

# Things are the same as their “essences”?

## Notes on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* Z-6

Lucas Angioni  
UNICAMP/CNPq

### 1.

Scholars argue that in *Metaphysics* Z-6 (or VII-6) Aristotle discusses an interesting question about essence and identity: whether the essence of each thing is identical with that thing.<sup>1</sup> Others argue that identity cannot be the issue, since the claim that the essence of each thing is identical with that thing is incompatible with the explanatory priority of the essence over the thing.<sup>2</sup> I will argue for a rather deflationary view of this chapter. First, the chapter belongs to a “*logikos*” discussion of the notions of essence and substance, which has started at Z-4. The “*logikos*” standpoint is a *preliminary* discussion of some logical and formal features of essences and has no metaphysical depth. Second, the chapter mostly targets the specific Platonic view according to which a definiendum and its definiens cannot have a relation of mutual implication or coextensiveness between them.

Before going to a close examination of the passages from Z-6, I start with exegetical points of utmost importance. I am following the traditional English translations in using the word “essence”, but one must keep in mind that the Greek expression for it is “*to ti en einai*”, which can be more literally translated as “what being is (for something)”. This expression is frequently

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1 See Lewis [1990], p. 340; Code [1981], p. 113; Woods [1975], p. 168; Loux [1991], p. 91-3.

2 See Charles [2011].

used with a dative complement, so that "*to ti en einai anthropoi*", for instance, means "what being is for man" or "what it is for a man to be".<sup>3</sup> Many scholars believe that an expression like "*to ti en einai anthropoi*" is interchangeable with "*to einai anthropoi*": both mean basically the same, i.e., "being for man" or "what being for man is".<sup>4</sup> This interchangeability might work for most contexts and I will not challenge it. But a more problematic step is the claim that both expressions introduce a *way of being*: e.g., the way of being in virtue of which something is a man.<sup>5</sup>

I do not challenge the claim that both expressions might well introduce ways of being in many contexts. I do challenge the claim that these expressions introduce ways of being in *Metaphysics* Z-6. Aristotle's discussions in further chapters of *Metaphysics* Z will play with the distinction between objects and ways of being. But I do not believe that this distinction plays any role in Z-6. In *Metaphysics* Z 4-6, expressions like "*to ti en einai anthropoi*" or "*to einai anthropoi*" are just place-holders for a description that is given as answer to the question "what man is?", and this description is not meant to be a full explanatory account of man's essence in terms of ways of being: it only selects a cluster of features that are good enough to identify all objects that are man.<sup>6</sup> Expressions like "*to ti en einai anthropoi*" or "*to einai anthropoi*" ("the essence of man") are replaceable with descriptions like "biped animal", not with descriptions like "*being* a biped animal". This point is very important for what follows in this paper. The "essence" we are talking about when we follow Aristotle's text on the issue *whether things are the same as their essences* amounts to a deflationated notion with no metaphysical depth: the essence of man, for instance, is just a cluster of features (say, *rational animal*) that is good enough to assure a correct application of the term "man".

3 See Bostock [1994], p. 86, for a survey of these issues.

4 This opinion is as old as Pseudo-Alexander's commentary: see 480.2-3.

5 See Charles [2011] p. 151 for such a view.

6 In *Metaphysics* IV, 1006a32 ff., "being-for-man" (*to anthropoi einai*) is what "man" (note the neuter article, *to anthropos*, at 1006b17) signifies; now, at 1006b25-6, Aristotle explains that the relation between "man" and "being-for-man" is similar to that between "cloak" (*himation*) and "robe" (*lopion*) – which is "oneness in number" as explained in *Topics* 103b24ff. (see note 14); and, at 1006b3-4 and 31, it is clear that "being-for-man", as what is signified by "man", is replaced with "biped animal" – not with "*being* biped animal". As to Aristotle's usage of "*to ti en einai*", see *Topics* 132a1-3, where "biped pedestrian animal" is the example of a *proprium* that signifies "*to ti en einai*" for man.

To make this point clearer, it is worth considering that Aristotle makes room for different sorts of definitions, i.e, different sorts of answer to the question “what X is?” A definition answering the question “what is thunder?” might well be (a) “the noise in the clouds which is caused by the quenching of fire”, (b) “such and such a noise in the clouds” or just (c) “fire being quenched”.<sup>7</sup> The first one is a triadic definiens account which *involves* the causal factor (namely, the quenching of fire) that makes thunder be what it is. The second one is a definiens account which *lacks* this same causal factor, whereas the third one is a definiens account which *focuses* exactly on it or is *exhausted* with it. What is important here for my purposes is, firstly, that an expression like “what being is for thunder” might pick up *any* of these accounts (and be replaceable with it) depending on the context.<sup>8</sup> Secondly, accounts (a) and (b) can be taken as referring expressions that pick up exactly the thing supposed as definiendum, whereas account (c) might be taken as introducing a way of being – the feature that makes the definiendum be what it is. A consequence of this is that accounts (a) and (b) can be construed as predicates in identity statements with their definienda.<sup>9</sup> Now, the most important point for my purposes is that, in Z-6, Aristotle is considering accounts like (b) – or at most accounts like (b) or (a), but (c) is out of the picture. Z-6 belongs to a “logical” approach which is not concerned with issues about explanatory power of definitions.

There are other important exegetical preliminaries. So far I have discussed only one of the relata involved in the question Aristotle raises at the beginning of Z-6: “whether each thing is

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7 I am expanding the examples given by Charles [2011], p. 158. See more about these types of definition in Charles [2000], p. 23-55.

8 I cannot understand why Charles [2011], p. 158-9, argues that “the phrase ‘what it is to be A’ seems to be used as a place-holder (at the logical level) for the relevant causally explanatory feature”. Charles believes that “*to ti en einai*” indicates “the feature [= a way of being] which makes the substance the one it is”. At least for the *proprium*, Aristotle oscillates in the *Topics*: in 133b7-8, the *proprium* of man is “*being biped pedestrian*” (*einai pezon dipoun*), but in 133a3 as well as in 136b20-1, the *proprium* of man is “*the biped pedestrian*” (*to pezon dipoun*). It is reasonable to argue that such oscillation also applies to Aristotle’s uses of “*to ti en einai*” and “definition”. But the most important point is that one cannot infer from the use of the infinitive “*einai*” that Aristotle introduces a way of being.

9 See Charles [2011], p. 155: “man = *df* the animal which is two-footed”. What is wrong according to Charles is to believe that an identity statement can involve an object and its definiens account in terms of way of being, like “man = *df* being a two-footed animal”.

the same as its essence or is different from it" (1031a15-6). But something must be said about the other relatum as well: what "each thing" means in this context? Many scholars assume (sometimes without argument) that "each thing" picks up or at least involves the notion of an individual, like Socrates.<sup>10</sup> I do not see any evidence for this assumption. The Greek expression is "*hekaston*" ("each"), which is absolutely neutral and ontologically non-committal. There is no evidence that the issue to be tackled in Z-6 is about individuals. First of all, at the end of the chapter, Aristotle says that "the question whether Socrates and being-for-Socrates are the same thing is obviously answered in the same way" (1032a6-8)<sup>11</sup>, as if individuals like Socrates have not been considered so far in the overall discussion.<sup>12</sup> Most importantly, Aristotle's discussion does not mention any individual at all, nor does it involve any feature that characterizes an individual *qua* individual (like liability to generation and corruption etc.). I argue that individuals are not only far from being at the core of the discussion but also completely absent of it. "*Hekaston*" ("each") rather refers in this context to the precise object of which it makes sense to say that it "has an essence": *definienda*.<sup>13</sup> Aristotle does not focus on any particular class of *definienda*: actually, he is only concerned with the question "whether each *definiendum* is the same as its *definiens* account".

Now, the relationship of sameness that is at stake is also very simple: it amounts to what is sometimes labelled "numerical unity" (or "oneness in number", or "numerical identity", from *Topics* 103b24-7ff.), but since "numerical unity" seems to be used differently by Aristotle in many other contexts (like *Metaphysics* 1016b31ff.), I prefer to say that the "sameness" at stake in Z-6

10 See Hartman [1977], p. 58-62, Irwin [1988], p. 216-7, Woods [1975], p. 167-8, Loux [1991], p. 102-4. A more refined approach is found in Furth [1985], p. 114, who stresses the ambiguity of the expression "essence of X": X may refer either to a *definiendum* (a universal) or to an individual, so that *rational animal*, for instance, is the essence of *man* not in the same way as it is the essence of *Socrates*. This actually develops what is found in Code [1981], p. 112-3: the essence of Socrates will be "the signification of an appropriately related definition", namely, the definition of the species man. Any way, Code's and Furth's views are *expansions* and *developments* from what we find in Z-6: I still do not see that Aristotle was concerned with establishing those points in Z-6.

11 Ross's translation with alterations. I am always assuming the Greek text as edited by Ross [1924].

12 See Charles [2011], p. 157.

13 Some occurrences of "*hekaston*" in this sense include *Metaphysics* 1036a 28, *Posterior Analytics* 71b 9, 76a 4, 14, 16; *Physics* 184a 12, 194b 18. See a similar (if not identical) view in Charles [2011], p. 157. Even Frede & Patzig [1988], p. 243-4 (who believe that Aristotle is committed to individual forms) agree that "*hekaston*" does not refer to individual substances in this context.

amounts to coextensiveness (or *de dicto* necessary coextensiveness) between each definiendum and its definiens account.<sup>14</sup> This fits well with the *logikos* approach Aristotle has introduced in Z-4, which is only concerned with some minimal relations between definiendum and definiens (like non-circularity, coextensiveness, elucidativeness) and pays no attention to ontological and explanatory issues about definitions.<sup>15</sup>

But why is Aristotle interested in discussing coextensiveness between definiendum and definiens? The *logikos* approach has established that every term can be taken as definiendum to be defined in an account that elucidates its meaning and guarantees a correct application of the term. Now, coextensiveness between definiendum and definiens might seem incompatible with the explanatory features of definitions. A definiens account must capture the basic causal factor that makes the definiendum what it is. This causal factor, inasmuch as it explains what makes the definiendum be what it is, must be prior to the it: it cannot be identical with the definiendum, since this would lead to the unwelcome result that the definiendum will be prior to itself.<sup>16</sup> Now, what are the options to avoid this inconsistency between, on the one hand, the coextensiveness requirement for definitions and, on the other, the explanatory priority of the definiens over the definiendum?

Aristotle is arguing against one option to avoid this inconsistency in Z-6: an option presented by some version of Platonic theory of Forms. In this version of the theory, the co-

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14 See Code [1981], p. 113. The notion of “*tauton*” at Z-6 is the same one we find in *Topics* 103a 23-7 (as well as in many other *Topics* passages where definitions, sameness and propria are discussed. e.g., 145b32; 146a6-7): “*tauton*” amounts to “numerical unity” (or “oneness in number”) in the sense of coextensiveness between two terms, or between a term and a description, or between two descriptions – for instance, between “cloak” (*himation*) and “robe” (*lôpion*) or between “man” and “biped pedestrian animal”. I agree with Charles [2011], p. 155, when he says that a statement of identity in number in this sense “connects two referring expressions”. An excellent survey of the options for taking the sameness relation at stake in Z-6 is found in Cohen [1978], p. 75-6.

15 I have focused on the “*logikos*” approach in Z-4 at Angioni [2013]. See Burnyeat [2001], p. 9, 21-22, for a similar view. I agree with Burnyeat that most of Z 4-6 is at the *logikos* level, but I argue that the basic feature of the *logikos* standpoint is the absence of any concern with the real causal-explanatory power of definitions, instead of mere absence of hylomorphism (hylomorphism is *one* way of tackling the issue of causal-explanatory power of definitions).

16 In this point I agree entirely with Charles [2011], p. 152.

extensiveness requirement is abandoned because it seems incompatible with the causal role ascribed to essences: an essence can explain what the definiendum is only if it is prior to it, and if it is prior to it, it must be an independently existent entity over and above the definiendum. The latter claim is Aristotle's main target. In the overall context of the *Metaphysics*, he wants to prove that the causal priority of the essence over its object does not require it to be an independently existent entity. But in Z-6 his focus is more limited: he defends the coextensiveness requirement, showing that some arguments against it are not valid, whereas others lead to inconsistencies. As to the question about the compatibility between the coextensiveness requirement and the explanatory priority of the definiens over the definiendum, I cannot discuss it in this paper, which is focused on Z-6. But two things must be said. First, the asymmetry required for the essence's causal priority is compatible with a symmetrical relation on the ontological level: the essence cannot exist without the thing and vice-versa. Even if strict coextensiveness does not hold of each thing and its essence, a relation of mutual implication holds: if the essence of X exists, X exists; and if X exists, the essence of X exists; if the essence of X does not exist, X does not exist, and vice-versa. This symmetrical dependence about existence is compatible with the asymmetry required for the explanatory priority of essences.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, my opinion is that Aristotle's ultimate model for definition, which will emerge only from *Metaphysics* VII-17 and VIII, will solve the issue: definitions like (a) have a triadic structure which preserves the coextensiveness requirement (since the description made of the triad of terms is "the same as the definiendum") and at the same time have the basic causal factor (a way of being which cannot be "the same as the definiendum") as one of its elements.

## 2.

Let me begin the analysis of the text. The discussion in Z-6 can be divided into two main parts. In the first one (1031a19-28), Aristotle examines whether an accidental compound is the same as its essence. In the second one (1031a8-1032a4), Aristotle examines whether a *per se* thing is the same as its essence.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See Charles [2011], p. 162, 169 and Peramatzis [2011], p. 242 about this issue.

<sup>18</sup> Many scholars take the central point in Z-6 as related to the Third Man Argument and to an infinite regress generated by the "non-identity assumption" in the Theory of Forms. See Owen [1975], p. 21-5 and

The discussion in the first part is directed *against* the claim that an accidental compound cannot be the same as its essence.<sup>19</sup> The argument for that claim is the following: white man could not be the same as the essence of white man (what-being-is-for-white-man), since, if it were, the essence of man must be the same as the essence of white man too. It is far from clear at a first glance why this unwelcome conclusion will follow. But, actually, it does not follow. Aristotle gives us sufficient information to build the argument in the following way:

- (i) white man is being-for-white-man;
- (ii) man is white man (“as they say”, 1031a 23);<sup>20</sup>
- (iii) therefore, man is being-for-white-man.<sup>21</sup>

The unwelcome conclusion was not yet drawn. But it is easy to find how it could be reached. Even adversaries prompt to reject premise (i) will easily agree that sameness between something and its essence holds for cases like man. Thus, a fairly implied premise is:

- (iv) man is being-for-man.

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Woods [1975], p. 169-70. For a sharp criticism of these views, see Code [1981], p. 104-10. I do not believe that these issues play a central role in Aristotle’s strategy in Z-6.

19 Pseudo-Alexander (480.19-20, 480.38-481.4), as well as Ross, Frede & Patzig and many others (like Wedin [2000], p. 259), believed that Aristotle was arguing *for* this claim, not *against* it. This interpretation is based on a series of misunderstandings of Aristotle’s discussion. Ross [1924, p. 176] believed that the argument in 1031a21-4 was intended as a sound *reductio ad absurdum* of the claim that white man is the same as the essence of white man. Frede & Patzig [2001], p. 244, are puzzled by the fact that Aristotle recognizes that the arguments supposed to lead to “his thesis” do not work. Burnyeat et alli [1979], p. 33-6, who follow Ross, are also puzzled by 1031a38: “it leaves Aristotle without any argument standing against the thesis that accidental unities are identical with their essence”. The fact is that Aristotle does not want any argument *against* it.

20 Burnyeat *et alli* 1979: 33, believe that “as they say” (“*hos phasin*”, 1031a 23) refer to the ordinary man, not to any philosopher. But there are two layers (so to speak) in this discussion: the ones who propose the argument concluding in sentence (v), and the ones who will deny (i) in order to avoid conclusion (v). See more on note 25.

21 Such a language is indeed awkward, but according to my claim that “being-for-X” is replaceable with the description that gives a *logikos* definition of X, such a syllogism is equivalent to the following: (i) white man is (say) a biped animal that has whiteness; (ii) man is white man; (iii) therefore, man is a biped animal that has whiteness.

Another fair assumption is that such an argument is taking all sentences as sameness statements. Maybe Aristotle and his adversaries would agree that sentences (i) and (iv) follow the pattern of statements in which a definiens is attributed to its definiendum, but the important point is that they also would agree that these sentences are convertible.<sup>22</sup> Then, assuming (iv'), the converse of (iv), as a minor premise and sentence (iii) as a major, we get the following argument:

(iii) man is being-for-white-man;

(iv') being-for-man is man;

(v) therefore, being-for-man is being-for-white-man.<sup>23</sup>

Sentence (v) is exactly the conclusion announced in 1031a21-2 as an unwelcome result of the claim that an accidental compound is the same as its essence. This claim itself is represented as premise (i) above. But there are three things entangled in the text: first, the arguments themselves from (i) to (v); second, adversaries' reaction against these arguments; third, Aristotle's criticism of this reaction. Sentence (v) is unacceptable not only for Aristotle but also for his adversaries. But these adversaries want to avoid this conclusion by dropping premise (i): they argue that accidental compounds cannot be the same as their essences.<sup>24</sup>

22 Sameness as taken in 1031a21-2 is enough for convertibility.

23 Again, such a syllogism is equivalent to the following: (i) man is a biped animal that has whiteness; (ii) rational animal is man; (iii) therefore, rational animal is a biped animal that has whiteness. From a formal point of view, these arguments (i)-(ii)-(iii) and (iii)-(iv')-(v) follow the pattern proposed by Ross [1924, p. 176], which in my opinion is flawless (see also Frede & Patzig [2001], p. 246). The problem is how Ross understands what is going on. See note 25.

24 Pseudo-Alexander (480.16-19) has taken the adversary argument as a single syllogism in the third figure: (a) man is the same as white man; (b) man is the same as being-for-man; therefore, (c) white man is the same as being-for-man. There are three major problems with this interpretation. First, conclusion (c) is not what Aristotle announces at 1031a21-2 as an unwelcome result ("being-for-man and being-for-white-man will be the same"). Second, no place is assigned in this argument for the premise that *white man is the same as being-for-white-man* (which is taken up with "*ei gar to auto*" at 1031b21 and seems to be the target of a *reduction*, see Ross [1924], 176). Finally, this third figure syllogism is invalid if the conclusion is intended (as it should) as a universal statement. This probably has led Pseudo-Alexander (and others) to believe that Aristotle's main target was a dull sophist that could be refuted with the first lectures on syllogistics. However, the sophistic



Thus, the claim that accidental compounds are not the same as their essences is, in the context of Z-6, an adversary's clumsy attempt to avoid the conclusion of a sophistical argument.<sup>25</sup> This claim is far from being an Aristotelian one. Aristotle's way of avoiding the conclusion of the sophistical argument is to show that it is not a sound argument: it is based on the assumption that all its sentences could be taken as sameness statements *in the same way*.<sup>26</sup> But this assumption is false, as Aristotle remarks: "the extreme terms do not become the same [as the middle term] in the same way" (1031a 25), and this fact jeopardizes the soundness of the argument.<sup>27</sup>

In the first argument, both premises can be taken as sameness claims: premise (i) claims that white man is the same as being-for-white-man, whereas premise (ii) claims that man is the same as white man. But for Aristotle the kind of sameness involved in each claim is different. Premise (i) can be taken as a sound claim that the description "white man" is necessarily coextensive with its definiens account, "being-for-white-man". Aristotle is not concerned with deep ontological issues about accidental compounds having essences or not. His answer to such issues would arguably be that no accidental compound has a real essence of the same type ascribed to natural kinds or to hylomorphic compounds (see 1030a2-17). In Z-4, he has clearly said that

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argument itself is more elaborated, and Aristotle's main target is rather a clumsy attempt to refute it.

25 Pseudo-Alexander ("since some said that being-for-man is the same as being-for-white-man, [Aristotle] takes the argument by which they have concluded this and so refute it", 480.9-12) did not notice that there are *three* things involved: (i) an eristic argument claiming to conclude that being-for-man is the same as being-for-white-man, (ii) an attempt to avoid this eristic conclusion by abandoning its first premise, (iii) Aristotle's criticism of this attempt. The expression "it might plausibly seem" (*doxeien an*) at 1031a19 introduces (ii), not (iii). Ross [1924, p. 176-7] did not notice the "three-layers" of the discussion, nor Frede & Patzig [2001], p. 245-6, who then are led to take (iii) as a piece of Aristotle's self-criticism and the expression "it might plausibly seem" (*doxeien an*) as a sign of caution.

26 Even Pseudo-Alexander (480.24-26) has seen that the core of the sophistic argument rests on a failure to distinguish different sort of sameness statements.

27 See Ross [1924], p. 176 (although he believes that Aristotle intended the argument to be a sound *reductio* against (i)). Pseudo-Alexander (480.21-24) claims that, in the sentence "the extremes do not become the same" (1031b25), we must supply an implicit complement: "to a being *per se*". He is surely thinking of the conclusion of his invalid third figure syllogism, "white man is the same as being-for-white-man". But it is hard to guess what Pseudo-Alexander has done with "*hosautos*": this adverb makes it clear that Aristotle is describing what happens in both premises ("each extreme does not become the same [as the middle] in the same way as the other"), not what happens in the conclusion ("one extreme does not become the same as the other").

accidental compounds like white man do not count as primary things and, consequently, do not have essences and definitions in the strictest sense. Nonetheless, accidental compounds can be defined at a *logikos* level through accounts that satisfy some minimal requirements: accounts that will elucidate the meaning of the terms for accidental compounds and be coextensive with them. At this *logikos* standpoint, Aristotle is happy with the claim that the description "white man" (or whatever term arbitrarily introduced for picking up the same entity referred to by that description, like "cloak", 1029b27-8) is "the same" with a "more accurate description" (1030a16) which explains what being a white man amounts to – like a description saying that "this is attributed to that" (1030a15-6).<sup>28</sup> Now, Z-6 discussion belongs to this *logikos* standpoint, so that "being-for-white-man" is just a shortcut for this more precise description. Aristotle agrees that premise (i) follows the pattern of a *logikos* definition. Therefore, he accepts that "white man" is the same as "being-for-white-man" since every definiendum is the same as its definiens. "The same" in this context does not mean anything more than "coextensive", or "necessarily coextensive" if the necessity is taken as *de dicto*.

The story is completely different for premise (ii). This sentence can only be taken as true if its subject refers to a particular man that happens to be white. But there is no necessary co-extensiveness between the terms. There is just an accidental overlap: in some circumstance, it just happens that a certain man is white, so that he satisfies all necessary and sufficient requirements for being denominated by the description "white man". But from this occasional fact it does not follow that this man is *necessarily* a white man, since he may lose the relevant properties that made him a white man and still continues to be a man.

Sentence (iii) itself is acceptable on similar terms. If being-for-white-man is just a shortcut for the more accurate description that elucidates the meaning of the description "white man", there is no worry in accepting that a man, like Socrates, is being-for-white-man if he is a white man. If "being-for-white-man" is equivalent to such a description like "a rational animal with pale skin", it is clear that Socrates, being a white man, is a rational animal with pale skin. Sentence (iii) follows as conclusion if the sameness involved is understood as it was in premise (ii).

The problem rests on the step taken in the second argument. Premise (iv') is acceptable:

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<sup>28</sup> Aristotle knows perfectly well that a description can be taken as definiendum: see *Topics* 102a1 (a definition can be a "logos that is given in the place of a logos"). See Code [1981], p. 111.

given that a definiendum term and its definiens are necessarily coextensive, the definitional statement (iv) is convertible into (iv'). The problem consists in taking this premise together with premise (iii) as if they were sameness claims *at the same level*. As I have said, sentence (iii) itself might be perfectly acceptable: the predicate that explicates the meaning of "white man" is attributed to a particular man that happens to be a white man. But sentence (iii) is far from establishing that this man is the same as being-for-white-man *in the same sense* in which man is the same as being-for-man. Sentence (iii) does not claim any necessary coextensiveness between man and being-for-white-man.

Thus, conclusion (v) does not follow from premises (iii) and (iv') exactly because the sameness claim in each premise is different from the other.<sup>29</sup> Aristotle explains that "the extremes"<sup>30</sup> are not the same as the middle term in the same way: "being-for-man" is the same as "man" in the sense of being necessarily coextensive with it, whereas "man" and "being-for-white-man" are the same merely in the sense that they happen to refer to the same entity in a particular, contingent circumstance. The result is *that there is no real middle term* for the argument: there is a shift in the reference of "man" from premise (iii) to premise (iv'). Thus, on closer examination, the premises have four, not three terms, and nothing follows from them. "Man" in premise (iv') is taken universally as a general term, and "being-for-man" is the shortcut for the definiens account that is necessarily coextensive with this general term. On the other hand, if premise (iii) is taken seriously as a true statement, it is clear that "man" can only refer to a particular man that happens to have a pale skin (or happens to have the relevant feature to be called a "white man"). A rephrasing of those premises on this more accurate analysis will render:

(iii) [*this*] man [= Socrates] is being-for-white-man;

(iv') being-for-man is man;

(v) therefore, being-for-man is being-for-white-man.

Since there is no real middle term, no conclusion follows.<sup>31</sup>

29 See Lewis [1991], p. 85-140 for an exhaustive treatment of this topic. See also Williams [1985], p. 71-9.

30 Aristotle's talk of "extremes" was what has led me to reconstruct the argument in syllogistic form.

31 My use of "*this*" on re-interpreted (iii) does not mean to introduce a particular quantifier; "*this*" was just a way of marking the need of re-interpreting the reference of "man", so that it actually refers to (say) Socrates.

3.

In a very short passage (1031a25-8), Aristotle considers a reply from his adversary. Suppose the adversary agreeing with Aristotle's way of blocking conclusion (v) by pointing to the absence of a real middle term: it is the *general* term "man" that is the same as "being-for-man", whereas it is a *particular* man, Socrates, that is the same as "being-for-white-man". The adversary now replies with an argument in which there is a real middle term and this middle term is the same as both extremes *in the same way*: in an accidental way. Suppose a man, Socrates, who happens to be a white man and at the same time a musical man, so that (iii) "man is being-for-white" will be true about him as well as (vi) "man is being-for-musical". The truth of this last statement will be grounded in a reasoning similar to (i)-(ii)-(iii): if this man, Socrates, is really a white man, then he has the relevant feature which is picked up in the definiens account elucidating the meaning of "white man"; similarly, if he is really a musical man, then he has the relevant feature which is picked up in the definiens account elucidating the meaning of "musical man". From this, the following argument might be presented:

(iii) man [= Socrates] is being-for-white[-man].<sup>32</sup>

(vi') being-for-musical[-man] is man [= Socrates].

(vii) being-for-musical[-man] is being-for-white[-man].<sup>33</sup>

Adversaries now can argue that both extremes turn out to be the same as the middle term *in a same way*, namely, accidentally (with EJ reading).<sup>34</sup> Alternatively (especially with A<sup>b</sup> reading),<sup>35</sup> they will claim that both extremes, namely, descriptions that are accidentally attributed to

32 I take "to leukoi einai" and "to mousikoi" to be shortcut for "to leukoi anthropoi einai" and "to mousikoi anthropoi einai". See Ross [1924], p. 177.

33 For a different view of the formal structure of the argument, see Ross [1924, p. 177]. Ross was misled by his belief that Aristotle was trying to deny that accidental compounds can be the same as their essences.

34 Manuscripts EJ omit the article "ta" in 1031a27, so that "kata symbebekos" (a) must be taken as an adverb modifying "gignesthai" (1031a26) and (b) can be taken as describing the way in which each extreme becomes the same as *the middle* (which was the point criticized at 1031a25). In favour of this reading, "kata symbebekos" will be in perfect contrast with "ou [...] hosautos" at 1031a25.

35 Manuscript A<sup>b</sup> has an article "ta" in 1031a27, so that (a) "kata symbebekos" must be taken as playing the role of adjectif of "ta akra" ("the accidental extremes, i.e., the middle terms that have become accidentally the

the same thing, turn out to be *really* the same in the conclusion. Both readings are after all good ones: with the first one, the text will be describing what happens in both premises; with the second one, the text will be rather describing what the adversary claims to result in the conclusion. But the general outcome is the same.

Maybe Aristotle's point would be sharper with A<sup>b</sup> reading: he denies that the conclusion (vii) has really established that being-for-musical is the same as being-for-white. In this case, "*dokei de ou*" is denying "*sumbainei*", which must be taken as "results in the conclusion". An appropriate translation will be: "maybe this would seem to result in the conclusion, namely, both extremes (which are accidentally the same as the middle) turning out to be the same; however, this does not seem to be so". The reason for the failure of the attempted conclusion could not any more be the absence of a real middle term. "Man" stands for the same entity in premises (iii) and (vi'), and this middle term is the same as each extreme in the same way. However, the argument is still invalid, and the main reason is that both sentences (iii) and (vi') state a contingent relation between their terms. If premise (iii) is taken seriously as a true statement, it just says that a particular man happens to have a pale skin (or happens to have the relevant feature to be called a "white man"). The same would apply to premise (vi'), although it is more awkward because the subject-predicate order is inverted: if it is a true statement, it can only mean that a given thing, to which it happens to have musical instruction (or whatever feature that is relevant to be called a "musical man"), is the same as this particular man.<sup>36</sup> Now, if one accepts this meaning for (vi'), one must also accept that the conversion of (vi) into (vi') is merely superficial: in its "deep grammar", (vi') is still saying that a particular man happens to have the relevant feature to be called a "musical man".<sup>37</sup> Once the superficiality of the converse (vi')

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same as the middle") and (b) the emphasis of the sentence will be on "*gignesthai tauta*", "become the same" as describing the conclusion. In favour of this reading, there are two factors: first, the contrast between "*ekeino doxeien an sumbainein*" ("there will seem to be a sound consequence", 1031a26) and "*ouk ananke*" ("it does not follow", 1031a24) will be enhanced; second, it is compatible with EJ reading as well, since "*kata symbebekos*" – even if it is adverbial – can also be taken as describing the way in which the extremes become the same as *each other*.

36 Another way to attack the adversary reply is to argue that (vi) cannot be really converted into (vi').

37 See *Posterior Analytics* 83a1-14 for this kind of sentence with an inversion in the subject-predicate order.

is shown, the reply is reduced to a fallacy of the accident, in which the adversary claims that what is attributed to the subject ("man") must also be attributed to its accident ("being a white man").<sup>38</sup> It is clear, then, that from statements of *contingent co-reference* between a subject and a description such as (iii) and (vi) one cannot jump to the conclusion that one description is also an attribute of the other – and it will be even more absurd to claim, like in (vii), that both descriptions are necessarily coextensive with each other.

Therefore, in order to avoid unwelcome conclusions such as (v) and (vii), Aristotle does not need to deny that accidental compounds are the same as their essences, that is, he need not reject sentence (i). In this context, "being the same as its essence" has a *logikos* meaning: it merely amounts to being necessarily coextensive with the description that introduces the essence. There is no reason to attribute to Aristotle the thesis that accidental compounds are not the same as their essence, nor the thesis that accidental compounds do not have essences at all.<sup>39</sup> It might be objected that in 1031a28 Aristotle goes to the second part of his argument without any explicit conclusion about the first part, as if he had left open the issue about accidental compounds having essences. However, although Aristotle has established that accidental compounds do not have essences and definitions in a stricter sense (1030a2-14), he has also established that they have essences and definitions at the *logikos* level. His conclusion at Z-4 was that "even white man will have an account and definition, but in a different way from the definition of whiteness and of a given substance" (1030b12-3). And Z-6 argument still works on the *logikos* point of view.

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38 By "the fallacy of the accident", I have in mind what Aristotle presents at *Soph. Elenchi* 166b28-32. The argument now seems to be well reducible to a third figure fallacy. But the fact that the reply at 1031a25-8 can be reduced to the third figure does not prove that the *original* argument alluded to at 1031a21-5 must also be cast in the third figure, as Pseudo-Alexander has understood (see note 24).

39 Code [1981], p. 119, says that Z-6 thesis (i.e., the identity between each thing and its essence) can be extended to "any definable object, whether a primary substance or not", but it is not clear whether he will consider accidental compounds as one of these "derivative cases" of definition and essence. Cohen [1978], p. 78, rejects what he calls the "abstract interpretation" because it will lead to the thesis that accidental compounds are the same as their essences.

## 4.

The second part of Z-6 discussion examines whether “each item said in itself (*kath’ hautō*)” is the same as its essence (1031a28-9). For brevity’s sake, let me call these items “*per se* things”. It is not clear either the meaning or the extension of this description in this context,<sup>40</sup> but two points are clear: things picked up by this description seems to be opposed to accidental compounds, and Aristotle straightaway focuses on Platonic Forms (or on some version of Platonic theory of Forms).<sup>41</sup> The text reads as follows:

“But in the case of *per se* things, it is necessary for a thing to be the same as its essence, for instance, if there are some substances which have no other substances nor natures prior to them, as some say the Forms are? If the being-for-Good is to be different from the Good Itself, and the being-for-Animal is to be different from Animal Itself, [...], there will, firstly, be other substances and natures and Forms besides those which are asserted, and, secondly, these others will be prior substances if essence is substance” (1031a29-b3).<sup>42</sup>

Aristotle’s argument is very compact and entangled, but it seems to ascribe the following assumptions to Platonists:

- (1) Forms are substances in such a way that there are no other substances prior to them.
- (2) Forms have essences.

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40 I will discuss what this expression means as I will examine passage 1031b22-28. For now, let me say that I do not see any deep metaphysical texture into it, like Frede & Patzig [2001], p. 248, do.

41 The reason for this focus on Platonic Forms is far from resting on the assumption that what will prove true about them will also be true about *per se* things of “this world”, as Pseudo-Alexander (481.7-12) has assumed. Ross [1924], p. 177 believes that Aristotle’s purpose is to use Forms as an “illustration” of the sameness of a *per se* thing with its essence. This sounds funny, since the Platonists themselves do not believe in this sameness. A much better story is found in Charles [2011], p. 162-5: Aristotle is arguing that an essence cannot be an independent entity “over and above” the thing of which it is the essence, as Platonists have believed.

42 Revised Oxford Translation with modifications. I cannot agree with the translation “so-called self-subsistent things” for “*kath’ hauta legomena*”, since self-subsistency is completely out of the picture in the discussion. For this expression, Bostock’s translation is better: “things which are spoken of in their own right” (Bostock, 1994, p. 8). It is worth stressing that I take the Greek text from Ross’s edition and do not accept Jaeger’s clumsy emendation at 1031b2.

Given those assumptions, Aristotle argues that if a Form is not the same as its essence (which is what the Platonist claims), the latter will be prior to it in such a way that will jeopardize the primacy of Forms as stated in (1). In short, the core of the argument is that assumptions (1) and (2) are incompatible with each other. But it is far from clear how the argument works and what exactly Aristotle targets. There seems to be an implied assumption like this (1031b1-3):

(3) (a) If a *per se* thing is not the same as its essence, (b) its essence is (a substance or a nature) prior to it.

But it is far from clear at a first glance whether (3) is a premise from Aristotle's criticism or from adversaries' implied assumptions. Besides, since there seems to be an incompatibility between (1), (2) and (3) applied to Forms, one might wonder which of these claims Aristotle would suggest to throw out in order to avoid the inconsistency, as well as which of these claims is Aristotle's main target in Z-6 discussion.

It may prove useful to look at the second part of Aristotle's discussion of *per se* things (1031b3-15), since at the end of it Aristotle seems to be arguing that the antecedent of (3) is wholly wrong. The passage starts as follows: "Besides, if these things are severed from one another, there will be no knowledge of the ones [*sc.* the Forms] while the others [*sc.* the essences] will not be beings at all. (By 'severed' I mean, if the being-for-Good does not belong to Good Itself, and if being good does not belong to being-for-Good). For there is knowledge of each thing only when we know its essence etc." (1031b3-7).<sup>43</sup>

The core of Aristotle's argument seems clear enough. On the one hand, to know X is equivalent to grasp the essence of X. If the essence of X is not the same as X, grasping it would not lead to knowing X itself, which seems absurd. On the other hand, the fact that the essence of X belongs to X is what makes X what it is. If the essence of X is not the same as X in the sense of not belonging to X, then X could not be what it is, which also seems absurd. Besides, the essence of X, being separated from X, would not be X. The result Aristotle draws from this is the following: "It must be, then, that the good and being-for-good are one [*sc.* the same]<sup>44</sup> thing, [...], and so with all things

43 This is partly Revised Oxford Translation (ROT), partly my own translation (since it would be misleading to say that I have only modified ROT).

44 Aristotle uses "*hen*" ("one"), not "*tauto*" ("the same"), but this is no surprise, since the notion of "same-



which are not said of something else, but are said *per se* and are primary" (1031b11-14).

Now, this remark sounds like a denial of (3a), the antecedent of (3): it cannot be true that a *per se* thing is not the same as its essence. Aristotle commits himself rather to the claim that:

(3a\*) A *per se* thing is the same as its essence.

Aristotle's commitment to (3a\*) can also be found at the final remarks of the chapter (1032a4-6). But it is not clear how this commitment, which results from the second part of his discussion of *per se* things (1031b3-15) relates to the first part (1031a29-b3). In order to show the inconsistency between (1) and (2), Aristotle needed a further interpretation of (3b), the consequent of (3), such as:

(3bF) The essence of a Form is (a substance or a nature) prior to it.

There is a blatant inconsistency between (1) and (3bF). Now, why Aristotle has not targeted (3bF) straightaway, instead of targeting the antecedent of the conditional (3)? It is not clear how (3a\*) will generate trouble for the Platonic theory, since the denial of the antecedent (3a) in (3) cannot affect the truth of the consequent (3b).<sup>45</sup> But if the truth of the consequent (3b) is not affected by the rejection of the antecedent (3a) – and this rejection was the point at 1031b11-4 –, it is most unclear how assumption (3) is related to the discussion about (1) and (2). The whole of Aristotle's discussion at 1031a28ff. would seem to be a terrible mess.

My solution is the following. Aristotle's discussion suggests that his adversaries regard (3) as rather a bicondicional:

(3) (a) If a *per se* thing is not the same as its essence, (b) its essence is (a substance or a nature) prior to it.

This thesis is convertible with the following one: if a *per se* thing's essence is (a substance or a nature) prior to it, this thing is not the same as its essence. The outcome is a bicondicional:

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ness" involved here, which is merely coextensiveness, is described as "numerical oneness" ("*hen arithmoi*") in *Topics* 103a23-4 ff., so that Aristotle can use "*hen*" and "*tauto*" interchangeably in this context: see 1031b19, 32; 1032a2, 6.

<sup>45</sup> *Topics* 111b17-23 (see also 112a19-21; 113b15-26; 124b7-14) shows that Aristotle was well aware of these rules of propositional calculus.

(3') (b) Iff a *per se* thing's essence is (a substance or a nature) prior to it, (a) this thing is not the same as its essence.

Understanding (3) in this way, as (3'), allows us to understand why Aristotle targets (a) in his discussion. First of all, Aristotle tries to show that to deny (a) is the only way available for the Platonists to preserve (1) and to avoid inconsistency in their theory. The denial of (a) entails the denial of (b), so that Forms might have essences and still be substances which no other substances are prior to. But this is not the end of the story, of course. Aristotle's main purpose is not merely to point to internal inconsistencies in his adversaries' theory. Aristotle is targeting (b) itself, or, to put it more precisely, the underlying aim of Aristotle's discussion is to reject (b),<sup>46</sup> but since (b) entails (a) – (a) is a result of (b) at the *logikos* level –, Aristotle focuses on (a), for his discussion is still on the *logikos* level.

It is important to stress that (b) is another assumption of the Platonists. Aristotle would agree with them that the essence of X must be prior to X itself. But Aristotle understands this priority in a very different way. A common ground between him and the Platonists is to ascribe a causal or explanatory priority to essences: the essence of X is what makes X be what it is and, for this reason, has an explanatory priority over X. Now, causal or explanatory priority is, for Aristotle, an asymmetrical relation which is compatible with many symmetrical relations like mutual entailment and coextensiveness.<sup>47</sup> The essence of X, being explanatorily prior to X, can perfectly well be "the same as X" in the sense of being necessarily convertible with X. Accordingly, a definiens account of X, which reports the essence of X, is a description which is necessarily coextensive with X.

In Z-6, Aristotle does not focus on these points about explanatory priority. But the reader of Z-6 cannot ignore that his Platonic adversaries would rather claim that causal or explanatory priority is *not compatible* with symmetrical relations like mutual implication or coextensiveness. The essence of X has causal or explanatory priority over X. But, for the Platonists, in order to have this sort of causal priority, the essence must also have a distinctive kind of ontological pri-

46 Aristotle targets (b) more directly in contexts like *Metaphysics* Z 13-14, although this is a highly controversial view. I have defended it in Angioni [2008].

47 See *Categories* 14b10-22, *Posterior Analytics* 78a28ff.

ority: it must be a prior entity which exist and is what it is independently of X.<sup>48</sup> More precisely, the essence of X must be a substance prior to X. Thus, the Platonist is committed to the following assumption:

(4) If Y is the essence of X, Y is a substance prior to X.

In Platonic terminology, the essence of X must be a substance *separated from X* or *over and above X*,<sup>49</sup> and this ontological separation makes it impossible for the account of X's essence to refer exactly to the same thing X: it must refer to a different thing, namely, Y. From the fact that such an ontological priority of Y over X is incompatible with sameness (i.e., coextensiveness) between X and Y, it follows another important claim of the Platonist:

(5) If Y is a substance prior to X, Y is distinct from X.

Now, (5) itself may be unproblematic, but from (4) together with (5), it follows:

(6) If Y is the essence of X, Y is distinct from X.

It is easy to see now that (3') is just a compact version of (4) together with (6): actually, the conditional (4) was packed into the component (3b) of (3) or (3'). Now, applying claim (6) to Forms, one reaches what we actually find in Aristotle's text:

(7) Being-for-Good, which is the essence of Good Itself, is distinct from Good Itself (1031a31-2).

There is no doubt that "*auto to agathon*" in 1031a31 introduces a Form and "*to agathoi einai*" introduces its essence. We can now understand what Aristotle is doing in 1031a29-b3. If (3') is taken as a background assumption, it is enough to put it together with (7) to have the following result:

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48 I disagree with Gill [2003], p. 179, who claims that Platonic Forms are identical with their essences because they are explanatorily primary. According to Platonic assumption (4), the essence of a Form must be a distinct entity existing separately from that Form.

49 See Charles [2011], p. 161-2. At *Metaphysics* 999a17-21, Aristotle reports the requirement that causes must be separated from the things of which they are causes. Since essence is a cause and Forms were intended as essences (see 988b4-5), Platonists believed that Forms must be separated inasmuch as they are essences. I have discussed this at Angioni [2008], ch. 2.

(8) Being-for-Good, which is the essence of a Form (the Good Itself), is a substance prior to that Form (the Good Itself) and cannot be the same as that Form.

It is very clear that (8) is incompatible with (1):

(1) Forms are substances in such a way that there are no other substances prior to them.

If (8) is true, then it is not true that the Form named "The Good Itself" is a substance which no other substance is prior to. Therefore, Aristotle is showing that some version of theory of Forms collapses into claims inconsistent with each other. Whoever are the "ones" (*tines*) referred to at 1031a31, they cannot maintain at the same time claims (1), (2) and (3'). Now, as I have said, (3') is a compact version of (4) and (6). Claim (4) can be taken as a hardcore metaphysical claim that gives this version of theory of Forms its specific feature. As such, claim (4) is the special target of many discussions in the *Metaphysics*.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, claim (6) – which follows from (4) and (5) – is the outcome of that metaphysical claim on the level of logical relations between *per se* things (taken as *definienda*) and their essences (taken as *definiens*). Since chapter Z-6 is still located at the *logikos* level, Aristotle's focus is only to reject (6). Of course, rejection of (6) will ultimately lead to rejection of (3') and (4), and Aristotle would rather suggest to the Platonist to preserve (1) and (2) instead of (3'). But Aristotle's focus in the second part of Z-6 is only to argue that non-sameness (non-coextensiveness) between a *definiendum* and its *definiens* account is not required to make sense of the notion of essence. Claim (6), therefore, is Aristotle's target at the second part of Z-6 as well as the clumsy attempt to reject sentence (i) was his target at the first part of Z-6. In the first part of Z-6, Aristotle has shown that the premise that accidental compounds are the same as their essences leads to no absurd consequence, since the *reductio* accepted by his adversaries was not a valid argument. Similarly, in the second part of Z-6, Aristotle has shown that the requirement of explanatory priority for essences does not lead to any asymmetrical ontological independence of essences over their objects. Therefore, Aristotle's ultimate view in the second part of Z-6 is that (6) is wrong: at a *logikos* level, X and X's essence, i.e., a *definiendum* and its *definiens* account, are necessarily coextensive with each other: "Now from these arguments, each thing and its essence are one and the same not *per accidens*, as well as because to know each thing is to know its essence" (1031b18-21).

Thus, Aristotle's own view is that a *per* thing is one and the same as its essence, and being one and the same in this case merely amounts to being necessarily coextensive with each other. Aristotle's argument has no metaphysical depth on the issue whether the essence is a way of being rather than an object. Nor does he argue against claim (4) in this context. The notion of essence in this context is taken at the *logikos* level: "essence" (i.e., *to ti en einai*) is just a shortcut for the set of features that identifies the definiendum and establishes what it is in a general way – with no attention to ontological and explanatory issues about it. Aristotle's only issue is whether the definiendum and its definiens account are necessarily coextensive with each other.<sup>51</sup>

## 5.

One might object that Aristotle has never explicitly said that accidental compounds can be the same as their essences: quite on the contrary, at 1031b22-8, he has rather suggested or implied that they are not the same as their essences.

My answer requires a discussion of the expression "not *per accidens*" ("*ou kata symbebekos*") at 1031b19 and at 1031b22-28. Most scholars take "not *per accidens*" as equivalent to "not contingently" and therefore, as equivalent to "necessarily". This interpretation is tempting because the sameness between definiendum and definiens as understood in this discussion is necessary – if the necessity is taken as *de dicto*. However, this is not what Aristotle means. I am *not* saying that Aristotle will be committed to the contrary claim, that the sameness between definiendum and definiens is *not* necessary in this sense. Of course, it is necessary. What I am saying is that Aristotle's point with the expression "not *per accidens*" at 1031b21 is quite different: "not *per accidens*" stresses that each thing ("*hekaston*" at 1031b21) is the same as its essence *if it is not taken as an attribute* (not as a *symbebekos*). This interpretation, which fits perfectly well what I have said about the *logikos* level, will be clearer from my discussion of Aristotle's next step, which reads as follows:

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51 His second argument for his own view – that to know each thing is to know its essence (1031b20-1) – can perfectly well be interpreted as relying on the minimal claim that to know what a given thing is amounts to grasping what its definiens account says.

"Now, (i) concerning that which is used as attribute (*"to kata symbebekos legomenon"*), like, for instance, the musical and the white, (ii) it is not true to say that the item itself is the same as its essence, (iii) because it signifies in two ways; in fact, [*"white"*] signifies not only that to which white is attributed but also what is attributed. Consequently, (iv) in some way the item itself is the same as its essence, but in another way it is not. (v) For [the essence of white] is not the same as a man, that is, as a white man;<sup>52</sup> (vi) but it is the same as the property." (1031b22-28).

This passage is highly controversial. The most important point is how to understand the expression *"to kata symbebekos legomenon"*, which most scholars take as introducing terms referring to accidents like *"white"* and *"musical"*.<sup>53</sup> I argue that Aristotle is not talking about these terms, although they are chosen as most conspicuous examples. The expression *"to kata symbebekos legomenon"* must be understood as introducing a way of taking or using terms in the context of a given sentence: a term *"kata symbebekos legomenon"* is a term (from whatever category) taken *according to what it refers to*. When Aristotle says that *"white is kata symbebekos musical"*, he means that the thing to which *"white"* happens to refer in a given context, say, a particular man, has the property of being musical. The same apply to a sentence like *"man is kata symbebekos musical"*: the thing to which *"man"* happens to refer in a given context, say, a particular man, has the property of being musical. The clause *"kata symbebekos"* indicates that, in the context of a given sentence, what the term *denotes* is more important than its straightforward meaning.<sup>54</sup> The expression is opposed to *"kath' hauto legomenon"*, which in turn means that a

52 I read both articles in the *"men"* clause in the dative, as the editors (Bekker, Ross, Jaeger). The dative is better for the parallelism with *"toi pathei"* in the *"de"* clause. I take *"the being-for-white"* as the implied subject of *"tauto"* in both *men-* and *de-*clauses, whereas the datives *"toi anthropoi"* and *"toi leukoi anthropoi"* are complements of *"tauto"* (connected with each other by an epexegetic *"kai"*). The issue is whether being-for-white is the same as *man* or *as white man* (as Bostock's translation suggests).

53 This view is favoured by Pseudo-Alexander's commentary, 484.14-15: he believes that *"pathos"* at 1031b27 refers to things like the music in the soul of Socrates.

54 Some traditional mistakes (as well as many exegetical non-sense) come from the unjustified assumptions that (i) *"kata symbebekos"* always means *"accidentally"*, (ii) is equivalent to *"non-necessarily"* and (iii) has a whole sentence as its scope. I have explored this issue at Angioni [2006], p. 114-23, 150-2. More particularly, in [2007] and [2009] I have explored what *"kata symbebekos"* means in the context of Aristotle's theory of scientific demonstration.

term is being taken according to the description that gives its basic meaning and independently of its being attributed to a particular thing. Consider the following sentences:

- (a) “this man [= Socrates] is white”.
- (b) “this white man [= Socrates] is white”.
- (c) “white (in this context) is *df.* a body that has whiteness”.

Sentence (c) takes “white” *kath’ hauto* (or *per se*) without focusing on what depends on white’s being attributed to something else.<sup>55</sup> Actually, sentence (c) gives the rule for a correct application of “white” in some contexts inasmuch as it focuses on what whatever object must be to be called white, no matter which thing is actually called white. Alternatively, “white” might be introducing in the context of 1031b27-8 *whiteness itself*,<sup>56</sup> that is, a quality in the genus of colours etc. We will have, then:

- (c’) “white is *df.* such and such a colour”.

Whether one prefer (c) or (c’), the important point for my purposes is that such a kind of definitional statement is precisely what Aristotle seems to have in mind at 1031b27-8. The expression “*pathos*” in step (vi) at 1031b27-8 focuses on that which may be attributed to something else but is not actually (in the context of a sentence like (c) or (c’)) being attributed to a particular thing. Sentences like (c) and (c’) must be understood as a *logikos* definitional statement in which white (namely, whatever white thing *or*, alternatively, whiteness itself) is the same as its essence (namely, a body that has whiteness *or*, alternatively, such and such a colour). Thus, it is no surprise that Aristotle says that white *qua* property is the same as its essence at 1031b27-8.

On the other hand, in sentences like (a) and (b), the property of being “white” is attributed to a given thing, namely, this man or this white man, so that “white” turns out to be a true denomination for this man or this white man on this condition: “white” in such a context – as in

55 At *Metaphysics* V-7, 1017b22 ff., “*kath’ hauto*” can be taken in this way: “*kath’ hauto*” only means that a given term (which is normally used as predicate, such as “healthy”, 1017b28) is being taken *in itself*, that is, apart from its attributive relation to something else.

56 Ross [1924, p.176, 179] takes “*pathos*” as “the quality white” (Revised Oxford Translation: “the attribute white”; Bostock: “the attribute”), as well as Frede & Patzig [2001], p. 256.

many other contexts that presupposes (a) or (b) as a previous condition<sup>57</sup> – denotes the subject to which the property of being white is attributed, namely, this man or this white man.<sup>58</sup> This man is what “white” *signifies* (“*semainei*”, 1031b23) in such a context. As I have said, what the term *denotes* is more important than its straightforward meaning in this case: the term “white” is taken according to what it happens to refer. Now, on these conditions, it is not true to say that “white” is the same as its essence: “white” refers to a given man that happens to have whiteness in his body, and a particular *man* that *happens* to have whiteness in his body is not the same as being a body that has whiteness.

To make the point clearer: Aristotle’s issue at 1031a22-28 is only whether the essence of white is or is not the same as a man or as a white man. This is very different from the question examined at 1031a19-28: whether accidental compounds are the same as their essences. His negative answer only means that white man is not the same as the essence of *white*, but the term “white” has no claim to describe the essence of white man. White man is just what happens to be the reference of “white” in a given context. Now, this is far from affecting the claim that white man is the same as the essence of *white man*. The distinction captured by sentences like (a)-(b) and (c) can easily be applied to accidental compounds as well. Consider, for example:

(d) “this white man [= Socrates] is a white man”.

(e) “white man is *df.* a biped animal that has whiteness”.

Sentence (e) focuses on what whatever object must be to be called a white man. It explains what “white man” means independently of being attributed to a particular man. On the other hand, sentence (d) attributes the description “white man” to a particular man, say, Socrates. Aristotle’s reasoning at 1031b22-8 can be applied to sentence (d): the reference of “white man” in (d) is restricted to the particular man at stake, Socrates, which happens to have the relevant feature to be called “white man”, but also has a being of his own besides the property of being a white man. It is clear that the essence of white man is not the same as Socrates: the description “a biped animal that has whiteness” is not coextensive with “Socrates”. This means

57 For instance, in a sentence such as “the white is musical”, “white” presupposes (a) and so denotes a man that is white. See *Posterior Analytics* 83a10-2.

58 I have developed this point in Angioni 2006: 114-23.



that, when “white man” is used “*kata symbebekos*”, that is, when it is used attributively and is taken according to what it refers to (namely, Socrates, in this case), it is not the same as its essence – similarly, when “white” is used “*kata symbebekos*”, that is, when it is used attributively and is taken according to what it refers to (namely, a particular man or a particular white man), it is not the same as its essence. Now, this is far from affecting the coextensiveness that holds in sentence (e). When the description “white man” is taken *in itself* but not “*kata symbebekos*”, it is the same as its essence: the description “white man” taken as definiendum is coextensive with the more accurate description that specifies what “white man” means.

## 6.

This leads me to the concluding remarks in Z-6: “It is clear, then, that, for primary things as well as for *per se* things, each thing is one and the same as its essence” (1032a4-6, my own translation).

Two or three issues must be addressed. What the term “primary” is picking up at this context, what the description “a thing that is said *per se*” is picking up and, consequently, what is the relation between the extensions of these two expressions. Together, they seem to exhaust the extension of things for which it is true to say that an essence is one and the same as the thing it is the essence of.

Most scholars believe that “primary” is taking up the primary things introduced at Z-4, 1030a10-14. I agree with this, since it is true that coextensiveness between definiendum and definiens holds for the definitions of primary things. But I cannot any more agree with the claim that the description “a thing that is said *per se*” is equivalent to “primary”. This claim cannot rely on what Aristotle says at 1031b13-4, when he talks about “things that are not said of others, but are *per se* and primary”.<sup>59</sup> Primary things that are what they are independently of “one thing being attributed to the other” (1030a10-14) are surely *per se* things, but this does not guarantee that the converse is also true, namely, that all *per se* things are primary in this sense. I argue that

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59 Translators take the expressions as equivalent: so Ross and ROT (“each primary and self-subsistent thing”) and Bostock (“things that are primary and spoken of in their own right”). For a view somehow similar to mine, see Wedin [2000], p. 258, 264-5.

the description "things said *per se*" at 1032a5 is opposed only to terms used in an attributive way ("*kata symbebekos*") and, therefore, picks up whatever term inasmuch as it is not applied to a particular thing ("*ou kata symbebekos*").<sup>60</sup> Thereby, the extension of this description at 1032a5 is as liberal as the extension of *definienda* at the *logikos* level: items from every category can be subtracted from attributive sentences and be taken in themselves for an account of what they mean. "White" can be taken *per se* as well as "man". An even "cloak" or "white man" can be taken *per se* at a *logikos* level, in which it is universally true that each thing is the same as its essence, that is, every *definiendum* is coextensive with its *definiens* account.

Aristotle concluding words at Z-6 are very enlightening: "It has been explained, then, how an essence is the same as each thing, and how it is not" (1032a10-11, my own translation).

Aristotle believes to have established on which conditions things are the same as their essences and on which conditions they are not. His phrasing is relevant: he does not say *which* things are the same as their essences and *which* are not, but *how* the ones that are the same are the same and *how* the ones that are not are not.<sup>61</sup> Looking back to our contrast between sentences like (a) and (c) or (d) and (e), we can clearly see that things are not the same as their essence when the terms introducing them are taken attributively as referring to particular things, like in (a) and (d):

(a) "this man [= Socrates] is white".

(d) "this white man [= Socrates] is a white man".

It is tempting to suggest that this would also be true for substantial sortals like "man". Consider again:

60 It might also be argued that "*kath' hauto*" changes its meaning from 1031b13 to 1032a5: the former context works with *per se*<sup>3</sup>, whereas the latter works with the *logikos per se*<sup>1</sup>. But I do not believe that "*kath' hauto*" at 1031b13 can be taken as *per se*<sup>3</sup>, for it refers to Platonic Forms, and one of the criticisms against Platonic forms is that they depend on elements that are heterogeneously distinct from each other and thus lack intrinsic unity (see *Metaphysics* 1039a3-14, as well as chapter Z-14 as a whole).

61 In other words, Aristotle has not (and could not have) given a list of things that are the same as their essence (for instance, substances) and a list of things that are not the same (for instance, accidental compounds). He has rather suggested that "things" in general can be the same or not with their essence *according to the way they are taken*.

(f) “this man [Socrates] is a man”;

(g) “man is *df.* a biped animal”.

The being for Socrates *qua man* may well be the same as the being-for-man.<sup>62</sup> But if one takes Socrates *qua Socrates*, i.e., if one takes Socrates with all the relevant properties that make him the individual he is (and make him different from all the other individuals of the same species), it would be more difficult to make sense of the claim that Socrates is the same as being-for-man.<sup>63</sup> This is not the place to discuss whether individual essences or individual forms are needed.<sup>64</sup> Actually, instead of arguing in this direction, Aristotle’s discussion about essence and definition in the following chapters of *Metaphysics* will take a different route: Aristotle will focus on the relationship between the elements in a definiens account. His issues then will be whether and how the relationship between the elements in a definiens account will explain how the elements of the definiendum make up one unified thing. Essence and definition will be examined from an explanatory point of view with reference to real causal relations. In this way, it is tempting to suggest that Aristotle final remarks at Z-6 represents the end of a *de dicto* examination (the *logikos* approach) and prompts the beginning of a *de re* approach – as if he were saying: “we have examined enough how terms and definitions stand to each other from the point of view of their logical relations; let us now take a closer look on how things themselves

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62 See Code [1981], p. 112-3 for a view along these lines.

63 One way of trying to make sense of it is to say that essences are by their nature *universals* and that the particular features that makes Socrates the individual he is (different from all others of the same species) are not relevant for his essence: his essence amounts to being a man. But I doubt whether this way really works. Charles [2011], p. 166 suggests that the assumption that being for Socrates is being for man comes only from the fact that “we have been given little advice as to what *being Socrates* might be”. Actually, Aristotle has *never* tackled the issues whether the particular features of Socrates are relevant or not for the “essence of Socrates” and whether there are individual essences at all. He was not concerned with these questions at the extant texts. However, from this one cannot conclude that his official doctrine was that essence is always universal.

64 If my interpretation is right, and if Aristotle’s remarks at 1032a6-8 are taken seriously, there is room for a description to be taken as “the essence of Socrates”: the description collecting the relevant features that make him the individual he is and make him different from all co-specific individuals. However, this “essence of Socrates” will only play a role at a *logikos* level (like the “essence of white man”) and will have no consequence on the deep metaphysical issue about individual essences. Thus, my view has nothing to do with the kind of approach introduced by Frede & Patzig [1988].

are and what are their causal relations in order to establish what essence is and how definitions must capture the causal role of essences".<sup>65</sup>

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ABSTRACT

*I discuss Aristotle's views in Metaphysics VII-6 (Z-6) on the issue whether each thing is the same as its essence. I propose a deflationary interpretation according to which Z-6 develops a "logical approach" (logikos) in which "sameness" amounts only to coextensiveness between definiendum and definiens with no attention to more specific issues about ontological and explanatory features of definitions.*

**Keywords:** essencialism, substance, definition, identity, sameness, predication.

RESUMO

*Discuto o que Aristóteles quer dizer em Metafísica VII-6 (Z-6) ao procurar discernir se cada coisa é idêntica a sua essência. De acordo com minha proposta, Z-6 ainda se circunscreve em um "ponto de vista lógico" (logikos) no qual "X ser o mesmo que Y" deve ser entendido apenas em termos de coextensão entre definiendum e definiens, sem nenhuma preocupação com questões mais específicas a respeito da ontologia e do poder explanatório das definições.*

**Palavras-chave:** essencialismo, substância, definição, identidade, teoria da predicação