CHAPTER 2

Using Artefacts against Plato

In this chapter, I address Aristotle's use of artefacts as counter-examples or central elements in counter-arguments against Plato and the Academy. The common opinion, within the Academy, that there cannot exist Ideas of artefacts is used by Aristotle to highlight the internal incoherence of the Platonic theory. Moreover, the case of artefacts offers evidence that Ideas are either inert and superfluous or even in contradiction with the coming-to-be of individual substances. The fact that Aristotle uses artefacts against Plato is important for two main reasons. First, since he is well aware that artefacts often represent problematic cases, Aristotle devotes particular attention to them. Second, a focus on artefacts brings to the surface problems in the Platonic theory that need to be revised and resolved in the Aristotelian system. Although Aristotle's use of artefacts against Plato does not fully coincide with his own account of artefacts, it nonetheless lays its foundations.

2.1 The Arguments

2.1.1 Against the Arguments from the Sciences

The second part of *Met.* A 9 (990b9-15) concerns unwanted forms of different kinds. The Platonists' arguments must be rejected because they lead to unwanted Ideas, namely Ideas of things that the Platonists deny have Ideas: the one-over-many argument proves the existence of unwanted Ideas of negations; the argument that when a thing ceases to be, its corresponding Idea exists as an object of thought entails the existence of Ideas of perishable things; finally, the arguments from the sciences prove the existence of such unwanted Ideas as those of artefacts. In brief, the arguments from the sciences, as Aristotle understands them, consist in proving the existence of Ideas by appealing to the things of which there are sciences: since sciences concern things that are not particular, this would mean that there are things over and above particulars, namely Ideas.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 15:09:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009340557.003

However, one undesired result of these arguments is that, if anything going beyond particulars is an Idea, there will also be Ideas of artefacts, which the Platonists reject. Upon closer examination, the arguments from the sciences do not entail the existence of Ideas of artefacts, but only the existence of Ideas of 'all things of which there are sciences' (*pantôn hosôn epistêmai eisi*). The shift from sciences to arts is manifestly made in *Peri Ideôn*, in which the arguments from the sciences are introduced and discussed more comprehensively:[1]

> Such arguments, however, do not prove the point at issue, which was that there are Ideas, but prove [only] that there are certain things apart from particular and perceptible things. But it is not at all the case that, if there are certain things apart from particulars, these things are Ideas: for apart from particular things there are the common things, of which we say there are sciences. A further point is that there are Ideas too of the things subject to the arts, for every art refers to some one thing the things that come-to-be from it, and these things which are subject to the arts exist, and the arts deal with certain things apart from particulars. But this last argument, in addition to the fact that it does not prove that there are Ideas, appears to establish Ideas of things for which they [= the Platonists] do not want Ideas to exist. For if, because medicine is not a science of this health but of health in general, there is such a thing as Health-itself, there will also be [something like this] in the case of each of the arts. For [an art] does not deal with this particular thing, but with that which is its object in general, as carpentry with bench in general, not with this bench, and with couch in general, not this couch; similarly, sculpture, painting, and building, and each of the other arts is related to the things subject to it. Therefore, there will also be an Idea for each of the objects of the arts, the very thing they [= the Platonists] do not want. (Alex., *in Metaph.* 79,15–80,6)

The first objection is the most straightforward and goes straight to the core of the problem: the arguments by which the Platonists presume to demonstrate the existence of Ideas prove less than what the Platonists want them to prove; thus, these arguments are not valid. The fact that the object of a science is something that has features that cannot be tracked in the sensible realm, although correct, does not prove the existence of Ideas, but only the existence of something common. Aristotle does agree that science requires something that is not reducible to particulars. The Platonic mistake is to overinterpret the '*para*'. As long as one states that the object of the sciences must be different from the sensible things, in the sense that it must exist (in some way, to some extent) apart from the particulars and be one, identical and

[1] For a detailed discussion, see Forcignanò 2016.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 15:09:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009340557.003

determinate, Aristotle is in agreement. The problem arises when this thing that exists apart from particulars is said to be paradigmatic in the sense that it stands over and above the particulars (i.e. is ontologically independent).

The second objection is of considerable significance for the present discussion, for it appeals to the case of artefacts. If, with the first objection, Aristotle warns the Platonists that they prove less than what they want to prove (*non-sequitur*), with the second one he warns them that they also end up proving more than what they want to prove (*ad hominem*). In fact, if everything that is an object of science – that is, everything that is not particular but common and stable – is also an Idea, there will be Ideas of artefacts as well, since arts, too, deal with things existing apart from particular things. Although there is no mention of art in the reconstruction of the arguments from the sciences, Alexander claims that the arguments applied to the sciences must hold also for arts. The art of medicine refers to some one thing just as much as any science does, such that the object of medicine (i.e. health) must also have a corresponding Idea. Surely, the aim of an art such as carpentry is to build a particular thing, but the art itself deals, in the first instance, with a universal notion (i.e. the form in the mind of the artisan). The example of medicine, which is a borderline case between an art and a science,[2] makes it necessary for Alexander to broaden his reasoning to include arts that differ more clearly from sciences. In fact, Alexander also mentions carpentry (*hê tektonikê*), sculpting (*hê andriantopoiêtikê*), painting (*hê graphikê*) and building (*hê oikodomikê*). The passage from sciences (or from branches of knowledge) to arts is made judiciously by means of the case of medicine. In fact, not only is medicine treated as a science, but it also justifies the jump from sciences to arts. Medicine (*hê iatrikê*) is defined as the science of health just as geometry is the science of the equal and the commensurable. In the objection, however, what is valid for medicine is also valid for each of the arts (*epi tôn technôn hekastês*). The jump from medicine to each of the arts is possible because the object of the arts is something that is one (*hen*), always identical (*to hauto*) and determinate. In order to enhance the likeness, Aristotle takes advantage of the ambiguous nature of medicine. Medicine, in fact, has a twofold nature that Aristotle detects, but that only the mature Aristotle of *De Sensu* 1 will untangle: on the one hand, medicine must be bound up with a branch of theoretical knowledge, such as biology; on the other hand, medicine has a strong therapeutic and practical status. With the arguments from the sciences, the Platonist is accepting the Idea of health, as well, and, more shockingly, the Ideas of bench, couch, statue, house and even of copies, such as paintings. It is noteworthy that Alexander mentions imitative, as well as

[2] Vegetti and Lanza 1971, 18–20.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 15:09:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009340557.003

productive arts. Although one might say that, in the case of imitative arts, only the object to be imitated is required, which is a particular thing, in Alexander's view, they also, and in the first instance, deal with a general account: the sculptor not only needs Socrates to be there to imitate, but they must also have general knowledge of what a statue is. None of the arts is science, but they all are science-like insofar as they must be endowed with general knowledge and an account, which can be said, in some sense, to exist apart from the particulars. Moreover, the general account is not only what the artisan must have, but also what the artisan ends up with when they consider what they produce. This point seems to be what Alexander has in mind at the beginning of the objection, when he states that every art refers its products to some one thing (*pros hen ti*). There are two ways in which one can say that arts have to do with things that are separate from particulars: on the one hand, all houses can be referred to or brought back to a single house existing apart from the numerous houses; on the other hand, the art and the notion of house possessed by the artisan is a single thing existing apart from the houses. Although there is, from both perspectives, something existing apart from the particulars, such that the Platonists ought to accept Ideas of artefacts, what exists apart from individuals, by being general, is not also a separate Idea, as the Platonists want.[3]

Aristotle straightforwardly states that the Platonists *do not want* Ideas of artefacts. Certainly, the mere fact that the Platonic arguments prove the existence of Ideas of artefacts is not in itself an objection. Rather, the objection obtains because, according to Aristotle, the Platonists deny the existence of Ideas of artefacts, as can be seen from the *ou boulontai* of 79,23 and 80,6. The Platonic Ideas are presented as universals that are existentially independent from their concrete instantiations. Platonists do not want artefacts-universals that exist independently of the concrete artefacts. Therefore, Aristotle criticises their arguments from the sciences by using their denial of separate forms of artefacts to construct an *ad hominem* argument against the separation of forms.

2.1.2 *The Threat of* Aporia

Other books of the *Met.* have this debate as a background, and even more explicitly introduce artefacts as a means of exploiting a chink in Plato's armour. In *Met.* B 4 and K 2, Aristotle repeats that no one would posit

[3] None of what Alexander says about the sciences involves Plato in positing Ideas of artefacts beyond those that would naturally be posited anyway, as the case of health shows.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 15:09:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009340557.003

separate forms of artefacts. B 4 and K 2 are consistent with, and close to, passages in the *Metaphysics* and the *Peri Ideôn* that are straightforwardly and uncontroversially dedicated to the criticism of the Platonic theory of Ideas. Both in B 4 and in K 2, a reason that is given for positing something apart from particulars is the existence of knowledge, which requires something that is not individual but universal. B 4 and K 2 start with an epistemological question and end up with an *aporia* in which artefacts are mentioned. The reference to the Platonic separation of forms is strengthened by the resemblance of these arguments to the Platonic arguments from the sciences, which are laid out and rejected in A 9 and in *Peri Ideôn.* Here it is important to bear in mind that the non-existence of separate forms of artefacts is not due to the fact that artefacts are not substances or that they do not have any form at all, but rather to a common opinion in the Academy. Aristotle accepts and utilises this denial, while refraining from endorsing the Platonic view on the existence of separate Ideas.

The eighth *aporia* in Book B is first raised in the context of an epistemological problem:[4] (i) if there is nothing apart from the particulars, there would not be any knowledge, because knowledge requires the universality of the object – but there is knowledge; (ii) at the same time, if there is something apart from the particulars, the genera exist apart from particulars – but it has been said that this is not the case. In the second case (ii), we would also face the problem of understanding when exactly the separate thing must be posited. As for the first case (i), there would not be knowledge, but everything would merely be an object of sensation. The question is then formulated with reference to coming-to-be. Since perceptible things are perishable and in motion, there would not be anything eternal and unmoved. And again, if nothing is eternal, there would not be any coming-to-be. Since there is coming-to-be, there must be something eternal constituting the ultimate term of the series to avoid an infinite regress. Speaking in favour of the existence of a separate substance is the existence of the matter: if matter exists (and it is ungenerated), the substance must also exist, unless the substance and the matter do not exist – but this is not the case. Since it is impossible that nothing exists, there must be a separate substance. However, *if* one must posit something apart from the particulars, one must still identify those cases in which it is necessary to do so. Aristotle states that it is difficult to determine in which

[4] For a better and more detailed understanding of the *aporiae* in B 4, see Madigan 1999. For the eight *aporia* in particular, see Broadie 2009. For Aristotle's use of *aporiae* in *Met.* B, see Buddensiek 2018.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 15:09:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009340557.003

cases one ought to suppose that there is something, like shape and form (*tên morphên kai to eidos*), that exists alongside the concrete thing (*para to sunolon*). However, it is evident (*phaneron*) that there is nothing apart from the concrete things when these things are artefacts, such as a house:

> And since this is impossible, it is necessary that there is something apart from the compound, i.e. the shape and the form. But if we are to suppose this, there is an *aporia* as to the cases in which we are to suppose it and the cases in which not. For evidently it is not possible to suppose it in all cases; we could not suppose that there is a house apart from the particular houses. (*Met.* B 4, 999b15–20)

Aristotle does not provide any explanation for his denial of the separation of forms of artefacts, but rather seems to present the point as a *communis opinio*. He speaks in the first-person plural, which might suggest that there was a general agreement about the denial in the Academy. If the denial of the existence of separate forms of artefacts was an agreed-upon opinion, it would also be reasonable for Aristotle not to provide any further explanation. The absence of such an explanation, together with the use of the first-person plural, is sufficient to indicate a reference to the Academy, even if Plato is not explicitly mentioned.[5] The separation at issue is clearly the Platonic separation of the form from the compounds: first, we have the expression *para to sunolon* and, second, the example concerns a house existing apart from particular houses (*tas tinas oikias*). There are no forms that exist independently of the particular artificial compounds in which they are found. Aristotle states that what is not yet clear is in which cases, if any, there are separate forms. It is true that there seems to be general agreement about the fact that there are no separate forms of artefacts and that there are cases in which it is more reasonable to posit Ideas, but this does not mean that Aristotle is claiming that there are indeed separate forms. In fact, he only says 'if we are to suppose this', but not that we actually should suppose that there is a form apart from the concrete things. This hypothetical way of raising the *aporia* should be stressed: *if* one wants to prove the existence of Ideas, one should come up with good candidates, but artefacts are the worst-possible candidates for having separate Ideas. Perhaps there are Ideas, but there are certainly no Ideas of artefacts.[6]

[5] Whether or not Plato denies the existence of Ideas of artefacts is addressed in Chapter 1 (Section 1.1). What is important for the present context is that Aristotle believes that Platonists (and Plato in some passages) do not want to posit Ideas of artefacts.

[6] We could understand Aristotle as saying that art serves to show that forms are matter-involving because forms of artefacts importantly involve matter. According to this interpretation, the separation at stake might be separation in definition or thought. The problem with this interpretation is

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 15:09:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009340557.003

The ninth *aporia* of K 2 has been linked to the eighth *aporia* of B 4 due to their similarity. In fact, the *aporia* concerns the tension between positing something existing apart from the individuals and assigning only particular objects to science. If the objects of science cannot be the particulars because they are unlimited in number, something apart from the particulars must be posited. The problem is, again, whether there is a substance existing separately from the sensible substances (1060a8–9), a substance that is per se separate and that does not inhere in any sensible thing (1060a12–13). If there is such a substance, the question would be what things have such a corresponding substance. This *aporia* brings out several issues: if it posits such a substance for every sensible thing, the theory is unreasonable; but if it posits such a substance only for things like men and horses, a reason is needed for privileging some animals over others and animals over inanimate things in general (1060a15–16). K 2 introduces a new element, which is the apparently unjustified preference for positing the existence of forms of some things and *not others*. These other things include certain animals, as well as inanimate things. The class of inanimate beings includes naturally occurring inanimate beings, as well as artefacts. After running through a series of other issues, K 2 concludes with a consideration bearing more specifically on artefacts:

> Further, is there anything apart from the compound (by which I mean the matter and that which is with matter), or not? If not, all things that are in matter are perishable. But if there is something, it must be the form and the shape. It is difficult to determine the cases in which this exists and in which it does not; for in some cases, it is clear that the form is not separate, like in the case of a house. (*Met.* K 2, 1060b23–8)

Aristotle is addressing here the question of whether something exists apart from the compounds of matter and form via two possible answers. If there is nothing apart from the particulars, which are defined by their being en-mattered, everything is perishable. If, by contrast, there is something apart from the particulars, it is the form. However, Aristotle once again warns that if we take the form to be apart from the compounds, there is the problem of defining the cases in which there is a separate form, because there are certainly cases in which no one would posit separate forms, such as that of artefacts. This is the only case in which the problem is easily resolved due to its clarity (*dêlon*), but if one posits a separate form apart from the compounds, one also requires

that in these passages Aristotle's use of artefacts is not meant to illustrate his own theory of artefacts but rather to attack Plato's internal incoherence.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 15:09:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009340557.003

a criterion to account for the necessary limitations to the scope of this separation. Neither is Plato mentioned nor does Aristotle speak in the plural, such that it is not evident, on the face of it, that he is referring to the debate in the Academy. However, the similarities with the previous passages, as well as the content of the chapter, suggest that K 2 is operating within the same framework.[7] In this passage, the usage of *para to sunolon*, meaning 'apart from the compound', seems once again to indicate that what is at issue is Platonic separation from the compounds.[8] Platonic separation entails existential independence, in the way that universals are independent from their concrete instantiations. Interestingly, Aristotle does not express any agreement with the Platonic view but, once again, formulates it hypothetically: *if* there is something apart from the compound thing, this is the form. *If* there is something apart from the compounds and this is the form, the problem of determining in which cases it is like that (since it is not like this in every case) arises. Aristotle is not endorsing the view that there is a form that exists apart from the concrete things. Rather, he is using artefacts to attack the Platonic doctrine of separation. If artefacts represent a case in which positing Ideas is undesirable, the doctrine of Ideas needs reworking.[9]

In conclusion, in both B 4 and K 2, Aristotle is using artefacts to bring out the internal problems of the Platonic theory of Ideas. His rejection of separate forms of artefacts is not the result of an argument concerning the substantiality of artefacts, but a common opinion that does not fully square with the epistemological and physical concerns of the Platonic theory of Ideas. The Platonists' denial of the existence of Ideas of artefacts is used by Aristotle in order to point out the urgency of arguments and reasons why we shall posit some forms and not others. Aristotle presents artefacts as the instance in which the Platonists would rather not posit Ideas. This is, however, problematic, since it shows that the Platonists must come up with better arguments for positing some Ideas and not others.

[7] A difference with respect to the previous passage is that Aristotle first uses *para to sunolon*, as in B 4, and then uses *chôristos* to refer to the case of artefacts.

[8] When we approach H 3, the relation between *para to sunolon* and *chôristos* will be addressed once again. As for K 2, it seems either that *para to sunolon* and *chôristos* are synonymous or that *chôristos* is broader than *para to sunolon*.

[9] In this case too (see n. 6), we could imagine Aristotle stating that artefacts' forms are inseparable because functional and thus matter-involving. However, I think that Aristotle is not advancing his own theory of artefacts yet, but only working within Platonic tensions.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 15:09:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009340557.003

2.1.3 The Logical or Semantic Argument

In the first part of the second half of Z 8 (until 1033b26), Aristotle illustrates the semantic/logical argument by which he excludes, against the Platonists, that the pre-existing form in a generation is a separate existing determinate thing (*tode ti*). This argument shows that the opponent would allow for no generation at all. Generations, as Aristotle argues, would be denied. In its simplest version,[10] the argument states that if something S is on its way towards coming-to-be something F, then F must mean something before the process is completed:

> Is there then a sphere apart from the individual spheres or a house apart from the bricks? Rather we may say that no 'this' would ever have been coming-to-be, if this had been so. The 'form' however means the 'such', and is not a 'this' – a determinate thing; but the artisan makes, or the father generates, a 'such' out of a 'this'; and when it has been generated, it is a 'this such'. (*Met.* Z 8, 1033b19–24)

If the form was separately existing, the coming-to-be of individual substances would even be prevented. In other words, if the sphere is a $tode_1$ – like the Platonists hold – an already existing *tode* like the bronze becomes another already existing $tode_1$. An already existing *tode* cannot become the terminus of any process of coming-to-be: the only way in which the terminus of a process can logically or meaningfully pre-exist is as a *toionde*. Although the process ends up in a form as *tode ti* (like the form of Socrates), that terminus cannot meaningfully be a *tode*, neither as a *tode* like the form of Callias nor as a *tode* like form of Man or Animal, but the process itself, in its unfolding, must be aiming at a *toionde*. With this argument, Aristotle is able to conclude that the only pre-existing form that the Platonists can prove is a *toionde*: were the pre-existing form more than a *toionde*, it would make the coming-to-be unconceivable. Individual substances come-to-be, the form does not but it pre-exists as a *toionde* in the father or the artisan. Interestingly, the question raised is about artefacts, which were found to be the easiest case: 'So, is there a sphere besides these [particular spheres], or house besides the bricks?' The question of whether there is a house apart from the particular houses is raised precisely because the negative answer is beyond doubt: no one would ever posit a separate Idea for houses. Aristotle treats the denial of Ideas of artefacts as a point with which the Platonists rightly agree, in such a way that they are constrained to give up on the existence of Ideas.

[10] This argument comes from the *Phaedo* 101C2–6.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 15:09:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009340557.003

2.1.4 Aristotle's Argument from Evidence

In the last section of A 9 (and its parallel in M 5),[11] Aristotle argues that the separation of forms is incompatible with their role as causes of generation and being. The aforementioned passages, together with a very interesting passage from *GC*, are similar insofar as they deal with efficient causation: how can Ideas be causes of coming-to-be? Evidence provided by the case of artefacts is employed precisely in order to oppose the view that Ideas might work as efficient causes. It is indeed by looking at artefacts that one can see that Ideas are either inert or superfluous.

> Further, it would seem impossible that the substance and that of which it is the substance are separate, so that, how could the Ideas be separate if they are the substances of the things? In the *Phaedo*[12] this is stated in this way – that the forms are causes both of being and of coming-to-be; yet when the forms exist, still the things that partake in them do not come-to-be, unless there is some mover; and many other things come-to-be, e.g. a house or a ring, of which we say there are no forms. (*Met.* A 9, 991b1–7)

The Platonic theory of Ideas as causes of coming-to-be fails for two main reasons. The first reason is that the Ideas do not seem sufficient to guarantee coming-to-be: in order for things to come into existence, an efficient cause is required. Even if one accepts the existence of separate Ideas, they still seem to be unable to explain the coming-to-be of particular things. One needs an efficient cause in order for something to come-to-be, like a craftsman in the case of artefacts. The second reason is that Ideas do not seem necessary in certain cases: there are things, such as houses or rings, that come into being, but to which the Platonists do not ascribe Ideas. These examples clearly refer to the artificial realm, which offers the evidence that things come-to-be even without a corresponding Idea.

In *GC* 2.9 too, Aristotle emphasises the incompatibility between the theory and the causal role that the Ideas are supposed to play in the coming-to-be:

> For if the Forms are causes, why is their generating activity intermittent instead of perpetual and continuous – since Forms and their participants always exist? Besides, in some instances we see that the cause is another. For it is the doctor who implants health and the man of science who implants

[11] *Met.* M 5, 1079b35–1080a8 is a duplet. A 9 and M 5 differ insofar as Aristotle speaks in the first person in the former (*phamen*) and in the third person in the latter (*phasin*). The shift from the first-person plural to the third-person plural might suggest that Aristotle was previously presenting his opinion as an insider and that he was later taking distance from the opinions in the Academy.

[12] *Phaedo* 101C.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 15:09:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009340557.003

> science, although Health itself and Science itself and their participants exist; and this is the case with other things that are made in accordance with a capacity. (*GC* 2.9, 335b18-24)

The first objection is that if the participation is the way in which Ideas are causes of coming-to-be, since there are always Ideas and things participating in them, the coming-to-be should occur perpetually and continuously. Yet, perpetual generation occurs only in living beings and not in artefacts.[13] I take 'perpetually' to stress that the generating activity is everlasting in the sense that it had no start; whereas I take 'continuously' to emphasise that the generating activity, even when it started at a certain time *t*, has no interruptions. While perpetual generation occurs only in the case of living beings, continuous generation might regard both artefacts and living beings.

The second objection is crucially related to our discussion of Z 8. Aristotle states that *we see* (*theôroumen*) that there is a cause other than the Idea. At this stage, he clarifies his point with reference to artificial production. In the technical production of health, *we see* that there is a doctor implanting health in the patient, in such a way that there is no point in postulating an additional cause, such as the Idea. Moreover, the case of art shows that where there is intermittent causation, which is also in nature, we need a further cause than the Ideas to explain the causation – thus, Ideas are insufficient causes. On the one hand, in the case of artisanal production, there is a cause that is sufficiently effective to render the Ideas superfluous; on the other hand, even if one argues for the existence of the Idea of health, the fact that health is intermittently produced makes the Idea of health useless to account for why things come-to-be.[14]

At this point, two related questions arise: (1) If the doctor implanting the health is visible to everyone, why is the father not equally visible to everyone? (2) Where does the form in the mind come from? The first question concerns the reason why the Platonists would easily agree on the fact that the forms are superfluous for artificial production but would not simultaneously agree that the forms are superfluous for generation, since the presence of the father seems as evident as that of the artisan. *We see* that the father generates the offspring as much as *we see* that there is a doctor who implants health. In Z 8, Aristotle introduces the synonymy principle

[13] This point is related to H 3: the question whether to posit something eternal is answered in the negative in the case of artefacts, since their intermittent generation depends upon artisans. On the other hand, the continuous generation of living beings may entail the existence of some eternal forms. The problem is more extensively discussed in Chapter 5 (Section 5.4).

[14] The same applies to all productions that come-to-be in accordance with a capacity (*kata dunamin*; i.e. other external principles). See Chapter 3 (Section 3.3.2).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 15:09:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009340557.003

with the notorious formula 'man begets man' to get the Platonists to agree that the coming-to-be can be explained without reference to separate forms. The form is indeed instantiated in a synonymous thing, namely in something else that has the same form as the product. Plato has a synonymy principle as well: the Idea is synonymous with the things of which it is the Idea and paradigm. However, the Aristotelian synonymy principle is applied to the things in such a way that the synonymous Platonic Idea is superfluous, for it is applied to efficient causes such as the father and the artisan.[15] Thus, Aristotle seems to think that the father is indeed visible to all the world, but the presence of a form in the father is not as self-evident as that of the form in the mind of the artisan. Human demiurges, as causes of the coming-to-be of artefacts, are similar enough to the Platonic Demiurge to be readily accepted as an explanation. The form in the mind of the artisan is a certain *intellectual* form, which is close enough to the models followed by the divine Demiurge. By contrast, the father as cause of the coming-to-be of the offspring does not seem to provide a sufficient explanation (from a Platonic point of view).[16] The introduction of the synonymy principle in Z 8 is used to show not that there is a father who generates the offspring (that is clear enough to the Platonists too), but that there is a form in the father, which is sufficient to explain the generation of the offspring and to make a corresponding Idea superfluous. The synonymy principle is employed to signal the similarity between the case of artefacts and that of natural substances. If this is right, a second question consequently arises. If the form in the mind of the artisan is similar to the Demiurge's models, where does it come from? In fact, the risk is that we end up saying that the artisan does indeed have Platonic Ideas in mind (implying that there are Ideas of artefacts). But this has a couple of consequences that the Platonists themselves would not easily accept: first, the artisan would be a philosopher, since he would be able to see Ideas;[17] second, the artisan would be the one who possesses

[15] The details of Aristotle's application of the synonymy principle to artefacts are unfolded in Chapter 4 (Section 4.3).

[16] Broadie (p. 252) suggests a plausible explanation: 'the form without matter in the builder's intellectual soul is metaphysically different enough from the explanandum to be a terminus of explanation, whereas biological parent and offspring seem equally non-intellectual effects of something, so that neither is source of form to the other.' Broadie deals with the same question and provides a convincing discussion. However, she does not deal with the second question, which also seems important.

[17] We could also say that the artisan sees the Idea only to some extent, for he cannot define it, or that he sees it but not in its proper context with other forms, which requires dialectic. The issue is intricated, but we have seen that the human artisans have as their models the real couches.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 15:09:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009340557.003

knowledge, whereas the Platonists ascribe knowledge to the user and only true belief to the artisan.[18]

In conclusion, artefacts are used by Aristotle to criticise Plato's theory of Ideas as separate forms and efficient causes. This does not however mean that Aristotle's mentions of artefacts are completely useless in reconstructing his own theory. We should be careful not to take too little from these passages as well as not to take too much out of them. While Aristotle is already establishing some of the building blocks for his own account of artefacts, he is not yet arguing whether they are substances or clearly locating them within his ontology.

2.2 The Notion of Separation

As we have just seen, in the *Metaphysics*, we frequently come across the point that no one would posit the existence of separate forms of artefacts. This point is repeated in A 9 (and its double in M 5), B 4, K 2 and Z 8 and recurred in all our arguments.[19] The concept of separation is primarily conveyed by means of the adjective *chôristos*. Notoriously, there are several ways of interpreting this concept. Something can be conceptually or definitionally separable (*chôristos en tôi logoi*); or it can be separate in the way that a particular substance is separate (i.e. in the sense that it has an independent existence, as opposed to properties); or again, a thing can be separate in the way that universals are separate from their instantiations: Platonic universals are separate from their concrete instantiations such as to be ontologically independent and capable of existing even if they have no instantiations.

What separation does Aristotle have in mind when he affirms that there are no separate forms of artefacts? The first kind of separation can be easily excluded: forms are conceptually separable or separable in definition in the case of both artefacts and natural substances. Aristotle does not regard artificial forms as non-separate in the sense that they cannot be 'thought of' separately.

[18] *Rep.* 601D. See also *Cratylus* 390D and *Euthydemus* 288E–289A and 289B–C.

[19] Aristotle states that there are no separate forms of artefacts also in H 3 and Λ 3. I dedicate to these passages a separate section: although they seem to mark the same point about the non-separation of forms of artefacts, they are not situated in relation to the criticism of Plato in the same way as the others. Briefly speaking, H 3's remarks do not arise from an epistemological question, nor do they directly pertain to the criticism of the Ideas as causes of coming-to-be. H 3 belongs to an Aristotelian discussion on the ungenerability of Aristotelian forms. Λ 3's remarks arise neither from an epistemological question nor from the criticism about the causal role of the Platonic Ideas. Λ 3 deserves its own separate discussion because Aristotle does refer to the Platonic theory of Ideas and links it to the problem of Ideas of artefacts, but within the framework of his own discussion and conceding a particular point to Plato. I discuss H 3 and Λ 3 in Chapter 5 (Section 5.4).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 15:09:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009340557.003

One example is to be found in *Met.* H 2, where Aristotle openly proposes three ways of defining a house: one definition mentions the matter, another definition mentions the compound of matter and form, while a third definition mentions only the form. The definition of the house as a shelter is the definition of the form and the house in actuality and, most of all, it is a possible and acceptable way of addressing the object. To be sure, one might reply that the definition of the form on its own also involves some matter or that the definition of the compound artefact as such should mention both. After all, artefacts are functional objects whose form is matter-involving. This problem also arises, however, in the case of natural beings. In *DA* 1.1, Aristotle ascribes the inclusion of matter to the study of the soul too.[20] Separation in the second sense has a better claim to be the separation at issue,[21] but the way in which Aristotle addresses the problem in our passages seems to speak against it. In fact, *chôristos* is accompanied by other important qualifications. For instance, in K 2, together with *chôriston*, we find *para to sunolon*, which also occurs in B 4 (as well as *para tas tinas oikias*). These qualifications rather suggest the ontological or existential separation of Platonic Ideas from the particular instances. Therefore, the passages denying that there are separate forms of artefacts deal with an existential separation of the universals, or forms, from their instantiations à la Plato. Separation here would thus mean that universals can exist without their instantiations. This kind of separation also implies that the forms are eternal and actual, since the Ideas are supposed to differ from perishable things (by being eternal) and to be causes of coming-to-be (and thus are actual). First and foremost, however, forms are independent from compounds. Only as a result of being distinct from perishable things and being causes of coming-to-be are they eternal and actual. Let us, however, keep in mind that understanding these passages and the concept of separation as tailored against the Platonists does not mean yet that Aristotle takes artefacts' forms to fail to be separate in the other possible ways (i.e. in definition or from the matter) or in the categorical sense.

2.3 Aristotle's Dialectical Use of Artefacts

Aristotle addresses the problem of the separation of forms of artefacts within his criticism of the Platonic theory of Ideas. Taking on the role of an insider, he first presents artefacts as bad candidates for having Platonic

[20] See Charles 2021.

[21] This is the option adopted by Ross (1924): artefacts do not have separate forms because their forms are not substantial, but they belong to different categories. This view is primarily based on H 2.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 15:09:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009340557.003

Ideas (B 4 and K 2) and uses the Platonic denial of forms of artefacts to construct an *ad hominem* argument. In opposition to another aspect of the theory of Ideas, namely the conception of Ideas as causes of coming-to-be (Z 8), Aristotle identifies a potential counter-example in the denial of separate forms of artefacts (1.3) and a refutation based on the evidence provided by the artificial case (1.4). For instance, Aristotle points out that the visible fact that there is a doctor who implants health in the patient makes the Idea of Health ultimately superfluous. The synonymy principle as displayed in Z 7–9 seems to represent the way in which Aristotle shows that there is already a form and an efficient cause (the father and the artisan), which is completely sufficient for the explanation of a generation.

Deploying artefacts against Plato and his theory of forms is at the core of Aristotle's interest in artefacts. But it also lays the foundations for metaphysical views that take into account the status of artefacts. It is therefore already possible to extract certain conceptual building blocks from these arguments. First, Aristotle finds the synonymy principle useful, but he articulates his own version of this principle and then proceeds to give his own account of the forms of artefacts. However, the introduction of the synonymy principle for living beings and artefacts alike has, as a side effect, the smoothing over of the difference between artefacts and living beings. Only at this stage does Aristotle feel the urge to delineate the differences between them. I will deal with this issue in Chapter 4.

Aristotle also certainly agrees that separation is a criterion of substantiality and would regard Ideas as substances in the fullest sense – *if only* there were such things at all. In H 1, Aristotle summarises the results of the preceding books and mentions natural substances as agreed-upon substances, since all thinkers accept them. There are, however, substances that only certain schools accept (e.g. Ideas and the objects of mathematics). Aristotle states that 'we must inquire later into the Ideas and the objects of mathematics; for some say these exist apart from sensible substances' (*Met.* H 1, 1042a22–4). In the *Categories*, substances are separate from their properties. In the *Metaphysics*, separation in the categorical sense is deemed insufficient and the concept is correspondingly further specified. It is paired with eternity, but, once again, with the important qualifications laid down below.

Of course, with regard to the epistemological question, Ideas are also eternal, for instance. The objects of sciences, as well as the Ideas, are eternal, since items that differ from perishable things are supposed to be eternal (Sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.2). Furthermore, Ideas are also causes of coming-to-be; they are not inert, but they are supposed to have a causal role in the

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 15:09:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009340557.003

generation of substances (Sections 2.1.3 and 2.1.4). However, separation as such does not yet entail eternity and causality. On the one hand, eternity seems to come about as a result of the fact that the objects of sciences must be different from perishable things (i.e. eternal); on the other hand, the role of causes of coming-to-be is an additional feature of the Ideas that is not immediately implied by the notion of separation at issue. In fact, Aristotle believes that the Platonists' goal is also to find something that works as a cause, but that they do not reach their goal and, while seeking the goal, they violate the principle of parsimony. On Aristotle's view, the objects of science are eternal and forms, as objects of science, are indeed eternal. However, there are ways of being an eternal form without being separated in the way that Ideas are.

As for the second point (i.e. that movement must be referred back to something eternal), Aristotle qualifies it with attention to artefacts. First of all, movement in the sense of generation must first be safeguarded and not denied as with the semantic/logical argument; second, it must be referred back to an eternal form. However, eternity can be attained in different ways, for instance, through the separation of the form not from the compound, but from matter instead. Chapter 5 (Section 5.4) goes more into the details of this affair but let me anticipate somewhat for the sake of clarity. Forms of living beings are eternal only insofar as they are continuously occurring. This lower degree of eternity is due to the fact that their forms are not separated from matter, but they occur in an en-mattered fashion. The highest kind of eternity is attained by unmoved movers, which lack matter altogether. Now, the intermittent generation of artefacts is the reason why they do not attain any degree of eternity. For this reason, the case of artefacts, in which an artisan is sufficient to bring an object into existence, shows that eternal separate forms are unnecessary. However, the case of living beings – as opposed to that of artefacts – is crucial for establishing that separate forms, in the sense of entities coinciding with forms alone (i.e. unmoved movers) might have to be posited, after all.

We should however refrain from relying too much on Aristotle's use of artefacts against Plato and inferring that, since forms of artefacts are not eternal, artefacts are not substances. Eternity is not a criterion of substantiality, and Aristotle is not providing an argument for denying that artefacts are substances. All Aristotle is saying is that there are no Platonic Ideas. Certainly, he seems to agree on the fact that the forms of artefacts are not separate, but this does not imply in any way that the forms of other beings are separate in the Platonic sense. Moreover, artefacts are problematic cases not because they are not substances, but because they raise issues within the

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 15:09:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009340557.003

Platonic theory of forms itself. We find no argument against the substantiality of artefacts, as can be made clear by stressing three points in each passage: (i) the references to Plato or to the Academy and its debates, (ii) the way in which separation is understood, namely as separation of the form from compounds and (iii) the absence of agreement on Aristotle's part with the Platonic view. The separation question and the substance question must be kept separate: the fact that forms of artefacts do not exist apart or are not separate in the Platonic sense does not mean that artefacts are not substances. There are indeed ways of being a substance without existing apart. Furthermore, eternity cannot be taken as the criterion of substantiality. As I show in Chapter 5, eternal beings are substances, but what it is to be a substance is not primarily to be eternal. Moreover, from Aristotle's repeated statement that no one would posit the existence of separate forms of artefacts one should not infer that forms of artefacts do not exist. Indeed, forms of artefacts might still exist and even be separate – just not in the Platonic sense.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 15:09:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009340557.003