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Alexander of Aphrodisias on the Principle of Non-Contradiction: The Argument “from Signification”

In Metaph. 4.4, Aristotle sets out to refute the views of those who deny the principle of non-contradiction. The nature and scope of these arguments have been a matter of scholarly controversy. Elizabeth Anscombe accurately described this text as “long, difficult and bad-tempered” but pointed out that in it Aristotle was making a connection between his ontology and the principle of non-contradiction.¹ Some prominent logicians questioned the status of PNC as an indemonstrable first axiom.² Some leading Aristotle scholars saw his arguments in support of PNC in Metaphysics as a sign of his departure from a demonstrative model of science developed in the Posterior Analytics.³ Clearly this difficult text has been used to support several very weighty claims, and even this alone would make understanding it important for students of Aristotle. Alexander’s interpretation has received some critical attention in recent scholarship,⁴ but many questions still remain.

In this paper, I would like to provide an outline of Alexander's reading of Aristotle's argument which will allow us to see how his position stands in the light of contemporary discussions of Aristotle's argument. After a very brief summary of the main points of Aristotle's argument in 1.4 in § 1, I discuss (in § 2) Alexander's interpretation of elenctic demonstration (with special attention to his distinction between the elenchos proper and the more general argument from signification), and in § 3, I try to show that Alexander develops his own version of unrestricted

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2 For a good analytical summary, see Berti (2014).

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essentialist interpretation of Aristotle’s argument which has some philosophical merits.

1 Outline of Aristotle’s Argument

The discussion of the principle of non-contradiction is answering the question raised in the second aporia of Metaph. 3.2: “Is it the task of a single science to investigate both the ultimate principles of being and the basic principles of reasoning (e.g., the principle of non-contradiction)? Or is it the task of fundamentally different sciences?” (996b26–997a15). In Metaph. 4.3, the question is reformulated to ask whether it belongs to the same or different sciences to treat of what is called in theoretical disciplines “axioms” and of being. Aristotle’s answer supports the first disjunct: it is the task of the single science, for these principles belong to all the things that are rather than to some particular kind separate from others (1005a22–23).

In the space of a dozen lines in Metaph. 4.3, we have several formulations of the principle:

PNC-I ([A] belonging and not belonging to [B]): It is impossible for the same thing both to belong and not to belong to the same thing at the same time and in the same respect—and let us assume we have drawn all the further distinctions that might be drawn to meet logical complaints (1005b19–20)

PNC-II (contrary attributes belonging to the same thing): It is impossible that contrary attributes should belong at the same time to the same subject (the usual qualifications must be presupposed in this premiss too) (1005b26–27)

PNC-III ([A] being and not being [B]): It is impossible for anything at the same time to be and not to be (F) (1006a3–4)

PNC-IV (veridical or semantic): It is impossible that it should at the same time be true to say of the same thing both that it is man and that it is not man. (1006b33–34)

In Metaph. 4.3, Aristotle establishes that the PNC is the “firmest” principle about which it is impossible to be mistaken. Aristotle’s goal, as he explains, is not to demonstrate (i.e., scientifically prove) the PNC: this is impossible as it would require

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5 For a recent study of Aristotle’s overall strategy in Metaph. 4.3–6, see Crubellier (2008).
6 For a recent detailed study of these formulations and on relation of PNC to other logical principles making up the Law of Contradiction in Aristotle and later tradition, see Cavini (2007 and 2008).
a derivation of PNC from some prior principle. Rather, his goal is to show that given that it is true, it is necessary to believe it and rejecting it is implausible.\footnote{This argument has been at the centre of controversy; see Łukasiewicz (1993), pp. 22–48, Barnes (1969), and Wedin (2004).}

Aristotle’s argument in \textit{Metaph.} 4.4 can be divided into three parts. The first part (Aristotle, 1005b35–1006a28, Alexander’s commentary \textit{in Metaph.} 271, 24–275, 20) opens with a methodological preamble, in which Aristotle tells us that there are some people who deny the PNC in full earnest, and some others still who ask for its demonstration. This latter query is, for Aristotle, a sign of poor education (1005b35–1006a11).

Despite this disparaging remark, Aristotle still goes on to say that it is indeed possible to demonstrate the PNC, not by an unqualified demonstration, which would require deriving the PNC from a more fundamental principle, but by a qualified one, which he calls “elenctic”, or “refutative”. This kind of demonstration will be effective against those people who subvert the proof of the “firmest principle” in \textit{Metaph.} 4.3 by claiming that they are happy to deny its assumption, i.e., the truth of PNC, and so also on rational grounds deny it as the principle governing their beliefs. Aristotle promises to show how they cannot avoid committing to PNC on pain of being unable to engage in any rational discourse. (1006a11–28).

In the second part (Aristotle 1006a28–1007b18, Alexander 275, 23–290, 21), after the introduction of the concept of elenctic demonstration and the general explanation of the way it works, Aristotle sets out the details of the argument from signification. It is the longest single argument in this chapter. Its main line is punctuated by a number of departures building up towards additional arguments that result in several important points and distinctions which Aristotle uses to respond to possible difficulties or counterexamples and stave off any misreadings of the proposed argument. I’ll look at its main steps in the course of my discussion of Alexander’s interpretation.

The third part contains six shorter arguments in which Aristotle goes on to show further implausible consequences of the denial of the principle of non-contradiction.\footnote{Argument from monism (1007b18–1008a2, Alexander 290, 24–292, 21), argument from the law of excluded middle (1008a2–7/292, 24–293, 32), arguments against partial and total denial of PNC (1008a7–34/293,35–2976), argument from bivalence (1008a34–b2/2977–25), argument from truth and pragmatic (1008b2–31, 297, 28–300, 22), argument from the more and less (1008b31–1009a5/300, 24–301, 25).}

My main focus in this paper is on the elenctic demonstration and the argument from signification which correspond to the first and second parts of the overall argument of Gamma 4.
2 Alexander on Elenctic Demonstration

Aristotle’s argument in Metaph. 4.4 starts with an explanation of the goals and epistemic status of his proofs in defense of the PNC. These proofs are addressed to those opponents who would not accept the PNC and would ask for its demonstration. Aristotle indicates that although the principle does not need a demonstration, there must be a rational way of establishing the truth of the principle for its opponents, by showing that some of their assumptions depend on it, and so they cannot deny it without denying also some of those assumptions.

(T1) (1) But it is possible to demonstrate by way of refutation also about this, that it is impossible, if only the disputant says something. If he says nothing, it is ridiculous to look for a speech in response to one who has a speech of nothing, in so far as he has not; such a person, in so far as he is such is similar to a plant. (2) I say that an elenctic demonstration differs from a demonstration because someone who is demonstrating would seem to be begging the question, whereas if another were to be responsible in such a way it would be refutation but not a demonstration (1006a11–18)10

This “demonstration by refutation” or “elenctic demonstration”11 must be different from both a standard demonstration and a standard elenchos. We already know the reason why it cannot be a standard demonstration: a demonstration would need an even more fundamental principle as its premiss, and this Aristotle will not concede. It cannot be an elenchos proper, because an elenchos is a reduction to a contradiction,12 but Aristotle’s opponents will not be taking a contradiction in their claims as a sign of defeat, as it is their position that it is not problematic.

The logical structure of the elenctic demonstration of the impossibility of the denial of PNC mirrors the dialectical reductio ad absurdum in the following way.

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9 ‘Speech’ translates λόγος, the word that is rendered differently in different translations. In this paper I largely follow Kirwan’s translation of Metaphysics Gamma and Madigan’s translation of Alexander’s commentary. In both cases light modifications will be obvious (needed in part for some consistency of vocabulary). Kirwan translates λόγος as ‘statement’, while Madigan prefers ‘speech’. There are many other possibilities. I will keep the translation ‘speech’ for both Aristotle and Alexander, understanding by it a meaningful speech which can be used by the parties in a dialectical argument rather than any utterance.

10 (1) ἔστι τ’ ἀποδείξεως ἐλεγκτικῆς καὶ περὶ τοῦτοῦ ὃτι ἀδύνατον, ἐν μόνον τι λέγη ὃ ἀμφιβολῶν· ἄν δὲ μὴθέν, γελοιών τὸ ἔτειν λόγον πρὸς τὸν μηθένος ἔχοντα λόγον, ἣ μὴ ἔχει· ὅμως γὰρ φυτῶν ὁ τοιοῦτος ἢ τοιοῦτος ἢ δῆ. (2) τὸ δ’ ἐλεγκτικῶς ἀποδείξεως ἔλεγχων διαφέρειν καὶ τὸ ἀποδείξθαι, ὅτι ἀποδεικνύων μὲν ἄν δὸξειν αἰτεῖσθαι τὸ ἐν ἀρχῇ, ἄλλου δὲ τούτῳ αἰτίου ὄντος ἔλεγχος ἄν εἰη καὶ οὐκ ἀποδείξεις.

11 Metaph. 4.4: 1006a15. See a fine discussion of this passage in Crubellier (2008).

12 An. Pr. 2.20, 66b11, 8. See also Soph. El. 9, 170b110, 171a2.4.
While in the *reductio*, the respondent aims to hold on to his professed beliefs and avoid the trap that will lead him to a contradiction, in our special case the respondent is happily embracing any contradictory statement and the dialectician’s task is to force him into making a statement that would prove that he cannot be committed to a contradiction.

Formalizing a standard dialectical discussion will give us something like this:

\[ \{ \Gamma, \{ B \in \Gamma \mid A \& \neg A \} \} \vdash \neg B \]

Here \( \Gamma \) stands for any beliefs the respondent may have, and \( B \) is a particular belief that entails a contradiction. In order to avoid the contradiction, the respondent must reject \( B \) (deriving \( \neg B \)).

Formalizing the elenctic demonstration will give us the following strange result:

\[ \{ \Gamma, \{ B \in \Gamma, (A \& \neg A) \mid \neg B \} \} \vdash \neg (A \& \neg A) \]

Here, \( \Gamma \) stands for any beliefs the respondent may have, and \( B \) is a particular belief that is so important to the respondent, that whatever formula entails its denial must be rejected, even if this leads the respondent to the denial of the contradiction, to which he was committed to begin with.

P. Gottlieb has aptly called this proof “the elenctic demonstration turned upside down”.\(^{14}\) The respondent is forced to deny the contradiction because denying one of his other premisses, \( B \), is still less acceptable to him. It is very hard to imagine what kind of a dilemma could be so powerful as to force the denier of the PNC to drop this commitment of his. As M. Crubellier has pointed out, it is the task of a questioner to discover the kind of premiss that the respondent will not be able to deny.\(^ {15}\)

An important constraint for the questioner is that his proposed premiss cannot involve any reference to the law of contradiction. Aristotle describes this step, i.e., the premiss of the proof supplied by the opponent to make the refutation possible, as satisfying a condition “if only the disputant says something” (T1.1). The

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13 I am grateful to Stephen Menn for discussing the formalism with me (he is not responsible for the final version).
14 Gottlieb (2009).
meaning of “says something” has been controversial. We will take a look at Alexander’s understanding of this condition.

Alexander generally seems to be treating Aristotle’s argument as dialectical, because its main purpose is the refutation of those who object to the PNC, and because by refuting them and showing the reasons for accepting the PNC, one still contributes to the elucidation of the principles of science, which is one of the main tasks of dialectic outlined by Aristotle in Topics 1.2. 16

Alexander begins his analysis of this proof by describing the difference between the demonstration *simpliciter* and the elenctic demonstration.

(T2) (1) The one who demonstrates something without qualification assumes certain things as primary and more familiar than the thing to be demonstrated, and attempts in this way to demonstrate the proposition. (2) But it is not possible to assume anything primary and more familiar than this axiom, as has been said [1005b12–25], and so it is not possible to demonstrate it either. (3) Further, one who assumes from himself 17 and posits that everything either is or is not what he says it is will seem to be begging the question, i.e., to be assuming in advance the object of the inquiry, for this is what the inquiry was about. (4) Since, however, the refutation is carried on in reply to someone else, i.e., is derived from what the respondent posits (a refutation is a syllogism that leads by way of questioning to a contradiction), it can also be carried on by way of such premisses. (5) For such a syllogism is not carried on by way of premisses that are primary, nor will one appear to beg the question [by assuming this] from himself, if the respondent agrees that everything either is or is not something which it is said to be. (6) For it is he who is responsible for such a syllogism: the one who thinks that things immediately familiar should be proven, and who is being forced out of shame to grant these things; (7) if the one demonstrating posited these things from himself, he would seem to be begging the question. (8) For as Theophratus said in his On Affirmation, demonstration of this axiom is forced and contrary to nature. 18

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16 I have shown in Kupreeva (2017) that Alexander takes this task very seriously.
17 ‘From himself’ (αὐτοῦ) means from own decision rather than being proposed by the opposing party in a dialectical debate. This formula is standardly used by Alexander in this discussion for this kind of signposting. Thanks to Stephen Menn for flagging and discussing this.
18 (T2) (1) ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἀπλῶς ἀποδεικνύως λαβὼν πρῶτα τινα καὶ γνωριμώτερα ἄντα τοῦ δεικνυόμενου, οὔτω τὸ προκείμενον ἀποδεικνύναι πειράται. (2) οὐχ οὖν τε δὲ πρῶτον τι καὶ γνωριμώτερον τούτου λαβεῖν, ὥς προείριται, ὥστε οὔδε ἀποδείξει αὐτὸ οὖν τε. (3) ἐτὶ ἂν ἀυτοῦ λαμβάνων τε καὶ τίθεις πάν εἶναι τούτῳ ὁ λεγεῖ ἢ μὴ εἶναι δόξει τὸ ἐν ἀρχῇ αἰτεῖσθαι καὶ τὸ ἐτούτου προ- λαμβάνειν, ἐπεὶ περὶ τούτου ἡ ζήτησις ἢν. (4) ὁ μέντοι ἔλεγχος ἐπεὶ πρὸς ἄλλον γίνεται καὶ ἐξ ὧν ὁ προσδιαλεγόμενος τίθησιν (ἐστὶ γάρ ἔλεγχος συλλογισμὸς δι’ ἐρωτήσεως εἰς ἄντιφασιν ἄγων), δύναται γίνεσθαι καὶ διὰ τῶν τοιούτων. (5) οὔκετο γὰρ οὔτε διὰ πρῶτων ὁ τοιοῦτος συλλογισμός, οὔτε τὸ ἐν ἀρχῇ λαμβάνειν τις παρ’ αὐτοῦ δόξει, ἢ ὁ προσδιαλεγόμενος συγχωρήσῃ πάν ἢ εἶναι τι ὁ λέγεται ἢ μὴ εἶναι. (6) ἐκείνος γὰρ αἴτιος τοῦ τοιούτου ὁ ἄξιον δεικνυθαι τε τὰ αὐτόθεν γνώριμα καὶ διδόναι ταῦτα ἀναγκαζόμενος τε καὶ δυσώπωμενος, ὃ εἰ ὁ ἀποδεικνύως ἐτίθει ἂν’ ἀυτοῦ, ἐδοκεῖ ἃν τὸ ἐν ἀρχῇ αἰτεῖσθαι: (7) ὡς γὰρ εἶπε Θεόφραστος ἐν τῷ Περὶ καταφάσεως, βίαιος καὶ παρὰ φύσιν ἢ τούτου τοῦ ἄξιωματος ἀπόδειξις. (273, 4–19)
In (T2.1–2), Alexander follows Aristotle in seeing the PNC as the most primary and best known, indemonstrable principle. He further explains (T2.3) that this principle cannot be taken for granted by a questioner in a dialectical debate against the opponent of PNC, for this will be begging the question. But (T2.4) a valid refutation can have its premisses posited by the respondent. Alexander points out that the proof will be question-begging if the questioner “posits that everything is or is not what he says” (T2.3), but not if the same assumption is made by the respondent (T2.5). This expression “if the respondent agrees that everything either is or is not something which it is said to be” (T2.5) seems to be Alexander’s paraphrase of Aristotle’s “if only the disputant says something” (T1.1 above). So, Alexander’s interpretation of this condition is not yet explicitly connected with the argument from signification, but takes it to be the most general description of the respondent’s role as a source of premisses in this dialectical exchange. The nature of the premisses is not yet discussed.\(^\text{19}\) The report about Theophrastus’ appraisal of this demonstration as “being against nature” at (T2.8) suggests that Alexander’s interpretation at this point might have as its source Theophrastus’ work On affirmation and negation, which he seems to know well.\(^\text{20}\)

In a standard dialectical discussion, with both interlocutors recognising the decisive role of the PNC in the argument, the questioner asks general questions, presupposing “yes” or “no” answers, selecting these questions so as to challenge some known stock beliefs of the respondent. In our case of elenctic demonstration, the respondent denies the PNC. Therefore, the questioner can’t expect the respondent to be impressed if a contradiction is discovered in his views: it was licensed by the respondent to begin with, so having him reiterate it in his answers will not make a refutation. The only way to produce a refutation is somehow to force the respondent to give up on his denial of PNC without resorting to the PNC. In doing so, the questioner has to ask a question so that the respondent in his answer must voluntarily give up on his denial of PNC without a standard reductio ad absurdum. This is

\(^\text{19}\) So, Kirvan’s analysis of the phrase at 1006a12–13 as presupposing not only the argument from signification but in fact, the definitive formula as a part of the respondent’s speech is a bit far-fetched from the point of view offered by Alexander’s interpretation. K. Flannery sees it as a flaw of Alexander’s interpretation of Aristotle, attributing it to Alexander’s failure to appreciate the difference between the semantic and the dialectical argument (Flannery (2003), pp. 121–123). I am going to show that Alexander does indeed treat the elenctic refutation as a dialectical argument, but distinguishes it from the argument from signification which follows after the elenchos.

\(^\text{20}\) Fr. 68.3c and 85 A FHS&G and see next note.
why, probably, Theophrastus called this a “forced” proof, going against the nature of the proof.21

Aristotle gives us some more details about the nature of the premiss that can be elicited from the respondent:

(T3) The starting point, in reply to all such arguments, is not to insist that [the respondent] say that something is the case or is not the case, but to signify something for himself and for another: for this is necessary if he were to say something that is meaningful. (1006a18–21)

ἀρχῇ δὲ πρὸς ἄπαντα τὰ τοιαῦτα ὅ ὅ τὸ ἀξιόν ἢ εἶναι τι λέγειν ἢ μὴ εἶναι (τούτο μὲν γὰρ τὰξ ἀν τις ὑπολαβεὶ τὸ ἐξ ἄρχης αἰτεῖν), ἄλλα σημαίνειν γὲ τι καὶ αὐτῷ καὶ ἄλλω τούτο γὰρ ἁνάγκη, εἰπὲρ λέγοι τι.

The only request that comes from the questioner is that the respondent should “signify something for himself and for another”, i.e., commit to some meaningful speech. The option of not assigning any meaning to his own statements is ruled out by Aristotle in strong terms: someone who does not “say something” is not entitled to a search for the logos, as long as he has not got any logos himself, and this type of interlocutor is similar to a plant. (T 1.1, 1006a13–16) Thus the respondent’s choices are limited.

Alexander’s manuscript reading of Aristotle’s text at 1006a18–20 (T3) is different from our received text in the crucial bit of missing the negative particle ὅ where it is particularly important.22 So Alexander would have to comment on the text which prima facie says that the starting point in such arguments is precisely to insist that the respondent say that something is the case or not.23 Alexander spends some time developing a tortuous interpretation of this reading that would exempt the questioner from a charge of petitio principii. But Alexander is famously good at developing tortuous explanations to save the right meanings, and in this case, he gets the faulty text to say the same thing as the correct one. He explains that Aristotle means: “i.e., he [the respondent] should be asked whether it does not seem to him that everything that is said [to be something] is that or not, e.g., whether ‘man’ is or is not man, and likewise horse, dog, etc.”24 Where the problematic text would have a yes-or-no question concerned with something being

22 Our Ross’ text has “is not” (on the basis of EJ, with Alexander being the only source to report the reading without negation). See Kotwick (2012), pp. 130–134.
23 Flannery thinks Alexander is attracted to this reading; I don’t see any evidence for this in the arguments.
24 273, 24–26: τουτεστιν ἐρωτητέον αὐτόν εἰ μὴ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ πάν ἢ εἶναι τούτο ὃ λέγεται ἢ μὴ εἶναι, οίον ἀνθρωπον ἢ εἶναι ἀνθρωπον ἢ μὴ εἶναι, ὁμοίως ἢ πάν, κύνα, τὰ ἄλλα.
the case, Alexander’s interpretation renders it as the question concerned with the use of language, asking whether the objects to which the names are applied are or are not such as their names say they are.  

Alexander is still not too happy with this construal of the text and informs us that some manuscripts have the reading which seems to him to make better sense—this is the reading of the rest of our tradition of this text so far. On the basis of this superior reading he develops an interpretation of what “saying something” could mean as a step in a dialectical argument.

(T4) Alexander in Metaph. 274, 1-13

(1) And this way [i.e., with negation] the meaning is more perspicuous. (2) He thinks, then, that one should ask the respondent whether, when speaking, he signifies anything, to himself and to another, by the words he speaks and by the names he gives to things, and whether there is something to which he applies the name, i.e., which he wishes to signify when he speaks and produces the name. (3) For one who says that he signifies nothing by what he says and the answers he makes could not be saying anything to himself or to another, (4) nor will his thoughts which he uses [speaking] to himself in place of names and speech, be signifying anything; (5) for if these were signifying anything, it would be possible to put names on the things signified by the thoughts, and thus the spoken sound would also be signifying. (6) In this way the respondent would be agreeing that he was not using speech; for speech is the significant spoken sound (7) But he would likewise destroy the speech (logos) if he said that it no more signifies than does not signify. For if he did not signify whenever he said something, he would not be in conversation: for this one again is like a plant.

25 273,22–26: Τού ἐλεγκτικοῦ συναλλογισμοῦ καὶ τοῦ πρὸς ἄλλον γινομένου περί τῆς τοῦ προκειμένου ἀξίωματος διείξεως ἀρχήν φησιν εἶναι τὸ ἀξίων τὸν προσδιαλεγόμενον ἢ εἶναι τι λέγειν ἢ μή εἶναι, τοῦτον ἐρωτητέον αὐτὸν εἰ μή δοκεῖ αὐτῷ πᾶν ἢ εἶναι τοῦτο ὁ λέγεται ἢ μή εἶναι, οἷον ἄνθρωπον ἢ εἶναι ἄνθρωπον ἢ μή εἶναι, ὁμοίως ἵππον, κύκλια, τὰ ἄλλα.  

26 My interpretation here and in what follows differs from Flannery (2003). I think that Alexander realises the impossibility of the position described by the transmitted text and when interpreting it he uses the explanation he finds further down in Aristotle’s argument from signification to get the right sense. He is not very happy with the reading he has, pace Flannery.  

27 This reading is adopted by modern editions of the Metaphysics, see n. 22 above.  

28 (1) καὶ ἐστὶ γνωριμίατον τὸ λεγόμενον οὕτως, (2) ἄξιος δὲ ἐρωτάν τὸν προσδιαλεγόμενον, εἰ λέγων τι σημαίνει δι’ ὠν λέγει τε καὶ ὁνομάζει καὶ ἐστὶ καὶ ἀλλὰς, καὶ ἐστὶ τα καθ’ θ’ φέρων τὸ ὄνομα καὶ ὁ σημαίνειν βουλόμενος λέγει τε καὶ προφέρεται αὐτό. (3) ὁ γὰρ λέγων μηδὲν σημαίνειν δι’ ὠν λέγει τε καὶ ἀποκρίνεται, οὕτως οὔτ’ ἂν πρὸς αὐτὸν λέγοι τι οὔτε πρὸς ἄλλον. (4) οὐδὲ γὰρ τὰ νοηματα ἐστὶ σημαίνοντα τι, οἷς ἀντὶ τῶν ὀνομάτων καὶ τοῦ λόγου χρῆται πρὸς αὐτόν. (5) εἰ γάρ ἢν τι τάστα σημαίνοντα, ἢν ἄν τοὺς σημαινομένους υπ’ αὐτῶν καὶ ὀνόματα τίθεσθαι, καὶ οὕτως ἂν ἢν καὶ ὁ φωνὴ σημαινοσα. (6) οὕτω δὲ αὐτὸς ἂν ὀμολογεῖ ὑπ’ ἀριθμὸς λόγῳ ὁ γὰρ λόγος φωνὴ σημαντικὴ. (7) ὁμοίως δὲ ἀναφε βίον καὶ λέγει μηδὲν μᾶλλον σημαίνειν αὐτὸν ἢ μὴ σημαίνειν, εἰ οὖν μὴ σημαίνοι όταν λέγοι τι, οὔτ’ ἂν διαλέγεσθαι εἰπε· πάλιν γὰρ οὔτος ὁμοίως γίνεται φυτώ.
According to his explanation, the question asked by the dialectical questioner is whether the respondent signifies anything, to himself and to another, by the words he speaks and the names he gives to things. This is further paraphrased as asking whether there is something to which he applies the name and which he wants to signify when speaking and producing the name. We can now see that this question is exactly the same as the one that Alexander teases out of the incorrect MS reading, so there is no reason to think that he is somehow swayed by the wrong text or otherwise biased.\(^2^9\) If the respondent answers this question by “no, I don’t signify anything at all with what I say” or “I signify no more this than that”, he will destroy the logos.

In his summary of the elenchic demonstration, Alexander gives us two different versions of the argument:

(T5) **Alexander in Metaph. 274, 13–20**

(1) [First version] But if he grants and agrees that he signifies something by what he says, it will be possible for us to assume this and carry out a refutation of his proposition. He uses “demonstration” for “refutation”. (a) For the one who grants this is by that very fact treating something as definite. (b) For he grants that what is signified by each speech is something definite. (c) For what is no more this than that is indefinite. (2) [Second version] (a) Or the statement “there will, then, be something definite” [1006a24–25] is this very thing that is granted, that the respondent signifies something. (b) This being granted, then, “there will be demonstration” [1006a24], that is, refutation, of which refutation the cause will be not the refuter but the one being refuted, for he will be refuted on the basis of what he grants.\(^3^0\)

Both versions presuppose that the respondent grants that he “signifies something” with his speech. What is different is the explanation of how the *elenchos* is achieved in the two cases. According to (T5.1), the respondent grants that he signifies something by what he says. It is then possible for the questioner (“us” in the sentence) to proceed with the refutation from this assumption. “We” will establish that the respondent by granting us that he signifies something treats this something as definite. At (T5.1b) the proof moves from “granting that he signifies some-

\(^2^9\) The only difference between the two readings, on his presentation, is that the incorrect reading without οù formulates the question about meaning as a dilemma: something that the correct reading purports to be avoiding.

\(^3^0\) (1) ἰν δὲ διδό καὶ συγχωρῇ σημαίνειν δι’ ὡν λέγει, τοῦτο λαβόντας δυνατὸν ἔσται ἔλεγχον τοῦ προκειμένου ποίησασθαι ἀντὶ γάρ τοῦ ἔλεγχου τῇ ἀπόδειξις εἰρήσατο. (a) ὁ γὰρ τούτῳ δῶς ἡ δὴ τι ορίζει (b) δίδωσι γὰρ οὐρισμένον τι εἶναι τὸ ύπ’ ἐκάστου λόγου σημαίνομενον (c) ἀφίστον γάρ τὸ οὐδὲν μᾶλλον τοῦτο ἢ τοῦτο. (2) (a) ἢ τὸ ἔσται δὴ τι οὐρισμένον αὐτὸ τούτῳ δεδομένον τὸ σημαίνειν τὶ (b) τούτῳ δὴ δοθέντος ἔσται ἀπόδειξις τούτῳ ἔλεγχου, οὗ ἔλεγχου αἴτιος οὐχ ὁ ἔλεγχων ἄλλ’ ὁ ἔλεγχωμεν· ἕκ γὰρ ὃν διδώσων ἔλεγχεται.
thing by what he says” and that thing being definite to a universal claim that every 
logos signifies something that is definite. It is not clear whether we get an assent of 
the respondent to this move: this could be a part of this interpretation, or this gen-
eralisation could be derived by the questioner as a consequence of the single as-
sumption granted at the beginning. The final step (T5.1.c) “but what is no more 
this than that is indefinite” entails that the denial of the claim that any x is no 
more this than that must now be given up by the respondent because it does not 
satisfy the condition on every logos that follows from the assumption he has 
earlier granted. This seems to be the rough idea of the first explanation. Alexander 
may be not totally happy with it, because it is not clear whether it is dialectically 
effective: what if the respondent only grants the signification claim but denies a 
more general claim and any further derivations?

On the second version (T5.2), the very thing that is granted, namely that the 
respondent signifies something, is understood to be “something definite” men-
tioned by Aristotle.31 Once this response has been obtained, there will be a “de-
monstration, i.e., a refutation” of the denial of the PNC, for which the respondent 
and not the questioner will be responsible.

Alexander seems to make use of both interpretations in his commentary. The 
first interpretation based on the idea that the respondent must signify something 
definite is at the foundation of Alexander’s interpretation of the argument from 
signification, as we shall see in § 3. It aims to give universal, or “global”, refutation 
of PNC-denial. This interpretation has its difficulties. We already mentioned the 
need for justification of the generalised premiss (T5.1.b): it may be dependent on 
the argument from signification, but in this case the elenchic refutation as a 
whole will depend on this argument, which has not yet been fully explained at 
this point. Alexander may think that taken in a narrow exegetical sense, this un-
derstanding does not do justice to Aristotle’s idea in this text.

The second interpretation, on the other hand, seems to be in better agreement 
with Aristotle’s claim that the respondent, the denier of PNC, is responsible for this 
proof. While on the first version, the conclusion that something definite has been 
granted is derived from the initial concession by the respondent that he signifies 
something and then considered in a generalised form that is applicable to any sim-
ilar objection, on the second version this conclusion that there will be something 
definite is seen as a part of what is being granted, so that the “demonstration” is 
taken to be produced by the respondent himself rather than derived by the ques-

31 Unless this is a paraphrase, we seem to have a different reading at 1006a24–25: where the MSS 
have ἐδή γὰρ τι ἔσται ὑμισένον, Alexander reports ἔσται δὴ τι ὑμισένον (274, 18).
tioner from his concession about signifying. 32 This argument lacks a generalised premiss which the first version has, so this refutation will have a “local” rather than “global” scope. But its merit is that it raises no questions about the provenance of the generalised premiss, and it agrees better with the terms of the discussion described by Aristotle so far. The fact that in Alexander’s interpretation this version is given as the last one may indicate that Alexander himself prefers it to the first one. 33

(T6) Alexander in Metaph. 274, 20–32

(1) And the one responsible for the refutation will be the one refuted, not the one refuting; for he is refuted out of what he himself grants. (2) For if [the one refuting] tried to argue from himself 34 that to be the case and not to be the case cannot be both true of the same thing at the same time, and assumed that speech signifies something and treated this as definite, he would appear to beg the question; (3) but since it is the one who supports that thesis who is forced to agree to this position, he is responsible for the refutation, because he does away with speech. (4) For one who says that everything is not more so than not so (this was to do away with [the notion of] contradiction) does away with speech. But in doing away with speech he makes use of speech. This is [the meaning of] “he abides by the speech” [1006a27]. (5) Aristotle proves by what he says that (i) one who says that speech signifies nothing says that speech has been done away with. (ii) Or if there is speech, there is also something posited as definite, and it is not true in every case that nothing is this rather than that. (6) And he was wary of appearing to be producing a demonstration in a strict sense because he set it out as indemonstrable and the principle of all the axioms. 35

Alexander here explains how the refutation depends on the respondent. Alexander takes the structure of the refutation to be summarized in Aristotle’s statement

32 Alexander appears to be drawing this distinction between the two arguments at 276, 3–6 (T10.1 below; discussed in section 3.2 below, pp. 305–307).

33 It may also indicate (although we have no evidence for this) that Alexander finds the first version in an earlier commentary which he is using while writing his own (e.g. by Aspasia, or his teacher Aristotle, sometimes identified as Aristotle of Mytilene, or some other earlier commentator on the Metaphysics).

34 “From himself” (ου’ εαυτο); see n. 17 above.

35 (1) οὐ ἐλέγχοι αἴτιος οὐχ ὁ ἐλέγχων ἀλλ’ ὁ ἐλεγχόμενος ἐκ γάρ ὑπὸ δίδωσιν ἐλέγχεται. (2) εἰ μὲν γάρ ἀρ’ αὐτοῦ δεικνύος τὸ μὴ δύνασθαι ἐπὶ τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἢμα τὸ εἶναι τε καὶ μὴ εἶναι ἀλήθευσθαι ἐλάμβανε τὸν λόγον σημαίνει τι καὶ ὥριζε τοῦτο, ἔδοκεν ὅτι τὸ ἐν ἀρχῇ λαμβάνειν. (3) ἐπεί δὲ ὁ τῇ θέσει παραστάμενος ἐκείνη αὐτός ἦστιν ὁ ἀναγκασθεὶς συγχωρήσαι τοῦτο, ἐκεῖνος τοῦ ἐλέγχου αἴτιος, ἀναφρών λόγον. (4) οὗ γάρ λέγων πάν οὕδεν μᾶλλον οὕτως οὐ δύσως οὕτως ἔχειν (τοῦτο γάρ ἦν τὸ ἀναφέρειν τὴν ἀντιφάσιν) ἀναφέρει λόγον. ἀναφρῶν δὲ λόγον χρήσαι λόγῳ· τοῦτο γάρ τὸ ὑπομένειν λόγον. ἐδείξει δὲ δι’ ύπ’ ὅτι ἀνηρήσκας λέγει λόγον ὁ μηδὲν σημαίνει αὐτὸν λόγων. (5) ἢ εἰ ἦστι λόγος, ἔστι τι καὶ ὧρισμένον τιθέμενον, καὶ οὐκ ἐπὶ παντὸς ἄλληθες τὸ οὐδὲν μᾶλλον τοῦτο ἢ τοῦτο. (6) ἐφύλαξάτο δὲ τὸ δοκεῖν κυρίως αὐτοῦ ἀπόδειξιν πεποίησθαι, ὦτι ἐκεῖτο αὐτὸ εἶναι ἀναπόδεικτόν τε καὶ ἀπάντων τῶν ἀξιωμάτων ἀρχή.
at 1006a26: ‘for even doing away with the speech he abides by the speech’ (ἀναιρῶν γὰρ λόγον ύπομένει λόγον).³⁶ (T6.2) may be directed against the proof at (T5.1), where what is granted by the respondent is clearly separated from the demonstration conducted by “us” on behalf of the questioner. It is clear from these texts and from what follows that Alexander has no quarrel with the nature of the moves made by “us” in that demonstration. However, because it is not clear how the acceptance of these further moves is secured in our elenchos, he probably sees these details as obscuring the general form of elenctic argument at this stage. What is important at this point is to show that the PNC-denier himself accepts the key premiss that leads to the refutation, on pain of being excluded from the rational conversation, rather than granting a neutral point from which a refutation can be derived by his questioner defending the PNC.

In (T6.4), Alexander explains why denying the PNC puts one outside rational discourse. The PNC-denier holds that everything is no more thus than not thus, no more F than ~F, where F is any predicate. This does away with contradiction, not by reducing it to a further contradiction, but by denying its very concept, so that there is no work for the PNC to do. This position lacks consistency in a way more fundamental than could be acceptable for a respondent with inconsistent opinions: in this latter case the discovery of inconsistency by registering a contradiction does not need to annul the respondent’s participation in the dialogue at least up to this point, whereas the PNC-denier who admits to not signifying anything locks himself out of rational discourse. Yet somebody who in this way destroys meaningful speech must still use meaningful speech to do so.

In (T6.5) Alexander summarizes Aristotle’s refutation in the form of a dilemma which faces the PNC-denier: “Accept that you are not making any statements and take your exit, or agree that you signify something with your statements, and then you’ve lost”. The first horn (T6.5i) corresponds to the “exit” option: if the respondent does not signify anything, he confirms that he makes no statement, and the discussion is over. The second horn (T6.5ii) corresponds to the “staying” option: the denier agrees that he signifies something and stays in the discussion, sticking to his denial of PNC, only to be forced to give up on it.³⁷ The following pas-

³⁶ The expression translated here as ‘abides by the speech’ (ὑπομένει λόγον) is rare and occurs in rhetorical and polemical contexts in the meaning of countenancing or tolerating somebody’s speech (e.g. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Antiquit. Rom. VIII. 71.1.3, X.402.1, X.41.2,3) Alexander seems to take logos here as speech or account in general rather than the adversarial speech of the opponent more specifically (so too Asclepius in Metaph. 260, 33–34)

³⁷ This passage has been analyzed differently by Madigan, who saw (i) and (ii) as two different interpretations of the refutation (Madigan 1993, p. 56 and n. 341), and Flannery, who took (T6.5ii)
sage confirms that this is Alexander’s understanding of the overall structure of the argument and gives us a new version which more fully illustrates how the respondent, the PNC-denier, is in charge of his own refutation:

(T7) (1) This person is responsible for his own refutation: not the one asking questions (if he who assumes this had assumed it from himself, he would have appeared, as Aristotle said [1006a16–17, 20–21] to beg the question), but rather the respondent, who is forced either to do away with speech or to give answers that conflict with his own thesis. (2) And he adds the explanation. “While, then, he completely does away with speech” by his thesis9 (i) For one who says that in every case nothing is any more this than the opposite of this does away with speech. (ii) For he will say, as he says about other things, that speech too is no more than it is not. (iii) But this is [the stance] of one who does away with speech, because speech is significant vocal sound, and one who says that speech no more signifies than it does not signify would also do away with speech; (iv) but this is what one who says that in every case a contradictory pair can be true at the same time would say.) (3) While he indeed does away with speech by his thesis, he agrees to it by his answers; for when he says that speech signifies, he posits that there is speech, positing by his answer what he destroyed by his thesis (275, 8–20).40

In (T7.2 (i)–(iv)), we have the position of the PNC-denier presented as a reasoning concluding that speech is neither signifying nor not signifying, the claim that does away with speech (T7.2iii). So, the step whereby the respondent admits to signifying something supports rational discourse and destroys his own reasoning that nullified it.

to be a third version of the argument (Flannery 2003, p. 129). Neither construal seems to me to be borne out by the text.

38 As before: i.e. as his own premiss (see nn.17, 34 above)
39 Alexander paraphrases and explains Aristotle’s claim at 1006a26: ἀναίρων γάρ λόγον ὑπομένει λόγον.
40 T7 (1) οὐτὸς δὲ τοῦ ἐλέγχου αἰτίος, οὐχ οἱ ἐρωτῶν (εἰ γάρ αὐτὸς Ἰφ’ ἑαυτῷ ἔλαβε τοῦτο ὁ λαμ-βάνων τοῦτο, ως εἴπεν, ἐδοξεν αὐτό τὸ ἐν ἀρχῇ λαμβάνειν), ἀλλ’ ὁ ἀποκρίνόμενος, ἀναγκαζόμενος ἢ ἀναίρετον λόγον ἢ μαχόμενα ἀποκρίθηκαι τῇ θέσει τῇ ἀὐτοῦ. (2) καὶ προστίθηκε τὴν αἰτίαν. ἀναίρων γάρ ἰδιὸς λόγον διὰ τῆς θέσεως (i) ὁ γὰρ λέγων ἐπὶ παντὸς οὐδὲν μᾶλλον τοῦτο ἢ τὸ ἀντικείμενον αὐτοῦ λόγον ἀναίρετ (ii) ἐρεῖ γάρ ὑμίως τοις ἄλλοις καὶ τὸν λόγον μηδὲν μᾶλλον εἶναι ἢ μὴ εἶναι (iii) τοῦτο δὲ ἀναφεύγοντος λόγον, ὁτι ο μὲν λόγος φωνῇ σημαντικῆ, ὁ δὲ μηδὲν μᾶλλον σημαίνει ἢ μὴ σημαίνειν λέγων αὐτὸν ἀναίρει ἢ καὶ οὐτὸς λόγον (iv) λέγοι δ’ ἀν τοῦτο ὁ λέγων ἁμα τὴν ἀντί-φασιν ἀλληθεύειν ἐπὶ παντὸς δύνασθαι — (3) ἀναίρων δὴ λόγον διὰ τῆς θέσεως, δι’ ὀν ἀποκρινέται συγχρεῖ: λέγων γάρ τὸν λόγον σημαίνειν, τίθησιν εἶναι λόγον, ὃ διὰ τῆς θέσεως ἀνήρει, τοῦτο διὰ τοῦ ἀποκρίσεσθαι τίθεις.
3 Argument from Signification

This section of Chapter 4 (1006a28–1007b18) is devoted to the explanation of the way in which signification depends on the PNC. This has to do with the notion of signifying and Aristotle explains the way it works using many examples.

3.1 Signifying Something: An Instance of Elenctic Reasoning?

Aristotle begins by explaining what he means by “signifying something” and why signifying nothing makes any discussion impossible.

(T8) (1) First of all, it is clear that this itself is true, that the name signifies “being an F” or “not being an F”, so that it is not the case that everything is so-and-so and not so-and-so. (2) Further, if “man” signifies one thing, let that be “hiped animal”. What I mean by “signifying one [thing]” is this: if that thing is a man, then if anything is a man, that thing will be to be a man. (3) But it makes no difference even if someone were to assert that it signified more than one thing, provided that these were definite; for a different name could be assigned to each formula: I mean, for instance, if one did not say that “man” signifies one, but many, of which one would have one formula “hiped animal”, and there were several others, but limited in number, he could assign a peculiar name for each formula. (4) But if, instead of so assigning, he were to assert that it signified infinitely many things, it is obvious that there would be no speech. (5) For not to signify one thing is to signify nothing, and if names do not signify, discussion with others is eliminated; and, in truth, even with oneself, since it is not possible even to think of anything for someone who is not thinking on one thing, and if it is possible, one name could be assigned to the object [of thought] (1006a28–b11).

41 (1) πρῶτον μὲν οὖν δὴ λέγω ώς τοῦτο γ’ αὐτὸ ἄλληθές, ὅτι σημαίνει τὸ ὀνόμα τὸ εἶναι ἢ μὴ εἶναι τοῦτο, ἡστ’ οὖκ ἂν πᾶν σῶς καὶ οὐχ οὕτως ἔχον (2) ἔτι εἰ τὸ ἄνθρωπος σημαίνει εὖ, ἕστω τούτῳ τῷ ζῷῳ δίπους λέγω δὲ τὸ ἐν σημαίνει τοῦτο· εἰ τοῦτ’ ἐστιν ἄνθρωπος, ἂν ἂν τὸ ἄνθρωπος, τοῦτ’ ἐσται τὸ ἄνθρωπός εἰναι (3) διαφέρει δ’ οὖθεν οὐδ’ εἰ πλείως τις φαίνη σημαίνει μόνον ἔνως ὀρθμένα τεθείη γὰρ ἀν ἐν’ ἐκάστῳ λόγῳ ἐπερνᾶν ὀνόμα· λέγω δ’ οὖν, εἰ μὴ φαίνῃ τὸ ἄνθρωπος ἐν σημαίνειν, πολλὰ δὲ, ὅν ἐνὸς μὲν εἰς λόγους τὸ ζῷον δίπον, εἶλεν δὲ καὶ ἐπερνᾶν πλείους, ὀρθμένοι δὲ τὸν ἀριθμόν τεθείη γὰρ ἂν ἂν οὖν ὀνόμα καθ’ ἐκαστὸν τὸν λόγον· (4) εἰ δ’ μὴ [τεθείη], ἀλλ’ ἀπειρα σημαίνειν φαίνῃ, φανερῶν δὴ οὖν ἂν εἰς λόγος· (5) τὸ γὰρ μὴ ἐν σημαίνειν οὐθέν σημαίνειν ἀστίν, μὴ σημαίνοντων δὲ τῶν ὀνομάτων ἀνήκηται τὸ διαλέγεσθαι πρὸς ἄλληλος, κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἀλήθειαν καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν· οὐθέν γὰρ ἐνδέχεται νοεῖν μὴ νοεῦντα ἐν, εἰ δ’ ἐνδέχεται, τεθείη ἂν ὀνόμα τούτῳ τῷ πράγματι ἐν).
Aristotle’s first sentence (T8.1) is difficult: both what is taken to be true and the inference from it allow for several different interpretations.\textsuperscript{42} As a further difficulty, Alexander’s commentary here reports a different text: where the received text of Aristotle has “or” (ὁ) Alexander’s lemma at 1006a28 has “and” (καί).\textsuperscript{43} Whether or not this different reading influenced his interpretation of the passage is hard to say, but his interpretation differs from all others that have been offered.\textsuperscript{44}

\textbf{(T9) (1)} First, he says, given that things said signify something, it is true that the one who says that something “is” signifies something, and likewise the one who says that something “is not”, but not that he signifies and does not signify. (2) And he referred to “being” and “not being” as the names. (3) If it is true of them that they signify and not true that they do not signify, then it is no longer the case that both the affirmation and the negation are true of everything. (4) For since “not signifying” is the negation of “signifying”, it is not true of that which has been conceded to signify something. (5) For even if it does not signify, signifying would not be conceded, and so there would not be any speech. (6) And when he says “first of all, it is clear that this itself is true, that the name “being” signifies”, having said this, he has added “a this”, which indicates that the signifying [expression] signifies some definite nature. (7) For someone who signifies something for himself or for another always signifies a this or a that; namely, he signifies some of the things that are and something that differs from other things that are not signified by the same [expression]. For it is not the case that all [expressions] signify the same [things], nor are all things signified by one expression (275, 23–31).\textsuperscript{45}

Alexander seems to take Aristotle’s argument in (T8.1) as a concluding round of the elenctic demonstration. In what has been seen as a problematic move, he

\textsuperscript{42} Kirwan, in his commentary (ad loc.), lists three interpretations different from Alexander’s: (1) ‘The name chosen signifies e.g. “(to be) man” or “not (to be) man” but never both [or exclusive]; so it is impossible to be both man and not man’...(2) ‘One who says that x is e.g. a man signifies that x is, or is not, something in particular; so it is not everything whatever (whatever you like)...’(3) ‘The name chosen signifies being or not being something; and that is the starting point from which we proceed to prove PNC’. (Kirwan 1971, p. 93)

\textsuperscript{43} πρώτον μὲν οὖν δῆλον ὡς τοῦτο αὐτὸ ἀληθὲς, ὅτι σημαίνει τὸ ὄνομα τὸ εἶναι καὶ μὴ εἶναι [τοῦ] (275, 21–22). This reading does not seem to be attested in other sources; see Kotwick (2016), p. 290.

\textsuperscript{44} Kirwan attributes two different interpretations to Alexander: (4) ‘The name chosen signifies to be or not to be something and does not also not signify that; so at least one predicate, “signify” does not share its contradictory with any of its subjects’. (5) ‘the name “to be” or “not to be” signifies this particular thing’ (Kirwan 1971, p.93) He considers both to be unsuccessful.

\textsuperscript{45} Τὸ πρώτον, φησι, δοθέντος τοῦ τὰ λεγόμενα σημαίνειν τι, ἀληθὲς ἐστὶ τὸ σημαίνειν τι τὸν εἶναι τι λέγοντα καὶ τὸν μὴ εἶναι τι ὁμοίως. ἀλλ’ οὕτω καὶ σημαίνειν καὶ μὴ σημαίνειν. ὄνοματα δὲ εἶπε καὶ τὸ εἶναι καὶ τὸ μὴ εἶναι. Εἰ δ’ἀληθὲς ἐπ’αὐτῶν τὸ σημαίνειν, οὐκ ἀληθὲς δὲ τὸ μὴ σημαίνειν, οὐκέτι ἢ ἐπὶ παντὸς καὶ ἢ κατάφασις καὶ ἢ ἀπόφασις ἀληθῆς ἢ ἐπὶ τῶν σημαίνειν τὸ μηδὲν σημαίνειν ἀπόφασις ἢ οὐκ ἐστὶν ἀληθῆς ἢ τῶν σημαίνειν τοι συγγραμμένων. Εἰ γὰρ καὶ μὴ σημαίνοι, οὐκέτ’ ἢ ἐπὶ τὸ σημαίνειν συγγραμμένον, οὕτω δὲ οὐκέτ’ ἢ οὐδὲ ὁ λόγος εἰ.
takes τὸ ἐἶναι and τὸ μὴ ἐἶναι in Aristotle’s text to be names (T9.2). Alexander may be relying on De interpretatione 3, 16b19–22, where Aristotle says that verbs pronounced by themselves are names, so there is nothing to forbid μὴ ἐἶναι to be a naming and signifying expression. It is perhaps important to see that Aristotle in the De int. 3 passage says that verbs spoken by themselves are names because they ‘signify something’ (σημαίνει τὸ) insofar as ‘the speaker arrests his thought and the hearer pauses’, but they do not yet signify whether something is the case or not. This latter clause defines the force of his claim that follows, that taken separately, “being” or “not being” do not signify “the thing” (τὸ πρᾶγμα). “Signifying the thing” involves signifying whether or not something is the case, whereas “bare” substantivated infinitives or participial constructions cannot do this latter job. Aristotle here does not retract what he said in lines 16b19–21 about the verbs spoken by themselves being names. In Ammonius’ commentary, we find the explanation of this point according to which the ‘name’ here stands for a signifying expression (54, 24 Busse) which may be going back to Alexander’s lost commentary.

Alexander explains in (T9.3) that each of these names does signify, and therefore the affirmative statement which says that “being” signifies is true, as is the similar affirmative statement about “not being”. Both the negative statements which deny signifying to each of these two names, respectively, are false. Thus (T9.4) for each of these names we have a contradictory pair of affirmation and negation such that when one of the pair is true, the other is false. This would provide us with a position that differs from the total denial of PNC. We have to understand that these truth values underlying this position have also been granted by the opponent of the PNC. Avoiding the petitio principii, Alexander points out that, on the other hand, the case when the affirmation of signifying of either of these two names is taken to be false (T9.5) and the respective negation true will amount to the respondent’s refusal to grant signifying in the elenctic demonstra-

46 Kirwan has this worry about Alexander’s reading, pointing out a possible inconsistency with De int. 16b22–25, and he seems to be seconded by Whitaker, who does not name Alexander (Whitaker 1996, p.190, n. 11).
47 See further and n. 51 below.
48 16b20–21: ἵστηκε γὰρ ὁ λέγων τὴν διάνοιαν, καὶ ὁ ἄκουσας ἤρέμησεν (Ackrill trans.)
50 οὐ γὰρ τὸ ἐἶναι ἢ μὴ ἐἶναι σημείον ἐστι τοῦ πράγματος, οὐδ’ ἔαν τὸ ὑπὲρ τοῦ ψιλὸν (1006a22–23)
51 Alexander reiterates this point shortly in our text arguing that all the names according to Aristotle are by convention: τὸ τε γὰρ ἐἶναι καὶ τὸ μὴ ἐἶναι ὄνομα αὐτῶν. οὐδὲ γὰρ κωλύει καὶ τοῦτο γίνεσθαι ὄνομα, ὡς τῶν κατὰ συνήθηκεν τῶν ὄνομάτων (280, 30–31). For Alexander’s view on the nature of names, see also his Quaest. 3.11.
tion, thus closing the rational discussion in line with Aristotle’s dialectical framework discussed in the previous section.

So, this argument is taken by Alexander as the application of the argument “from signifying” to the case of our denier of the PNC. Perhaps it has to be read as supporting his interpretation of the nature of elenctic refutation in (T5.2) above.

Modern interpretations of this passage differ on how to take the expressions τὸ (μὴ) εἶναι τοδί in (T8.1). Anscombe translates τὸ εἶναι τοδί or τὸ μὴ εἶναι τοδί, “to be (or not to be) a this” and argues that the expression τὸ εἶναι τοδί means the formula of essence, taking it to be in the category of substance. Whitaker more recently has argued that τοδί need not be a substance and stand for a particular (τόδε τι), as well as quality, quantity, etc. On his reading, the requirement of definiteness does not seem to entail any essentialist interpretation.

Now, despite an altogether different construal of the text, Alexander’s interpretation of this passage seems to have something in common with both these approaches, but as I will try to show below it is distinct. Alexander in (T9.6) does read its account of signifying along essentialist lines, agreeing in this with Anscombe. He says that the names “being” and “not being” signify “a this”, which in turn refers to “some definite nature” that differs from all other things. The meaning of this “definite nature” is not specified any further, and moreover, Alexander does not tell us what the nature signified by “being” and “not-being” is on his reading of the argument, postponing this explanation till the next step in Aristotle’s argument. We will see in § 3.3 that his essentialist interpretation of the expression does not entail a substantialist interpretation of the category of τοδί: on this, he agrees with Whitaker.

### 3.2 Signifying One Thing vs. Many

In (T8.2), Aristotle introduces a further requirement for a signifying expression: it should signify “one thing” (ἐν). In order to explain what he means by “signifying one thing” Aristotle introduces a stipulative definitional formula of a thing being signified in this way. When our respondent agrees that he signifies something by “man”, for instance, he has to accept that the name “man” in all its occurrences stands for such a formula, e.g., “animal biped”. In the case where a name is used homonymously (T8.3), a different formula and a corresponding name can

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be assigned to each different use to avoid saying that such-and-such a name signifies indefinitely many things. In this latter case, i.e., when a name signifies indefinitely many things (T8.4) there will be no rational discourse, and even thought itself will be eliminated (T8.5).

The exact force of this unity requirement has been a matter of controversy, and the example of “man” (ἀνθρώπος) does not make things clearer: are we to understand that this requirement can be met only by substances?⁵⁴ In order to see what Alexander’s position is, it will be good to study his reading of Aristotle in some more detail.

Alexander provides us with his take on Aristotle’s argument in the following summary. It is worth citing in full despite its length because Alexander himself introduces it as his synopsis of Aristotle’s argument from signification.

(T10) Alexander in Metaph. 276, 3–28 (ad 1006a31–b11)

1 Having assumed that the names signify and each of them signifies something definite, and having proved on this basis that someone who has granted this will no longer be able to state that this is no more than its opposite, (2) now using this he proves that the contradictory pair (ἀνθρώπος) can in no case be jointly true (συναληθεύειν). (3) But he states and proves what he set out to prove by means of many arguments. The reason for this is that he takes instead those [premises] through which he proves what he wants to prove and establishes them as the ones that must be assumed; this is why the text (λέξις) is less clear. (4) But for someone who has grasped it, the sense of the reasoning is as follows. (5) If each name signifies, it signifies some one thing. For that which signifies, signifies something, and what is something is one. For even if homonyms are said of several things, one who uses them and signifies something by them is not signifying all these things at the same time. (6) (i) The names that are different and do not signify the same thing as the name that was posited as signifying one thing clearly will not be said of that thing. (ii) For otherwise that [thing] would no longer have the one nature, if the names that are signifying different things were true of it. (7) (a) “Man” and “not-man” are different names, and not the names of one thing, (b) for they will be neither predicated of the same (ἐπὶ τῷ ίδίῳ), (c) nor will that which is signified by “not-man” be true of that which is signified by “man”, (d) given that the names themselves differ from one another, and the different names express different [things], and each name expresses one [thing], i.e., one nature (e) For that which is signified by “man” will no longer be one, as has been said, if “not-man”, which signifies another object, were also true of it. (The same argument as applies in the case of “man” and “not-man” applies in all other cases as well.) (8) But if the things revealed by these names do not belong together, then neither

⁵⁴ Some commentators took it this way raising worries about a potential petitio principii committed by a questioner on this scenario and about potential confusion of sense and reference by Aristotle himself. This is an influential reading defended by Anscombe (1961). Other scholars have resisted this approach arguing for the unrestricted scope of signifying one thing in Aristotle’s argument. More on this point below in § 3.3.
would the affirmation saying that so-and-so is a man have as simultaneously true together the negation saying that so-and-so is not a man.\textsuperscript{55}

Alexander first (T10.1) outlines the general structure of Aristotle’s argument.\textsuperscript{56} As already pointed out in the previous section,\textsuperscript{57} he seems to take Aristotle’s explanation at (T8.1) as an instance of elenctic demonstration against someone who denies the PNC but concedes to signifying something with his speech. The denial of this concession will exclude the respondent from rational discourse. So, on pain of that, the questioner can elicit from the respondent a concession of signifying and the rejection of non-signifying, which together can give us a position different from the denial of PNC. As Alexander is aware, this position is forced upon the opponent by the elenctic demonstration and it does not amount to establishing the PNC. It is not even an instance of PNC. The logical form of the outcome of this elenchos would be:

Sa & ¬Sa,

\textsuperscript{55} (1) Λαβῶν ὦτι σημαίνει τὰ ὀνόματα καὶ ἕκαστον αὐτῶν τοῦτο, καὶ δεῖξας δι’ αὐτοῦ ὦτι μηκέτι δυνῆσαι λέγειν ὅ τοῦτο συγχωρήσας τὸ οὐδὲν μᾶλλον τοῦτο ὦτὶ τὸ ἀντικείμενον αὐτοῦ, (2) νῦν τοῦτω προσχώμενος δείκνυσιν ὦτι ἐπὶ μιθεὸν οἷόν τε τὴν ἀντίφασιν συναλήθευεν. (3) διά πλειώνων δὲ λέγει τε καὶ δείκνυσι τὸ προκείμενον. αἰτίων δὲ τοῦτο ὦτι μεταλαμβάνει τὰ δι’ ὦν δείκνυσιν ὦ βούλεται, καὶ κατασκευάζει αὐτὰ ως δεόντως λαμβανόμενα· διὸ καὶ ἀσαφεστέρα ἢ λέξεις. (4) ἐκλαβάντι δὲ ὦ νοῦς τῆς ἑπιχειρήσεως τοιοῦτος. (5) εἰ ἕκαστον ὀνόμα σημαίνει, καὶ ἐν τῇ σημαίνει τὸ γάρ σημαίνον τι σημαίνει, τὸ δὲ τί καὶ ἐν· καὶ γὰρ εἰ κατὰ πλειώνων τὰ ὁμόνυμα, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἢ ἐμα τὰ πάντα σημαίνει οἱ χρώμενοι αὐτοῖς καὶ σημαίνων τι δι’ αὐτῶν. (6) (i) τὰ διαφέροντα δὴ ὀνόματα καὶ μὴ ταύτων σημαίνοντα τὸ κειμένῳ ἐν σημαινεῖν δῆλον ὡς οὐ βρηκαίνεις τα’ ἐκείνου· (ii) εἰ ἐγὼ γὰρ ὦ οὐκέτι μια φύσις ἑκείνου, εἰ τὰ διαφέροντα πραγμάτων σημαντικὰ ὀνόματα ἄλληθευτό κατὰ τοῦ αὐτοῦ. (7) διαφέροντα δὲ ὀνόματα τὸ τε ἄνθρωπος καὶ τὸ οὐκ ἄνθρωπος, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐνός ὀνόματα πράγματος· οὐ γὰρ ἐπὶ ταύτου κατηγορηθήσεται, οὐδὲ ἢσται ἄλληθευόμενον κατὰ τοῦ σημαίνομένου ὑπὸ τοῦ ἄνθρωπος τὸ σημαινόμενον ὑπὸ τοῦ οὐκ ἄνθρωποι, εἰ γε διαφέρει τα’ αὐτὰ τὰ ὀνόματα ἄλληλως, καὶ τὰ διαφέροντα διαφέροντας ἐστὶ δηλωτικά, καὶ ἐνός ἕκαστον καὶ φύσεως μᾶς· οὐ γὰρ ἢν ἐπὶ το’ ἄνθρωπος σημαινόμενον ἐν, ἡ ἐρρήθη, εἰ ἄλληθευτό εἰπ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ οὐκ ἄνθρωπος, ἄλλο πράγματος ὀν σημαντικόν· ὦ δέ αὐτὸς λόγος ὃς ἐπ’ ἄνθρωποι καὶ οὐκ ἄνθρωπος, καὶ ἐπὶ τὸς ἀλλ’ τῶν πάντων. (8) εἰ δὲ μὴ τὰ ὑπὸ τῶν ὀνόματος τοῦτον δηλούμενα συνυπάρχει, οὐκ ἢ τῇ καταφάσει τῇ λεγομένῃ εἰναι ἄνθρωπον τοῦτο, ἡμι συναληθεύοι ἢ ἀπόφασις ἢ λέγομενα μὴ εἰναι ἄνθρωπον τοῦτο. (276, 17–27)

\textsuperscript{56} This part is skipped by Mignucci in his discussion and therefore he does not sufficiently appreciate that Alexander distinguishes between the elenctic refutation in a dialectical exchange as set out by Aristotle in 1006a18–31 and the argument from signification in 1006a31–b34 (which may be seen as directed against the strong form of the denial of PNC). See Mignucci (2003), p. 112.

\textsuperscript{57} See pp. 302–303 above.
where a is a respondent and S stands for ‘signifies something with his speech’. The resulting statement is not logically equivalent to PNC, even though it provides a sort of case against the denial of PNC by showing the statement that such a denial is not true as conceded by the opponent of PNC.

At the next step, according to Alexander, Aristotle wants to prove that in no case can both parts of a contradictory pair be true together (T10.2). Aristotle conducts this next proof “making use” (προσχρόμενος) of what has been established in the elenctic refutation. Alexander tells us that this second proof is conducted διά πλειόνων, probably referring to a complex structure of the argument from signification. In the sentence that follows in (T10.3) he says that the reason for this more complex structure of the argument is that Aristotle additionally adopts, μετάλαμβάνειν, those premisses ‘through which he will prove what he intends to prove’ and establishes them as necessary assumptions, which gives an impression of unclarity. Μετάλαμβάνειν can also mean ‘take instead’ and in this meaning it may be a reflection on the use Aristotle makes of the elenctic demonstration, to which Alexander refers in the previous sentence (T10.2). While in the elenctic demonstration we have the main premiss provided by the respondent, and the conclusion has the force within this very narrow, “local” scope, the task of the argument from signification is to show that it is possible to have this kind of proof for a general case, starting from the premiss that each name signifies something. This kind of argument requires a more detailed discussion of the nature of signifying. Establishing these new assumptions ‘as necessary’ means showing that they are true and that the conclusion follows from them. This involves further additional steps in the argument.

In (T10.4) Alexander signals the opening of a “synoptic” argument which will provide the proof of the PNC based on the agreed assumption about signification, in its universal version, i.e., where the impossibility of contradiction depends already not on one “forced” quasi-counterexample, but on some universal feature of signification. The overall schema of the argument seems to be as follows:

If each name signifies, it signifies some one thing (T10.5)

The names that are different and do not signify the same thing will not be said of that thing. (T10.6)

‘Man’ and ‘not-man’—and all the other names of this form (F and not-F)—are different names, and not the names of one thing (T10.7)

But if the things revealed by these names do not belong together, then neither would the affirmation saying that so-and-so is a man (x is F) have as simultaneously true together the negation saying that so-and-so is not a man (x is not F) (T10.8)

Each of these claims is established by means of clarifying arguments. So the proof ‘by means of several arguments’ refers to both several inferences involved
and several clarifications which establish the key concepts and show how infer-ences work.

In (T10.5) Alexander follows Aristotle as he explains what “signifying one thing” means by drawing a contrast between univocal and multivocal (homonymous) expressions. This contrast is helpful because it gives us an idea of what is ruled out by the requirement of the unity of the signified object. Homonyms share the same name but have different definitional formulae associated with these names, e.g., the name “bank” can signify a financial institution or a landscape feature (as in ‘the left bank of the Forth’) or a piece of garden furniture. This multivocality can be disambiguated if we assign a different name to each definitional formula (e.g., bank₁, bank₂, bank₃). If the same name, as a linguistic item, signifies more than one definitional formula, this will still not create a multivocity as long as the formulae are definite in number (T8.3) Aristotle in this whole argument seems to have in mind the opponents who will be looking for different methods of mitigating their concession of signifying one thing by making its scope more “inclusive”, so as to include, ultimately, some possibility for deriving a contradiction. One of such moves towards a more “inclusive” treatment of the one is to say that each name signifies something one, but also many other things, as in the case of homonyms. Aristotle posits a limit to such an inclusion by demanding that the number of different things signified by one name be finite.

Alexander devotes a small digression to the question: “Why if each name were to signify more [things] that are definite, the rational discourse is not destroyed, even though the signified thing is not one, and if it were to signify unlimited [things], it is destroyed?” (278, 21–23). His discussion has a structure characteristic of some short treatises preserved in Alexander’s school collections, Mantissa and Quaestiones, where we have the main question based on Aristotle’s claim and different types of answer that could be given to this question.  

58 Alexander gives five different arguments to explain and support Aristotle’s position.  

(T10.5 A) Either [1], first, everything definite and comprehensible is in a way one, so that even [a name] that signifies more things [than one], but a limited number, in a way signifies one thing. It is possible to circumscribe them, i.e., to separate them from the things that are not being signified, and to say that these are the things that are being signified, whereas with those that are unlimited this is impossible.

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58 This type of a question belongs to vera problemata in Bruns’ classification, where we have the statement of the puzzle and the arguments for proposed solutions (see Bruns 1892, pp. VVII and Sharples 1992, p. 4).

59 Madigan notes arguments (i) and (ii) as two different explanations, but it is clear that the three short arguments that follow respond to the same question and all five form a single small treatise suitable as a basis for classroom discussion.
Or [2] [Aristotle says] “to signify more [things], but a definite number” because it is possible for all those things that are taken as signified to be distinguished from each other and made definite by distinctive names, in this way [the names] would be signifying something. But if each of the names signified an unlimited number of things, none of the things signified by a name could have a distinctive name or sign. But in this way even the names given to them could not be signifying anything, as they could no more be predicated of the things to which they are given than of those to which they were not given.

Further, [3] if each of the names signifies an unlimited number of things, then each of the names would signify the same things. But if all names signify the same things, discussion and signification are destroyed. For no name signifies one thing if it is posited that all names signify the same things as each other. For to say that each name signifies all things is equivalent to saying that each name signifies nothing.

It is also possible for someone who proceeds methodically to show in the following way that the things expressed by each name are not unlimited in number, though the proof is more dialectical. [4] If “man” signifies an unlimited number of things, then either [i] “man” also signifies “not-man” (for this too is included among the unlimited number of things), so that one who says “man” would also have signified “not-man”; or, if this is absurd, [ii] there will be some thing over and above the infinite number of things; the addition of not-man to the infinite number of things that “man” signified makes the things even more numerous; and thus the infinite number will be less than some higher number.

Further, [5] either [i] the name “infinite” signifies non-infinite as well, and thus each name no more signifies an infinite number of things than it signifies a non-infinite number of things; or [ii] if it does not signify this as well, then, first, (a) it will not be possible [in that case] for the negation also to be true of that of which the affirmation is true; and further, (b) that which is signified by the name “non-infinite” will be outside the infinite number of things; the infinite number of things will be more numerous with the addition than they were by themselves. (278, 24–279, 14).

Alexander elucidates Aristotle’s point that homonymy cannot be used by the opponents of PNC as a legitimate case to argue that a thing can be an F and not an F because a bank can be a financial institution and not a financial institution (insofar as we mean a riverbank). Aristotle resolves this problem explaining that any homonymy could be disambiguated and presented as a finite series of unambiguous (non-homonymous) names, each with its own signified object.

Alexander considers the question why such a series should be finite or limited. In the first argument the main reason he gives is that there should be a definite number of different signified things for each name, so that it would be possible to separate what is signified by this name from what is not signified by it. The con-

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60 The text at 278, 27–30, is uncertain. I read: ἦ τὸ τῆλεω σημαίνειν, ὑρισμένα δὲ τῶ δύνασθαι πάντα τὰ σημαίνομενα ληφθέντα διακριθήναι τε ἀπ’ ἄλληλον καὶ ἰδίος ὀνόμασι ὑρισθήναι, τούτω ἂν εἰς σημαίνοντα τι.
contrast seems to be not with the case when we have an infinite number of signified objects, i.e., definitional formulae, corresponding to one ambiguous name. The claim is not that even if this original ambiguity is resolved in a distinct way by each of these formulae, we cannot say the same with regard to the original ambiguous term on the whole. Rather the claim seems to be that in the case of infinite number of significata, it will be impossible to assign a distinct name to each of them, and the original term will be permanently ambiguous.

This point seems to be spelled out more clearly in the second argument, where Alexander says that if each name signified an unlimited number of things, it would be impossible to have a distinct name for any of those things. The limit on the number of “things” signified by a name is imposed by the definitional formula whose negation serves as a definitional formula for those things that are not signified by this name.

What is being resisted in both this and the previous argument is an attempt to introduce the concept of signifying bypassing the question of how this signification is fixed. As soon as we have an Aristotelian answer to this question, namely, that it is fixed by means of a definitional formula, it becomes impossible for the name so defined to signify an infinite number of things. In the argument [3] Alexander points out that signifying an infinite number of things means that all names will signify the same things, and this will destroy the signification.

These three short arguments are distinguished by Alexander from the following two, which are described as “more dialectical”: this striking description immediately precedes argument [4], but the nature of the proof in both arguments seems very similar and most likely the description is intended for both. While the arguments [1]-[3] are directly showing how taking the object of signification to be un-

61 In this sense, Alexander agrees with Kirwan and Dancy that the unlimited in question is not an infinite series but lack of definition in the case of each signified object, i.e., each definitional formula. Neither Aristotle nor Alexander say much about what provides such a formula with unity and limitedness, but it is clear from counterexamples that a formula must answer stronger criteria than just any syntactically well-formed combination of names. See Kirwan (1993), p. 94, and Dancy (1975), pp. 83–87.

62 The case where we could have an infinite number of finite well-formed definitional formulae does not seem to be considered by either Aristotle or Alexander. The reason may be once again that Aristotle’s concern is to rule out the case where accepting an indefinitely number of names as a potentially infinite series (in accordance with Aristotle’s own definition of the infinite in Physics 3:6, as that of which some part is always beyond), leaves open a possibility that at one of the future assignments of meaning to an ambiguous term will bring about an ambiguous or, worse, contradictory definitional formula. The actually infinite multiplicity of good formulae is much less problematic in this respect (this agrees with the argument about Aristotle’s actual infinities developed recently by Jacob Rosen in Rosen 2021).
limited leads to the impossibility of signifying and rational discourse, in the two last arguments, [4] and [5], the discourse is destroyed by the absurd consequences of the assumption that a name can signify things without a limit. In the argument [4], the first absurd consequence [i] is that “man” signifies the same as “not-man”, and that is described as absurd. But of course, it is absurd for Alexander and his students, whereas for Aristotle’s opponents this is exactly a desideratum as a position to take in the elenctic demonstration. So, this particular reduction to absurdity by Alexander cannot be very strong because it begs the question. The second consequence [ii] is based on a familiar kind of reduction to what is greater than infinity.

Argument [5] treats “infinite” as a name and shows that if either [i] does not properly signify “infinite” in that it also signifies the “finite” or [ii] if the opponent denies that it signifies the finite, this will (a) amount to his denial of his rejection of PNC and (b) lead to the thing “greater than the infinity”, because if what is finite is outside the scope of what is infinite, the two together would make something that is greater than the infinite.

The names that are different and do not signify the same thing as the name that has been posited as signifying one thing will not be spoken of that thing (T10.6): e.g., bank₁ will not be spoken of a financial institution, nor bank₂ of a piece of garden furniture. Alexander explains the reason for this: the nature of that thing would not be one, or single, if the names that were signifying different things were true of it. It is clear from our text that (T10.6) continues the discussion of the possible counterexample of homonyms started in (T10.5).63

In order to understand these arguments, it is good to keep in mind that by “things signified” Alexander, following Aristotle, means not the extensions of the predicates or formulae used to explain the signification but the objects as specified by stipulative definitional formulae. “Circumscribing” definite names is thus done by these definitive formulae—and also, as we can see from some of these arguments, by their negations, which too, in their turn, have the function of circumscribing and will thus “signify something one”.

Two problems have been raised in connection with this view. The first was originally a question for Aristotle, which we can now forward to Alexander: are the things signified by names only substances? The second was raised recently by Mario Mignucci and had to do with the coherence of this argument and the account of signification that underlies it.

63 Mario Mignucci in his reconstruction of Alexander’s argument omits the discussion of homonyms and takes (T10.6) as a separate self-standing premiss (γ) which he considers to be false or at least in need of a supplement. But his reconstruction omits some crucial parts of the context. More on this in § 3.4. See Mignucci (2003), pp. 112–116, with a reconstruction of premisses on p. 112.
Mario Mignucci argued that the fact that two different names may have no single nature does not forbid us to predicate them of the same subject: e.g., the names “man” and “white” can be both truly predicated of Callias without any contradiction. The suggestion he makes is that Alexander should distinguish between the predicate which expresses the signified relatively to the subject (“identifying predication”), and the predicate which does not express the signified relatively to the subject (“non-identifying predication”). In the former case, the predicate will express the nature of the subject and in the latter case not: e.g., “man” expresses the nature of the subject (Callias) and “white” does not express the nature of the subject. In this way, presumably, it will be possible to derive the PNC for both the identifying and non-identifying predication by reasoning about signification.

In order to see how this argument works, it will be useful to take into account a further distinction drawn by Aristotle, between “signifying one thing” and “signifying about one thing”. Alexander presupposes it in this argument.

### 3.3 Signifying One Thing vs. Signifying About One Thing

For his conclusion in this argument, Aristotle still needs a further distinction between signifying one thing and signifying about one thing. This distinction will allow him to establish that what is signified by a name cannot be signified by its negation, a key step in deriving the PNC “from signification”.

This is a complex argument, and before reading it with Alexander, it will be good to have a general outline of its structure. In doing so, I will not discuss in detail the problems of each step in order to keep the overall framework clear.

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*(T11) (1) Let the name, then, as was said originally, signify something and signify one thing.

(2) “To be man” cannot signify the same as “not to be man”, if “man” signifies not just about one thing, but signifies even that which is one. For we do not consider that as signifying one thing, namely that which signifies about one thing, since in this way also the “musical”, the “white”, and the “man” would signify one thing, so that all will be one: for they would be synonyms. (3) And it [“to be man”] will not be to be and not to be the same thing, except homonymously, as if, for instance, what we were calling “man”, others would be calling “not-man”. But the question is not whether something can be the same and not the same in respect of name, but in respect of the thing. (4) (a) And if “man” and “not man” do not signify different things, (b) it is clear that there will be no difference between “not to be man” and “to be man”, (c) so that “to be man” will be “not to be man”; (d) for they will be one. For being one means this: as in the case of garment and cloak, if their definition is one.(e) And if*

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[“man” and “not man”] are one. (f) then “to be man” and “not to be man” will signify one thing. (g) But it has been shown that they signify different things. (5) [Concluding argument] (a) Therefore it is necessary, in order to make a true statement that something is a man, to say that it is a biped animal (for this was what “man” signifies). (b) But if this is necessary, then it cannot fail to be the biped animal (for “necessary” means “impossible not to”). (c) Therefore it is impossible to say that it is true that the same thing simultaneously is and is not a man (1006b11–b34).

In (T11.1) Aristotle restates the assumptions of his argument. (T11.2–4) provides us with the claim that “to be man” and “not to be man” signify different things (T11.2); the expression of the form “to be man” will not signify being and not being the same thing, except by homonymy (T11.3); (T11.4) proves that “man” and “not-man” signify different things.

The concluding argument (T11.5) is: (a) if it is true to say of something that it is a man, then it must be a biped animal (the signified of the name “man”); (b) if this is necessary, then it is impossible for it not to be a biped animal. (c) Then it is impossible to say that it is true that the same thing simultaneously is and is not a man. I’ll consider the concluding argument (T11.5) in the next section. Now, let us concentrate on the distinction between the two types of signifying.

The distinction between signifying one thing and signifying about one thing is drawn as an auxiliary step in the proof of the claim that “to be man” cannot signify the same as “not to be man” (T11.2). Without this distinction, the names “musical”, “white”, and “man”, when signifying about one thing, will all be signifying one thing.

The one thing these three different names are signifying about is taken to be an individual, e.g., Socrates, of whom all these three predicates are true. This is

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65 (T11)(1) ἐστώ δή, ὡσπερ ἐλέξη κατ’ ἄρχας, σημαίνον τι τὸ ὅνομα καὶ σημαίνον ἐν (2) οὐ δὴ ἐνδέχεται τὸ ἀνθρώπως εἶναι σημαίνειν ὅπερ ἄνθρωπος μὴ εἶναι, εἰ τὸ ἀνθρώπος σημαίνει μὴ μόνον καθ’ ἑνὸς ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν (οὐ γὰρ τούτῳ ἀξιοῦμεν τὸ ἐν σημαίνειν, τὸ καθ’ ἑνός, ἐπει ὅτως ἔστι παρὰ τὸν μοισικόν καὶ τὸ λευκόν καὶ τὸ ἄνθρωπος ἐν ἐσήμαινεν, ὅτε τοῦ ἕπαιντα ἐστι· συνόνιμα γὰρ). (3) καὶ οὐκ ἔσται εἰναι καὶ μὴ εἰναι τὸ αὐτὸ ἄλλ’ ἳ παρὰ ἄλλον· ὡσπερ ὃν ἂν ἢ ὅτε ἂν ἄνθρωπον καλοῦμεν, ἅλλοι μὴ ἄνθρωπον καλοῦμεν· τὸ δ’ ἀποροῦμεν οὐ τούτῳ ἐστιν, εἰ ἐνδέχεται τὸ αὐτὸ ἄμα εἶναι καὶ μὴ εἶναι ἄνθρωπον τὸ ὅνομα, ἅλλα τὸ πράγμα. (4)(a) εἰ δὲ μὴ σημαίνει ἔτερον τὸ ἄνθρωπος καὶ τὸ μὴ ἄνθρωπος, (b) δὴ λόγου ὅτι καὶ τὸ μὴ εἶναι ἄνθρωπος τοῦ εἶναι ἄνθρωπος, (c) ὅστε ἐστιν τὸ ἅμα τὸ ἂνδρυπνῳ εἶναι μὴ ἄνθρωπως εἶναι· (d) ἐν γὰρ ἔσται· τούτῳ γὰρ σημαίνει τὸ εἶναι ἐν, τὸ ὅς λύπον καὶ ἰμάτιον, εἰ ὁ λόγος εἰς (e) εἰ δὲ ἐστὶν ἐν, (f) ἐν σημαίνει τὸ ἅμα τὸ ἂνδρυπνῳ εἶναι καὶ μὴ ἄνθρωπῳ. (g) ἅλλ’ ἐδείξει τὸ ἔτερον σημαίνει. (5) (a) ἀνάγκη τοῖνυν, εἰ τί ἐστιν ἂλθες εἰπεῖν ὅτι ἄνθρωπος, ὅμων εἶναι δίπου (τούτῳ γὰρ ἄνθρωπος τὸν ἄνθρωπος·) (b) εἰ δ’ ἀνάγκη τοῦτο, οὐκ ἐνδέχεται μὴ εἶναι <τότε> τὸ αὐτὸ ἃμα δίπου (τούτῳ γὰρ σημαίνει τὸ ἁμαρτάκει εἶναι, τὸ ἀδύνατον εἶναι μὴ εἶναι ἁμαρται). (c) οὐκ ἂρα ἐνδέχεται ἄμα ἂλθες εἰπεῖν τὸν αὐτὸ ἄνθρωπον εἶναι καὶ μὴ εἶναι ἄνθρωπον.
suggested by Aristotle’s own use of an example of an individual, and Alexander understands this example in the same way. This understanding of the subject of predication as an individual has led some scholars to identify an individual with an individual substance of the Categories and thus to an interpretation of the scope of the argument ‘from signification’ as restricted to substances only. On such a view, of our three names, ‘man’, ‘white’, and ‘educated’, only ‘man’ signifies one thing when thus signifying about one thing, whereas the other two expressions signify something about one thing, but do not signify one thing in the sense required by Aristotle.

The argument to this effect, connecting this passage with Aristotle’s discussion of substance in the Categories and Metaphysics Z, has been given by Elizabeth Anscombe. In relation to our text, the reasoning behind such a reading would go as follows: ‘man’ is the most important of all the names predicated of Socrates, because it expresses what Socrates is as an individual, and it must hold of Socrates as long as Socrates exists. The expressions ‘white’ and ‘musical’, although true of Socrates, do not express what he is and must not hold of Socrates always in the same way as ‘man’, but sometimes their negations can also be true of Socrates, such as ‘not-white’ and ‘not-musical’. Even if we assume that ‘white’ can signify as ‘something one’, the individual white colour that is ‘in’ Socrates as ‘in a subject’, in the sense of the Categories Z, there exists an insoluble ambiguity about whether in ‘signifying one thing that is white’ the ‘one thing’ is to be understood as (a) a white colour present in Socrates as in a subject—if so, our signification would be per se, having as its object a per se existent which is not said of anything further (Cat. 2, 1a25–29), or (b) a thing which has white colour, as in the reading of our example mentioned above, e.g., ‘white man’, where the signified of a name ‘man’ does not possess an attribute ‘white’, but can have it accidentally—this meaning of a white thing (τὸ λευκόν) will not satisfy the criteria for Aristotle’s one thing because it belongs to an entity of which the predicate ‘not-white’ can also truly hold. This ambiguity cannot be clarified in the case of such predicates as ‘white’ and ‘educated’ because the presence of a subject in which the per se existents they signify (i.e., the individual properties of being white and educated “owned” by a given individual substance) must always be presupposed in their signification. Anscombe thought we could get support for this interpretation—or evidence of Aristotle’s confusion on this point—by clarifying the scope of the modal

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66 In the argument “from substances”, 1007b5–15.
67 See T12 below.
69 Anscombe (1961), pp. 41–43.
operator of necessity in the concluding argument where Aristotle derived an instance of the PNC for “man” (1006b28–34). But she admitted that prima facie the concluding derivation permits a construal that accounts for the unrestricted scope of the whole argument.\footnote{Anscombe (1961), p. 44.}

Several more recent works argue for the unrestricted scope of PNC in the argument from signification but do not address the role of the distinction between “signifying about one” and “signifying one” in their interpretations.\footnote{The “unrestricted” reading is supported, on different grounds, by Dancy (1975), Kirwan (1993), Whitaker (1996), and Wedin (1999). Kirwan and Wedin argue for it on the basis of the logical structure of the concluding argument (1006b28–34). Whitaker’s unrestricted interpretation seems to be based on the view of Aristotle’s signification according to which words pick out things (Whitaker 1996, p. 195), but the role of essence in the process of “picking” does not seem to be very important.}

What about Alexander? He sees the distinction between signifying one and signifying about one thing as implicit in Aristotle’s account of signification which he uses in his “synoptic argument” (in (T10)). Explaining the concept of “signifying one thing”, he says:

\begin{quote}
(T12) (1) What the signified object is, he defines and makes known by means of showing that it is not the case that if something is said about something, this already signifies one thing, as he will also say further down. (2) For it is not the case that if “white” is said about Socrates, then Socrates and “to be Socrates” are also signified by the white. (3) As for all those things that are predicated so as to signify nature and essence, as is the case with those predicated in “what it is”, they are taken as signifying one thing, and in this way something one is signified by each of the names. (4) And he explained in what sense he said “signifying one thing” lest someone should think that he means one numerically, nor that a numerically one thing should be called one, as he will say, but a certain one nature. (5) For if “man” signifies a biped animal, then “to be man” will consist in being a biped animal (276, 37–277, 9).\footnote{In (T12.1), the formula “something is said about something” from Aristotle’s definition of premiss\footnote{An. Pr: 11, 24a16–17.} refers to any well-formed statement, such as “Socrates is white” (T12.2) which is contrasted with predication in the genus “what is it?” (T12.3) Alexander points out in (T12.2) that in the ordinary predication, the name that ex-}
presses the predicate does not necessarily signify the subject of the statement. By contrast, in the case of the predication “in what-it-is”, the predicate expression will signify the subject of the statement (e.g., “Socrates is a man”). (T12.3) This distinction is introduced in order to make it clear that “signifying one thing” should not be taken as referring to the thing which is one numerically (T12.4). “Signifying one thing” means signifying *nature* and *essence* (*ousia*) rather than something that is numerically one (T12.3–4).

The terminology of “*ousia*”, “nature”, and “things predicated in what it is” in (T12.3) might suggest that Alexander takes “signifying one thing” to be restricted to the category of substance, along the lines of Anscombe’s reading above. Therefore, it is important to show that this is not the case.

As we can see in (T12), Alexander relates the distinction between the two kinds of signifying to the difference between two types of predication. Signifying *about one thing* is what a name is doing as a standard predicate of one thing about another, *ti kata tinon* (T12.1) Signifying *one thing*, which means signifying *nature and substance* (*ousia*), characterizes the predicates in “what it is” (ὡς ἔχει τὰ ἐν τῷ τι ἐστι κατηγοροῦμενα) (T12.3).

One way of understanding the latter kind of predicates would be indeed to take them to be substances, the first of the ten highest genera of being: in his list of ten categories in the *Topics* 1.9 Aristotle uses the expression *τι ἐστι* instead of *οὐσία* for what we translate as “substance” (103b20), a variation duly noted by Alexander in his commentary who, however, remarks also that *τι ἐστι* is used in many ways.74

The weakness of this interpretation of the predicates ‘in what it is’ (from T12.3) is that it reduces the difference between the two kinds of signifying to the categorial difference between the predicates in the category of substance and the predicates in the non-substantial categories. But there is nothing in either Aristotle or Alexander to suggest such a reduction. In *Metaphysics* Γ, Aristotle does not exclude substances from “signifying about one thing”: in his example, “man”, as well as “white” and “educated”, can signify “about one thing”, e.g., individual Socrates. “Man” is then taken as an example of “signifying one thing”, but this is not enough to suggest that such signifying is reserved for the class of substance-predicates.75 If this example entailed that the names “white” and “educat-

74 Alexander *in Top.* 65, 17–19: “Instead of ‘substance’ Aristotle adopts the phrase ‘what-it-is’: for substance is what is in the strict sense, and the ‘what it is’ and the definition are strictly of substance, even if ‘what it is’ is used in more than one way” (trans. Van Ophuijsen).
75 Marco Zingano is one of very few authors who discusses this problem and correctly rejects this version of “essentialism” (Anscombe-style; see Zingano 2008, p. 409 n. 5). But Zingano treats in the
ed” do not signify, respectively, one thing each, Aristotle probably would have indicated this, as this would be an important exception to his argument from signification. It is more promising therefore not to stick with substantialist interpretation of signifying one thing, but to see if we could make any sense of “signifying one thing” as a property of any predicate, not alternative to, but distinct from “signifying about one thing”. What exactly might be this property?

We know that “man”, according to the Categories, is “said of” “this man, e.g., Socrates” as “man” and “Socrates” share a definitional formula (“biped animal”). This would be a special way in which “man” is said of Socrates, but “white” and “educated” are not. On the other hand, “white” and “educated” could conceivably be predicated in a similar way, as “being said of something”, of an individual taken to be “this white” and “this educated thing”. We have indirect evidence that Aristotle sees it this way in the Categories 2, where Aristotle distinguishes the class of things that are in a subject and are said of the subject. And there is more direct evidence in Topics 19, where Aristotle uses the expression τί ἐστι in a sense different from the above mentioned but also technical, as signifying any one of the ten highest kinds, namely, the one to which the predicate expressed in the predication belongs.

(T12 A) Aristotle, Topics 19, 103b27–(1) It is clear from this that he who signifies the “what-it-is” signifies sometimes substance, sometimes quantity, sometimes quality, and sometimes some of the other categories. (2) For when about a given man he says that the given one is a man or an animal, he says what it is and signifies substance. (3) When about a given white colour he says that the given is white or a colour, he says what it is and signifies quality. (4) Similarly, if about a given length of a cubit he says that the given is a cubit long in respect of magnitude, he says what it is and signifies quantity. (5) And similarly with the rest. (a) For each of such things, if it is said either about itself or about the genus of it, signifies what it is. (b) But

same way a different kind of essentialism, the one that seems to be closer to Alexander’s version that I am exploring here.

76 Categ. 2, 1a20–22.
77 Categ. 2, 1a29–b3. This example is much discussed in connection with the problem of the ontological status of non-substantial individuals, especially with the problem of recurrence. For the current discussion, it is important that Aristotle has room for the case where X is legitimately ‘said of’ Y, where Y is a non-substantial individual, no matter how clear or felicitous this particular example is, and no matter what we think of the recurrence of Y. What is important is that there are non-substantial universals and they are said of their corresponding individuals.

78 Top. 103b20 and n.64 above.
79 This text, and the exact ontological status of τὸ τί ἐστι has been much discussed. See, in particular, Michael Frede’s paper on the nature of the categories in Aristotle (Frede 1981). My task here, though not unrelated to the problems discussed by Frede, is more narrowly circumscribed: to find some support for non-substantial predication in ‘what-it-is’ (proposed by Alexander) in the texts of Aristotle.
when it is said about another thing, it does not signify what it is, but quantity or quality or a certain one of the other categories. 80

Aristotle distinguishes two types of categorial predication: one when the subject and the predicate are in the same category (say, “man” is predicated of this man, e.g., Socrates, or “colour” of this white colour) and another when the subject and predicate are in different categories (e.g., “Socrates is white”).

When predication is in the same category its predicate signifies the “what-it-is” and the category in question. Thus, if we say “the white of this page is white” we signify the “what-it-is” of the white of this page and its quality: both are expressed by “[colour] white”. If we say “the white of this page is a colour”, we signify the “what-it-is” of the white of this page and its quality: both are expressed by “colour” (the genus of white and a kind in the highest genus of quality).

When subject and predicate are in different categories, the predicate does not signify the “what-it-is” but signifies only its own category. Thus, if we say “Socrates is white”, “white” signifies a quality (of whiteness or colour white), but does not signify any “what-it-is”.

Alexander, in his commentary on this Topics passage, explains that the cases of predication in the same category, when the predicate signifies this category and “what-it-is”, include: predication of a thing of itself, predication of a genus of a thing, and predication of the definitional formula of a thing:

(T12B) Alexander in Top. 67, 3–(1) That the what-it-is is given in each category, and that what is predicated in the what-it-is can be obtained for each category, this, as I have said, Aristotle shows by induction. (2) For each of the things under each category, whether the thing is itself said of itself, as e.g., that the man is man or the white is white, and so with the other categories, <or whether> it gives the genus appropriate to it, “signifies what-it-is”. (3) Similarly, when someone gives the definition of each thing, he too states the what-this-thing-is: for it is equivalent to pronounce the man man or biped land animal, for in both expressions it is said about itself, and both have the same extension, which is why he has taken the name instead of a definition. (4) But when the thing predicated is not of the same genus as the subject but is said of another thing (for this is the sense of “but when one thing is said of another thing”), then the genus of the problem will be from the same category as

80 (1) δήλον δ' εξ αὐτῶν ὅτι ὁ τί ἔστι σημαίνων ὅτε μὲν οὐσίαν σημαίνει, ὅτε δὲ ποσόν, ὅτε δὲ ποιόν, ὅτε δὲ τῶν ἄλλων τινὰ κατηγορίων. (2) ὅταν μὲν γὰρ ἐκκείμενον ἀνθρώπων ψή τὸ ἐκκείμενον ἀνθρώπων εἶναι ἢ ζῷον, τί ἔστι λέγει καὶ οὐσίαν σημαίνει. (3) ὅταν δὲ χρώματος λευκοῦ ἐκκείμενον φῆ τὸ ἐκκείμενον λευκὸν εἶναι ἢ χρωμα, τί ἔστι λέγει καὶ ποίον σημαίνει. (4) ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐάν πηχυαίον μεγέθους ἐκκείμενον ψῆ τὸ ἐκκείμενον πηχυαίον εἶναι μέγεθος, τί ἔστι λέγει καὶ ποσόν σημαίνει. (5) ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐάν τῶν ἄλλων ἑκατόν γὰρ τῶν τοιούτων, ἔν τούτω περὶ αὐτοῦ λέγεται ἐάν τὸ τέλος περὶ τούτου, τί ἔστι σημαίνει· ὅταν δὲ περὶ ἑτέρου, οὐ τί ἔστι σημαίνει ἀλλὰ ποσόν ἢ ποιόν ἢ τινὰ τῶν ἄλλων κατηγορίων.
the thing predicated. (5) It then no longer signifies the what-it-is, for a thing from one category is not predicated of a thing in another category as what-it-is; one thing is stated of another in those in which the thing predicated is an accident (trans. Van Ophuijsen, modified).  

Alexander takes Aristotle's examples in (T12 A2–5) to be parts of an inductive proof showing that each category has its own frame for signifying "what-it-is". He spells out the results of Aristotle's argument by stating the types of predication in each category which correspond to signifying "what-it-is". In ordinary predication, where subject and predicate are in different categories, there is no predication in "what-it-is".

Moreover, every category also has its own qualified οὐσία. In the Metaphysics Δ, explaining the senses of οὐσία, Aristotle mentions the meaning which he describes as the substance of each thing (οὐσία ἐκάστου): "also the what-it-was-to-be, whose formula is a definition, and this is said to be the substance of each thing."  

Aristotle devotes just a line and a half to this meaning of οὐσία as οὐσία ἐκάστου, but Alexander's commentary elaborates on it and allows us to see that Alexander takes for granted the essences that correspond to non-substantial categories:

(T12C) Alexander in Metaph. 374, 37—375, 9 (1) In addition to the above-mentioned meanings, Aristotle says, they call substance (οὐσία) the ‘essence whose formula is definition’. For when asked what essence is we say that it is definition (and he uses a more general expression ‘formula’ (λόγος) for definition (ὁρισμός)). (2) He says in fact that substance (οὐσία) is also the definition of each thing, namely of that of which it is the definition, not without qualification. In this way there could be the substance (οὐσία) of a quality, a quantity, and likewise all the rest. (3) This would be different from the enmatter form which he mentioned shortly before [1017b14–16] as the cause for each of the substances to be the one it is, because that one is in things put together naturally and is a natural form and is substance (οὐσία) in a strict sense, whereas that which is discussed now is the form according to which each thing has

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81 (1) ὅτι καθ’ ἐκάστην κατηγορίαν τὸ τί ἦστιν ἀποδίδοται, καὶ ὅτι τὸ ἐν τῷ τί ἔστιν κατηγορούμενον καθ’ ἐκάστην λαμβάνεται, τῇ ἐπαγωγῇ, ὡς εἴτοι, δείκνυσιν. (2) ἐκάστον γὰρ τῶν ὑπ’ ἐκάστην κατη-

gorían, ἂν τε αὐτὸ περὶ ἑαυτοῦ λέγηται, οἷον ὅτι ὁ ἀνθρωπός ἀνθρωπός ἦστιν ἢ τὸ λευκὸν λευκὸν ἔστι (καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἀλλῶν ὅμοιων), <ἐν τῇ> τὸ ὁικεῖον γένος αὐτοῦ ἀποδίδω, τί ἔστι σημαίνει. (3) ὅμοιος δὲ κἀν τὸν ὀρισμὸν τις τὸν ἐκάστου ἀποδίδω, τὸ τί ἦστιν αὐτὸ λέγει· ίσον γὰρ ἔστι τὸν ἀνθρώπων ἀνθρώπων εἰπεῖν ἢ ἦσαν πεινῶν δίσοιν· ἐν ἀμφότεροις γὰρ αὐτὸ περὶ ἑαυτοῦ λέγεται, καὶ ἐπὶ Ἰσης ἀμφότερα· διὸ αὐτὸ τὸ ὄρισμον τὸ ὁνόμα ἔλαβεν. (4) ὅταν δὲ τὸ κατηγορούμενο

μὴ τοῦ αὐτοῦ γένους ἢ τῷ ὑποκειμένῳ, ἀλλὰ περὶ ἄλλου λέγηται (τούτῳ γὰρ ἔστι τὸ ὅταν δὲ περὶ ἑτέρου), ἐξ ὧς ἂν κατηγορίας ἢ τὸ κατηγορούμενον, ἐξ ἐκείνης καὶ τὸ γένος τοῦ προβλήματος ἔσται. (5) καὶ οὐκέτι τὸ τί ἔστι τὸ ὑποκειμένου σημαίνει· ὃ γὰρ ἐν τῷ τί ἔστι κατηγορεῖται τὸ ἐξ ἄλλης κατηγορίας τοῦ ἐξ ἄλλης, περὶ ἑτέρου δέ ἐτερον λέγεται, ἐν αἰς συμβεβηκός ἔστι τὸ κατηγορούμενον.

82 Metaph. 5:8: 1017b21–22: ἠτι τῷ τί ἦν εἶναι, οὐ ὁ λόγος ὄρισμός, καὶ τούτῳ οὐσία λέγεται ἐκάστου.
its essence (τὸ τί ἦν ἐστὶν) even if it is not in substances: for essence (τὸ τί ἦν ἐστὶν) is not only of substances. (4) Therefore such forms are not substances without qualification, but they are substances of those things whose essence they express. This is why it is said that each thing has some substance. (5) Someone can also understand this so that the form is said in many ways: in one way, as the cause of being for that in which it is, as the soul, about this way he said before, and another as the being itself whose cause was perceiving soul, which is not the same as the soul, but soul is its cause. (6) And he would be mentioning this now not the external form and shape, which is somehow a limit of each thing and defines it.  

In (T12C2) Alexander explains the οὐσία ἑκάστου as a qualified definition distinguishing it from an unqualified definition, which he seems to posit as a default case, and which allows us to speak of essences and definitions not only of substances, but also of qualities, quantities, and other categories. The difference of unqualified essence is that it corresponds to the enmattered form which has a causal role in relation to the substance in which it is present (T12C3).

The default case Alexander describes here is in agreement with his reading of Topics 1.9 passage (T12 A2–5, T12B) according to which ‘signifying what-it-is’ characterises predication in the same category. From the three kinds of such signification considered there, the relevant one here is ‘when someone gives the definition of a thing’ (T12B3).

This seems to be the sense of οὐσία that Alexander is using in his unrestricted interpretation of ‘signifying one thing’ in Metaphysics Γ 4 (T12 above).

It is remarkable that the distinction between the two types of essence is followed in T12C3–5 by the distinction between the two senses of ‘form’. Standard enmattered form (Form-1) corresponds to the unqualified essence, which is a formal cause of a hylomorphic compound. Another sense of form (Form-2) picks out the

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83 ‘The being itself’; reading αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἐστὶ at 375, 12, following, with Dooley, Bonitz's conjecture from Sepulveda's translation.
84 (1) Πρὸς τοῖς προερμημένοις οὐσίαιν φησι λέγεσθαι καὶ τὸ τί ἦν εἰσὶ, οὐ τί ἦν εἰσὶν λόγος ἐστὶν ὁ όρισμός· τι γὰρ ἐστὶ τὸ τί ἦν εἰσὶν ἀπατούμενοι, λέγομεν ὅτι ὁ όρισμός, λόγον κοινότερον εἰπών τὸν ὁρισμόν. (2) οὐσίαιν δὴ φησι καὶ τὸν ὁρισμόν τὸν ἑκάστου ἑκείνου εἰσιν οὐ ὁρισμὸς ἐστὶν, οὐχ ἀπλῶς· οὕτω γὰρ καὶ ποιοῦ οὐσίαν ἐστιν οὐκ ἐν καὶ ποιοῦ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὁμοίως. (5) διαφέροι δ’ ἀν τὸν ἐννῦλου εἴδους, περὶ οὐ πρὸ ἀλίγου εἶπεν ὡς αἰτίου ὄντος ἐκάστη τῶν οὐσιῶν τὸν εἰσὶν ταύτην ἢτις ἐστὶν, ὅτι ἑκέινη μὲν ἐν τοῖς φύσεις συνεστάσιν οὐσία καὶ ψυχικόν εἴδος οὐσία καὶ κυρίως ἂν οὐσία, τό δὲ νῦν λεγόμενον εἴδος, καθὼς τὸ τί ἦν εἰσὶν ἑκάστω, καὶ ἐν μὴ οὐσίαις ἐστιν· οὐ γὰρ μόνον τὸ τί ἦν εἰσὶν ἑπὶ τῶν οὐσιῶν. (4) διὸ οὐδὲ ἀπλῶς τὰ τοιαύτα εἰδὴ οὐσίαι, ἀλλ’ ἐκείνων οὐσίαν ὃς τὸ τί ἦν εἰσὶν διῆλθαι, διό καὶ λέγεται ἑκάστου οὐσία τις εἶναι. (5) δύναται τις καὶ τοῦ εἴδους ως πλεοναχώς λεγομένου ἀκόουσιν, καὶ ἑνὸς μὲν ὄντος ὡς αἰτίου τοῦ εἰσὶν ὅπερ ἄν ἐστιν, ἢ ψυχή, περὶ οὐ εἴπε πρῶτον, ἄλλου δὲ ὡς αὐτοῦ εἰσίν, οὐ ἂν αἰτία ἢ ψυχή ἢ αἰσθητική, ὥς οὐκ ἐστι ταύτην τῇ ψυχῇ, ἑκέινη μέντοι αἰτία τούτου. (6) καὶ εἷς ἂν τοῦτον νῦν μηνυμένως, ἄλλ’ οὔχι τῆς ἐξωθήνει μορφῆς καὶ τοῦ σχήματος, ὁ πέρας πῶς ἐστιν ἑκάστου καὶ ὄριζε αὐτό.
characteristics of a hylomorphic composite that are caused by the Form-1. Form-2 is not to be taken in the sense of shape contrasted with body, rather it seems to be an ensemble of all the properties that are causally dependent on Form-1. With this distinction Alexander signals a very important exegetical presupposition in his interpretation of Aristotle’s hylomorphism. The important point for the current argument is that Alexander sees the ‘qualified’ essence, which is the definition of a property in any category, including all non-substantial categories, as fully underwritten by his version of hylomorphic theory of substance.

So, Alexander’s interpretation of “signifying one thing” seems to be essentialist in so far as “one thing”, the definitional formula of a thing, is understood as the nature and essence of the thing, but it is not substantialist, because a thing in question can belong to any of the ten categories. Next, we will see how this distinction works and whether it really can support the concluding argument.

3.4 Negated Names and Two Types of Negation

The distinction between “signifying one thing” and “signifying about one thing” is important in disambiguating certain expressions with negation, of the form “not-man”. This is how Alexander explains the use of “signifying one” commenting on Aristotle (T11):

(T13) Alexander in Metaph. 279, 32–280, 20 (1) [Aristotle] teaches us how one should understand “signifying one”. For “man” is one [thing] because it signifies some one nature, not because it is said of one thing. (2) But as it signifies one nature it would not signify also simultaneously some other nature. (3) He shows that not everything said about one thing is one. For “man”, “the white”, and “the educated” can be truly predicated about one thing, but it is not the case that because of that they are one. (4) And he arrived at proving this because it seems that “discussing” can be predicated about one and the same thing as “man” [signifies], e.g., about Socrates; yet “discussing” is not “man”. (5) For in this way, of that about which (καθ’ οὗ) “man” is predicated, the “not-man” would also be predicated accidentally, but it is not the case that thereby already that which is signified by “man” and “not man” are the same. (6) For “signifying one thing” is not defined in the same way as “being predicated about one thing”. (7) Aristotle proved by the additional argument that [names] predicated about one thing do not by the same token also signify one thing. (8) For several [names] different from each other are predicated about one thing; those [things] that are ac-

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85 See Marwan Rashed’s discussion of this distinction in relation to the ontological project of the middle books of Metaphysics in Rashed 2007, 232–234. There remains a question of Alexander’s motivation for setting this discussion in parallel with the discussion of two types of essence, but discussing it would lead to a major digression in this already very long paper. I plan to discuss this question elsewhere.
cidental to something are similarly predicated about that thing to which they are accidental, which is one, but it is not the case that because of that all [of them] signify one and the same thing. (9) Thus, it is not the case that since “educated”, “white”, and “man” are predicated of one thing, therefore even that which is signified by them is the same. (10) For had the signified been the same, so that there would be no difference between being predicated of one thing and signifying one thing, they would have been synonyms, i.e., polyonyms, for he now uses “synonyms” instead of “polyonyms” (279, 32–280, 20).  

The concept of “one nature” which Alexander uses in (T13.1) is already familiar. The nature of X for Alexander is the “what-it-is” expressed by the definitional formula of X, where X can belong to any of the ten categories. There is an important point that Alexander spells out: as the name signifies one nature it cannot simultaneously signify another nature (T13.2). There is exactly one definitional formula for each name which expresses that which a name signifies. When several different names are said about one and the same thing, they do not signify one nature. Alexander uses Aristotle’s example of “man”, “educated”, and “white” predicated of Socrates to illustrate the point (T13.3).

Aristotle’s aim in drawing this distinction, according to Alexander, is to disambiguate the negated name “not-man”. If we use it to mean anything that is different from “man” without any further qualification, so that either “white” or “educated” or “discussing” could be substituted with “not-man”, then the following piece of reasoning could get us a purported denial of PNC: “Socrates is a man. But Socrates is also white. To be white is not the same as to be a man. So, Socrates is also not the

86 (1) πῶς τὸ ἐν σημαίνειν ἀκοῦειν χρῆ, διδάσκει ἡμᾶς· ὁ γὰρ ἄνθρωπος ἐν τῷ φύσιν τινὰ μίαν σημαίνει, οὐ τὸ καθ’ ἑνὸς λέγεσθαι. (2) μιᾶν δὲ φύσιν σημαίνουσι οὐκ ἃν ἁμα καὶ ἄλλην τινὰ σημαίνοι. (3) ὅτι δὲ τὸ καθ’ ἑνὸς λεγόμενον οὐ πάν ἐν, δείκνυσι· καθ’ ἑνὸς γάρ καὶ τὸ ἄνθρωπος καὶ τὸ λευκὸν καὶ τὸ μούσικὸν δύναται κατηγορεῖσθαι ἄλλως, ἄλλ’ οὐ διὰ τούτο καὶ ἐν ταύτῃ. (4) ἢ θέλε δὲ ἐπί τοῦ δεικνύναι τούτῳ διὰ τὸ δοκεῖν δύνασθαι καθ’ ἑνὸς καὶ τοῦ αὐτοῦ καθ’ οὐ τὸ ἄνθρωπος, οἰον κατὰ Σωκράτους, κατὰ τούτου καὶ τὸ διαλέγεσθαι· τὸ δὲ διαλέγεσθαι οὐκ ἄνθρωπος. (5) εἰ δέ γάρ ἂν καθ’ οὐ τὸ ἄνθρωπος, καὶ οὐκ ἄνθρωπος κατηγορούμενος κατὰ συμβεβήκος· ἄλλ’ οὐ διὰ τούτο ἡδη καὶ ταύτῳ ἔστι τὸ τε ὑπὸ τοῦ ἄνθρωπο τοῦ οὐκ ἄνθρωπο σημαίνομεν. (6) οὐ γάρ τούτῳ ἄρισται τὸ ἐν σημαίνειν τὸ καθ’ ἑνὸς κατηγορεῖσθαι. (7) ὅτι γὰρ η διὰ ταῦτα τοῦ αὐτοῦ κατηγορούμενα ἡδη καὶ ἐν σημαίνει, δι’ ὑπερ παρέθετο ἑδείξε. (8) καθ’ ἑνὸς γὰρ πλείον κατηγορεῖται διαφέροντα ἄλληλων· τὰ γάρ συμβεβηκότα τινί, ἔτερα ὄντα καὶ τούτῳ ὑποκύπθηκα καὶ ἄλληλων, ὁμοίως κατηγορεῖται κατ’ ἑκείνου ἑνὸς ὄντος, ὑποκύπθηκεν, ὑμὴ διὰ τούτῳ πάντα τοῦ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν σημαίνει. (9) οὐ γὰρ ἐπεὶ καθ’ ἑνὸς τὸ μούσικὸν καὶ τὸ λευκὸν καὶ τὸ ἄνθρωπο συμβεβήκα τοῦ ἐν σημαίνει, ἔσται συνώνυμα, τούτου δεικτεί πολυώνυμα, καθ’ ἄν πλείον κατηγορεῖται· τὰ γὰρ συνώνυμα οὐκ ἄντι τοῦ πολυώνυμα χρῆται.  

87 For instance, if we were to take in this way Plato’s suggested solution to the Parmenidean paradox of Not-Being in the Sophist, taking “Not-Being” as “Different from Being” (Soph. 255d5–e7)
same as a man. To be not the same as a man is to be a not-man. Hence Socrates is a man and not-man. Hence Socrates is a man and Socrates is not a man”.

But Alexander explains that in this case “not-man” would be predicated of Socrates accidentally, just as “white” was. (T13.4–5) So, it should inherit its accidental type of predication from the “white” for which it was substituted: this kind of “not-man” is predicated of Socrates accidentally and does not constitute a real denial of PNC. Being predicated about one thing does not amount to signifying one thing. Had the three terms “man”, “white”, and “educated”, signified one thing, they would have been synonyms, Aristotle says, or polyonyms, as Alexander corrects.\(^{88}\) This would mean that each of these expressions is just another way of signifying the essence of a thing (Callias or Socrates).

The important corollary of this discussion is that in order to get a genuine denial of PNC, the negated name “not-man” should inherit its type of predication not from an accident, but from the definitional formula itself, so that the function of this kind of negated expression should be not just to “point away in every direction indiscriminately”, as is the function of negated names construed as indefinite names in De interpretatione.\(^{89}\) Rather, its role should be a more targeted destruction of the definitional formula itself. It is a different meaning of negation. Alexander explains it in this way, elaborating on Aristotle’s text:

(T14) Alexander in Metaph. 281, 1–(1) The object of our investigation was not whether it is possible to impose to the same thing both the name “man” and “not-man”, so that their difference would be merely verbal and no longer also according to that which is signified, (2) but whether, when the objects signified by each differ, and “man” signifies such a form whose formula is “animal footed biped”, while “not-man” signifies the destruction of such a form, it is possible for these to be predicated simultaneously and about the same thing so that it would be the

\(^{88}\) Aristotle uses the concept just once in our extant corpus (Hist. An. 289a1–3: Καλεῖται δ’ ἦ μὲν λαμβάνει, στόμα, εἰς ὅ δὲ δέχεται, κοιλία· τὸ δὲ λοιπὸν πολύωνυμὸν ἔστιν). This concept goes back to Speusippus’ division of names into tautonyms (further divided into homonyms and synonyms) and heteronyms (further divided heteronyms proper, polyonyms and paronyms) of which we know through Boethus’ report preserved to us by Simplicius (Simplic. in Categ. 38.19–24 Kalbfleisch = Boethus fr. 10 Rashed, see also Barnes 1971). It seems that this classification was used by Peripatetics as a part of their own school legacy: at least Alexander’s correction of Aristotle’s usage here suggests this much. Cf. also Alexander, in Metaph. 247.22–29: οὕτως ἔχει πρὸς ἄλλα καὶ τὸ ἁμέρες καὶ τὸ ἔλαχιστον, καὶ στέρμα καὶ καρπός, καὶ ἀνάβασις καὶ κατάβασις, καὶ πάνθ’ ὥσα κυρίως ἐπερώνυμα καλεῖται, εἰσπὼν δὲ τὸ ὅν καὶ τὸ ἐν ταύτῃ εἶναι καὶ μίαν τινὰ φύσιν, οὐ μέντοι ὡς ἐνι λόγῳ δηλόωμεν, ἐπηνεγκεῖν ὅτι διαφέρει δὲ οὐδὲν οὐδ’ ἂν καὶ κατὰ τὸν λόγον αὐτά ταύτῃ ὕπολαβμεν εἶναι, μὴ μόνον κατὰ τὴν ὑποκειμένην φύσιν, ὡς εἶναι τῶν πολυωνύμων τὸ ὑποκειμένου αὑτοῦ, ὃν πλείω μὲν ἄνοματα, καθ’ ἐκαστὸν δὲ τῶν ἀνομάτων ὁ αὐτὸς λόγος, ὡς φαινόμενον καὶ μαχαίρας, καὶ λωπίου καὶ ἰματίου.

\(^{89}\) I borrow a fine description by Whitaker (Whitaker 1996, p. 64).
same thing to be such a substance and not to be. (3) For the contradictory opposition is of this kind, while the opposition which is accidental is not contradictory. 90

Alexander spells out Aristotle's distinction between the accidental and non-accidental predication of a negated name "not-man" of Socrates in terms of signifying. If we predicate "not-man" of Socrates accidentally, meaning that Socrates is white, say, and being white is not the same as being man, the opposition the "not-man" and "man" will be accidental and not contradictory.

Let us use a rather ugly contraption Not-Manac to stand in for the predicate "not-man" used as such an umbrella term for all the things that are not the same in definition as Man (which will be a predicate form of the name "man"). The pair:

Man (Socrates) and Not-Manac (Socrates)

is not a contradiction because we can substitute a predicate (White, Educated, Bald, In the Market, 70 years old) instead of our Not-Manac. Note that we cannot substitute 'Not-(a)-Biped-Animal' for Not-Manac, because the 'biped animal' is not an accident of 'man'.

But a contradiction will arise if we take 'not-man' to stand in for the predicate whose only meaning is that the definitional formula associated with 'man' is not applicable to a thing of which 'not-man' is predicated. Let us call it Not-Mandef, a "definitional" Not-Man: also not an inch-perfect label, because this predicate Not-Mandef does not define anything. It only denies the application of a definition (a definitional formula or a corresponding predicate) to a subject. And it can give us a contradictory opposition. The pair:

Man (Socrates) and Not-Mandef (Socrates)

will make a contradiction when said of the same subject. The predicate Not-Mandef denies the application of the definition of the signifying expression 'man' to Socra-

90 (1) οὖκ ἦν δὲ τούτῳ ἡμῖν τὸ ζητούμενον, πότερον δύναται τῷ αὐτῷ πράγματι καὶ ἀνθρώπος ὄνομα καὶ μὴ ἀνθρώπος τεθήκαι, ὡς εἶναι τὴν διαφορὰν αὐτῶν κατὰ τὴν λέξιν μόνην, μηκέτι δὲ καὶ κατὰ τὸ σημαίνονξον, (2) ἀλλ' εἰ ὄντων τῶν σημαίνομένων ὑπ' ἐκατέρω διαφερόντων, καὶ τοῦ μὲν ἀνθρώπου τὸ τοιοῦτον σημαίνει τὸ εἶδος οὐ λόγος ζώον πεζόν δίπολο, τοῦ δὲ οὐκ ἀνθρώπου τὴν ἀναίρεσιν τοῦ τοιοῦτου εἶδους, οἶον τε ἁμα ταῦτα καὶ κατὰ τοῦ αὐτοῦ κατηγορεῖσθαι οὕτως ὡς εἶναι ταῦταν τὸ εἶναι τὴν τοιαύτην υφ' ὅσιαν καὶ μὴ εἶναι· (3) τοῦ τοιοῦτου γὰρ δηλωτικὴ ἡ ἀντιφατική ἀντίθεσις, οὐκ ἀντιφατικὴ δὲ ἡ ἀντίθεσις ἢ κατὰ συμβεβηκός.
tes. In order to introduce this kind of opposition Aristotle needs this distinction between ‘signifying one thing’ and ‘signifying about one thing’.

Alexander seems to think that this distinction, in order to work properly, has to be supported by the whole system of categories, in particular by the predication of “what-it-is”, and more specifically still, of the definitional formulae, within each category. Aristotle’s example of “man” illustrates the way it works with substances, but we could do the same with the predicate in any other category, for instance, we could take “white” and formulate in the same way as above:

White (Socrates) and Not-White\textsubscript{ac} (Socrates)

is not a contradictory pair if Not-White\textsubscript{ac} stands for Man (Socrates). But

White (Socrates) and Not-White\textsubscript{def} (Socrates)

is a contradictory pair if the definition of white is, say: “the colour which dissolves the eye-stream”\textsuperscript{91} and the definitional Not-White denies the definitional formula of white. The analysis then could be sketched out as follows. White (Socrates) will say that Socrates is of a colour that satisfies the definition of white and Not-White\textsubscript{def} (Socrates) will say that Socrates is of a colour that does not satisfy the definition of white (assume Socrates has just one colour: a multicolour version can be worked out as well, using Aristotle’s tools for disambiguation we have just seen). Here the definitional formula and the subject to which it is applied also must be in the same category, the way we had it with substance, but in this case it will be a non-substantial category of ‘qualified’ (ποιόν). Socrates \textit{qua} qualified cannot receive contradictory properties, and this will be true of all categories, and supplying any further qualifications that are needed to rule out any easy counterexamples.

This analysis of Alexander’s interpretation of Aristotle might answer the worry raised by Mario Mignucci who accepted that Alexander’s interpretation of “signifying one thing” does not restrict it to substances alone, but thought that he did not distinguish sufficiently clearly between understanding a negated name of the form not-X (e.g., “not-man”) as a complement of X (the understanding that rules out their joint predication of the same subject, say Y) and understanding not-X as anything that is different from X (the understanding that does not rule out their joint predication of X, as when both “man” and “white” are predicated of Soc-

\textsuperscript{91} \textit{Top.} 3.5, 119a30; cf. \textit{Metaph.} 11.7, 1057b8.
rates in an ordinary way).\textsuperscript{92} Assuming that each name “signifies one thing”, i.e., signifies the corresponding proper nature, still, when both “white” and “man” are predicated of Socrates, “man” does signify one thing, but not the “white”, because only “man” expresses the nature of Socrates. Mignucci suggested that in this perspective it is necessary to distinguish between “signifying one thing” and “signifying one thing in respect of the subject”.\textsuperscript{93} For instance, in the statement “Socrates is white” and “Socrates is a man”, both “white” and “man” do signify one thing, i.e., signify, respectively, their own proper nature (corresponding definitional formula to each), but with respect to Socrates only “man” signifies one thing, but “white” does not. Mignucci thinks that this further distinction is necessary, but Alexander misses it.\textsuperscript{94}

But it we take Alexander’s “broad” essentialist interpretation of “signifying one thing” to be linked to the way in which a definitional formula is predicated within each of the ten categories, this further distinction suggested by Mignucci may be unnecessary. For Alexander follows the distinction drawn by Aristotle in the \textit{Topics} 1.9 between the predication in the same category (i.e., when the subject and the predicate belong to the same category) and not in the same category (i.e., when the subject and the predicate belong to different categories). According to this distinction, the definitional formula—which expresses the one nature or the one thing signified by a name—belongs to the former type of predication, where the subject and predicate belong to the same category. This is the only kind of predication that could give us a contradictory pair if name and its negation were predicated on the same subject. And every name that has a definitional formula has its own category and its own subject of predication with which it is synonymous under that category. So, even if “white” is an accident of Socrates, still the pair “White” and “\textit{Not-White}_\text{def}” will be contradictory and subject to the same rules in this respect as the pair “Man” and “\textit{Not-Man}_\text{def}”.\textsuperscript{95}

Aristotle’s concluding argument (\textbf{T11.5}) above is:

\textbf{(a)} Therefore, it is necessary, in order to make a true statement that something is a man, to say that it is a biped animal (for this was what “man” signifies). (1006b28–30)

\textsuperscript{92} Mignucci (2003), p. 114.
\textsuperscript{93} Mignucci (2003), p. 115.
\textsuperscript{94} Mignucci (2003), pp. 115–116.
\textsuperscript{95} This analysis based on Alexander’s interpretation might also provide an answer to a much earlier worry raised by Maier with respect to Aristotle’s argument from signification which he saw as working only for definitional formulae and unable to account for all the statements where predicates are accidental (Maier 1896, pp. 55–56).
(b) But if this is necessary, then it cannot fail to be the biped animal (for “necessary” means “impossible not to”) (1006b30–33)

(c) Therefore it is impossible to say that it is true that the same thing simultaneously is and is not a man. (1006b33–34).

The crucial role is given to the definitional formula that expresses what is signified by a name used as a predicate term in a statement. It is impossible for it to hold and not to hold of the subject of its predication. Alexander summarizes this argument in his commentary three times: twice as a part of a larger argument (at the beginning, at 276, 17–27 and in the end, 282, 3–19), and once in some more detail to its text (282, 19–36). All three seem to be mutually consistent. Let us consider the one that comes from Alexander’s synopsis we have been discussing, our (T10.7) above:

(a) “Man” and “not-man” are different names, and not the names of one thing (ἐνὸς πράγματος),

(b) for they will be neither predicated of the same (ἐν ταύτῃ),

(c) nor will that which is signified by “not-man” be true of that which is signified by “man”,

(d) given that the names themselves differ from one another, and the different names express different [things], and each name expresses one [thing], i.e., one nature (καὶ ἕνὸς ἑκάστον καὶ φύσεως μίας)

(e) For that which is signified by “man” will no longer be one, as has been said, if “not-man”, which signifies another object, were also true of it. (The same argument as applies in the case of “man” and “not-man” applies in all other cases as well.)

(f) But if the things expressed by these names do not belong together, then neither would the affirmation saying that this (tode) is a man have as simultaneously true together the negation saying that this (tode) is not a man.

We know that the difference between the names “man” and “not-man” is accounted for by a difference of a respective signified thing which is expressed by a definitional formula. We have now seen that Alexander is taking both “man” and “not-man” in the strictly definitional sense, so that “not-man” should be taken as our Not-Man_{def}, not as Not-Man_{ac} above. The name “Not-Man_{def}” signifies that the definitional formula of “man” does not apply. The name and its definitional negation will never be predicated of the same thing (b) because the predication in question is not the accidental predication, but a definitional predication of two different names.

That which is signified by a “not-man” will not be true of what is signified by “man” (c) because two genuinely different names correspond to two different definitional formulae which cannot express the same nature, but must express two
different natures signified respectively by each name (d). Had it been possible for “not-man” to signify what is signified by “man”, this signified object and nature would no longer be one. (e) Since these things (or natures) do not belong together (συνυπάρχει), it follows that the affirmation saying that this is a man will not be true together with the negation saying that this is not a man (f).

Thus, the refutation of those who deny the PNC seems to be based on the impossibility for the definitional formula and its negation to hold truly of the same subject in a statement. The denial of PNC allows for these two formulae, one of which negates the other, to “belong together” as being signified by the same name, and this destroys signifying, since the first postulate stated by Aristotle was that the name should signify something one, e.g., the name “man” should signify always “animal biped” (if this has been stipulated), and cannot signify both “animal biped” and “not [an] animal biped”. The latter case amounts effectively to the opponent’s withdrawal of his concession to signifying something and once again to the destruction of rational discourse or to being excluded from it.

4 Conclusion

This is a very incomplete survey of Alexander’s commentary on Aristotle’s argument from signification in Metaphysics Γ 4, not just because it does not cover the whole argument, but also because Alexander’s commentary needs to be much better contextualized with his other work on the Organon and other relevant parts of the corpus. There is still much to do on all these fronts. However, some of the results we have discovered are interesting for Aristotelian scholarship. In the elenctic demonstration, Alexander seems to distinguish two different (but related) arguments: the elenchos proper, where the concession of “something definite” is secured “locally”, from this interlocutor, and the more general argument based on a generalized concession by an imaginary opponent, where the defender of PNC can work out certain general rules applicable in all such cases. Alexander’s interpretation of signification develops an unrestricted essentialist, but not substantialist, interpretation of the scope of the argument. Its particular interest for Aristotle scholars is its very important connection with the account of predication that we find in Topics and in the Categories. Alexander’s approach allows us, I think, to see what work the categories do in Aristotle’s first philosophy. ⁹⁶

⁹⁶ To this extent, Alexander’s interpretation of the argument from signification may be seen as belonging to the project that was described by John Ellis as his defence of Aristotle’s Categories (Ellis 1994).
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