

## Matter in Z3

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**Abstract** In this paper, I will discuss a certain conception of matter that Aristotle introduces in *Metaphysics* Z3. It is often assumed that Aristotle came to distinguish between matter and form only in his physical writings, and that this led to a conflict with the doctrine of primary substances in the *Categories* that he tries to resolve in Z3. I will argue that there is no such conflict. In Z3, Aristotle seems to suggest that matter is what is left over when we strip a thing of all its properties. I take it that he does not want us to strip away these properties by physical means or in our imagination. Rather, we are asked to strip a referring noun phrase of all its predicative parts. We are thus not supposed to be able to refer to something that has no qualities whatsoever, but to construct a phrase that refers to something that has properties without referring to its having them, and without implying which properties it has. The idea that there might be a way of referring to something definite without mentioning any of its qualities is platonic and it still underlies modern predicate logic. In Z3, Aristotle argues against this conception and thus against the basic idea of predicate logic. According to him, matter is at best an inseparable aspect of a primary substance, which substance is best referred to as a compound τὸδε τι (“this such”). Matter is what the τὸδε refers to as part of this phrase. But it cannot exist in separation from form, and we cannot refer to it by a separated term, without also referring to the substantial form of the substance of which it is an aspect.

**Keywords** Aristotle · Matter · Plato · Substance · Predicate Logic

### Abbreviations

Cat.            Categories  
Met.           Metaphysics  
Gen. Corr.    De Generatione et Corruptione

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## 1 Introduction

Like other “what”-questions, the question “What is matter?” can be answered in two different ways. First, one may give a list of different instances of matter. Matter is, for instance, what wood is for a bed, rubber for a ball, concrete and bricks for a wall, and so on. Second, one may attempt to pin down what all these instances must have in common, that is, define what it is for them to be matter—if this is indeed what they are. These two kinds of question are not always kept apart as easily. For instance, when physicists claim that matter ultimately consists in quantum-mechanic particles or fields, or whatever they claim in detail, one may think that they provide a general definition of what it is for anything to be matter. This however is not the case. (One could imagine a material world that does not contain any elementary particles or fields.) Rather, when physicists say whatever they say about matter, they do basically the same as we do when we list instances of matter. They say what happens to be the matter of which things in our actual universe consist. The only difference is, perhaps, that physicists list fewer and more generally specified instances.

Of course, the definition of matter is just the most general specification of its actual instances. Nonetheless, when physicists tell us what matter is, they answer an empirical question. To define matter as what physicists find out to be matter would turn the claim that it is indeed matter into a logical truth. But it is not a logical truth. In general, in order to evaluate the claim that X is matter, “X” and “matter” must be taken to have different meanings. I am in this paper not interested in the question out of what things in this world actually consist. The general systematic question that this paper addresses is rather what it is to be matter for whatever anyone may come up with as the actual matter of physical things.

I should make clear in the beginning that I only ask here what it is to be the matter *of* another thing. I am not interested in the concept of absolute or prime matter, but only in the concept of relative matter: matter-of-something. Prime matter may probably be defined, in a second step that I will not take, as the matter-of-everything. Nor should the question that I will address be confused with a question about the most basic elements of concrete things. An *element* is something into which a thing may be decomposed or analyzed, which may itself not be decomposed or analyzed into further constituents of a different kind (*De Caelo* Γ5). Matter need not satisfy the latter condition, and hence, the concept of matter is more general.

The more specific topic of this paper is the *Aristotelian* conception of matter. However, as I should also note at the outset, I am not at all interested in any contingent mistakes that Aristotle may have made because of his particular historical or even biographical background (not that I believe there are many of them). When I inquire into the Aristotelian conception of what it is for something to be matter, I am only interested in its valid parts, and I am prepared to discuss invalid parts of it only in order to find out whether they are valid or not.<sup>1</sup> Even more specifically, I will focus on the conception of matter that Aristotle discusses in *Metaphysics* Z3.

Let me first briefly dwell on my general systematic question. What is it to be that out of which something consists? This question is surprisingly difficult to answer. Various attempts have been made that I will sketch only very briefly before discussing one of them in somewhat more detail. First, that out of which a thing consists may be taken to be that out of which it came to be that is still present in the thing, as Aristotle seems to say in *Physics* B3 194b24. But this cannot hold true of matter in general, since that out of which a thing consists is not

<sup>1</sup> I should also make clear that although I will compare certain passages from Aristotle with parts of Plato’s *Timaeus*, I am not interested in comparing their philosophical “systems” or “ontologies.” I will not even take it for granted that in the *Timaeus*, Plato states his own views.

always that out of which it came to be. For instance, all of the matter that constituted Socrates as a baby may have been gradually replaced by other stuff, and thus not remained present in him. If matter were defined as that out of which Socrates came to be that is still present in him, he may then turn out to have gradually dematerialized. And indeed, Aristotle does not define matter in the passage from *Physics* B3. Rather, he only lists matter (ὕλη) as one possible example for what he calls “the cause out of which” (τὸ ἐξ οὗ, 195a16–19). Matter *can* be what remains in a thing when it changes, but it need not.

Second, matter does not seem to be that which makes the difference between two individuals that have the same form, since the respective parcels of matter, in order to make such a difference, should themselves be different individuals, and thus by assumption consist of further matter (Charlton 1972).

Finally, it will turn out in this paper that the method Aristotle seems to employ in *Metaphysics* Z3 for isolating the matter of a thing does not yield anything specific. Hence, it does not seem to be the case that matter is what is left over when we take away all form. I will here concentrate on this latter attempt to say, in general, what it is to be matter.

I begin with a brief discussion of the more general aims of *Metaphysics* Z3. I will then ask how we are supposed to take away attributes of a thing and will come up with an answer in linguistic terms: We are supposed to delete the descriptive bits from a noun phrase, leaving only articles and demonstratives in place. The question will then be whether matter can possibly be that which is referred to by a bare article or demonstrative. Further, I will point out a certain similarity between the concept of matter that Aristotle discusses in Z3 and the receptacle of all change that Plato introduces in the *Timaeus*. It will turn out that the discussion in Z3 should be read as a critique of the Timaeian notion of a bare, ultimate subject of predication and that this concept is not in fact one that Aristotle could have had any use for.

## 2 The Pale and the Dead Socrates

Aristotle introduces the idea of stripping away all attributes of a given thing in *Metaphysics* Z3 in order to show that at least in one sense of “substratum,” the essence of a substance cannot be taken to be its substratum: the *material* substratum of things is not their essence.

This is the story, as it is usually told, about why Aristotle raises this issue. The most basic question that we can ask about a thing is what it is; less basic are the questions how it looks and feels, where it is located, how it relates to other things etc. In the *Categories*, an early or at least introductory text, Aristotle had claimed that what-questions are properly answered by reference to substances, and that in the primary sense, substances are the concrete instances of a species, such as Socrates, or a particular horse (2a11–14). But then, in his physical writings, Aristotle came to distinguish between the matter and form of sensible substances. As a result, there seemed to be something more basic out of which Socrates and the particular horse may be said to consist. For clearly, Socrates has once come into being out of some stuff, and as everyone knows, he eventually ceased to be and a dead body was left behind. But coming and ceasing to be are changes, and as Aristotle argues in *Physics* A7, the proper account of any change involves three principles: that which results from the change, that which changed into that which results, and that which makes the difference between them. Consider, for instance, the change by which Socrates turns pale. The pale Socrates (1) is that which results, the not yet pale Socrates with the potential for being pale (2) is that which changes into the pale one, and the latter’s paleness (3) makes the difference. Now what is crucial is that the thing that changed into the pale Socrates must be specifiable without presupposing its actual paleness. It must be something that may or may not be pale (*Physics* A7; *Gen. Corr.* B1). In

the case of the pale Socrates this is easy, for we may refer to him by his name, whether he is pale or not.

In *De Generatione et Corruptione* A3, Aristotle further distinguishes qualified from unqualified coming to be. In the proper description of a qualified coming to be, the “be” is supplemented by a qualifier. When Socrates comes to be pale, this qualifier is “pale.” Socrates does not simply come to be, period; he only comes to be pale. The same holds true for ceasing to be. If Socrates ceases to be pale, he does not cease to be, period. He ceases to be, period, only when he dies. Aristotle adds, however, that to a certain extent the distinction between qualified and unqualified coming and ceasing to be concerns only the way in which we talk. For when Socrates ceases to be pale, we can also describe this change as an unqualified ceasing to be: the pale Socrates ceases to be, period (*Gen. Corr.* A4, 319b25–27). Hence, the question arises whether conversely, the death of Socrates can also be described as a case of *qualified* ceasing to be. When the pale Socrates unqualifiedly ceases to be, Socrates ceases to be pale. Now Socrates drinks the hemlock, tells Crito that he owes a cock to Asclepius, and ceases to be, period. But perhaps there is something of which we may properly say that it ceased to be *something* by changing from the living Socrates into the dead Socrates. This something would have undergone a qualified ceasing to be: it ceased to be the living Socrates, but did not cease to be, period (Cf. Gill 1989, p. 54). And there seems to be something that responds to this description, at least when we narrow down our focus to the immediate time instant when Socrates dies. What may or may not be Socrates is the organic matter that is left behind immediately after his death. But if there is such a parcel of matter that may or may not be Socrates, we should also say that during his lifetime, this matter *was* Socrates. And then it seems that Socrates is not a basic and primary substance. When someone points at Socrates and asks what this is, we should say that it is an ensouled parcel of matter: a heap of organic matter in a certain arrangement such as to be capable of certain movements. If this is so, “Socrates” is not the most basic answer to the question what this is. The really basic subject appears to be his matter.

If there is any such tension between the *Categories* and the *Physics*, it must have troubled Aristotle in Z3, for here he argues that matter does not qualify as a substance, and that accordingly, the question what a thing is may not be answered by reference to its matter. This is, at least, the common story.<sup>2</sup>

I will argue that there is no real conflict between the picture of (primary) substances in the *Categories* and the doctrine of matter and form. In both contexts, Aristotle supposes that concrete substances are composite entities with a formal and a material aspect, but he denies that any of these aspects may be considered in isolation. If Aristotle gets his point home, it is indeed misleading to say, pointing at Socrates, that what this is is a parcel of matter in a certain shape. The only correct answer would be that it is a human being: the kind of thing that unqualifiedly ceases to exist when Socrates dies.

### 3 On Denuding

Let me now turn to the concept of matter that Aristotle seems to introduce in *Metaphysics* Z3. In Z3, Aristotle argues that the primary substances that we should study in metaphysics cannot be the ultimate matter of all things in this sense. He proceeds, roughly, in three steps. First, he argues that if we strip a physical thing of everything that is said of something else, we end up with matter; in a certain sense of matter. Second, he shows that matter in this

<sup>2</sup> Cf. for instance Witt (1989), Gill (1989), Loux (1991), Bostock (1994).

sense is neither separable nor a “this such.” Third, since primary substances should be both separable and a “this such,” Aristotle concludes that matter in the specified sense cannot be the primary substance he was looking for.

Consider again Socrates. How are we supposed to strip him of what may be predicated of him?<sup>3</sup> One way of doing so might be to kill him. After his death, there is something left over, and this will be his matter. But first, this matter will still have some of the features Socrates had. At least initially, it will have his size, color and smell. Second, the more general context of the argument requires that we go on stripping, until we have reached the ultimate substratum of qualities. But there is no way of physically denuding a thing of *all* its properties, since it seems that after each step, we will be left with something that has further properties. After all, Aristotle also writes that the absence of a quality would also be a quality (1029a25–26). When we imagine a thing that lacks a certain quality, we therefore imagine a thing that has another quality, namely the quality of lacking the first. There is strictly no way of even only imagining a thing without any qualities (Stahl 1981).

Some scholars have suggested that instead of taking away the properties of a thing, we are only supposed to change them, or only to imagine them changed. If we can change the remains of Socrates regarding their shape, color, smell, etc., we will have shown that none of these qualities are essential to them, and since in every one of these changes from one quality to another, something must underlie that may be one or the other, we will have shown that there is something underlying the sum of all the changes that may as well have none of the qualities in question (Bostock 1994, p. 78).

But consider how Aristotle describes the change that occurs when one of the elements—fire, air, water, earth—changes into another (*Gen. Corr.* B1–4). All four elements, he tells us, may change into another. When water changes into air, it ceases to be cold and becomes hot. When air changes into fire, it remains hot, but turns dry and ceases to be moist. One should thus expect that there is something underlying such a sequence of changes from water to fire that is in itself neither cold, nor hot, nor moist. But this would imply that there is something more basic than the elements, which would imply that fire, air, etc. are really not elements after all. If the elements are indeed elementary, there can be nothing else into which they could be decomposed or analyzed. The only thing into which fire may be decomposed is fire, and this means that there is nothing in or underlying fire that would not be what fire is: hot and dry. The solution that Aristotle offers is that whenever something changes between moist and dry, it must remain either hot or cold, and whenever it changes between hot and cold, it must remain either moist or dry. Hence, although there is something that remains the same in each change, there is nothing that remains the same throughout all changes—except for a disjunctive property. Whenever we look at the changing thing, it will necessarily be one of the elements and have exactly two of the qualities that define them. But at no instant will there be anything that is neither hot nor cold (or neither moist nor dry). This however means that there is no general way of reaching a more basic level by freely varying the attributes of a thing. It would not work for the elements. What we cannot strip away from the elements are disjunctive properties: every element must be either hot or cold, and cannot be neither hot nor cold (and likewise for moist and dry).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Aphrodisiensis calls this procedure “denuding” (ἀπογυμνωσις) in his *Commentary to Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, CAG 1, 464,23–29; Cf. Dancy (1978, p. 395).

<sup>4</sup> Some say that Aristotle believed in a “prime matter” that would underlie the change of one element into another, some deny this (Bostock 1994, p. 73). I ignore this issue here since as Charlton points out, “there will be no empirically discoverable difference between a world which contains prime matter and a world ... in which there is nothing more basic than the elements” (Charlton 1983, p. 197). In any case, all we can say is that when fire turns into air, the hot turns from dry to moist; whatever it may be that is hot here.

Hence, even if we change all things in all their respects, this need not amount to stripping all properties away. There will be at least some disjunctive property that resists denuding. This means that changing all properties of the remains of Socrates need not yield anything that does not have any of these properties. At any rate, it is not clear why a universal variation of attributes should leave us with matter. Given the remains of Socrates, we could also change them in such a way that we gradually replace parts, as we may change a circle by replacing the stuff out of which it is made. It is not at all clear why matter should survive such a procedure (Dancy 1978, pp. 396–397).<sup>5</sup>

However that may be, we do not arrive at anything that has no properties by taking away its properties, nor by changing all of them, since whatever we do to it, the thing in front of us will keep some disjunctive properties or take on some new negative properties. How are we supposed to strip a thing of its properties, then?

#### 4 τὸδε τι

In the course of his argument in Z3, Aristotle pronounces what sounds like an official definition of what it is to be matter:

I call matter that which is in its own right neither said to be such (τί), nor so many (πόσον), nor anything else by which a thing may be determined. For there is something of which each of these is said (κατηγορεῖται), and which itself has a being different from that of each of the categories—for while others are said of substance, the latter is said of matter—and so the last thing will in its own right be neither such, nor so many, nor anything else at all. (Z3, 1029a20–3)

This apparent definition is interesting because it does not refer to any actual, physical stripping. Or, more precisely, the stripping does not occur on the side of the thing, but rather on the side of the expression by which we refer to it. Matter, according to what Aristotle says here, is what is not *said* to be a “τί,” nor a “πόσον,” nor anything else by which one may specify what or how something is. Since “τί,” “πόσον” etc. refers the initial segment of the list of categories, we are apparently supposed to take a noun phrase that refers to a given thing and delete all parts from it that would fall under any of the categories. Some noun phrases are, of course, non-starters. If we take “Socrates,” for instance, and take away what would fall under one of the categories, we end up with nothing. But take, for instance, “the philosopher who taught Plato.” To teach is an action, Plato is a primary substance, being a philosopher is a quality, or, perhaps, a passion. What is left is “the ... who ...” since demonstratives and pronouns do not fall under any of the Aristotelian categories.

This is, I submit, what Aristotle suggests in Z3. The idea is that if we take a noun phrase that refers to a composite substance and delete all terms from it that have any descriptive content, we may be left with a phrase that exclusively refers to the matter: the ultimate subject of which all the descriptive bits are said. This reading has the considerable advantage that

<sup>5</sup> This is in fact a point that should trouble Aristotle in general. Living beings are capable of metabolism, that is, of remaining alive during a change of their matter. But since metabolism is certainly a kind μεταβολή, it plainly makes no sense to declare that matter is whatever remains the same during a change. When a living being changes its matter, even only a part of it, this change must still be describable in terms of the three principles, but that which underlies the change and may have this or the other matter cannot be the matter. It is not clear how Aristotle would describe this change; he might say that the so-called “material cause” of this change is the organism, and that which makes the difference is not a form, but the possession or lack of a certain quantity of stuff. In any event, the matter will not be the underlying substratum of the change.

to refer to a thing without mentioning its features is certainly not the same as referring to something that does not have any features (Stahl 1981, p. 178). Matter is, on this account, precisely what would correspond to a mere “this” and “that.”

The important detail to note is that Aristotle tells us to subtract first the “τί,” and then the other categories, starting with “πόσον.” But whereas “πόσον” is in fact the expression that Aristotle uses for the category of quantity, “τί” is not the word he uses for the category of primary substance. Rather, he refers to substances by means of the complex expression “τόδε τι” (Cat. 5, 3b10).<sup>6</sup>

Substances such as Socrates or a horse are referred to by “τόδε τι,” composite things that do not possess the same degree of substantial unity are more properly called “τόδε τοιόνδε,” as for instance the brazen sphere in *Metaphysics* Z8, 1033b21–24, or the bed in *De Partibus Animalium* A1, 640b27. These items are not substances bearing a substantial form, but only matter having a property. All in all, we might imagine combining these three linguistic devices such that a composite substance that has a property, such as the pale Socrates, would be canonically referred to as (τόδε + τι) + τοιόνδε.

What does the “τι” refer to?<sup>7</sup> The first category, (primary and secondary) substance, is basic because it is the answer to the question what a thing is. The other categories do not specify *what* a thing is but rather *how* a thing looks and feels, how it relates to others, etc. For them, Aristotle uses the general expressions “τοιόνδε” or “πόιον τι.”<sup>8</sup> This difference between what a thing is and how it is is also reflected in the way in which Aristotle introduces the so called *formal cause* in *Physics* B3. He writes: “In another way, the form or the paradigm, that is, the definition of the essence, and its genera, are called causes” (194b26–7). What he introduces here are not the qualitative features of a thing, *how* it is, but its essence: *what* it is. The essence is what one specifies in a definition, and a definition tells us what something is. But what Socrates is, for instance, is not a form, shape, or attribute; and hence, the formal cause (essence) is not a form, shape, or attribute. “Τι,” as part of the “τόδε τι,” denotes what a thing is, not only how it looks and feels.<sup>9</sup> It does not refer to one of its properties, but to its formal cause, which is also what Aristotle calls a *secondary* substance in the *Categories*. When he refers to it as such, he uses the phrase “τί ἐστι.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Cf. for this phrase Smith (1921), Frede and Patzig (1989/2, p. 15); Witt (1989, p. 163, fn. 15); Gill, in Scaltsas et al. (1994, p. 68).

<sup>7</sup> I disregard the grammatical distinction between τί (the interrogative pronoun *quid*) and τι (the indefinite pronoun *aliquid*). Both pronouns refer to the same in different modes: in a question or in an answer to this question. “Was” and “wat,” in German and Dutch, may also be understood in both ways (as both “what” and “something”).

<sup>8</sup> See *Met.* B6 (1003a9–10) and Z13 (1038b34–39a2) for τοιόνδε; *Cat.* 5 (3b13–16) for πόιον τι.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Loux (1991, p. 61): “τι” is a placeholder for a substance predicate; that is, for a reference to specific paradigmatic form.

<sup>10</sup> Apelt (1891, pp. 137–138); cf. also *Topics* 103b29. Incidentally, that secondary substances are not properties in the strict sense speaks against Tugendhat’s reading of the phrase “τόδε τι” (2003, p. 25, fn. 22). He writes that “τόδε τι” does not denote a “this somewhat” but “a this” and backs up this claim with a reference to *Categories* 3b13–17, where Aristotle first uses “τόδε τι” and then “πόιον τι,” such that in both phrases, the “τι” seems to indicate particularity rather than being of a certain kind (“πόιον τι” = a particular quality, “τόδε τι” = a particular “this”). But in this passage, Aristotle says that *secondary substances* are “πόιον τι.” Now secondary substances are indeed a highly special kind of quality. Hence, the “τι” in “πόιον τι” does not refer to the particularity of a quality token, but indicates that what we have here is a special kind of quality. Hence it performs the same function as I suppose it does in “τόδε τι”: a τόδε τι is a special kind of particular individual and the τι refers to what is special about it, just as secondary substances are special kinds of qualities, and the “τι” indicates that they are somehow special. The same holds true, e.g., for ἐν τι in Z12, 1037b27, and τοιόνδε τι in the *Sophistical Refutations* 178b38: “τι” does not indicate particularity, but that a unity or the bearer of a quality is of a certain kind.

Let us return to the passage from Z3. We see now that the argument of Z3 does not in any way refer to the analysis of change in the *Physics*, but rather to the structure of the expression “τόδε τι” that Aristotle already uses in the *Categories*. What he calls matter here is not the underlying subject of a change, but that which one part of the expression “τόδε τι” might be taken to refer to when considered in isolation. Given that the canonical way of referring to composite substances is by the composite expression “τόδε τι,” it is a straightforward move to assume that one of the elements of this expression refers to the form of the substance and the other one to its bearer.

Take a reference to Socrates, of the general form “(τόδε + τι) + τοιόνδε” e.g. “this pale, snubnosed man sitting over there,” and denude it. Stripping it will proceed in two steps. First we take away the words that specify how Socrates looks and feels, such that the only words left are “this ... man ...” Now, Aristotle seems to argue in Z3, since an expression like “this man” is an instance of the general pattern “τόδε τι,” we may as well go on and take away the “τι” (“man”) such that only the “τόδε” (“this”) is left. This, since it is left at last and cannot be further stripped away, might seem to be the ultimate subject of predication. Matter is thus what corresponds to a mere “τόδε.” It is the “ὑποκείμενον ὡς κατὰ στέγησιν”: the τόδε τι deprived of its τι.<sup>11</sup>

Note that this does not mean that matter could never be a τόδε τι. Although the matter of living beings is not a substance in its own right, that out of which an artifact is made could already be a composite substance. Accordingly, Aristotle sometimes uses “τόδε τι” when he refers to matter.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, he also refers to secondary substances by “τόδε” or “τόδε τι.”<sup>13</sup> This is only to be expected since τόδε and τι are extremely basic and common words. We should certainly not expect that Aristotle always complies with the use of “τόδε” and “τι” he suggests in Z3.

In distinguishing between the τι and the other categories, Aristotle apparently tells us that there are two kinds of predication involved here. First, all categories other than substance are predicated of substances such as Socrates and this horse. Second, the category of substance is predicated of matter in the specified sense (*Met.* B1, 995b35; Z3, 1029a23-24; Z13, 1038b4-6). Whereas the τοιόνδε is predicated of a τόδε τι, it seems, the τι is predicated of a τόδε. Or, as Aristotle puts it in Θ7, 1049a34-36: where a form is said of a substance, the substance is the basic subject, but where a τόδε τι is said of something, the basic subject is its οὐσία ὄλική. Now since all ten categories are called κατηγοροῖα, that is, *predicates*, it should not be surprising that they all may be predicated of something, including the first one. One may *say of* someone that he is a man. What is surprising is that instead of saying that “man” is said of a composite that consists of matter, Aristotle apparently suggests that “man” is predicated of matter.<sup>14</sup> For when one says of someone that he is a man, one does not necessarily say of someone’s matter that *it* is a man.

<sup>11</sup> *Met.* H1, 1042b2-3. Cf. *Gen. Corr.* A2, 317a24-27; *Met.* Θ7, 1049a18 and 24-29. Cf. also Anscombe (1953, p. 86): “Now ‘this matter’ is τόδε but not τι, that is, it is designatable, identifiable, but it is not as such of any specific kind or necessarily possessed of this or that property or dimension.” Bonitz (1870) s.v. “ᾧδε”: “τόδε omnino id significat, quod sensibus percipitur.”

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle refers to matter as τόδε τι in *Physics* A7, 190b24-27. Cf. Dancy (1978, pp. 401-403).

<sup>13</sup> 1029a27-30: form as a τόδε τι, 1017b23-26 οὐσία is in one sense said of the τόδε τι, and in this sense it is ἡ μορφή κα- τὸ εἶδος. Note also the following passages, taken from Bonitz, where Aristotle refers to substances only by using “τόδε”: *Gen. Corr.* A3, 317b9, 21, and 28; *Met.* Z13, 1038b24; A1, 1069b11; N2, 1089a11 and b32. In *Met.* Z8, 1033a31-2, Aristotle writes that when we turn matter into a formed compound, what we produce is a τόδε; but here, τόδε may just function as a demonstrative referring to a composite substance.

<sup>14</sup> Although he also says in Z13, 1038b15, that substances are not predicated of any other thing.

A rather simple argument shows that Aristotle cannot mean that “man” is a property of Socrates’ matter (Witt 1989, chap. 4, §§4–5). For assume that “man” is an *essential* property of Socrates’ matter. This should mean that his matter cannot be anything other than a man, which is false. When Socrates dies, we have the matter without the man. Therefore, “man” should be an accidental property of Socrates’ matter. But this again cannot be what Aristotle wants, since whether Socrates is a man or not cannot depend on something else’s having some accidental property. This would upset the distinction between what something is (its essence) and how it looks and feels (its accidents). In the end, what this pale and snubnosed man is would depend on how his matter looks and feels. This would mean that all what-questions boil down to how-questions, and that this would not work out is what Aristotle is going to show in Z3.

## 5 The *Timaeus*

The idea that matter might be something of which a secondary substance is predicated gets Aristotle into considerable trouble. In this situation it is important to see that the concept of matter as that which may or should be referred to by a mere τὸδε is not Aristotle’s own concept of matter (Charlton 1970, pp. 136–145). In the end of Z3, Aristotle argues that if there were matter left after denuding a thing to a bare τὸδε, this matter would indeed be the primary subject of predication. But, he claims, there is nothing left. A bare τὸδε does not refer to anything, not even to matter. This shows that in Z3, Aristotle does not employ his own notion of matter. For plainly, “he has not clarified his own notion of matter by demonstrating its absurdity” (Gill 1989, p. 30).<sup>15</sup>

As Charlton (1983) has pointed out, the idea of matter as a bare τὸδε ultimately underlying all predication may be traced back to Plato’s *Timaeus*, although Plato does not use the word “matter” (ἄλη).<sup>16</sup> This is the relevant passage:

Rather, the safest course by far is to propose that we speak about these things in the following way: what we invariably observe becoming different at different times, such as fire, we should in any case not call this (τοῦτο) but in each case [we should call] that which is such (τὸ τοιοῦτον) fire, nor should we call this but always [call] what is such water. Nor should we ever call it something other of all the things at which we point and use the expressions “that” (τὸδε) and “this” (τοῦτο) and so think we are designating something, as though it has some stability. For it gets away without abiding the charge of “that” and “this,” or any other expression that indicts them of being stable. It is in fact safest not to refer to them by any of these expressions. Rather, what is such, coming around like what it was, again and again, that is the thing to call thus in each and every case. So it is safest to call that which is in each case such and such “fire,” and so with

<sup>15</sup> In *Met. Z8*, 1033a25–7, Aristotle refers back to the concept of matter he has introduced “before” and seems to confirm that he uses the term in this way. However, there is a way of reconciling this remark with the above claim. According to Aristotle, matter is not what an isolated τὸδε may be taken to refer to, but rather what a τὸδε potentially refers to when combined with a τῆ. Hence, his own concept of matter is not far from the one discussed in Z3: matter is not a bare τὸδε, but still a τὸδε as part of a τὸδε τῆ.

<sup>16</sup> Note also that a significant proportion of the relevant passages listed by Brunschvig 1979 involve a discussion of Plato. Owens (1967) claims that in Z3, Aristotle tries to reconcile his new scientific view on matter with the old naive logic of the *Categories*. This turns out to be wrong, since the substances in the *Categories* are already compound entities (τὸδε + τῆ), and Z3 is not concerned with anything like Aristotle’s own, let alone his *mature* concept of matter. At any rate, it is not clear why he should have taken his *mature* concept from the *Timaeus*.

everything that has becoming. But that in which they each appear to keep coming to be and from which they subsequently perish, that is the only thing to refer to by means of the expressions “that” and “this.” A thing that is some “such” or other, however, hot or white, say, or any one of the opposites, and all things constituted by these, should not be called any of these [i.e. “that” and “this”]. (49D-E; my modification of Zeyl’s translation)

Given that fire incessantly changes into something that is not fire, Timaeus advises us not to assume that fire really is *what* the thing we are referring to is. Rather, that which is fire is, properly speaking, something more basic that may have or not have the property of being fiery. Further, this underlying subject is what we should take to be the referent of the demonstratives “τοῦτο” and “τόδε.”

Before discussing the details, certain general qualifications are in order. First, Timaeus need not in this text present an account of the constitution of actual things in the world. The passage in which he claims that we should not call that which changes “fire” occurs in his description of the so called *precosmos*: the world before the demiurge has arranged and shaped things (Gill 1987, p. 47). The demiurge will shape the chaotic elementary constituents into triangles that will then more or less persistently be fire. Perhaps these triangles may be addressed as “this fire.” In the quoted passage, the point is only that in a world in which fire incessantly changes into something else, we should not speak of fire as the thing that changes, but rather of something else that changes and that is sometimes fiery, sometimes not.

Second, it is disputed how to translate the passage. I have chosen a translation that supports my point less well on the face of it; first in order not to forge evidence, and second because it seems to me the more faithful one. What is disputed is the meaning of the construction that Timaeus uses when he tells us, literally, “not this but in each case what is such to call fire” (μη τοῦτο ἀλλὰ τὸ τοιοῦτον ἐκάστοτε προσαγορεύειν πῦρ, 49D). This phrase may be consistently understood in two ways. First, he may tell us that we should not call this, the temporary manifestation of fieriness, “fire,” but that we should rather use the name “fire” for what is such. This is the reading I have chosen above. Second, he may want to tell us that we should refer to fire not by using the word “this,” but only by using the word “what is such.” The issue is, basically, whether to put “τοῦτο” and “τὸ τοιοῦτον” in quotes or, on the other hand, “πῦρ.” The second reading would connect to my reading of Aristotle in a more obvious and superficial way, since Timaeus would also make a point about the reference of demonstratives. He would say that strictly speaking the demonstrative “τοῦτο” on its own does not refer to the compound fire, but only to that which underlies this compound.

I prefer the first translation for the following reasons. First, the distinction between “this” and “what is such” does not work in the required way. Both terms refer to the underlying fiery thing, since this is precisely that which is such: this thing is what is fiery. Hence, if it is wrong to call fire a “this,” since “this” would refer to the temporarily fiery thing, it will be equally wrong to call fire “what is such,” since “what is such” would also refer to the temporarily fiery thing. (This is need not trouble advocates of the first translation, since here “this” may be taken to function as an anaphor rather than a demonstrative, referring back to the aforementioned manifestation of fieriness.)

Second, as has been noted by several commentators, in the *Theaetetus* Plato in fact denies that we may use the phrase “what is such” in order to refer to something that constantly changes (183B). Hence, we should prefer a reading that does not suppose a difference between the phrases “this” and “what is such.” The first translation does not do this. Timaeus tells us that we should not attach the name “fire” to this temporary manifestation of fieriness that we see, but rather to “what is such,” namely to the receptacle which may or may not be fiery.

But in fact, it is not easy to see any significant difference between the two readings.<sup>17</sup> On either reading, Timaeus draws a distinction between references to changing phenomena, and references to the underlying substratum that may be first such and then such, but in some sense remains the same. And he further claims that demonstratives only refer to the underlying thing, in two sentences the meaning of which is undisputed:

Nor should we ever call it something other, as though it has some stability, of all the things at which we point and use the expressions ‘that’ (τόδε) and ‘this’ (τοῦτο) and so think we are designating something. ... But that in which they each appear to keep coming to be and from which they subsequently perish, that is the only thing to refer to be means of the expressions ‘that’ and ‘this’.

I take it that Timaeus tells us, first, not to apply the name “fire” to that which undergoes constant change, but to apply it only to the compound thing that is in fact fiery. Second, he distinguishes between the function of such descriptive names as “fire” and non-descriptive terms such as “this” and “that”; and he recommends using non-descriptive terms for that which underlies a change, since descriptive phrases may eventually cease to refer to the same. These recommendations will concern us presently.

## 6 Predicate Logic

Advocates of the first translation may be troubled by the revisionist move according to which what everyone would call fire, the manifest phenomenon, is not really what we should call fire. Timaeus seems to say that we should not call fire “fire.” But Plato does such things. Further, especially to modern readers, this point should not seem as revisionist as one might think. For in telling us not to call the changing manifestation “fire,” what Timaeus recommends is only that we should keep in mind that fire is not the name of a property, but the name of something that has certain properties. In a world that constantly changes, Timaeus advises us not to use *descriptive* terms in order to refer to individuals, but only non-descriptive terms like indexicals, individual constants, and variables. In modern terms, we should refer to fire not by a descriptive term “F,” but rather by the complex expression “x such that Fx”; and we should formalize the sentence “fire is hot” not as “F is H,” but rather as “for all x: if x

<sup>17</sup> The dispute about how to read the construction “not this but what is such to call fire” is often confused with a quite different issue. For there are two different possible readings of either translation. According to the first translation, Timaeus might recommend not to call the thing that changes fire, but only to call either (a) the underlying receptacle, or (b) certain stable characteristics of that underlying receptacle that name. Similarly, in translation #2, he might recommend not to use “this” in order to refer to (a) the receptacle or (b) the stable characteristics of that receptacle (Cf. [Silverman 1992](#)). This issue is confused with the question which of the two translations is correct because it has also been raised in the article by Cherniss, in which he first recommended the alternative translation. Cherniss writes that according to his reading, “the only factors in generation that can properly be called by distinct names, ‘fire,’ ‘air,’ ‘water,’ etc. are the characteristics which being identical are severally distinct, not the unstable manifestations in phenomenal flux that cannot be clearly distinguished from another.” (1954, p. 124). This is indeed an obscure statement and Cherniss seems to go overboard here. It is much easier to assume that “this” refers to the receptacle, and not to draw an additional distinction between such features of the receptacle that change and others that do not change but are perpetually identical and are severally distinct, whatever that means. Gill is right in attacking Cherniss here, but I am less convinced by her alternative view that according to Timaeus, “this” really refers to the unchanging form (1987, p. 43). Rather, Timaeus seems to assume two unchanging things here, the paradigmatic forms and the receptacle, the combination of which yields something that changes. In any case, the message is clear. As Cherniss says, “the whole point . . . is that the proper reference for the term ‘fire,’ etc. is not the phenomenal flux of which men do erroneously try to assert them” (1954, p. 122). Rather, the reference of “fire” is something stable that underlies the change, whether this is the receptacle itself or one of its perpetually stable characteristics.

is F, then x is H.” This is what Timaeus means when he says that we should think of fire as “what is such”: we should think of it as “the x that is F.” And he adds that when we do so, that which is such is the receptacle. For the receptacle “turns watery and fiery, and receives the character of earth and air” (52D). But the variable “x” functions as a demonstrative by which we refer to that which is now fiery but may cease to be fiery.

Timaeus, in recommending ways of describing the precosmos, and Aristotle, in discussing the argument from Z3, consider the same issue. Timaeus tells us that the demonstratives “τοῦτο” and “τόδε” do not really refer to concrete things such as fire. Rather, they only refer to that which is such, namely the x that has the property of being fiery. Likewise, Aristotle suggests that by removing first the predicates (τοιόνδε) and then the term denoting the secondary substance (τι) from a referring expression, we might end up with a bare “τόδε” that would refer to the basic subject of predication. In fact, both discuss the very idea of predicate logic. Timaeus seems to advocate it, at least for the precosmos, whereas Aristotle rejects it.

There is, however, one significant difference between the passages from Plato and Aristotle: Plato does not employ the concept of matter. Rather, the receptacle, if this is the underlying thing he is referring to, is obviously not the matter of which things consist (Cornford 1935, p. 181). For instance, the receptacle is that in which things move, and if it is really supposed to stay perpetually the same, the receptacle itself cannot move. For assume that Socrates is really a perpetually unchanging receptacle x such that this x has the property of being socratic. Now when Socrates enters the room, for instance, this x does not enter the room. Rather, the property of being socratic changes its place, as it were, within x, the receptacle. Thus in Timaeian newspeak, Socrates does not really enter the room, but parts of the room start socratizing (in Quine’s sense, not in Marquis de Sade’s). If this is a concept of matter at all, it is the one that Aristotle attacks in *Physics* Δ2 (209b21–32). After all, the spatial location is something that a substance like Socrates may change, and hence it is one of its features, addressed by words falling under the category of *place*. Accordingly, in his discussion of the bare subject in Z3, Aristotle makes a subversive move: he tells us not only to denude Socrates of his look and feel, but also of the features that he has by virtue of his spatial location:

If matter is not a substance, it is hard to see what else could be; for when all else is taken off, nothing appears to remain. For the other things are attributes, products, and capacities of bodies; and length, breadth, and depth are quantities and not substances (for a quantity is not a substance). Rather, the substance is that primary thing to which these attributes belong. And yet when length, breadth, and depth are taken away, we see nothing remaining unless there be something that is determined by these [i.e. an x such that x has these attributes]; so that to those who consider the question in this way matter alone must seem to be substance. (1029a10–20)

What Aristotle wants to show in Z3 is that the underlying subject of predication as Timaeus has it in mind does not qualify as a substance. If we take Timaeus’ suggestion to the extreme, and this is what Aristotle does by deleting all descriptive words from noun phrases, we do not end up with a substance, but only with a bare τόδε. And, as Aristotle says in the concluding section of the argument:

For those who adopt this point of view, matter turns out to be substance. But this is impossible, since substances seem to be most of all separate and a τόδε τι, and for this reason the form and the compound would seem to be substance more than matter is. (1029a26–30)

That the bare “τόδε,” allegedly referring to what is such, does not refer to a τόδε τι follows immediately. After all, we have taken the “τι” away, and so cannot use it any longer in order to refer to a τόδε τι. We still need to understand why the bare “τόδε” does not refer to anything that would be separate.

## 7 Separability

What does it mean to be separate? Given our linguistic interpretation of denuding, the most obvious way to make sense of separability is the following: “τόδε” does not refer to anything separate because “τόδε,” when separated, does not refer.<sup>18</sup>

Aristotle thus tells us that we cannot refer to a substance by a word that requires a supplemental “τι” in order to refer. His view is that “τόδε” refers to a substance only in combination, only as part of “τόδε τι.” As he puts it, matter is not *actually* a τόδε τι; but only potentially (H1, 1042a27–28; cf. Z7, 1032a12–b6). I take this to mean that matter is that about a thing to which a “τόδε” refers only potentially, namely when it is combined with a “τι.”<sup>19</sup> Without a “τι,” “τόδε” does not actually refer to anything, but given the possibility of adding a “τι,” we may say that it potentially refers to the thing; and more specifically, to the material aspect of the thing.<sup>20</sup>

Ontologically speaking, that to which a bare τόδε refers is thus only potentially a substance. Now it is important to see that to be something potentially or actually does not make any *qualitative* difference. Although matter is only a potential substance and matter together with paradigmatic form is an actual substance, *what* they are potentially and actually is the exact same. What the matter of Socrates potentially is, is precisely what Socrates actually is. The potential Socrates is the same kind of thing as the actual Socrates, only in a different modality. That is, in order to say what it is to potentially be Socrates, one has to mention the exact same things as one would in saying what it is to be the actual Socrates. If there is a definition of what it is to be Socrates at all, this will also be the definition of what it is to be Socrates’ matter (H6, 1045b17–22).<sup>21</sup> The mortal remains of Socrates differ from Socrates in this crucial respect: whereas Socrates may or may not be pale, we can characterize what he is without referring to any of these two states. His remains, however, are what they are only because they once made up Socrates, and there is no way of specifying what they are that would not sooner or later refer back to the actual Socrates. In this sense, Socrates is separable and his matter is not. It is not possible to refer to the matter of a substance in separation: a “τόδε” without a “τι” does not refer to anything.

<sup>18</sup> Preiswerk (1939, pp. 85–86) accordingly writes that the τόδε τι is not composed of two parts that would have a meaning in isolation.

<sup>19</sup> Apelt (1891, p. 143) suggests that τόδε relates to τόδε τι as ἐκεῖνο relates to ἐκεῖνό τι in *An. Post.* 83a24. That is, τόδε refers to something that is (potentially or actually) a substance of a certain kind, whereas τόδε τι refers to a kind of substance; and τι in isolation would refer to its kind.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Tugendhat (2003, p. 90), “das ὑποκειμενον der οὐσία ... ist δυνάμει τόδε τι.” Tugendhat argues that the same holds true for the εἶδος: in separation, it is also only potentially a τόδε τι (115).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Sellars (1977, p. 118); Charles in Scaltsas et al. (1994). Witt (1989, p. 141): “By holding that matter should be viewed as potentiality, and form as actuality, Aristotle is taking a radical step in denying independent definitions to matter.”

## 8 Matter is not an Attribute

So far I have pointed out certain affinities between the concept of matter as discussed in Z3 and the receptacle as it figures in the *Timaeus*, and I have shown that according to Aristotle, the concept of matter in question does not refer to a substance, since it does not denote a separate τὸδε τι. It remains to be shown that according to Aristotle, the Platonic concept of matter is the wrong concept of matter. Since Aristotle repeatedly inserts qualifications such as “to those who consider the question in this way” or “for those who adopt this point of view,” we may guess anyway that what he presents in Z3 is not his own conception of matter. But assume, for the sake of argument, that this is not so and that Aristotle tells us what matter is in his own opinion. We know from the conclusion of Z3 that matter in the specified sense is not a separate substance; hence we should ask what else it could be. We may take the cross-classification of entities that Aristotle suggests in *Categories* 2 as our guideline. Some things are said of a subject, some are not, and some things are present in a subject, some are not. This yields four classes of things: (1) concrete, individual substances, referred to as τὸδε τι, which are not said of anything else and do not exist in anything else; (2) paradigmatic forms, which are said of substances but do not exist in anything else; (3) attributes, referred to by “τοιοῦνδε” or “πῶσον τι” which exist in other things and are said of them; finally (4) particular property instances that exist in substances, but are not said of them (1a20–b9). The last may sound controversial, but what is meant is only that, for instance, we do not say that a white thing *is* whiteness, but rather that it possesses whiteness. Whiteness is not said of the thing, but said to be present in it. On the other hand, with regard to the color “white” itself, which is a being of type (3), we say of a white thing that it *is* white.

It should in any case be clear that matter is not a substance (1), and not a paradigmatic form (2). The remaining possibility is that matter might be an attribute, either universal (3) or particular (4). This latter option seems plausible on the face of it, since we see things changing with regard to their matter, and we have just shown that the matter cannot be specified apart from that of which it is matter. In an instructive paper on the Aristotelian concept of matter, Russell Dancy has made this suggestion:

[Aristotle] is suggesting, I think ..., that the picture according to which the matter of a thing appears as the subject for its predicates is back-to-front: the material constitution of a thing ought more properly to appear in predicate position, so that, if fire were prime and air second, it would be better to say that air is fiery, as one says that Socrates is pale, ambulating, moving, and so on. (1978, p. 411)

According to this view, when Aristotle tells us in Z3 to take away the length, breadth and depth of a thing, he is already speaking of its material constitution. The proper way of denuding a thing would be to take away all its attributes, including matter. Unsurprisingly, what is left is not matter, but a bare nothing. Further evidence for this view may be seen in the fact that Aristotle sometimes speaks favorably of the custom of treating the material constitution of a thing as one of its features. For instance, we call a sphere brazen, and a bench wooden instead of calling the brass spherical or the wood bench-like. Aristotle coins a general phrase for this purpose and says we do not call a thing “τὸδε” but “ἐκείνον” (“thaten”) when it consists of “that” (*Met.* Z7 1033a5–23; Θ7 1049a18–b2).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Beere argues that in general, Aristotle advocates an “*adjectival* conception of matter” (2006, p. 304), at the same time acknowledging that there are profound differences between qualitative properties and matter (326). Beere’s alternative between substantival and adjectival accounts, however, seems to me to be incomplete; the correct account must be one that differs equally from both.

Now if matter is an attribute of a thing, Aristotle does not present his own account of what it is to be matter in Z3: matter cannot be what is left when we take away the attributes, because matter *is* one of these attributes. However, it is not clear whether this is what we should say. For matter certainly cannot be an attribute of a thing on a par with its other attributes. First, the matter that is left behind when Socrates dies is certainly the same matter as the one that formerly belonged to him. In general, however, particular attribute instances depend for their existence on the substance of which they are attributes, and this should mean that Socrates' matter ceases to be as soon as Socrates ceases to be. But this is not the way in which matter is inseparable. It still exists when Socrates does not; though it is only what it is, matter of Socrates, because it once belonged to him. Second, as we have seen, Aristotle says that in some sense, the paradigmatic form of a thing may be said of its matter: "while others are said of substance, the latter is said of matter" (1029a23–24, 1043a5–6).<sup>23</sup> It would not make much sense to say that all τοιόνδε is said of a τόδε τι, and that the τι is said of a τόδε, if the τόδε were another τοιόνδε. But if matter were an attribute, it would be a τοιόνδε. Third, although Aristotle qualifies the claim that matter is the basic subject of predication in Z3, he still concludes that there are three kinds of subject: matter, form, and the composite, only that the form and composite are subjects in a more proper sense (Z3, 1029a29–30; H1, 1042a26–31). Finally, Aristotle does not indifferently approve of the custom of calling things "thaten" (Gill 1989, p. 123). For instance, he actually finds it misleading to call a bench wooden, since in this case, the wood can be characterized as such independently of the bench. He approves of it in such cases as the dead Socrates. The matter that makes up the remains of Socrates was not a separable constituent of Socrates. As we have seen, the matter that is left behind after the death of Socrates can be specified as such only with a view to the actual Socrates. This means that as long as it actually is the matter of the living Socrates, it does not constitute a separate part of him. In this sense, the matter of living beings is entirely absorbed by their organisms (cf. Gill 1989). It may be seen outside captivity only before it enters the organism and after it leaves it, but then it will be the matter of Socrates only *potentially*, whereas it actually still is, say, a loaf of bread. (Or already a piece of fecal matter.) Conversely, as long as the matter belongs to Socrates, it is only potentially this bread or fecal matter. In such cases, where the matter is entirely absorbed by the thing to which it belongs, such that it can only be discerned as potentially something else, Aristotle encourages us to call the thing "thaten."

However that may be, we have only two possibilities. Either matter is an attribute, and then it should not be what is left over when we subtract all attributes from a thing. Or matter is not an attribute. But since matter is also not a substance or paradigmatic form, there would be nothing left that it could be. That is, when Aristotle demonstrates that the matter of Z3 is not a substance, he also demonstrates that *this* matter is nothing at all.

## 9 Conclusions

I have discussed the question whether the concept of matter that Aristotle introduces in *Metaphysics* Z3 is his own answer to the question what it is for something to be the matter of something; indirectly, I have thus also been concerned with this more general question. In Z3, matter is introduced as that which remains when all descriptive features are stripped away from a thing. I have suggested a linguistic reading of this stripping, according to which Aristotle tells us to delete all descriptive terms from a referring noun phrase. We are thus not

<sup>23</sup> Note, by the way, that he does not say that substance is *present in* matter.

supposed to imagine a thing without qualities, but only to refer to a thing without referring to its qualities. Hence, the question is whether matter is that to which we may refer by a bare demonstrative such as “τοῦτο” or “τόδε.” Aristotle’s answer is that “this,” as part of the phrase “this such” may be taken to refer to the material aspect of a substance. In separation, however, a demonstrative like “this” does not refer to anything, and hence it does also not refer to the matter of anything. The most basic referring expressions are already complex, at least in their canonical form “τόδε τι.” There is no way of referring to the matter of a thing without also referring to the thing.

The concept of matter that Aristotle introduces in Z3 by stripping a noun phrase of its descriptive content thus derives from Plato’s notion of the underlying receptacle of all becoming, which is also thought to be denoted by a bare “τόδε.” Plato recommends dividing our references to sensible things into references by means of a bare τόδε and descriptive predicates that are attached to them, much in the same way in which the atomic formulae of predicate logic are complex (Fx). When Aristotle denies that matter, in the sense of what is referred to by a bare τόδε, is substance, he rejects the ontological implications of this move. A bare τόδε cannot be a substance because it is not composite, not a τόδε τι, and not separable from such a composite. It cannot be the ultimate subject of all predication for the same reason. Whereas it is true that in some sense, we may say of Socrates’ matter that it is Socrates, since it is potentially Socrates, we do not thereby predicate a property of his matter.

The Aristotelian alternative to Plato’s underlying bare particular is the τόδε τι; and by using this phrase, Aristotle acknowledges already in the *Categories* that substances are composite entities that should be referred to as “what is this particular one and also of that general type.” Hence, in contrast to the usual story about Z3, the distinction between matter and form that Aristotle discusses there already appears in the *Categories* and is not something that began to trouble Aristotle only in his *Physics* and *Metaphysics*. It is not the distinction between two separable entities, but a distinction between two aspects that correspond to the parts of the canonical term for substances, the “this” and the “such.”

These considerations have certain implications for the question what it is, in general, to be matter. If Aristotle is right, as I take him to be, matter is what is referred to by a “this” as part of the canonical phrase “this such.” There is no way of referring to matter, as matter, in separation. But although all matter is essentially matter of something, this does not mean that there could be no prime matter in the sense of matter of everything. If there is any matter of which all material things consist, it is that to which the “this” in all canonical “this such” phrases refers.

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## Author Biography

**Boris Hennig** studied Philosophy and Theory of Science in Freiburg, Leipzig, and Dublin. His PhD about “Conscientia in Descartes” was awarded 2005 with the *Karl Alber Preis* and published in 2006. In Spring 2006, he taught as a Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Pittsburgh. He is currently a visiting scholar at the University of Pittsburgh and the Humboldt Universität Berlin.