

BEING FRANK ABOUT ZETA

Frank Lewis's delightfully engaging paper invites us to renew our contact with ancient philosophy's most enduring tar-baby, Book Zeta of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. There is much in Lewis's rich and suggestive paper that invites comment and further discussion. I shall, however, concentrate on the paper's central plot line and the ambivalent relationship Lewis finds between Aristotle and his teacher, Plato, in Z6 and Z13. In discussing these two chapters, and Frank Lewis's reading of them, I shall ignore the mountain of other commentary on Zeta that has accumulated over the centuries, including commentary from people contributing to this conference. My motive for declining to survey the existing commentary on Z6 and Z13 is not, I assure you, an overweening pride in the profundity of my own insights and judgments. It is simply an instinct for survival, plus a desire to make my comments moderately easy to follow.

The relationship between Aristotle and Plato that Frank Lewis sees in the two chapters of *Zeta* that he targets for discussion is something like this. In Z6 Aristotle gives us an argument for the conclusion that, at least among primary substances, each thing is identical with its essence. In reaching that conclusion, however, Aristotle uses Platonic Forms as his sample primary substances and, according to Lewis, appeals to Platonic intuitions to make plausible the assumptions he needs to make to get the results he wants. So, on Lewis's reading of this chapter, Plato counts here as "Friend."

In Z13 Aristotle argues that substance, *ousia*, is not "the universal" (*to katholou*). Plausibly, Lewis takes Aristotle's target for demolition here to be Plato's Theory of Forms. So now Plato, a Friend only seven chapters earlier, has become here, not just a foe, but *the* Foe. Yet it isn't, according to Lewis, just that Aristotle thinks Plato was right about how the main question of Z6 ought to be answered, that is, the question about whether each primary substance is identical with its essence, and wrong about how to answer the question of Z13, that is, the question about whether substance is the universal. The trouble is that, on Lewis's reconstruction, Aristotle uses a result from Z6 to criticize Plato in Z13. Thus there is a puzzle about whether, and, if so, how, Aristotle can get away with using Plato as Friend to rout, or help rout, Plato as Foe. Apparently the damage that Aristotle tries to do to Plato in Z13 cannot be counted as what the Pentagon would call "friendly fire."

I'm going to begin by sketching an alternative account of what is going on in Z6, that is, an account alternative to Lewis's. I suggest that we should not read Z6

as showing Aristotle co-opting Plato to garner outside support for a point that Aristotle himself wants to make about substance and essence. Rather, I suggest, we should read it as continuing a critical examination of the Theory of Forms that Plato had himself begun in Part I of his dialogue, *Parmenides*. I can easily imagine that the debate over what we might call the "Unabashed Theory of Forms," i.e., the theory that emerges in Plato's dialogue *Phaedo* and in the *Republic*, was a topic of heated discussion in the Academy when Aristotle was first a student there. Z6, I suggest, is a child, or perhaps a grandchild or great-grandchild, of discussions that Aristotle had had when he first came to think, under Plato's tutelage, about *ousia*.

The mature Aristotle's most common complaint against Plato's Theory of Forms is that the theory, as Aristotle puts the point in A9 of the *Metaphysics* at 991b1-2, makes "substance and that of which it is the substance separate [or apart, *chōrri*]." Thus, on Aristotle's reading of Plato, where x is a Form and y is the substance of y, x is separate from y. According to Aristotle, that separation is a mistake. Aristotle thinks that, if the Forms are separate or apart from what they are of, they cannot succeed in functioning as the cause of either the being or the becoming of those things that participate in them; nor can they enable us to know their participants, or us know the Forms.

This criticism of Plato's Theory of Forms is not, however, novel. It arises already in Plato's own assessment of his Unabashed Theory of Forms in *Parmenides*, Part I. Thus in the Third Man Argument at *Parmenides* 132ab, separation, apartness, is guaranteed by assuming both that the Large Itself is large and also that, for any collection of large things, even a collection that includes the Large Itself, there will be some large-making something *over* them, and hence separate from, or apart from, them. It is the apartness generated by each fresh application of the One-Over-Many Principle that generates the undesirable regress.

What Plato thinks of as "over," Aristotle conceives as "prior to." That is, Aristotle asks whether, in every case, what makes x what it is, the essence of x, is prior to x, whereas Plato expresses functionally the same idea with his talk of a Form being over the things that participate in it. Plato's One-Over-Many Principle thus generates an indefinite regress of things prior to x, each one of which should then be responsible for making the things that are, in the appropriate sense, "under," or "posterior to" x, have the nature that they have.

As *Parmenides*, Part I, makes clear, Plato realizes that an unbridled regress of Forms is unsatisfactory. What is much less clear is how he thinks the regress can and should be halted. One promising move might be to say that the Form, Largeness, is not itself large. If it were not large, then, obviously, it would need nothing to make it large, and the regress would be stopped. Another promising move would be to say that the Form, even though paradigmatically large, doesn't need anything else to make it large. Being, so to speak, the very soul of largeness, the Large Itself is its own substance and essence, and, for this reason, needs nothing to make it large.

If Plato were to make that the second suggested move, then he would be a natural to take the role of Friend of the Forms in Z6. But, having given up an important part of the Unabashed Theory of Forms from the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, he would have become what we could call "Reformed Plato," rather than Unabashed Plato. Let's look at a bit of Z6 to see how Aristotle might seem to be dealing there with Reformed Plato.

At 1031a28 Aristotle asks about things said *kath' auta*, whether the thing is necessarily the same as its essence. Thus he asks, "For example, if there are some substances which have no other substances (*ousiai*) or entities prior to them, substances such as some assert the Forms to be?" Here we might recall that *Parmenides*, in his summing up speech after the regress problem with the Forms has been raised, and the problem of knowing separated Form has been aired, speaks of a Platonic Form as an *ousia autê kath' autên* (135a8-b1).

Aristotle goes on:

If the essence of good is to be different from the Form of good, and the essence of animal from the Form of animal, and the essence of being from the Form of being, there will be, first, other substances and entities and Forms besides those [already] counted [so to speak, the ground-level Forms], and, second, these others will be more substance if the essence is substance. And if the posterior substances are severed from one another, there will be no knowledge of the [posterior] ones and the others will have no being. (1031a31-1031b)

Clearly, this passage is not a mere repetition of the Third-Man and Master-Slave passages in the *Parmenides*. One would hardly expect to find a mere repetition of Plato in the heart of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. However, this passage does seem to me to continue the *Parmenides* discussion, where the vocabulary is now drained of Plato's poetry and his pathos and cast into the dry and academic prose of Aristotle's Lyceum. The "other substances and entities and Forms besides those [already] counted" seem to me to be, for example, the additional Forms of Largeness generated by the Third Man Argument. And, although the threat to knowledge that separation poses, comes out differently here from the Master-Slave Argument in the *Parmenides*, it does seem to present a close relative of the earlier threat.

Lewis reconstructs this part of Aristotle's argument in a way that begins with this premise:

(3) For each substance in a certain class of substances (in fact, the "primary" substances), there is no substance or nature prior to that substance. Lewis then adds, as the next premise, what he calls "an assumption central to the Platonic theory of Forms," namely this:

(4) Platonic forms are primary substances of the kind mentioned in (3).
From (4) he draws what he calls "two consequences," namely these:

- (5) There is no substance or nature prior to a Platonic form.
- (6) There is no other substance or nature or (Platonic) form in addition to the (Platonic) forms usually recognized, which is prior to them and more a substance than they are.

Thus, according to Lewis, (4) is "an assumption central to the Platonic theory of forms," and (5) is a "Platonic thesis." Moreover, according to Lewis, (5) follows from (4).

In fact, (5) is, I think, ambiguous. It might mean

- (5*) No substance or nature that is not itself a Platonic Form is prior to any Platonic Form,

which is certainly a good candidate for being a genuinely Platonic thesis, whether of the Unabashed Theory of Forms or of some abashed version of the theory. But to make Lewis's reconstructed argument valid, (5) needs to be read this way:

- (5**) In the case of each Platonic Form, no substance or nature is prior to α .

One might argue that Plato finds himself driven to (5**) by the Third Man Argument, or perhaps that he *should* find himself driven to it by the Third Man Argument. But (5**) hardly belongs to the Unabashed Theory of Forms of the *Platōdo* and the *Republik*, most obviously because, as we learn at the end of *Republic* VI, all other Forms owe their very being to the Form of the Good. (509b)

The upshot of my discomfort with Lewis's plot line so far is this: It might well be that some Reformed Platonist would happily accede to (4), (5**), and (6). But if it is the High Plato of the Unabashed Theory of Forms we have in mind, then what we must say is that he doesn't accept (5**) at all. Yet Aristotle needs him to accept (5**) to get his agreement to the reasoning in Z6. So the Plato of the Unabashed Theory of Forms can hardly be recognized as the Friend Lewis identifies in Z6.

What now about Z13? Here, according to Lewis, we see Aristotle using a result from Z6, namely, the result that each primary substance is identical with its essence, to defeat Plato. What Lewis calls Aristotle's "Primary Argument" begins this way.

Suppose that

- (17) x is universal to y and z , where $y \neq z$

and that

- (18) x is the substance of y .

Lewis reads Aristotle as supposing that the "Universalist" (i.e., the target of Z13) will accept the following, which Lewis calls the "Uniformity Principle":

- (19) Where x is universal to y and z , x is the substance of y just in case it is the substance of z .

From the conjunction of (17), (18), and (19) we may get this:

- (20) x is the substance of z

But, according to Aristotle, "those things of which the substance is one and the essence is one, themselves too are one" (b14-15). Thus we get what Lewis calls the Principle of "Partial Functionality":

- (21) Where x is the substance of both y and z , $y = z$.

Clearly (21) is unacceptable to the Theory of Forms, whether the Unabashed Theory or some Abashed version. For, according to Plato, the Form, Man, is the substance of both Socrates and Coriscus, although Socrates and Coriscus are certainly not identical with each other.

Did the Platonist in Z6 agree to anything that would force this unwanted conclusion on him? I think not. And Lewis, I think, agrees with me. The Identity Result of Z6 concerns only Primary Substances, such as Plato's Forms are taken to be, and their essences. It doesn't tell us anything about whether Socrates is the same as his essence, or, on the operative assumption that essence is substance, about whether Socrates is the same as his substance.

There is, however, a class of cases in which, according to Lewis, "Aristotle's anti-Platonic critique perhaps succeeds." These are cases that involve only Platonic Forms. Lewis asks us to consider, for example, the Platonic Forms, Animal, Man, and Tiger. Presumably, since man is an animal and also a tiger, Plato would agree to this:

- (a) Animal is universal to Man and Tiger.

Now the Plato-like suggestion being examined in Z13, that the universal is substance, seems, when put together with (a), to yield this conclusion:

- (b) Animal is the substance of Man and Tiger.

But then, by the Principle of Partial Functionality,

- (c) Where Animal is the substance of both Man and Tiger, Man is identical with Tiger

which is absurd. But, Lewis reasons, the Principle of Partial Functionality was generated in Z6 with Platonic support from the "Identity Result," that is, from the idea that, at least among Platonic Forms, each thing is identical with its essence, and so with its substance. In Z6 Aristotle had had the Platonist agree to this result. So perhaps Aristotle is, indeed, being successful at using the Platonist against himself.

Yet we may have moved too quickly on this. It is important to keep in mind what Lewis calls the "Governing Assumption" of Z6—that x is the essence of y iff x is the substance of y . Should the Platonist really agree that Animal is the substance of both Man and Tiger, and, given the Governing Assumption that substance is essence, the essence of both Man and Tiger? Surely not. No doubt Animal is, for the Platonist, *part* of the essence of both Man and Tiger, but Animal is hardly the essence of either Man or Tiger *tout court*.

But, Lewis may come back, the Platonist supposes that it is the universal that is substance. Indeed, it is this very Platonic claim that is under discussion in Z13. The Platonist, we are to assume, has already agreed that Animal is universal to both Man and Tiger. So how can the Platonist get out of accepting the consequence that Animal is the substance of both Man and Tiger, and therefore, by Z6, the *essence* of both Man and Tiger?

Here it is important to distinguish between different versions of the claim that substance is the universal. To say that substance is the universal might mean:

(d) If there are at least two distinct things, x and y , such that α is universal to them both, then α is the substance of x and also the substance of y .

I suspect that Lewis understands the claim that substance is the universal in this way. But the claim could also amount to this:

(e) If there are at least two distinct things, x and y , such that α is universal to them both, then α is a substance.

Obviously, (e) is not strong enough to generate the anti-Platonic result Lewis generates above.

So what is it that the Platonist is committed to in supposing that substance is the universal. Is it (d), or is it only (e)? The question is rather odd. When Plato is having Socrates present the Unabashed Theory of Forms, he does not really tell us whether a Form is *the substance* of whatever participates in it. One suspects that he might agree, if asked, that Man is the substance of Coriscus, but not agree that Animal is the substance of Man, or of Tiger. But, so far as I can see, there is no proof text on this point.

Is there any good reason why Plato should agree that Animal is *the substance of*, and hence the essence of, Man, as well as Tiger? I can think of none. Lewis has given us a good reason why he should *not* agree to this. If Plato were to ask my advice about what to say, I would tell him, "Just say 'No.'"

Another way to approach these issues is to note that when, in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, Plato has Socrates present the Unabashed Theory of Forms, he does not clearly include among the forms anything that Aristotle would recognize as a substantial Form. Thus, instead of talking about Man and Tiger, what he talks about is the Equal, the Just, and the Beautiful. These forms could certainly be considered substances in the sense that they are, according to Plato, the primary entities. But they could not be reasonably considered *the substances of* anything except themselves.

So what is the upshot of my comments on Frank Lewis on Z6 and Z13? First, I don't see Z6 as clearly counting Plato himself as a Friend of the reasoning there. Perhaps Aristotle is counting on the friendship of a Reformed Platonist who has digested the implications of *Parmenides*, Part I, and who has, for some reason or other, withdrawn the important claim that all the other Forms owe their very being to the Form of the Good.

As for whether Aristotle in Z13 exploits his passing friendship with Plato seven chapters earlier by using it against Plato himself, I have to divide my

response. I agree with Lewis that the Z6 result has no direct application to the case in which, say, Man is to be considered the substance of both Socrates and Coriscus. The Z6 result concerns only Forms, not concrete individuals, such as Socrates and Coriscus. That is half my response.

Lewis, however, thinks that Aristotle may indeed get Plato into trouble over the case in which a Form such as Animal is universal to two or more other Forms, say, Man and Tiger, and so might be taken to be the substance and essence of each one. I don't agree with this objection. It seems to me that Plato can get away with saying that the universal is substance, *and* that Animal is universal to both Man and Tiger, without having to agree that Animal is *the substance of*, and so also *the essence of*, of both Man and Tiger. Plato can say that the fact that Animal is universal to Man and Tiger is indeed sufficient to guarantee that Animal is a substance without guaranteeing, what he should not guarantee, namely, that Animal is the substance of, and so also the essence of, both Animal and Tiger.