and if creation takes time, then if each sensible is a copy of a model form, there was a time when at least some models, but no copies of them, existed. But this derives separation, not from the model–copy account on its own, but from that account *coupled with* a particular temporal claim. (I shall ask later whether or not Plato accepts the temporal claim.) The fact remains that the model–copy relation, on its own, does not require separation. To be sure, we might find it natural to assume otherwise; but whether Plato’s intuitions match ours is another question. It is worth noting too that Aristotle at least once suggests that being a model is *incompatible* with separation. A model, he says, requires

<sup>53</sup> On the alleged eternity of the forms, see J. Whittaker, ‘The “Eternity” of the Platonic Forms’, *Phronesis*, 13 (1968), 131–44.

copies; nothing is a model unless it has copies. Since forms are essentially models, they are essentially dependent on, and so are not separate from, their copies (Alexander, *In Metaph.* 86. 13–23 Hayduck). To be sure, Aristotle is criticizing Plato here. But the point remains that merely to say that forms are models does not guarantee separation. We need to explore the contexts in which that characterization occurs, to see what arguments it is intended to elucidate.

What of the perfection of forms? Surely forms, being perfect, cannot depend on mundane sensibles? But what does the perfection of forms consist in? It has been plausibly argued that to say that the form of F is perfect is only to say that, unlike F sensibles, it is F and not also not-F; it is not commingled with its opposite. And, in contrast to sensibles, the form of F is always F, both in the sense that so long as it exists, it is F—it cannot lose its F-ness—and also in the sense that it always exists. But if this is all that is involved in the perfection of forms, separation does not follow.<sup>54</sup>

One might concede that no single word or phrase or metaphor requires separation, yet argue that the general *tenor* of the dialogues at least strongly suggests it. For surely it is incredible that Plato could have believed that forms—those objects of such great reverence—are dependent on mundane sensibles? But perhaps other features of forms than IE are sufficient to explain Plato's attitude to forms. He believes, for example, that forms are perfect, everlasting, and unchanging, the basic objects of knowledge and definition, objects suitable for a discarnate soul's reflection. None of these features requires separation,<sup>55</sup> but they might be sufficient to explain Plato's attitude to forms. IE might provide an additional reason; but it is unclear that it is needed. Indeed, if separation is just IE, it is unclear it is so grand a property anyway. Certainly many philosophers have believed that universals can exist uninstantiated, without also according them any special importance. So IE appears to be neither necessary nor sufficient for explaining Plato's attitude to forms. Separation may seem a natural accompaniment; but surely we need stronger evidence than that to commit him to it.

The terminology and tenor of the theory of forms, then, do not require separation; separation may seem a natural part of the package, but it is not

<sup>54</sup> On the perfection of forms, see J. C. B. Gosling, 'Similarity in *Phaedo* 73b seq.', *Phronesis*, 10 (1965), 151–61; followed by A. Nehamas, 'Plato on the Imperfection of the Sensible World', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 12 (1975), 105–17.

<sup>55</sup> We have already suggested that neither perfection nor everlastingness implies separation. Later I suggest that neither does being unchanging; and our discussion of the flux arguments, in sect. 3, shows that neither does being basic to knowledge and definition (see also sect. 6 below). I consider separation and the soul in sect. 8.

required (or excluded) by the evidence we have examined so far. Perhaps, however, if we turn to Plato's arguments, we shall be led to re-evaluate that evidence.

## 6. Plato on Flux and Separation

On one familiar view Plato separates forms because of some sort of flux in sensibles. Is this view correct?

There is, of course, considerable dispute as to the precise nature of Plato's flux arguments. Some believe he is primarily concerned with flux in sensible particulars, in the sense that they undergo constant and radical change through time; just as forms are altogether exempt from change, so sensible particulars lack stability in every respect.<sup>56</sup>

Now Plato does, of course, believe that sensible particulars change through time; he may even believe they change in *some* respect all the time. But he does not believe they change in every respect all the time, or are not self-identical through time. Indeed, in the *Phaedo* he claims that a corpse

although liable to be dissolved and fall apart and to disintegrate, undergoes none of these things at once, but remains as it is for a fairly long time—in fact, for a very considerable time . . . ; and even should the body decay, some parts of it, bones and sinews and all such things, are still practically immortal. (80 c 2–D 4; cf. 86 c–D)

Nor are these claims contradicted by Plato elsewhere in the dialogues.<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, although sensible particulars do of course change through time, and although Plato often adverts to this in characterizing the differences between forms and sensibles, he does not rely on this fact in arguing for the existence of forms. As Owen and others have pointed out, here 'it is with the compresence and not the succession of opposites that he is expressly concerned'.<sup>58</sup> It is relational, not real, change that chiefly concerns Plato in arguing for forms—that what is large, for example, is also small, or that what is heavy is also light. Such change, moreover, attaches not only to sensible particulars—Theaetetus is tall (in relation to Socrates) and short (in relation to Milo)—but also, and primarily, to sensible properties—the action type of standing firm in battle is both brave and cowardly, in that it has some brave, and some cowardly, tokens. The flux of sensibles on

<sup>56</sup> See e.g. R. Bolton, 'Plato's Distinction between Being and Becoming', *Review of Metaphysics*, 29 (1975), 66–95.

<sup>57</sup> For a defence of this claim, see Irwin, 'Plato's Heracliteanism'.

<sup>58</sup> Owen, 'A Proof in the *Peri Ideōn*', 307.

which Plato focuses attention in arguing for forms, then, is compresence of opposites as it attaches to sensible particulars and, more especially, to sensible properties.

But does consideration of such flux license separation? Whatever Plato may think, it does not do so in fact. Consider, for example, the famous argument of *Phaedo* 74:<sup>59</sup>

- (1) Equal sticks and stones, sometimes, being the same, appear equal to one, unequal to another. (74 B 7–10)
- (2) The equals themselves never appeared unequal to you, nor equality inequality. (74 C 1–3)
- ∴ (3) These equals (sc. the equal sticks and stones) and the equal itself are not the same (*ou tauton*). (74 C 4–5)

This argument has been examined in detail by numerous commentators; for our purposes here, I can be brief. Plato assumes that there is something properly called ‘equality’ or ‘the equal itself’. The question he raises concerns its nature: is it the same as, or different from, sensible equals? (1)–(3) argue that it is different from them, on the ground that sensible equals have a property that anything properly called ‘the equal itself’ lacks: the property of appearing equal to one, unequal to another. ‘Appears’, in Greek, can function veridically, to mean ‘manifestly is’, and, I take it, so functions here. Hence the differentiating property is that of being both equal and unequal. Sensible equals have this property; that is to say, they suffer the compresence of opposites, and so are in flux. Since the equal itself escapes such compresence, it is different from sensible equals. Let us call this nonsensible equal itself ‘the form of equal’.<sup>60</sup>

Is the form of equal separate from sensible equals? The argument proves no such thing; it proves only that the form is different from, nonidentical to, sensible equals. Does Plato think the argument proves more than difference? He does not say so. He introduces the argument to show that equality is *para*, *heteron* from sensibles (74 A 11); his use of ‘*para*’ interchangeably with ‘*heteron*’ suggests his argument is directed to difference, not separation. And the argument’s conclusion asserts only difference, not separation: the equal

<sup>59</sup> I follow Burnet’s text of *Phd.* 74 B–C. At 74 B 8, I take ‘*tō(i) men . . . tō(i) d’ ou*’ to be masculines, not neuters. For detailed discussion of the passage see D. Gallop, *Plato: Phaedo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), along with my review in *Philosophical Review*, 86 (1977), 101–5; and K. W. Mills, ‘Plato’s *Phaedo* 74b7–c6’, *Phronesis*, 2 (1957), 128–47, and 3 (1958), 40–58.

<sup>60</sup> Somewhat strikingly, Plato does not call it so here; ‘*eidōs*’ and ‘*idea*’ are not used of forms in the *Phaedo* until 102 B.

itself and sensible equals are *ou tauton* (74 c 4–5)—not the same. Neither the language nor the logic of the argument suggests separation.

Other passages relying on flux admit of the same analysis: they are valid arguments for difference, but not for separation; nor does Plato say they prove more than difference. Consider, for example, the famous argument at the end of *Republic* V, where Plato distinguishes knowledge from belief. He argues that knowledge entails truth and an adequate explanation, and that such explanations are forthcoming only by reference to nonsensible forms. We cannot, for example, define beauty in terms of a certain colour or shape; for some things are beautiful that lack that colour or shape, and its addition to something does not always enhance the thing's beauty. Sensibles, that is (at least in a certain range of cases), suffer the compresence of opposites, and so are in flux; reference to them therefore cannot provide adequate explanatory accounts; knowledge, however, requires such accounts, and so cannot be won by reference to sensibles alone, and so must go beyond sensibles to nonsensible forms.<sup>61</sup>

The flux arguments, then, are valid arguments for forms different, but not separate, from sensibles; if Plato believes they license separation, he is wrong. But neither the language nor the logic of his arguments requires us to ascribe this error to him. This is not to say, of course, that forms are *not* separate; it is only to say that the flux arguments do not show, and are not thought by Plato to show, that they are. Other arguments might, of course, yield different conclusions. Before turning to other arguments, however, let us explore the point of the flux arguments further.

When Plato says that forms are different from sensibles, he means not only that they are different from sensible objects such as Theaetetus, but also that they are different from sensible properties such as redness; forms are nonsensible properties, properties irreducible to sensible properties. Beauty, for example, is not identical or reducible to any sensible properties such as bright colouring or circular shape. Though such properties might constitute or realize beauty in a particular case, none is what beauty is. This is the thesis Irwin, in *Plato's Moral Theory*, calls nonreducibility (NR):<sup>62</sup>

NR: . . . forms . . . are not definable through sensible properties alone, and not iden-

<sup>61</sup> I discuss this argument in detail in ch. 3, although the question of separation is not there considered; see also ch. 4. Notice that on my account, Plato does not rule out knowledge of sensibles. Aristotle, however, appears to think Plato does preclude knowledge of sensibles. In at least this respect, then, his account of the flux argument seems incorrect.

<sup>62</sup> Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory*, 154. I have slightly modified his definition. The quote from Irwin in the next paragraph is also from p. 154.



tical with these properties, or with sensible objects as described by their sensible properties.

As Irwin shows, ‘NR is a legitimate conclusion from Plato’s arguments.’ And it is important to note that NR is neither a trivial nor an obvious claim. It is the claim that not all properties are observable properties; it involves rejecting a version of empiricism according to which everything can ultimately be explained in terms of, or reduced to, sensible features of the world. Plato is right, then, to think NR requires argument. But those arguments do not show, and are not thought by Plato to show, that forms are separate from sensibles.

Notice that on our account of Aristotle, he agrees that Plato uses flux to argue for NR. The express conclusion of argument (I), for example, is that forms are different from sensibles—and we have seen that means that forms are different not only from sensible particulars, but also from sensible properties. And it also follows from (I) that forms are not definable through sensible properties alone. Indeed, this follows trivially, since (I) claims that forms, but not sensibles, are definable.

Irwin argues, however, that although flux in fact only implies NR, Plato fallaciously infers IE from NR.<sup>63</sup> Why? He sketches an invalid argument leading from NR to IE. But he does not suggest Plato actually used this argument; he says only that Plato ‘*could* argue’ in the suggested way. Irwin believes Aristotle’s testimony suggests Plato infers separation from NR. I have suggested that this is not so; but even if it is, Aristotle could of course be wrong. Irwin also suggests that Plato accepts separation. This may well be correct; but it does not follow that he accepts it because of flux. Indeed, it is somewhat surprising that Irwin believes Plato accepts IE at all. For not only does he show that flux does not imply IE, but he also notes—correctly, as we are in the course of seeing—how difficult it is to uncover any commitment to IE in the dialogues.

## 7. Substance and Separation<sup>64</sup>

We have seen that Aristotle probably believes that Plato infers from flux that forms are substances. And whether or not he believes that, he certainly claims that the substantiality of forms—however arrived at—grounds their

<sup>63</sup> See especially Irwin, *Plato’s Moral Theory*, 154–5. The brief quote that follows is from his p. 154 (emphasis added).

<sup>64</sup> Some of the matters discussed in this section are considered in more detail in ch. 15.

separation. Does Plato believe forms are substances? If so, is this because of flux? Does Plato infer from the substantiality to the separation of forms?

If all that is meant here by 'substance' is 'fundamental entity', then it seems uncontroversial that forms are Plato's substances; they are the basic entities in his ontology. And Plato may well believe that flux grounds their substantiality, explains their being the fundamental entities. At least, he believes that the flux of sensibles, coupled with considerations about knowledge and definition, requires the existence of nonsensible, unchanging, and everlasting entities suitable for a discarnate soul's reflection, entities the knowledge of which is necessary for any knowledge at all, and entities the definition of which is necessary for definitions of other things. And when he characterizes the realm of forms—the realm of *ousia*, of substance—it is to such features that he appeals. This suggests that Plato moves from the claim, licensed by flux, that forms are basic to knowledge and definition, to the claim that they are basic beings just as, in *Metaphysics H 1*, Aristotle indirectly suggests.

Aristotle protests, arguing that even though being basic to knowledge and definition are necessary for being a substance, they are not sufficient; separation is required as well. Since flux does not license separation, it does not license the substantiality of forms. If Plato moves from flux to substantiality, he reasons invalidly.

Aristotle's criticism is justified—given his account of substance. That is, one of Aristotle's criteria for being a substance is being separate; since flux fails to show that forms are separate, it fails to show that they are substances—as Aristotle understands the notion of substance. But Aristotle's criteria for substance are controversial, and it is not clear Plato accepts, or is committed to, them. To be sure, there is overlap between their criteria; both, for example, link *ousia* to knowledge and definition. But unlike Aristotle, Plato never makes it a defining feature of *ousia* that it be separate. Whenever he characterizes the realm of *ousia*, he mentions—not separation but—changelessness, everlastingness, inaccessibility to sense perception, being basic to a knowledge and definition, and the like. As we have seen, none of these features requires separation.

Flux, then, may well fail to guarantee substantiality as Aristotle understands that notion; but it does guarantee substantiality as Plato seems to understand it. To be sure, flux does not ensure separation; but since, for Plato, separation is not a defining feature of *ousia*, that does not matter.

Aristotle would be right, then, to argue that Plato grounds the substantiality of forms on flux; and whether or not he argues this, he is correct to claim that forms are Plato's substances. But he is incorrect if he believes

Plato links separation and substance. Correspondingly, he would also be incorrect were he to argue that Plato *invalidly* infers the substantiality of forms from flux. For that argument would be legitimate only if Plato accepted Aristotle's account of substance; and for that we have seen no evidence.

Aristotle's account of separation in *M*9, then, seems to rest on the incorrect assumption that Plato, like Aristotle, believes that substance is as such separate. Forms are Plato's substances; and they may well be separate. But there is no evidence that for Plato separation issues from substantiality. We have not yet, then, found a route to separation.

### 8. Anamnesis, Affinity, and Separation

The main other argument appealed to, to commit Plato to separation, stems from his doctrine of Anamnesis, the doctrine that all so-called learning is really recollection of things previously known by discarnate souls. Cornford, for example, claims that separation 'is entailed by the belief in Anamnesis. . . . Anamnesis, the separate existence of the soul before birth, and the separation of forms from sensible things, all stand or fall together.'<sup>65</sup> Similarly, Burnyeat criticizes Irwin's account of separation, according to which Plato slides fallaciously from NR to IE, saying: 'So Plato's great metaphysical vision rests on nothing more than an unclarity or confusion? I would find that the hardest paradox of all'; and he suggests we look instead at Anamnesis as the source of Plato's belief in separation.<sup>66</sup>

The passage just cited from Burnyeat leads us to hope that we can derive a valid argument for separation from Anamnesis, one that rests on something 'more than an unclarity or confusion'. But as Burnyeat ultimately concedes, this expectation is disappointed. Here is his account of the argument:

Anamnesis entails that:

- (1) Our knowledge of (e.g.) equality is independent of our empirical existence.

Plato's realist assumptions about knowledge also lead him to believe that:

<sup>65</sup> Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides*, 74. The argument Cornford sketches and attributes to Plato is, however, invalid, although he does not call attention to the fact.

<sup>66</sup> Burnyeat, review of Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory* (for the reference, see n. 14). All quotations from Burnyeat are from this review. I discuss the review in some detail because, among other things, it is the only review of Irwin's book that deals with his account of separation.

- (2) Knowledge is of something which exists independently of the knowing mind.

From (1) and (2) it follows that:

- ∴ (3) Our knowledge of equality is knowledge of something which exists independently of the knowing mind.

Burnyeat suggests that Plato then infers that:

- ∴ (4) Equality (the thing known) exists independently of all empirical reality.

But (1)–(3) obviously do not entail (4). Burnyeat seems to concede as much: ‘I do not, however, claim that the epistemological premise is sufficient justification for the Theory of Forms. Here, if anywhere, Plato’s vision outruns the resources of his argument.’ But now notice: Burnyeat rejected Irwin’s account, because it involved the paradox that the doctrine of separation rests on a mistake. The same is true of the argument Burnyeat attributes to Plato. Why is the invalid argument he attributes to Plato less paradoxical than the one Irwin attributes to him?

Perhaps it is less paradoxical because Plato offers it. As Burnyeat says, Plato claims that ‘the Theory of Forms and the pre-existence of the soul stand or fall together (*Phd.* 76e)’. To be sure; but *how*—in virtue of what features—do they stand or fall together? All Anamnesis requires is that there be, prior to the soul’s bodily existence, perfect, nonsensible entities suitable for a discarnate soul’s reflection. This does not even require that forms be everlasting, let alone that they be separate; nor do I see that Plato thought otherwise. He compares forms to souls with respect to many of their features—for example, their nonsensible nature, their everlastingness; it is then quite striking that although, in talking of the soul in the *Phaedo*, he often says that it is *chōris* or *chōristē* from the body, he never says that forms are *chōris* or *chōrista* from sensibles. It would have been quite easy for him to have done so, had he wished to press the point that separate souls go hand in hand with separate forms.

The real reason Burnyeat seems to find Anamnesis less puzzling than flux as a basis for, or correlate to, separation is that, allegedly like separation, it is part of a ‘cosmic vision’, part of Plato’s ‘transcendent, otherworldly dimension’. It is not so much that Plato invalidly inferred separation from Anamnesis, as that both are parts of an otherworldly vision that naturally, if not logically, go hand in hand. But if separation is just IE, then it is unclear that separation is so ‘otherworldly’. If—as Burnyeat may believe: I am

unsure—separation were some *other* property, then it might go naturally with Anamnesis. But if our account has been correct, this is less clear.

One might argue that although Anamnesis does not require separation, the ensuing Affinity argument does.<sup>67</sup> For Plato goes on to say that souls, like forms, are in some sense simple and partless; they cannot be dispersed or scattered or broken into bits; and they cannot change. Does not this show that forms are separate? For if forms really cannot change, then, no matter what happens, even if the sensible world ceases to exist, forms continue to exist; for to cease to exist would be a change in, or of, them. But if forms would exist even if no sensibles did, then they are separate.

But this line of thought involves a confusion. Even if it is true that forms cannot fail to exist, it does not follow that they are separate; it might only follow that then sensibles must exist too. If forms cannot fail to exist, then the world is such that they cannot fail to exist; and one of the conditions of the world this might necessitate is that sensibles cannot fail to exist either. (I do not mean, of course, that each, or any given, sensible necessarily exists, which Plato clearly disbelieves, but that it might be necessary that there always be some sensibles or other—a claim Aristotle accepts. I shall ask later whether Plato too accepts this claim. My point here is only that the Affinity argument does not require him to reject it, and so does not, in that way, at least, ensure separation.)

Nor does partlessness imply separation; why cannot an entity without parts be dependent on something with parts? And we in any case need to be careful in interpreting the partlessness of forms and souls. Neither have physical parts, of course; but both have many properties true of them. Once the relevant sort of partlessness is made clear, that partlessness implies separation is correspondingly less clear.

I conclude, then, that although Anamnesis and Affinity are compatible with separation, neither requires it. Nor do I see reason to suppose that Plato failed to see this.

## 9. Artefacts and Separation

Are the middle dialogues—leaving the *Timaeus* to one side for now—then uncommitted to separation? This may be the right conclusion to draw. But I offer for consideration the following, not often travelled, route to separation.

A given form is separate if it is ever uninstantiated. (This is, recall, suf-

<sup>67</sup> This was first suggested to me by M. M. McCabe.

ficient but not necessary for separation.) If there are examples of forms that are ever uninstantiated, those forms, at least, are separate, even if Plato does not call attention to the fact. Are there such examples?

The most likely candidates—quite surprisingly—are forms of artefacts.<sup>68</sup> In both the *Cratylus* and *Republic X*, Plato acknowledges forms of artefacts—of shuttle (*Cra.* 389) and of bed or couch (*Rep.* 596 B)—and as we shall see, a good case can be made for their being separate.

One might not wish to hear the case, however, on the ground that it introduces irrelevant evidence. It is unclear, for example, that the *eidē* of the *Cratylus* are the same entities as the *eidē* of the (other) middle dialogues. And *Republic X* is certainly odd; only here, for example, does Plato say that forms were created by a god—elsewhere, he insists that they have always existed.<sup>69</sup> And outside of the *Cratylus* and *Republic X*, forms of artefacts are neither mentioned in the middle dialogues nor sanctioned by their arguments. One might also dispute the suggestion that the *Cratylus* and *Republic X* are middle dialogues: some place the *Cratylus* early, others place it late; and G. Else has argued that *Republic X* is later than the rest of the *Republic*.<sup>70</sup>

Odd as the *Cratylus* and *Republic X* might be, however, I am reluctant to rule appeal to them out of court. Certainly Aristotle feels free to appeal to *Republic X*—although I doubt he had it in mind in committing Plato to separation.<sup>71</sup> For at least in the Arguments from the Sciences in the *Peri Ideōn*, he claims that the Platonists did not want forms of artefacts.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>68</sup> I thank Richard Sorabji for first getting me to consider forms of artefacts in connection with separation.

<sup>69</sup> The two claims are consistent if creation does not take time. I doubt, however, that this is Plato's view. And in the *Timaeus*, at least, it is quite clear that forms are not created by the Demiurge; and it is difficult to see who else would have done so. I take it to be tacit in the *Phaedo* and (rest of) the *Republic* that forms are uncreated, though I know of no place where this is explicitly said or required. Forms are often said to be deathless, but that is compatible with their being created; so too is the claim that they have always existed if, again, creation takes no time.

<sup>70</sup> A late (i.e. post-*Parmenides*) date for the *Cratylus* is urged by e.g. G. E. L. Owen, 'The Place of the *Timaeus* in Plato's Dialogues', *Classical Quarterly*, ns 3 (1953), 79–95, repr. in Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, 313–38, see esp. 323 n. 3. An early (i.e. Socratic) date is urged by A. E. Taylor, *Plato: The Man and his Work* (New York: The Dial Press Inc., 1936), 75 ff., and by J. V. Luce, 'The Date of the *Cratylus*', *American Journal of Philology*, 85 (1964), 136–54. On the date of *Republic X*, see G. F. Else, *The Structure and Date of Book X of Plato's Republic* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1972).

<sup>71</sup> He seems to have it in mind, for example, in his criticism of the One over Many in the *Peri Ideōn*; see Alexander, *In Metaph.* 80. 8–81. 10 Hayduck. I discuss the One over Many in connection with *Republic X* in my 'The One Over Many', *Philosophical Review*, 89 (1980), 197–240.

<sup>72</sup> Alexander, *In Metaph.* 79. 3–80. 6 Hayduck.

Although this claim is surprising in turn, it suggests that Aristotle does not rest his case, for committing Plato to separation, on his account of artefacts.

But if we admit the evidence of the *Cratylus* and *Republic X*, then I think we must conclude that at least artefact forms are separate. It seems reasonable to assume that shuttles, for example, have not always existed. And even if, according to *Republic X*, a god created (some) forms, they seem to have existed prior to the creation of actual artefacts by human artisans. Thus, in both dialogues the craftsman looks to forms in fashioning his creation; and it is unclear how he could do this unless the forms existed prior to his creation. But if the form of bed, for example, existed prior to the creation of any actual physical bed, and if there have not always been physical beds, then whether time is finite or infinite, the form of bed must have existed prior to any actual beds.<sup>73</sup> If so, it is separate. Similarly, although the *Cratylus* does not claim—or deny—that the form of shuttle has always existed, it seems clear that the form of name, which is mentioned in the same context, existed prior to any actual languages. And at the end of the *Cratylus*, it is suggested (although Plato does not explicitly endorse the suggestion) that some entities, of which the form of shuttle may or may not be one, have always existed. But even if not, the account of craftsmanship again yields the conclusion that at least artefact forms are separate.

Perhaps we should conclude, then, that at least artefact forms are separate in the middle dialogues. Can we tell the same story about other forms? That is, can we tell a plausible story that shows that they, too, were once uninstantiated and so are separate?

I am unsure. Consider, for example, moral forms. I take it that for a moral form to be instantiated, there must be souls. Now in the middle dialogues, souls have always existed; so one cannot point to a time when moral forms are uninstantiated, by pointing to a time when no souls exist.

Still, this need not be too daunting. Separation is separation from sensible particulars. So, what we really want to know is whether there have always been embodied people and, if so, if at least (an action of) one of them always instantiates virtue—appeal to virtuous souls in Hades may be ruled out as irrelevant, since they are not, in the relevant way, sensible.

Now so far as I can tell, in the middle dialogues Plato is uncommitted, one way or the other, on the question of whether or not there are always embodied people. If there are not always embodied people, virtue is at some point uninstantiated in the relevant way, and so is separate; but the middle dialogues seem uncommitted to the antecedent of this conditional.

<sup>73</sup> One might, I suppose, hold that the form of bed and the first bed came into existence simultaneously; but I doubt that this is Plato's view.

Still, even if there are always embodied people, there might be a time when none of them instantiated virtue.

One might argue that there is such a time, as follows: for Plato, knowledge is necessary for virtue;<sup>74</sup> and it seems likely that at some time, no one has the requisite knowledge. So at some time, (probably) no one is virtuous. Furthermore, for a virtuous (or just) city to exist, there must be virtuous (or just) people. So it seems that there is probably a time when no virtuous people or cities exist. Does not this show, then, that even if there are always embodied people, virtue is (probably) at some point uninstantiated?

I do not think so. For even if there is a time at which there are no virtuous embodied persons, and so no virtuous cities either, there might still be virtuous *actions*; Plato seems to allow that a nonvirtuous person—one who, for example, lacks the knowledge necessary for virtue—can perform a virtuous action; and virtuous actions surely instantiate virtue. I do not say that Plato is *committed* to the claim that at every point in time, there is at least one virtuous action or person; all I have argued is that his claim that knowledge is necessary for virtue cannot be used to show that there is a time when virtue is uninstantiated.

One might argue that it seems natural to allow that at least there *could* be a time when no virtuous people or actions exist, and so virtue can be uninstantiated and so is separate. I agree that this seems natural; but that does not seem a strong enough consideration to commit Plato to separation. Certainly some—of whom we have seen Aristotle is one—would argue that virtue, like other universals, cannot exist uninstantiated. I do not mean to say that virtue forms are *not* separate. All I have done is to reject certain arguments for showing that they are separate.

A plausible case can be made, then, for the claim that Plato is committed to the separation of artefact forms. But none of the evidence we have examined so far commits him to the separation of any other forms. Plato may, for all I have shown, believe that other forms are separate. But if so, he never argues for, or even mentions, the claim. Nor does he say things from which separation for nonartefact forms follows.

If he accepts separation, perhaps he believes it is an obvious feature of forms, standing in need of no argument or attention. Whereas Aristotle

<sup>74</sup> It is sometimes argued that Plato rejects the Socratic 'knowledge is necessary for virtue' thesis; but I do not think he does. For a defence of the claim that it is retained at least in the *Meno* and *Republic*, see Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory*, ch. vi, §§ 6.3 and 11.4, and ch. vii, § 8.1 (esp. n. 26). For a defence of the claim that it is rejected, see G. Vlastos, 'Justice and Happiness in the *Republic*', in G. Vlastos (ed.), *Plato: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ii. *Ethics, Politics and Philosophy of Art and Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1971), 66–95.



believes it is incoherent to separate universals, perhaps Plato believes it is an obvious fact about the world that universals can exist uninstantiated. I have suggested that Aristotle's charge of incoherence is unjustified; Plato's assumption of obviousness would be too. The question of whether or not universals can exist uninstantiated is a difficult and controversial one; arguments can be, and have been, brought to bear on both sides of the dispute.

### 10. Separation in the *Timaeus*

So far I have left the *Timaeus* to one side; but it repays our attention. For here Plato seems committed to separation for more than artefact forms, and on the basis of deeper considerations than those issuing from the *Cratylus* and *Republic X*.

In the *Timaeus* (27 D 5–31 A 1), Plato argues that the cosmos was created; for it is sensible, and everything sensible is created. Creations require causes; and so there is a cause of the coming to be of the cosmos. This is the Demiurge, who is powerful (though not omnipotent) and good. Creation requires attention to a model; what model did the Demiurge look to? There are just two possibilities: he looked either to forms or to features of the pre-existing chaos. Since the Demiurge is good and so free from jealousy, he wished his creation, the cosmos, to be as good as possible. He must, then, have looked to the best available model, the forms.

If this account of creation is taken literally, as Aristotle takes it, then it seems to follow that at least some forms were at some point uninstantiated.<sup>75</sup> For on this account, forms have always existed, but there is a time at which no sensibles exist; and from this it follows that there is a time at which some forms are uninstantiated by sensibles. But if any form was ever *actually* uninstantiated by sensibles, obviously it *can* so exist, and so is separate. For separation, again, is just the capacity for independent existence, i.e. the ability to exist uninstantiated. We can schematize the argument for separation as follows:<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Whether or not to take the account literally—or how much of it to take literally—is disputed. For some discussion, see e.g. G. Vlastos, 'The Disorderly Motion in the *Timaeus*', *Classical Quarterly*, 33 (1939), 71–83, repr. in Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, 379–99; and 'Creation in the *Timaeus*: Is it a Fiction?', in Allen (ed.), 401–19. It is not clear Aristotle took every feature of the account literally; but he seems to have taken the claim that time and the sensible world have not always existed literally. See e.g. *De Caelo* 279<sup>b</sup>ff., *Physics* 251<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>76</sup> I speak here as though forms are everlasting, rather than eternal, for the sake of simplicity. If we take seriously the eternality of the forms, then it is no longer clear that the

- (1)  $(\forall t)$  (Forms exist at  $t$ ).
- (2)  $(\exists t)$  (No sensibles exist at  $t$ ).
- $\therefore$  (3)  $(\exists t)$  (Forms exist at  $t$  but no sensibles exist at  $t$ ).
- $\therefore$  (4)  $(\exists t)$  (Forms are uninstantiated by sensibles at  $t$ ).
- $\therefore$  (5) Forms are separate (can exist independently of sensibles).

This argument shows that all forms are separate, in the sense that all did, and so all can, exist uninstantiated by sensibles: that is, by articulated sensibles such as tables and chairs, or natural kinds as we know them, or sensible fire as it exists in our world. However, the above argument does not show that all forms were at some point actually uninstantiated *tout court*. For example, though the form of fire was at one point uninstantiated by sensible fire as we know it (since there was a time at which the form of fire, but not sensible fire as we know it, existed), it is not clear that it was ever uninstantiated as such. For prior to the creation of sensible fire, chaos contained traces (*ichnē*, 53 B 2) of fire, and that seems sufficient for the form of fire always to have been instantiated by something, even if not by sensible fire as we know it. What about moral forms? The original chaos contained no embodied people or individual human souls; and so moral forms were not always instantiated by them. However, the Demiurge seems always to have existed; and he is just and good. Hence the forms of justice and goodness were always instantiated, at least by the Demiurge. Hence they were never uninstantiated *tout court*, though they were uninstantiated by articulated sensibles and presumably by chaos.

If separation is separation from articulated sensible particulars, then the above argument shows that all forms are separate, since (if the account of creation is taken literally) they all existed before there were any articulated sensibles. If, however, separation is the ability to exist uninstantiated as such, then the above argument, taken together with other things Plato believes, shows only that some forms are separate. It doesn't show that the form of goodness, for example, was ever uninstantiated as such, since the Demiurge always instantiated it.

Although the argument just sketched is a valid argument for the separation of at least some forms, it is once again important to note that Plato does not explicitly offer it; though separation follows from claims he makes, if those claims are taken literally, he does not, even here, explicitly argue

argument for separation I here construct for Plato goes through. If it does not, then either the *Timaeus* is not committed to separation after all or, if it is, then it is so committed because forms are eternal, rather than because of the argument I consider—if, that is, eternity implies separation, which is, as noted above, unclear.

for separation. Furthermore, if the account of creation is *not* taken literally, then we lose the argument for separation just rehearsed. For it rests on the claim that there was a time when forms but not sensibles existed: a claim a nonliteral account of the creation story might eschew.

On one controversial reading of the *Timaeus*, then, Plato is committed to, even if he does not directly argue for, the separation of at least some forms. Further, the considerations leading to separation are, on this reading, rooted in Plato's teleological vision of the cosmos, and they lead to the separation of key examples of forms. Here, then, is a more satisfying route to separation than that we found in the middle dialogues, even if Plato does not signpost it as such.<sup>77</sup>

Can we use the *Timaeus'* account of separation to show that (nonartefact) forms are separate in the middle dialogues after all? I do not think so. Plato may there believe that forms and sensibles stand in the model–copy relation, which is part of the *Timaeus'* account of creation; but that, on its own, is insufficient for separation. Plato does often enough say that forms have always existed, whereas sensibles come to be and cease to be. But this claim about sensibles seems to mean only that no *given* sensible always exists; whereas the argument in the *Timaeus* involves the stronger claim that there was a time at which *no* (articulated) *sensibles whatever* existed. And of course the *Timaeus'* claim that souls were created appears to conflict with the middle dialogues' claim that souls have always existed. Though the middle dialogues may well accept separation, then, they do not clearly do so for the *Timaeus'* reasons.

Our account of the *Timaeus* partially helps, and partially hurts, Aristotle. It helps in that, given his belief that the account of creation is to be taken literally, he is justified in concluding that at least some forms are separate, at least in the *Timaeus*. And given his further apparent belief that Plato's views about forms did not change significantly between the middle and late dialogues, he is also justified in finding separation in the middle dialogues.<sup>78</sup>

It hurts, however, in that the argument for separation we have uncovered is not the one Aristotle articulates; he never suggests that separation is grounded in facts about the creation of the cosmos. Although the *Timaeus*

<sup>77</sup> With my account of the *Timaeus* contrast the interesting account offered by Rohr, 'Empty Forms in Plato'.

<sup>78</sup> I do not mean to suggest, what is false, that Aristotle believes Plato never changes his mind about *anything*. But he does not seem to believe Plato changed his mind about separation. See e.g. *Metaph.* 987<sup>a</sup>34–987<sup>b</sup>1. Further support for this claim consists in the fact that the *Peri Ideōn* arguments draw freely on later dialogues, even when separation is at issue.

provides evidence in support of Aristotle, it is unclear it is the evidence he relies on; and the evidence he relies on—the substantiality of forms—serves him less well.

Further, even in the *Timaeus*, commitment to separation has to be teased out; so it is misleading of Aristotle to suggest that separation is a key feature of forms, one Plato argues for, beginning with the *Phaedo*. Though forms may well be separate, even in the *Phaedo*, neither Aristotle's account of separation, nor his belief that it is a matter of explicit concern to Plato, should be accepted.

### 11. Socrates on Separation

I turn, finally, to a brief account of Socrates. How does Aristotle distinguish Socrates from Plato, and is his account correct? One central difference Aristotle points to is that Plato, but not Socrates, separated universals from particulars. We have seen that Aristotle is probably correct to say that Plato separated (some) forms (in at least some dialogues); is he also correct to say that Socrates did not separate universals?

Before answering this question, there is a prior one: What exactly does Aristotle mean in claiming that Socrates did not separate universals? Allen suggests Aristotle means 'that Socrates did not distinguish Forms from their instances at all':<sup>79</sup> Socrates, in Aristotle's view, is a nominalist; he does not admit universals, as entities distinct from sensible particulars.

This view, if correct, would certainly distinguish Socrates from Plato; for whether or not Plato separates universals, he certainly believes there are universals as well as particulars; he is clearly a realist of some sort about universals.<sup>80</sup> But Allen's interpretation is not correct. His argument for it, first of all, rests on a misunderstanding. Citing *Metaph.* 987<sup>b</sup>4 ff. (translated above, in Section 3), he claims that it 'implies that Socrates identified the objects of definitions with sensibles, which is another way of saying that he did not distinguish Forms from their instances'.<sup>81</sup> But it is not another way of saying this. Allen thinks it is, because he takes sensibles (*aisthēta*) to include only sensible *particulars*. We have seen, however, that for Aristotle, sensibles also include sensible *properties*. In suggesting that Socrates, unlike Plato, identified universals with sensibles, Aristotle is suggesting, not that

<sup>79</sup> Allen, *Plato's Euthyphro and the Earlier Theory of Forms*, 136.

<sup>80</sup> Contrast D. Brownstein, *Aspects of the Problems of Universals* (Lawrence, Kan.: University of Kansas Press, 1973), ch. 4, who suggests that forms are (not universals but) particulars, so that Plato is a nominalist—he countenances particulars but not universals.

<sup>81</sup> Allen, *Plato's Euthyphro and the Earlier Theory of Forms*, 134.

Socrates somehow reduced universals to sensible particulars, but rather than he believed that all universals were sensible or observable properties. Aristotle's identification of Socratic universals with sensibles, then, does not support a nominalist reading.

Furthermore, in *M*9 (1086<sup>b</sup>3–7) Aristotle clearly says that Socrates recognized universals; he sees, on Aristotle's view, that universals are necessary for knowledge. It is just that Socrates did not ascribe IE to them—this is a further, and to Aristotle disastrous, move of Plato's.

In saying that Socrates did not separate universals, then, Aristotle does not mean that Socrates did not acknowledge universals. There are still, however, three possibilities as to what he does mean: (a) Socrates is uncommitted to separation; (b) Socrates says things that imply a rejection of separation; or (c) Socrates explicitly denies separation.

If Aristotle means (c), his claim is false; the issue of separation is not broached in the Socratic dialogues any more than it is broached in the middle or later dialogues. But I see no reason to assume Aristotle means (c).

Let us assume, then, that Aristotle means (a) or (b). Is his claim, so interpreted, correct? Allen, for one, argues that it is not. For, Allen argues, Socratic universals *are* separate. They are 'independent of and prior to their instances'.<sup>82</sup> Allen's arguments for this claim, however, are unsuccessful. He writes, for example, that

Ontologically, the priority of Forms is implied by the fact that they are essences and causes by which things are what they are; their existence is a condition for the existence of their instances. That priority implies existential independence. If Euthyphro's action in prosecuting his father is holy, its existence as holy depends upon the existence of the Form of holiness, by which it is holy; it would be merely queer to think that the Form of holiness depends for its existence on Euthyphro's action in prosecuting his father being holy.<sup>83</sup>

To be sure, the form of holiness can exist independently of Euthyphro's act of prosecuting his father, and so it is separate from that act; but to show that the form of holiness is separate in Aristotle's (and so in our) sense, it must be shown that the form is separate from sensible instances as such. And even if the existence of forms is 'a condition for the existence of their instances', it does not follow that forms are separate from their instances; there could be mutual dependence.<sup>84</sup>

Allen also offers other arguments designed to show that Socratic forms

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 136.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Allen, however, seems to think separation involves distributive, not collective, independence; so that, as he construes separation, at least the independent-existence part of separation (he believes that more than a claim about independent existence is involved in

are separate; but none of them succeeds. One might, however, appeal instead to an argument similar to one suggested earlier in connection with Plato: Socrates, like Plato, believes that knowledge is necessary for virtue; he also believes (perhaps unlike Plato) that no one has the requisite knowledge. Hence for Socrates, no one is virtuous. So is not virtue uninstantiated, and so separate?

Against this it might be argued, as it was before in connection with Plato, that even if no one is virtuous, there can none the less be virtuous actions; a nonvirtuous person—a person lacking the knowledge necessary for virtue, for example—can still perform a virtuous action; and virtuous actions instantiate virtue. So even if no one is virtuous, virtue might none the less be instantiated. Of course, this is not to say that virtue is *not* separate; it is only to say that the suggested route to separation is a dead end. There might, of course, be other routes to it. I myself cannot discover any, however, and so am inclined to believe, against Allen, that Socrates is not committed to separation. This suggests that, if Aristotle intends only claim (a), he is correct.

What, however, if Aristotle intends the stronger claim (b)? One might argue that there is terminological evidence in favour of (b). For example, Socrates says that courage—which I take to be a Socratic form—is *incourageous* people.<sup>85</sup> Does not this imply rejection of separation? Well, it all depends on what ‘in’ means here. When Plato, in the *Phaedo*, allows that the soul is sometimes in the body, he does not mean that it is not separate from it—not capable of existing without it. Similarly, even if Socratic forms are in sensibles, perhaps they can exist independently of them. Socrates does not explicate ‘in’ for us; but I see no reason to suppose that his use of it is incompatible with separation. He sometimes seems to mean no more than that universals are ‘had by’, characterize, sensibles. But this is compatible with separation; to say that my car is red does not imply that redness cannot exist uninstantiated. Socrates sometimes seems to mean that forms are *where* sensibles are; and Plato, at least in the *Timaeus*, may deny this. But, as we have seen, to say that forms are where sensibles are does not imply that they cannot exist independently of sensibles. The water in this jug is where the jug is, but it can exist without it. Socrates’ use of ‘in’, then, provides no evidence, one way or the other, about his views on separation; neither, so far as I can tell, do other features of his terminology, or any of his arguments.

separation) follows from the considerations he adduces. But this is just to say that he is wrong about what separation is. See above, sect. 1 and n. 4.

<sup>85</sup> See e.g. *La.* 191 E–192 B; cf. *Chrm.* 158 E–159 A; *Euphr.* 5 D 1–5; *Meno* 72 E 1, 7.

I am inclined to reject (b), then, as well as (c). But (a) seems correct: Socrates is uncommitted to separation. Since Plato, at least sometimes in some cases, is committed to separation, Aristotle is correct to say that Socrates and Plato differ over the issue of separation. But this does not entirely vindicate Aristotle. For he writes as though separation is the big differentiator between Plato and Socrates, and this is not true; commitment to separation is as muted in the middle dialogues as lack of commitment to it is in the Socratic dialogues. Though separation may indeed divide Plato from Socrates, it does not play the central role in their contrasting views that Aristotle suggests.

Separation is not, however, the only feature Aristotle points to in differentiating Plato from Socrates; and perhaps other of his claims are on firmer ground. Aristotle also claims, for example, that for Socrates, unlike Plato, all universals are sensible, that is, are sensible properties. Now Plato, as we have seen, accepts NR; forms are nonsensible properties, properties irreducible to, and indefinable in terms of, sensible properties. Socrates, by contrast, does not argue for, and does not seem committed to, NR; more strongly, he may believe that all properties can be defined in sensible terms alone.<sup>86</sup> Here, then, is an important difference between Socrates and Plato, and one Aristotle detects. Indeed, this vindicates Aristotle in spending so much time on the flux arguments. For though they do not prove, and are not thought by Plato to prove, separation, they do prove NR; and it is NR, not separation, for which Plato repeatedly, but Socrates never, argues.

Further features of Aristotle's account of Socrates are also worth noting. Aristotle may attribute to Socrates, not only the view that universals are

<sup>86</sup> That Socrates rejects, and Plato accepts, NR is a major theme of Irwin's *Plato's Moral Theory*, one defensible independently of Irwin's claim that Plato fallaciously infers IE from NR. I agree with Irwin that Plato argues for NR; and it is some support for Irwin's interpretation of Socrates that Aristotle, in claiming that Socrates identified universals with sensibles (i.e. with sensible properties), commits Socrates to a rejection of NR. But I am unsure how far one ought to press Socrates here. As Irwin argues, Socrates identifies moral forms, at least, with states of soul; it is unclear in what sense these are observable or sensible. Further, like Plato in the middle dialogues, Socrates rejects at least those observable accounts that fall prey to the F and not-F problem; and his rejection of behavioural accounts also betrays some dissatisfaction with at least some sorts of observable accounts. Irwin must argue—and does argue—that Socrates believes an observable account is available, though as yet unattained; whereas Plato gave up the search for such an account. But it may be more accurate to say only that Socrates failed to diagnose their failure to find satisfactory accounts, whereas Plato offers a diagnosis; their difference then would be that whereas Plato argues for NR, Socrates is uncommitted, one way or the other, on the issue. If this is correct, then Irwin and Aristotle overstate the difference between Plato and Socrates on NR, just as they overstate their difference on separation. None the less, they are right to claim that there is a difference between Plato and Socrates here, and one to which the flux argument is relevant, in a way in which it is not relevant to the issue of separation.

sensibles, but also the view that they are sensible *substances*. At least, he says that it was a mistake of Plato's not to make sensibles substances (*Metaph.* 1086<sup>a</sup>35–7),<sup>87</sup> suggesting, perhaps, that Socrates did make sensibles substances. If he means that Socrates' substances are not (just) sensible particulars but (also) sensible properties, then Socrates, like Plato but unlike the Aristotle of the *Metaphysics*, admits universal substances. Since he denies, or does not accept, separation, he also then believes, or does not deny, that there are nonseparated substances—again in striking contrast to Aristotle but in agreement with Plato, in so far as Plato, unlike Aristotle, does not require that substances be separate. On this reading of Socrates, then, Socrates is closer to Plato, and further from Aristotle, than Aristotle admits.

It is unclear, however, that Aristotle intends this reading. He does ascribe to Socrates the view that universals answer the 'What is F?' question, tell us what things are; for Socrates as for Plato, universals are the essences of things. But Aristotle does not believe that *ousia* as essence must be separate; only *ousia* as (primary) substance must be.<sup>88</sup> Now Aristotle believes that forms are Plato's primary substances; and he links their separation to their substantiality. But it is less clear that he thinks that Socrates' (primary) substances are universals. If he does not claim this, then even if he claims that Socrates' universals are essences, their nonseparation does not drive a wedge between Socrates and Aristotle, at least on that score. Rather, both allow that some universals are essences even though they are not substances or separate.

Even if Socrates and Aristotle agree on this score, however, they differ on another. For Socrates, on this reading, completely severs the connection between substance and essence; substances and essences constitute disjoint classes. For Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*, however, although some universals are essences, and no universal is a substance, it is also the case that substances—individual forms—are essences. Indeed, here is another point of contact between Plato and the Aristotle of the *Metaphysics*: both believe that some one sort of entity—something properly called 'form'—is at once substance and essence. To be sure, they have different conceptions of what candidates fit the bill, Plato promoting his forms or universals, Aristotle promoting individual forms such as Socrates or his soul or the prime and planetary movers. But they agree in linking substance, form, and essence in a way Socrates, on this reading,<sup>89</sup> does not. Whether Socratic universals are or are not substances, then, Aristotle differs from Socrates—either over

<sup>87</sup> The remark is odd, however; for Aristotle himself believes there are nonsensible substances. See above, sect. 3.

<sup>88</sup> I discuss this matter further in ch. 15.

<sup>89</sup> Again, see ch. 15.



the connection between substance and separation, or over the connection between substance, essence, and form. And in the latter case, Aristotle's affinities lie with Plato. But Aristotle carefully keeps these issues in the background—perhaps because they are in tension with his effort to portray Socrates as the hero, Plato as the villain, in the story of the introduction of universals into Western thought.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Earlier versions of this chapter were read at the Cambridge Philological Society, the Institute of Classical Studies in the University of London, and a seminar in Oxford conducted by Lesley Brown and Lindsay Judson; I thank the audiences on these occasions—especially Lesley Brown, M. F. Burnyeat, M. M. Mackenzie, and Richard Sorabji—for a number of helpful comments. I also wish to thank J. L. Ackrill, Julia Annas, Norman Kretzmann, Jennifer Whiting, M. J. Woods, and—as always, and especially—T. H. Irwin for helpful written and oral comments. The research for the paper was supported by a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities, sabbatical leave from Cornell University, and a visiting fellowship at Brasenose College, Oxford.