

[Chapter One]

A View of a View of the Good

I. A View of the Good

Upon reaching maturity those schooled to rule in Plato's ideal city, Kallipolis, are afforded a view of the good:

Then, at the age of fifty, those who have survived, who have excelled in all matters and manners, in both their deeds and their studies, are to be led to their immediate goal; and they are to be compelled (*anagkasteon*) to throw open the soul's shimmering eye, to focus on that very thing which provides light to all, and once they have seen the Good itself, to use it as their paradigm when ordering the city, the citizens, and themselves (*Rep.* vii 540a4-9).

Curiously, Plato suggests that those guardians who have survived the rigours of training require compulsion to complete their labours: they are to be compelled to cast open the eyes of their souls to behold the visage of the Good.¹ When they do so, when the guardians arrive at their moment of apprehension, they come to know the Good, the 'last thing learnt and hardly ever seen' (*Rep.* 505a2-4). Their journey upward then culminates, as depicted by Plato in highly charged language, in an unmediated

¹ One might also translate: 'one must lead them. . . ' and 'one must compel them. . . ' Presumably those doing the compelling here are the founders (*οἰκιστᾶι*) of the city (*Rep.* ii 379a1, vii 519c8). The language of compulsion here has three exact parallels in Plato (*Laws* 965c9; *Rep.* ii 378d2, and iv 421b9; cf. *Rep.* vii 519c5-d2) as well as one close parallel (*Rep.* vii 539e4). The close parallel pertains to the more understandable compulsion required for guardians to return to the cave. On pre-visage compulsion see Shields (2007).

perceptual, or quasi-perceptual,² *de re* apprehension of the Good itself, which perception in turn furnishes the guardians with the knowledge required to bring order to the city, to its citizens, and to themselves. The Form of the Good is uniquely suited to equip them for these tasks in view of its very nature: it serves as a *paradigm* (παράδειγμα; *Rep.* vii 540a9) for those seeking to inculcate the orderly goodness of personal and political harmony into the individual soul and its civic isomorph, Kallipolis.

Not much about this depiction is beyond dispute, and, indeed, the minimal description just tendered is already hotly contested.³ For present purposes, however, it will not be remiss to be modestly peremptory in setting out a crisp understanding of Plato's approach to the metaphysics of goodness;⁴ doing so will have at least the advantage of purchasing clarity for our first approach to Aristotle's critical posture towards the Academic account. We will in any case revisit some of these formulations as we move further into our discussion of Aristotle's reactions to them.

Our ultimate goal is to understand and assess Aristotle's criticisms of Plato's Form of the Good. To do so with any hope of success, we must keep two questions

² Plato speaks of the guardians as 'having seen' (ιδόντας; *Rep.* vii 540a8) the Good. Presumably the verb is here used in the sense of what grammarians call the 'intellectual use' of perceptual verbs. Hence, 'quasi-perceptual'. The force of such language seems at once very familiar and rather elusive; we reflect on it briefly below in #.

³ See, e.g., Fine ##

⁴ In fact, however, the view put forth summarizes the case made at length in Shields (forthcoming), which may be regarded as a companion volume to the present volume. The present volume in some measure presupposes the conclusions of the arguments given there, but may, it is hoped, be read with profit even assuming they are independently to be called into question.

sharply delineated, even if, in practice, they are intricately intertwining. First, what is Plato's metaphysics of goodness? Second, how does Aristotle understand Plato's metaphysics of goodness—if, that is, he understands it at all?⁵ These questions tend to meld into one another in practice, not least because some of our best evidence for Plato's conception of the Form of the Good comes from Aristotle himself, including primarily from passages in which he lobs critical appraisals in Plato's direction.

Despite the polemical context in which this evidence about Plato's conception of goodness emerges, one may none the less seek to determine whether Aristotle's portrayal of Plato is fair and accurate; one may then also ask whether, if his depictions are on the mark, his criticisms hit the Academic target he depicts. Here even if it is doubted that Aristotle's primary target is in fact Plato himself, one may none the less ask whether Aristotle's criticisms succeed in undermining the view criticizes. Even supposing, as some do, that Aristotle's target is not Plato but some other Academician, there remains a version of our original task, that of reconstructing and assessing Aristotle's response to it.

⁵ To say that he understands it, or even that he misunderstands it, already presupposes that he engages it. Even this latter thesis is controversial; some think his primary critical discussions take aim not at Plato himself, but rather some other Academic. See below § # for an investigation of these questions. Krohn (1876, 187) holds by implication that Aristotle misunderstood the doctrine of the good in the *Republic*: 'Der Einzige, der die spätere Phase der platonischen Staates wirklich verstanden hat, war Plotin.' More direct is Burnet (1928, 56): 'In the first place, it is certain that he [*scil.* Aristotle] never understood the teaching of the head of the Academy.'

To hold that issue in abeyance for the present, we may speak of a 'Platonic view of the Good,' whereby we mean not Plato's own view of the Good but rather a view conforming to Plato's view, perhaps deriving from Plato's Academy, perhaps not, or even, more loosely, as view merely akin to Plato's view of the Good, in the way that someone might describe Husserl's conception of the ego as 'Cartesian' or Rawlsian constructivism as 'Kantian'.⁶

So, we have a nexus of interlocking questions about the features of the view Aristotle assails, the proponent or proponents of that view, the accuracy of Aristotle's depictions, and the ultimate value of his criticisms—whether or not they aim at, or hit, a target espoused by Plato himself. It will turn out that none of these questions admits of a simple answer. Even so, by attending minutely to Aristotle's representation of the view of goodness he offers for critical scrutiny, primarily in *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 and *Eudemian Ethics* i 8, we can develop a fair picture both of the view he depicts and the reasons for which he regards it as severally problematic; we may also then turn to the rather less textually encumbered question of whether his critical posture is justified.

Critical opinion on this latter question is sharply divided, in some ways almost comically so: some find Aristotle's criticisms utterly devastating, even to the point of

⁶ We may speak this way without violence even though it is clear that Husserl himself wishes to be more circumspect (1960, 1): 'France's greatest thinker, René Descartes, gave transcendental phenomenology new impulses through his *Meditations*; their study acted quite directly on the transformation of an already developing phenomenology into a new kind of transcendental philosophy. Accordingly one might almost call transcendental phenomenology a neo-Cartesianism, even though it is obliged — and precisely by its radical development of Cartesian motifs — to reject nearly all the well-known doctrinal content of the Cartesian philosophy.'

liberating us all from an oppressively Platonic approach to the metaphysics of goodness; others find them utterly pathetic—so much so they are incredulous that Aristotle, superior philosopher that he indubitably was, could expect us to take them at all seriously; still others, unsure of what to make of them, are simply mystified by the entire affair.⁷

Matters are further coloured and complicated by the fact that some of Aristotle's readers are antecedently either sympathetic or hostile to Plato's metaphysics of goodness, and are accordingly disposed to be either sceptical or receptive to Aristotle's critical assaults. Here too, then, scholars approach Aristotle's arguments disposed to read them in one way rather than another.

Let us begin, then, by characterizing the *Platonic view of the Good*. It matters, of course, whose view it is, if anyone's; but in the present context it matters equally *which* view Aristotle takes himself to be recounting and rejecting. The view here recounted, although rooted in Platonic texts, equally reflects the sorts of theses Aristotle ascribes both explicitly and implicitly to the view he reports as embraced by his 'friends' (φιλοῖ; *EN* i 6 1096a13; cf. ix 12, 1172a5). Whether his chief friend is Plato is a matter of some dispute, but it should be conceded by all that the view of the Good he considers is a view of Academic provenance. It should also be conceded that this view bears at least a family resemblance to Plato's own expressed conception of goodness. Accordingly, a

⁷ We recount some representative critical reactions in Chapter Two # below.

first approach to Aristotle's critical discussion of the Good reasonably accords Plato's metaphysics of goodness pride of place.⁸

The Platonic view of the Good comprises the following twelve theses concerning the nature of goodness and our knowledge of it: (i) the Form of the Good (FOG) is, well, a Form; (ii) goodness is *univocal*; (iii) goodness is *one*—which is not to say that goodness, or the FOG,⁹ is *the One*—though neither is it to deny this; (iv) goodness is something common (*koinon*); (v) goodness is *universal (katholou)*; (vi) the FOG is an *acquaintable*, in the sense that one can have immediate *de re* knowledge of it; (vii) the FOG is *paradigmatic*; (viii) the FOG is *context-invariant*; (ix) the FOG is mind- and language-independent; (x) the FOG, as a Form, has all of its intrinsic properties essentially; (xi) goodness is necessarily co-extensive with Being; and (xii) goodness is *minimally productive*.

Some of these traits are reasonably straightforward, while others are a bit obscure; none of them is uncontroversially correct as a characterisation of Plato's view; all of them bear at least some preliminary explication. We may move through them

⁸ These twelve theses summarize a companion volume on goodness in the Academy, Shields (#). Fuller argument may be found there; for present purposes, however, as indicated, one may set aside the correctness of these ascriptions by focusing instead on one core question of the present book, namely whether Aristotle trains his sights on some or all of these theses, and then, whether, if he does, his arguments upend them.

⁹ Sometimes it is more natural to refer to the FOG simply as 'goodness', especially when we are thinking of it as a predicate. We do so in the present context without prejudice as to what it means for it to be predicated of the particulars which participate in it. See n. 13 below.

seriatim, explaining what each means and indicating why each has at least a claim to being authentically Platonic.

(i) The FOG is a Form. This first contention may seem beyond reproach, but there is in fact a long and perfectly credible tradition of denying that Plato regarded the Form of the Good as a Form.¹⁰ Much of this tradition stems from Plato's enigmatic contention that 'the Good is not being, but is yet further than being, surpassing it in dignity and power' (οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ' ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρῶσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος; *Rep.* vi 509b5-8). A careful analysis of this sentence, however, shows that it does not require the no-Form view of the FOG; moreover, understanding it in its context shows more completely that it would be a mistake to try to understand it in that way.¹¹

Rather, the Form of the Good is, on the contrary, one Form alongside other Forms, and so admits of whatever ontological characterization all Forms have. That is to say, then, that the FOG has the attributes that Forms have *as Forms*—let us call these its *ideal attributes*—and then the FOG, again like any other Form, will have additionally any attributes it may have in virtue of being the particular Form it is—let us call these its *peculiar attributes*. To illustrate, helping ourselves to a broad

¹⁰ See Krohn (#), Joseph (#), and, in a different way, Irwin (#), and Fine (#). One might think of the Form of the Good, for instance, simply as the totality of all Forms, or as a teleological organizing principle of all Forms or a mere condition of the existence of Forms, and so forth. See also Denyer (#), Santas (#), and Silverman (2002). For a critical assessment, see Shields (2008).

¹¹ See Shields (2008).

range of Forms for the purposes of exposition, the Form of Justice has the ideal attribute of being a *paradigm*, which trait it has in common with all other Forms, but it also has the peculiar attribute of being a virtue Form, which attribute it has in common with some other Forms, courage and temperance, for instance, but not others, the Form of Equality or the Form of Largeness, for instance. Ideal attributes, then, comprise all and only those attributes Forms have in virtue of being Forms; their peculiar attributes may or may not be shared with some other Forms, but will derive not from their status as Forms, but rather from their own individual intrinsic natures.¹²

(ii) The FOG is univocal. The FOG has as one ideal attribute *univocity*, which is to say that it admits of a complete, single, specification. More precisely, a predicate ϕ is univocal as applied to x and y =_{df} (i) x is ϕ and y is ϕ , and (ii) there exists a single, non-disjunctive, essence-specifying account of ϕ , as applied to x and y .¹³ So, for

¹² This distinction tracks the perspicuous distinction between ideal and proper attributes of Forms drawn in Keyt (1969), which rightly finds it first introduced in Aristotle's *Topics* 137b3-13. Cf. Cherniss (1962, 1-3).

¹³ Some care is needed here in speaking of a 'predicate' in this connection, since this is sometimes taken to suggest that the definitions in question will be lexical or otherwise linguistic. They are not. Rather, they will be essence-specifying. Because the word 'predicate' is hopelessly ambiguous, as between signifying a linguistic item (as in: 'is red' is the predicate in the sentence 'Her gown is red.') and a non-linguistic item (as in: 'rationality is predicated of women and men indifferently'), where the non-linguistic item is a quality or property expressed by the linguistic item, we must simply heed the context to know what is meant by the term. Neither Plato nor Aristotle expends a great deal of effort drawing this sort of distinction, but pretty clearly use both notions in different contexts. What is important for our purposes, however, is that in speaking of predicates in connection with univocity, we are speaking of them non-linguistically rather than linguistically or lexically.

instance, the predicate *being water* is univocal, since $\text{water} =_{\text{df}} \text{H}_2\text{O}$. The *definiens*, on the right sight of this formulation, specifies the nature of water, and does so non-disjunctively. If someone were to create a clear potable liquid which was indistinguishable from water in all its macro properties, even to a fairly deep level of inspection (it is clear, boils at 100°C , freezes at 0°C , and so forth), but which had a completely different chemical structure revealed only upon analysis, say, *xyz*, then this stuff would not be water—not, at any rate, if this essence-specifying account of water is correct.¹⁴ Nor would one create by fiat an essence-specifying account of water which incorporates this stuff simply by appending a disjunct: $\text{water} =_{\text{df}} (\text{i}) \text{H}_2\text{O}$ or (ii) *xyz*. Here we may notice one problem among others with a disjunctive definition in this context: it either implicitly closes off the addition of further disjuncts by fiat, in which case one needs an account showing why this is so, or it is implicitly open, so that the definition in effect reads: $\text{water} =_{\text{df}} (\text{i}) \text{H}_2\text{O}$ or (ii) *xyz* or (iii). . . , in which case the definition is incomplete and thus fails to be essence-specifying.

To return from water to goodness, then, the Platonic view embraces the univocity of the good, such that the Good yields, at least in principle, some essence-specifying account of the form: $\text{goodness} =_{\text{df}} \phi$. To put the matter less formally, and to situate

¹⁴ This common example derives from Putnam (#), but is not beholden to the particular reasons Putnam and his followers adhered to in arriving at this judgment; nor does it rely upon the thought that this identity statement is an instance of the necessary *a posteriori*. The point in the present context is rather that it represents an instance of a non-disjunctive essence-specifying account.

it in the dialectic of the Academy, we may compare this form of univocal definition to the sort Socrates demands in the *Meno*, when he castigates Meno for offering a definition of virtue (ἀρετή) as differing across a range of applications: (a) for a man, the ability to manage civic affairs and to benefit his friends while harming his enemies; or (b) for a woman, managing her home well while being submissive to her husband; or (c) something else yet again for children, for the elderly, and for slaves. Indeed, there is a virtue 'for every action and every age' (*Meno* 70a-71d). Socrates responds that he is not seeking a swarm of definitions but one, namely the one which captures the one Form whose presence makes all these virtuous people and deeds virtuous, in the way that all bees of whatever type have something in common in virtue of which they are all bees, or the way in which all shapes have something in common in virtue of which they are shapes (*Meno* 71e-72a, 72a-b, 72c-d, 74b-76b; cf. *Euthyp.* 11a-b). Socrates is here requesting a univocal definition of virtue (ἀρετή). He demands, and so evidently presupposes, univocity. So too for the the Good.

As we will see, this feature of the Platonic view will prove especially important when we come to assess the cogency of Aristotle's arguments against the view he targets as well as the eventual aptness of the alternative he promotes.

(iii) The Good is *one*—which is not to say that it is *the One*.¹⁵ Looked at one way, this third trait is a close consequence of the second, but it bears emphasizing that it means not just that the FOG is one thing and not several, but that it is one thing which is not also an agglomeration of several things, as the set of artworks owned by Art Institute of Chicago is its *collection*. The FOG is a *unity*. It might in principle be a unity by being simple, and so without parts, or by having discernible parts which are suitably subordinated to some principle of unity, as, presumably, a single human being is one thing made of many.

Here two observations are apposite, one negative and one positive:

Negative: there is a long tradition of understanding the Form of the Good to be identical with the One, which, thus written, is to be understood to be the first and highest principle of being, the source from which all other beings descend, becoming ever less unified and variegated the further they are removed from the source.¹⁶ Already in Aristotle there is a reasonably clear claim to the effect that Plato reduced all Forms to ‘Form-numbers’ and that these ‘Form-numbers’ are derived by some process from two superordinate principles, the One and the Indefinite Dyad, also called the Great and the Small (*Met.* A 6 988b22-988a1; cf. also *Phys.* 209b13–15).

¹⁵ Some think that Aristotle himself ascribes the view that the Good is the One in *Met.* # 988a7-17, 1075a38-b1, and 1091b13-15. For discussion, see Cherniss (1962, 382, nn. 300 and 301); Robin (1908, 504-505, 571-573. For Neoplatonic claims in this direction, see Plot. *Enn.* V 3.13, 6.6; VI 9.3; and Proclus, *El. Th.* 162, 123

¹⁶ Citations Krohn #

Aristotle further contends, or seems to contend, that the Form of the Good was identified by Plato with the One, such that it too, then, serves as an ultimate generative principle, a thesis accepted and developed in striking ways by Plotinus and subsequent Neo-Platonists. Controversy begotten by these passages in Aristotle has simmered along through the entire Aristotelian tradition, breaking through the surface most recently in the proposals of the Tübingen School, which saw them as licensing the recovery of a series of so-called Unwritten Doctrines regarding Plato's metaphysics of goodness, which in turn could serve to underwrite an enriched understanding of his entire philosophical system.¹⁷ This dispute is far-reaching and multi-faceted, with excesses on all sides. The negative thesis asserted here does not engage them directly: it is instead the modest point that in characterizing the Form of the Good as one, as a unity, Plato does not, and most certainly need not, identify it as *the* One, or as one of the two generative principles of all.¹⁸

Positive: There is some delicacy in the intersection of traits (ii), that goodness is univocal, and (iii), that goodness is one. Properly speaking, univocity, as

¹⁷ Some of the issues regarding Aristotle's status as a source of data about Platonic doctrine are instructively and amusingly recounted by Gerson (#). For a partisan statement of the approach embraced by the Tübingen School, see Krämer (1959), witheringly reviewed by Vlastos (1963). In (#) Cherniss reacted so strongly to the excesses of the Tübingen school that he tended, indefensibly, to discount the evidence of Aristotle altogether. Hew is slightly more judicious, however, in Cherniss (1954, n. 34). For an attempt to show how Aristotle may be used as a source of data about Plato which eschews these controversies, see Shields (#) and (#).

¹⁸ For an account of the crucial passages of *Republic* vi which argue that they do not bear the extravagant interpretations foisted upon them by proponents of this approach, see Shields (#) and (forthcoming).

introduced, characterizes the kinds of accounts or definitions various notions may enjoy, namely that they can yield essence-specifying definitions; this is further said to be an ideal attribute, manifested by all Forms. Now, one might think that since the Form of the Good, like other Forms, is one, a unity, it might also be, or even needs to be, *simple*, with the result that it would not admit of any definition at all, essence-specifying or otherwise.

This would be incorrect. A Form ϕ might *be* the essence of ϕ -ness, and thus provide the essence of what it is to be ϕ simply by being what it is. That is, the Form itself *provides* the definition by being the essence, and in so doing need not, though may, be itself further defined. First, a Form might be definable, provided that it is not simple. This seems to be the case with Justice, as Plato conceives it in the *Republic*.¹⁹ Second, and more importantly, in saying that a Form is one, a unity, we do not thereby commit ourselves to the thesis that the Form is something simple. Rather, while a Form might be simple, it might also be complex and yet unified in virtue of some principle of unity to which its discernible parts or attributes adhere.

Moreover, finally, even if it is simple, and therefore admits of no further definition, its necessary features might still be investigated and put on display.

Altogether then: one it might, but need not, regard the Form of the Good as simple; if it is not simple, it might, but need not, be definable; if it is not, one might never

¹⁹ Presumably, for instance, Plato accepts this definition of justice: # If so, this is an instance of a non-reductive analysis of a non-simple form.

the less seek to explicate the Form of the Good by rendering its necessary but non-defining features.

(iv) Goodness is something common (*koinon*). In holding that goodness is something common (*koinon*), we are not yet committed to its being a universal; still less are we asserting that it is an *ante rem* universal, where this is understood to mean that it exists necessarily, without existential dependence on its instances, in contrast to *in rebus* realism, understood as the doctrine that universals exist when and only when manifested by their instances. Aristotle regularly castigates Plato, in express contrast to his praise of Socrates, for *separating* Forms (*Met.* M 9, 1086a31-b14). This is made especially clear in the fragment of Aristotle's *Peri Ideôn* which Alexander of Aphrodisias provides in his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* A 9. There Aristotle retails arguments for the existence of Forms which he says are invalid when understood as arguments for separated universals but are none the less perfectly valid when construed as arguments for common things (*koina*). So, in his view, something might be common (*koinon*) without being separate (*chôriston*), and so might in principle be universal without being an *ante rem* universal. Moreover, something might even be common without being universal, in the way that there is something common to Duns Scotus and Iris Murdoch, namely that they both lectured in Oxford, without its being the case that there is some universal, *having*

lectured in Oxford, which each lecturer instantiates.²⁰

This too will prove to be relevant to Aristotle's presentation and criticism of the Form of the Good, because one core complaint lodged against it centres on this attribute especially.

(v) Still, in addition to being common, Goodness is *universal* (*katholou*). In characterizing the Platonic theory with this descriptor, however, one courts a reasonable sort of objection, namely that we have imported a markedly Aristotelian term into a Platonic context where it has no real resonance. After all, this is a term belonging to Aristotle's idiom rather than Plato's: in fact the technical term 'universal' (*to kathalou*) is a word alien to the Platonic corpus,²¹ and is current only in non-technical uses in earlier writers.²² More exactly, Plato uses something approximating this expression in only one line, *Meno* 77a6, where he wants to make clear that he is 'speaking about virtue as a whole, <wanting to specify> what it

²⁰ See Fine (#), along with the critical discussion by Shields (#).

²¹ By contrast, it occurs 812 times in the Aristotelian corpus. This is not to say, of course, that Plato had no concept of the universal. He might well, whether or not he uses this particular expression. It is, clear, however, that Plato does not use the exact expression Aristotle uses to characterize the theory under scrutiny; he may or may not simply use it in a more colloquial way ('speaking of virtue in general'), as do Demosthenes, *De Corona* 77.5 and Lysias, *Kata Mikinou Phonou* 229b2. Perhaps Plato's use falls somewhere in between. This is made all the more possible in view of the fact that Aristotle himself uses *καθόλου* sometimes technically (*De Int.* 17a39, *Met.* 1003a7, 1023b29), sometimes not (*Top.* 156a13, *Pol.* 1259a6).

²² Democritus DK B 29 l. 5; Empedocles DK 35 l. 15; Aesch. *Trag. frag. tet.* 44, A 639. l. 3

is' (κατὰ ὅλου εἰπὼν ἀρετῆς πέρι ὅτι ἐστίν).²³ Even here, however, it is unclear whether we should take Plato's use of the expression as at all technical ('speaking about virtue as a universal') or rather more loosely (perhaps 'speaking about virtue generally').²⁴ If we take it more loosely, if Plato is simply using the phrase in its colloquial sense, then perhaps calling the Good something *universal* will seem an imposition, and, more to the point, an imposition which does violence to a Platonic position.

This concern, though legitimate, is not compelling. In addition to the point already mentioned about technical and non-technical uses, it is important to appreciate that the Platonic view of the *relation* of the Good to good things is a one-many relation: the many good things are good because they stand in some relation to the Good, where, if the Good is an *ante rem* universal, then that relation will be some version of property instantiation. If, however, the Good is a perfect particular,²⁵ and that relation is rather some version of mimeticism, then there will remain a one-many

²³ More or less, because Aristotle's word καθόλου connects καθ' ὅλου, which as *LSJ* (s.v.) remarks is 'as it shd. perh. be written', a stylistic variant on Plato's κατὰ ὅλου. In its non-technical use, it means, simply, 'taken generally' or 'taken universally' or 'taken as a whole' or simply 'generally'. When 'taken universally' means 'taken under the guise of a universal', then it becomes something more technical. It is yet another semantic step to use the expression καθόλου referentially, as denoting *a* universal.

²⁴ These attributes imply but do not require that Aristotle is conceiving of the good in question as a universal. Cf. *APo.* i 4, 73b26

²⁵ Aristotle finds causes to criticize Plato on the grounds that Forms are somehow, objectionably, both universals and particulars, or have, effectively, both universal and particular natures (*Met.* M 9 1086a32-4, b10-11). For an analysis of the character and force of his complaint, see Shields (2008).

relation between the Good and good things, though the good will exist *ante rem* without being the sort of entity which can be wholly present at more than one location. It will, in this sense, then, fail to be a universal. Even so, it will be fair and appropriate, and not at all an imposition, to regard it as *universal* in the sense that it is the same for all instances of goodness and somehow shared by them. Something may be, in the sense here intended, universal without being *a* universal, as when one speaks of 'the universal church' or notes that 'status anxiety is universal among the bourgeoisie.' This would be more than saying that good things have goodness in common (*koinon*); it would be adding that they have goodness as a common attribute.

For our purposes, we may understand the Good to be universal in something approaching the technical way without going quite the distance to its being *a* universal, though, by the same token, we do not mean to rule out the possibility that it is a universal, perhaps even an *ante rem* multiply instantiable entity capable of being wholly present in more than one place at the same time.²⁶

(vi) Goodness is an *acquaintable*. This is effectively an epistemic point, namely that according to the Platonic view it is possible to have direct, *de re*, access to the Good, via a kind of intellectual perception or quasi-perception. We have already noted

²⁶ Eustratius (in Eth. 40, 27-29) ascribes the view to Plato that transcendent Forms are universals and yet one 'because each of them, while being one, contains many things which come to be in a body and enmattered from it and in accordance with it.'

that Plato uses perceptual, or quasi-perceptual, language in characterizing the first experience of the Good had by the guardians of Kallipolis, speaking after their encounter of their ‘having seen’ it (ιδόντας; *Rep.* vii 540a8).²⁷ The language used is charged, highly poetic, and evocative.²⁸ Taken at face value, it evidently characterizes the Guardians as achieving a direct, unmediated apprehension of the Good itself, not as grasping it indirectly or obliquely, not as learning propositions about it, not as coming to see how it must be and then inferring how it is. Instead, they see it directly, with the eyes of their souls.

This characterization variously excites and alienates Plato’s readers. Some find in it a commitment to a transcendent experience—something mystical, somehow ineffable, an apotheosis of the mind into the supernal realm. For these readers, the experience of the Good uplifts and completes. Others, reading these same texts, also find in them a commitment to a transcendent experience—and therefore spy something mystical in them, something distressingly occult, and thus find in them an implicit admission that an account of our knowledge of first principles is not to be had in non-metaphorical terms. Those in the first group, if otherwise sympathetic to Plato, may tend to point out, quite rightly, that the extravagant-

²⁷ See n. # 3 above.

²⁸ Of special note is the word ἀύγή, translated as ‘shining eye’ in an effort to reflect the word’s root meaning, as light or beams of the sun, which then is easily transferred in various ways to other subjects or bearers: the light of life (*Aesch. Ag.* 1123), the light of the eyes (*Soph., Aj.* 70), and thence transferred to the eyes themselves (*Eur. Rh.* 737).

sounding language can be explained away as hyperbole, only to be supplanted with comparatively sober and credible epistemic terms down the line. Needless to say both groups come to the passage in their different ways with hopes and expectations about its probable meanings.

We may be much more modest. In treating the apprehension of the Good as an instance of *de re* intellectual perception, one need mean nothing more than what Russell meant when he spoke of knowledge by acquaintance as follows: 'We shall say that we have acquaintance with anything of which we are directly aware, without the intermediary of any process of inference or knowledge of truths.'²⁹

Russell promotes as acquaintables universals, and especially the universal perceptual qualities he thought were manifested by sense-data: 'It is obvious, to begin with, that we are acquainted with such universals as white, red, black, sweet, sour, loud, hard, etc., i.e. with qualities which are exemplified in sense-data.'³⁰

Needless to say, Russell has come into wide criticism for his commitment to knowledge by acquaintance, but whatever its strengths or shortcomings, it would be wrong to dismiss it as mystical or disastrously unintelligible or as an obviously lamentable abnegation of his epistemic duties. Same again for Plato.³¹

²⁹ Russell (1912, 46).

³⁰ Russell (1912, 101).

³¹ For a measured, sympathetic defense of Russell's doctrine of acquaintance, see Giaquinto (2012), who contends that 'given some modification and elaboration of Russell's views, his claim that some universals are knowable by acquaintance is plausible.'

Crucially, what one makes of an episode of acquaintance of the Good is another matter altogether. By accepting a perceptual or quasi-perceptual model of *de re* acquaintance for the Good, one does not thereby necessarily gain infallible or exhaustive knowledge of it, any more than one gains exhaustive or infallible knowledge of the perceptual universals favoured by Russell. Again, the more modest point is merely that according to the Platonic view, one may in principle have direct, unmediated apprehension of the Good. Still, however modest, the commitment will rankle some sensibilities: knowing the Good *de re* will not be the same as knowing, for instance, *that the Good is thus and such*, whatever propositional knowledge this experience may license. Again, such a view may be challenging; its being challenging would not yet amount to its being somehow mystical or supernatural. Still less would it be to say that the Good itself is ineffable or otherwise unintelligible.³²

(vii) Goodness is *paradigmatic*. In one passage, Plato gives especially clear voice to a common theme in his characterization of Forms in general: 'What appears most clear to me at least is this: while Forms are set in nature just as paradigms (*παράδειγματα*), other things are similar to them and are likenesses; and this partaking of the Forms is for the others nothing other than their resembling

³² Cf. Cvetković, who makes a case for the opposing view (2005, 180): 'The Good is unknowable, and the soul can only touch it, or be united with it.' Cvetković cites *Rep.* 490b (205, 180 n. 18) on behalf of this view. Yet this passage, if anything, says the opposite, that by coming into contact with the Form of the Good, the philosopher 'would come to know' (*γνοίη*; 490b6).

them' (*Parm.* 132c12-d4). Paradeigmatism is thus an ideal attribute of Forms, and so holds of the FOG, provided, of course, that our first trait obtains, namely that the FOG is a Form.

So, accepting this commitment at face value, we may take as uncontroversial that the Good is a paradigm, indeed is a paradigm as one of its ideal attributes. It remains only to determine the way in which Forms are to be understood as paradigms. Here it serves to recall the way in which we saw the Good might be universal, in either of two ways: by being universally present or by being *a* universal. The first, but not the second, disjunct leaves open the possibility that the Good is a particular. This distinction is thus important for our understanding of paradeigmatism, since it leaves open the possibility that the Good might be a sort of perfect particular.

Some have thought this possibility not only convenient, but necessary, given that paradeigmatism positively requires that Forms be particulars, because it requires that they exemplify the property or feature for which they are held to be paradigmatic.³³ This thought, though incorrect, is understandable enough: if the Form Φ is a paradigm for ϕ -things, and ϕ -things manage to be only by resembling the Form Φ in respect of being Φ , then surely the Form must itself be Φ . After all, resemblance is symmetrical: x and y resemble each other in respect of being- Φ only

³³ So Ross # and # See Shields (#) and (forthcoming #) for a discussion of this matter

if x is Φ and y is Φ . The thought lies near, then, that as a proper account of paradeigmatism would require shared property exemplification and thus that all Forms, in virtue of their ideal attributes, be perfect particulars.

The contention that paradeigmatism requires shared property exemplification fails twice over. It fails first because x and y can share a property ϕ even though one is a particular and the other a universal. A beautiful boy and the Form of Beauty, assuming it is both a universal and self-exemplifying, can equally exemplify beauty. Further, it is a mistake to suppose that resemblance, or mimeticism more broadly, requires shared property exemplification. Thus, six bungalows in a post-war housing development can all be copies of the single blueprint serving as the paradigm in accordance with which all are built. The blueprint, though, does not exemplify the property of being a house, since it is not a house, but a two-dimensional schematic of a house. The blueprint merely *encodes* being a house.³⁴ So, in sum, paradeigmatism is compatible with perfect particularity but does not require it; similarly, it is consistent with shared property exemplification between paradigm and copy, but, once again, does not require it.

What really matters for *paradeigmatism* is that a Form, as a paradigm, be *normatively regulative* for its instances. In keeping with this requirement, then, one ideal attribute of the FOG will be this: it serves as a norm in terms of which all good things, of

³⁴ The language of exemplification and encoding follows the distinction as drawn in Shields (#), (#), and (#forthcoming).

whatever degree of goodness, qualify as good. This attribute, too, will come in for special criticism in Aristotle's treatment.

(viii) Goodness is *context-invariant*. Plato frequently characterizes Forms in terms which may initially strike his readers as exorbitant, perhaps even to a point which challenges a ready understanding of his meaning. So, for instance, in a passage in the *Symposium* elevated in tone relative even to some of his other exaltations of Forms, Plato characterizes the Form of Beauty, to which one ascends via a process of focussing progressively on it alone, shorn of its inessential accompaniments, as 'Beauty itself, taken by itself, within itself, one in Form, and existing always' (αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ μεθ' αὐτοῦ μονοειδὲς ἀεὶ ὄν; 211b1-2). If one focuses on these attributes, and understands them in relation to one of Plato's premier arguments for the existence of Forms, given at *Phaedo* 74a-d, one appreciates that as one feature among others of any given Form ϕ , ϕ will never be is, or never appear, to be not- ϕ . Thus, when speaking of Equality, Socrates asks: 'But now, did the equals themselves ever seem to you unequal, or equality inequality?' (Τί δέ; αὐτὰ τὰ ἴσα ἔστιν ὅτε ἄνισά σοι ἐφάνη, ἢ ἡ ἰσότης ἀνισότης; *Phaedo* 74c1-2). Although this query may be understood in various ways, it is plausible to suppose that Plato means, minimally, that unlike ϕ -things, the ϕ itself never proves to be not- ϕ . Thus, to use Plato's own illustration, a stick and a stone might be both equal and unequal: equal in weight, perhaps, but unequal in length. In this sense, the question of their equality is context

variant—in one context, weight, they are equal, and in another context, length, they are not. Equality itself, by contrast, is never unequal. Applying this to the Good, as indeed Plato himself does:³⁵ it will never be or appear to be bad, or not-good.

Goodness itself is not good only relative to a context of appraisal. It is wholly good, simply good, in every possible context of appraisal.

(ix) Goodness is mind- and language-independent. One can be comparatively brief about this and the next trait, since they are more or less self-explanatory: the Form of the Good exists before it has been discovered by the guardians, being the ‘last thing learnt’ and ‘hardly seen’ even then (*Rep.* vii 517b8-9): it is not created by their thoughts or their manners of speaking, or by ours, or by anyone else’s. In short, the Good is not invented but encountered. Indeed, this is hardly peculiar to it among Forms, since being mind- and language-independent pertains to Goodness, as to all Forms, as an ideal trait.

(x) Goodness has all of its intrinsic properties essentially, and does so as an ideal attribute. When he speaks of Beauty itself as beauty in its own right (or itself, or taken by itself; καθ’ αὐτὸ; *Symp.* 211b1-), Plato indicates that he has in view beauty alone, as undiluted and unalloyed. If Beauty itself is simply Beauty, and nothing else, then it has no tincture of any other intrinsic accidental trait or feature. It will have, then, no intrinsic accidental property of any kind. It does not follow from this

³⁵ A few pages later in the *Phaedo* Plato mentions ‘both the Beautiful and the Good and all that sort of being.’ (καλὸν τέ τι καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ πᾶσα ἢ τοιαύτη οὐσία; 76d8-9).

that it will have no features beyond being Beauty itself. On the contrary, as we have seen, it will have a series of other ideal features—it will be one, context-invariant, and so on—but all such features, as ideal, will pertain to it of necessity. Once again, as ideal, this trait extends to all Forms and so to the Goodness itself.

Plato makes this or an allied point in another way when arguing for the soul's immortality in the *Phaedo*. In the so-called Affinity Argument (*Phaedo* 78b4-84b8), the details of which do not concern us here, Plato likens the soul to a Form, which he in turn characterises as 'divine, deathless, knowable, uniform, incapable of disintegration, and always similarly disposed to itself with respect to the same things' (τῷ μὲν θείῳ καὶ ἀθανάτῳ καὶ νοητῷ καὶ μονοειδεῖ καὶ ἀδιαλύτῳ καὶ ἀεὶ ὡσαύτως κατὰ ταῦτὰ ἔχοντι ἑαυτῷ ὁμοιότατον; *Phaedo* 80b1-3). Most of these descriptors are familiar, though the last, that it is 'always similarly disposed to itself with respect to the same things' suggests something additional, namely that a Form will never shift internally in response to its interactions with any other object; Forms are stable and uniform. Since each Form is (or has, or both is and has)³⁶ the peculiar

³⁶ The question of whether Forms are self-predicative, and if so, in what way has excited a good deal of interest. Though well worth exploring, this issue need not detain us here, though we should note that if Forms as Forms are self-predicative, then self-predication will be an ideal attribute of Forms, and there seems to be no reason in Plato's text for making any such assumption. Of course, this is consistent with its being the case that an individual Form will be self-predicative as a matter of its having the peculiar attributes it has. Thus, to illustrate, the Form of Being will be an object of thought (will be νοήτων) *possibly* factively but *inescapably* modally. To return to the Form of the Good: it will presumably be good, though this may or may not be in virtue of its ideal attributes. For an in-depth study of Plato's commitments regarding self-predication in Plato's earlier period, see Malcolm (1991).

attribute it is essentially, no Form can shift in any way, with the result that every Form will lack intrinsic accidents altogether.

(xi) Goodness is necessarily co-extensive with being. In a remarkable passage of the *Republic*, Plato writes that 'in the case of things known, one is to say, then, that not only is their being known present to them because of the Good, but that both their existence and their being is present to them because of this, though goodness is not being, but is still further beyond, surpassing being in dignity and power' (*Rep.* vi 509b6-9). Interpretations of this passage vary widely,³⁷ but one plausible, if mildly deflationary, approach understands Plato to be offering a caution against *identifying* the Forms of Goodness and Being, something one might be tempted to do given that Being and Goodness are not only co-extensive, but necessarily so. On this approach, the dominant thought is that though, of necessity, every Form exists and every Form is good, we should not infer that *what it is for a Form to be good* is the same as *what it is for a a Form to exist*, intensionally construed. Just as, necessarily, all and only triangles are trilaterals, one should not presume on that ground that triangularity and trilaterality are the same attribute. Further, though correct as far as it goes, this illustration fails to highlight one further feature of the Form of the Good, namely that it is somehow prior to Being: its being present is responsible for, and so explanatory of, the existence of each other Form, including the Form of Being. That

³⁷ Shields (#) contains a survey of some approaches, as does Ferber (1989) and (2005).

is, though each Form exists and is good, the existence of a Form is explained by its goodness and not the other way around. This, at any rate, seems reflected in Plato's saying of Forms that both 'their existence and their being is present to them because of this' (καὶ τὸ εἶναι τε καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν ὑπ' ἐκείνου αὐτοῖς προσεῖναι; *Rep.* vi 509b6-7), immediately before going on to caution that 'goodness is not being, but is still further beyond, surpassing being in dignity and power' (οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ' ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος *Rep.* vi 509b7-9).

As we shall learn, this feature of the necessary co-extensivity of being and goodness plays a role in Aristotle's criticism of the Platonic conception of goodness, since Aristotle equally finds an intimate connection between being and goodness, holding that 'goodness is meant in as many ways as being' (τὰγαθὸν ἰσαχῶς λέγεται τῷ ὄντι; *EN* i 6 1096a23-24). As Aristotle understands this connection, however, it tells against the Platonic conception of goodness rather than in its favour.

(xii) Goodness is *minimally productive*. In claiming that the presence of the FOG is somehow responsible for the existence of the other Forms, Plato sounds a note which appears over and over again in his conception of Forms, namely that Forms are, in some sense of the term, *causes* (αἰτία). One salient example involving the good: 'Then it is by wisdom,' Socrates asks, 'that wise people are wise, and by the good that good things are good?' 'How could it be otherwise?' the pliant Hippias

responds (*Hipp. Maj.* 287c5-6).³⁸ Here too one may attach a wide range of meanings to his suggestion that Forms, in including the Form of the Good, are causes,³⁹ straddling in various ways the thoughts that Forms are either explanations *or* causes, or that Forms are explanations *and* causes, or even that Forms are explanations *because* causes. In calling them minimally productive, we do not discriminate among these alternatives, but contend that the presence of a Form ϕ is responsible for a ϕ -thing's being- ϕ . It follows that any fully adequate account of what it is for something to be ϕ will advert, either proximately or remotely, to the Form being- ϕ . Thus, all equal things will require, if their equality is to be understood, some reference to Equality itself, which is what it is for them to be equal at all. By the same token, all good things will require, if their goodness is to be adequately explicated, an appeal to the Form of the Good, again either proximately or remotely.

This attribute too is plainly on Aristotle's mind when launching his attacks of Plato's metaphysics of goodness, since after canvassing some candidates for the final good, he reports, accurately if his attribution is in fact to the Platonic view, that 'Some used to think that beyond these many good things there is some other good, something in

³⁸ Οὐκοῦν καὶ σοφία οἱ σοφοὶ εἰσι σοφοὶ καὶ τῶ ἀγαθῶ πάντα τὰγαθὰ ἀγαθὰ;" —III. Πῶς δ' οὔ; (*Hipp. Maj.* 287c5-6).

³⁹ See Fine (1987/#) and Sedley (#) for different ways of thinking about this issue. Bailey (2014) provides a clear overview and offers a plausible approach.

its own right (τι καθ' αὐτὸ εἶναι), which is the cause (αἴτιον) of the goodness of all these good things' (EN i 4, 1095a26-28).

These, then, are the twelve principal traits of the Platonic view of goodness. To re-emphasize: these traits are neither wholly independent of one another nor exhaustive of all key features of the FOG. They do, however, jointly bring to the fore the dominant traits of the Platonic conception of goodness relevant to our study, drawing out in different ways its singularity and priority, even while highlighting, in its ideal attributes, those features the Form of the Good shares with every other Form. Although challenging and sometimes difficult to explicate succinctly, these features of Plato's metaphysics of goodness are neither individually nor corporately in any sense of the term mystical.⁴⁰

Taken together, these twelve traits jointly summarize, then, a view of the Good, that Good which the best of the guardians apprehend when they at long last arrive at the epistemic destination they have craved throughout their schooling and training. Without arguing in the present context that this list is accurate in all details as a characterisation of Plato's considered view of the Form of the Good,⁴¹ let us, again, for

⁴⁰ Again, for an opposing view, cf. Cvetković, who concludes (205, 181) that 'Plato's mysticism can now be seen to be of the theistic type.'

⁴¹ That is the task of another book, namely, Shields (forthcoming #)

now, stipulatively refer to this collection of commitments as the *Platonic view of the Good*.⁴²

II. A View of a View of the Good: Preliminary Distinctions and Initial Questions

Aristotle has his own view of the Platonic view of the Good: he thinks it is false. In fact, he is highly critical of it, even to the point of disparaging it as otiose and as a hopeless non-starter. His view emerges primarily in two parallel passages, which overlap considerably but also differ in several key respects: *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 and *Eudemian Ethics* i 8. Aristotle inserts the first, better known discussion somewhat intrusively into the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where it emerges as a sort of interlude. In general, in *Nicomachean Ethics* i, Aristotle identifies the highest good for human beings as *eudaimonia*, happiness or human flourishing (*EN* i 7). He rightly observes, however, that any such contention proves a hollow concord when shared without some further commitment concerning the nature of *eudaimonia*. After all, even those who assent to the same statement, that *eudaimonia* is the highest good, may yet harbour substantive disagreements about the character of *eudaimonia* (*EN* 1097b22); when they do, they assent to the same sentence but use it to express different propositions. About that much Aristotle seems surely correct: two people who agree

⁴²This view of the Platonic view of the Good may be fruitfully compared with another, from an earlier period, owing to Eustratius, the Metropolitan Bishop of Niceae in the early twelfth century. In his commentary of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Eustratius proceeds just as we have done, by offering a characterization of the Platonic view he understands to be under attack. We retail that list below, in 2. # .

that happiness is the highest good agree on almost nothing, if one of them supposes that 'happiness' is just another name for pleasure (*EN* i 5, 1095b16-23) while the other is steadfast in her conviction that a happy life is the life of honour (*EN* i 5, 1095b23-26)—and so on for other conceptions of happiness. So, until the nature of happiness or human flourishing is fully specified, little is agreed by those variously inclined to identify the highest good as *eudaimonia*. The discussion thus turns naturally, almost inevitably—just as Aristotle himself turns it—to a discussion of the nature of the highest good which *eudaimonia* is meant to be.

Even before this discussion of the nature of the highest good gets underway, however, it is not at all the case that *nothing* substantive has been agreed by the parties willing to engage it. On the contrary, even those who dispute the nature of *eudaimonia* have accepted something significant in common: they in fact hold something highly controversial, namely that *there is a highest good*. They simply disagree about its character. One may doubt this in any number of ways, by holding, for instance, that although there are many goods, no one of them is pre-eminent, or, more radically, by embracing the nihilist conclusion that there is no such thing as goodness at all, such that nothing at all can meaningfully be said to be good.⁴³

⁴³ There are of course a range of meta-ethical postures here, not always delineated in the same terms. Here we implicitly distinguish nihilism from error theories of the sort Mackie (#) espouses by accepting the thought that the latter but not the former treat claims of the form 'x. . .is good' as meaningful but systematically false.

Importantly, though, there are other less marked forms of disagreement among those who accept the existence of a highest good, the sorts of disagreement which may be masked by their initial agreement that there is a highest good. Such disagreements tend to be less immediately visible than the obvious observation that those who accept *eudaimonia* as the highest good may yet differ about the nature of *eudaimonia*. This is because any agreement to the effect that there is a highest good, while surely non-trivial, is also crucially incomplete in another way. This we can appreciate by observing that already, even at this fairly abstract, non-specific level, a sort of problem emerges for Aristotle's interpreters and critics. This problem is reflected in the fact that even within the scope of just the first two paragraphs of the present section, we have ourselves already had occasion to speak not only of '*the highest good*' but also of '*the highest good for human beings*', without so much as marking the difference. Failing to mark this distinction can be unfortunate, even if we think, as some evidently do, that the '*the highest good*' and '*the highest good for human beings*' clearly come to the same. Plainly, as can be seen upon a moment's reflection, these expressions cannot be interchanged indifferently with one another. For while in principle these claims *might* come to the same, surely they need not. They would come to the same, for example, if it were to turn out that the '*highest good for human beings*' and '*the highest good*' name the same thing, the FOG, for instance. They might do so; but, then again, they might well not, even if there is such a thing as the FOG.

This shows that one cannot simply assume that these expressions are co-referential. On the contrary, one might reasonably believe that although there is a highest good for human beings there simply is no such thing as the highest good *simpliciter*, a highest good which is not also the highest good *for someone* or *for something*.⁴⁴ Or someone might think that there is such a thing as the highest good, an objective good, and then also another sort of good which is always subjective, which is to say that it is always at least partly constituted by the intentional or affective state of some psychological subject.⁴⁵ Such a person might then contend that ‘the highest good’

⁴⁴ This is the view of Kraut (#), and moreover, according to Kraut, the view of both Plato (#) and Aristotle (#) well. We will have occasion to query these contentions below, but for now it should be clear that Kraut sketches at least a possible position, and if the position he sketches is at least possible, then it is also possible that the disagreement introduced in the text is also in play. One might think, for instance, that since there is no highest good *simpliciter*, the phrase ‘the highest good’ always contains an implicit, contextually sensitive rider, such as ‘. . . for human beings’. Kraut (#) argues forcefully for the view that there is no such thing as absolute goodness; in this he follows the earlier expressions of similar views by Williams (1982) and Foot (1985). One way to combat these views, not Plato’s way, but surely one consistent with Plato’s approach, can be found in Hurka (1987).

⁴⁵ Because the terms ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ are used variously in value theory, let us stipulate for the purposes of our explorations that (i) a property Φ is subjective =_{df} Φ *constitutively* depends on the psychological attitudes or responses an observer has to some phenomenon; and (ii) a property Φ is objective =_{df} Φ is not subjective. So, as an easy example, *being fashionable* is a subjective property of a suit style, because for a suit to be fashionable is simply for it to be so regarded by the fashion trend setters and their followers, whereas *being even* is an objective property of a number, because its being so is wholly independent of its being so regarded. Of course, this formulation does not tell us whether, say, *being good* or *being beautiful* or *being mauve* are objective or subjective features of things; but it does at least provides a straightforward frame of reference for adjudicating disputes about these matters. This formulation agrees with the pellucid framework adopted by Huemer (#). For a more metaphysically explicit and nuanced articulation of a commitment to the objectivity of goodness, see Oddie (#). See also Rønnow-Rasmussen (2009), whose notion of personal value may be regarded, in these terms, as a very local species of subjective value. Finally, for a more general exploration the varieties of goodness, see Von Wright (1963).

names an objective good, whereas ‘the highest good for human beings’ names a subjective good, namely that good whose goodness at least partially resides in its being regarded as good by human beings.⁴⁶ Here we need not endorse either view to see that each is a possible position in logical space; this is already enough to show that talk of the highest good and the highest good *for S* may come apart. In the first case they come apart because the phrase ‘the highest good’, unlike the phrase ‘the highest good for human beings’, has vacuous reference; in the second case they might come apart because the first names an objective property and the second a subjective property, and such properties of necessity mutually exclude one another.

We see, then, that when Aristotle speaks of the highest or best good in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (τὰ γὰρ θὸν καὶ τὸ ἄριστον; 1094a22; cf. *EN* 1099a24), he may in principle be speaking of a subjective or an objective good. In fact, however, things are more complicated still, because though objective and subjective goods are mutually exclusive, they do not exhaust the kinds of goodness which may be in view in Aristotle’s text. Given in particular that subjective goods constitutively depend upon the attitudes or affective states of psychological subjects, one may reasonably think that in addition to *being good simpliciter* and *being good for human beings*, where the latter is

⁴⁶ To be clear, someone who thinks that there is a highest good for human beings that is not the same as the highest good *simpliciter* need not also think that the highest good for human beings is a subjective good. On the contrary, the highest good for human beings might be an objective good distinct from the good *simpliciter*. In the present context, we are only making vivid the point that no-one can presume without argument that the good for human beings cannot also be the same as the good *simpliciter*, if there is such a thing.

understood subjectively, there are also other forms of goodness for other sorts of living beings—being good for lambs, for trout, or for rosebushes—and then also forms of goodness which are altogether impersonal but still sortal-relative, including, for instance, functional goodness, as in the goodness of a knife or a pipe organ made in the Northern German baroque style. Aristotle plainly relies crucially on this last form of goodness, functional goodness, in the much discussed (and much maligned) function argument in *Nicomachean Ethics* i 7, 1097b9-1098a17.⁴⁷ As he deploys this notion in that argument, he shows that he appreciates that a distinction between functional and non-functional goodness may cut across a distinction between subjective and objective goodness. In consequence, we find ourselves confronted with a complex set of overlapping distinctions which must be kept distinct.

For the sake of clarity, let us name a first conception of the highest good, goodness *simpliciter*, as an *absolute conception* of the highest good, and mean by that, in a preliminary way, a form of goodness which is not qualified in any way: not goodness *for* someone or something; not goodness *in so far as* something is ϕ , where being- ϕ is some manner of predicate, whether sortal or non-sortal, whether kind-indicating or not, in so far, that is, as something is a shepherd, or an algorithm, or an opportunity, or a

⁴⁷ For a brief overview of the argument see Shields #. The literature on this argument is voluminous. For a classic critical assessment see Glassen (#); for a defense against the sorts of criticisms Glassen mounts see Whiting (#). Although it is not usually put in these terms, Glassen's gap, as it is called, turns on accusing Aristotle of conflating two forms of value, namely a predicate relative functional value (being a good knife, flute, or human) and a non-functional form of value (being good *for* for a knife or a flute or a human).

performer on the operatic stage; not goodness *as so regarded* by someone; not goodness *relative* to some agent or interest; not *functional goodness*, goodness as excelling at a function or task.⁴⁸ Let us then, by contrast, call the second, contrasting set of notions *indexed conceptions* of goodness, and mean by this all the forms of goodness which are in some way or other keyed to a limiting predicate or interest or perspective. These broad categories, between absolute and indexed conceptions of the final good are meant to be mutually exclusive and exhaustive, though, again, the various forms of indexed goods need not be mutually exclusive, since, for instance, functional and sortal kinds will come to the same, at least extensionally speaking, if the sortals in question are functional predicates, like *being poisonous*. Even so, despite this overlap, the notions are importantly distinct and thus are usefully distinguished. This is all the more so, since it might also turn out that an absolute good, which is by stipulation non-indexed, could also turn out to be good for someone or something, even necessarily so, in the sense that it could be good, for instance, for someone to grow as close to the absolute good as possible.

Taking that all together, when we approach Aristotle's treatment of the highest good, we must keep in mind two criss-crossing distinctions: (i) between objective and

⁴⁸ These ways of indexing goodness need not be mutually exclusive. To take but one example, when a kind K is a functional kind, like a knife, its sortal-dependent goodness and functional goodness will come to the same thing. Still, the different ways of indexing goodness listed correspond to the various ways people have thought about characterizing non-absolute goods. See Geach (1956), Von Wright (1963), Wiggins (2009), Shields (#, n. #), Segvic (2004), Oddie (2013) and (2017), and especially Kraut (2011).

subjective goods; and (ii) between indexed and non-indexed goods. Further, when we turn to his criticisms of the Academic approach to goodness, we will need to bear in mind how he conceives of the view he puts under review. So far, we have committed ourselves to accepting that the Platonic view of the good is *inter alia* objective and non-indexed. To repeat, however, we have *not* thereby said the objective good cannot, suitably understood, *also* be good *for someone* or *for something*. As we have already suggested, it might turn out to be the case that it is good for a subject to be as close to the absolute good as it can be, or, as Aristotle himself possibly thought (*EN* x 7, 1177a12-b26), and as some later Christian Aristotelians definitely did think,⁴⁹ that it might be good for an intellectual subject to contemplate the absolute good as its primary or exclusive object of intellection. In these ways, it might be good for something to orient itself towards the absolute good, to gravitate towards it in thought or deed. It would not follow that the absolute good would then become an indexed good; an indexed good is essentially indexed and a non-indexed good essentially not. There is, in general, no impediment to an objective good's being also good for someone or something. What a good cannot be is both subjective, and so essentially indexed to a subject whose affective or intentional attitudes at least partly constitute it, and also an absolute and therefore objective good.

⁴⁹ So, e.g. Aquinas, *ST* Suppl. 92, resp.

Once cast in terms of these orienting distinctions, at least three preliminary questions regarding Aristotle's talk of a highest or best good come immediately to the fore.

First, is he speaking only of an indexed good, for instance, of the good for human beings?⁵⁰ Aristotle speaks easily and unselfconsciously of the best or highest good (τὰγαθὸν καὶ τὸ ἄριστον; *EN* i 2, 1094a17-21); but he does so in contexts where it would be natural, if not unavoidable, for him to be speaking of an indexed good, the best good *for human beings*. He is, after all, in this context thinking about 'some end among practicable things which we wish for because of itself' (τι τέλος ἐστὶ τῶν πρακτῶν ὃ δι' αὐτὸ βουλόμεθα; *EN* i 2, 1094a18-19), which might reasonably be taken to indicate *our* end, the end indexed to humans exclusively. Given, however, that the end we seek might in principle be understood in absolute terms, such that it is also simultaneously a good towards which human beings will wish to gravitate, Aristotle's proceeding in this way does not settle the matter.

This, though, leads directly into our second question: does Aristotle allow, explicitly or implicitly, that there is such a thing as absolute goodness?⁵¹ Or does he recognize, perhaps as part of an anti-Platonic posture, only indexed goods?⁵² Our attitude towards this question will inform our approach to some additional questions

⁵⁰ This is the view of Brüllmann (2007).

⁵¹ Kraut (2011, #) argues that he does not.

⁵² Again, see Kraut (2011).

down the line concerning the Aristotle's objections to the Platonic conception of the good. For instance, does perhaps Aristotle at root object to (putatively) Platonic commitment to the existence of a non-indexed good? Or does he think, more mildly, that the existence of such a good, even if it does exist, is irrelevant to the programme of determining how best to live? A civic engineer might think that realism about numbers is false or even silly; or she might think, more mildly, that such questions are simply not germane to her interest in building functional, sturdy bridges.

Third, if we assume for the nonce that Aristotle does countenance a notion of absolute goodness, but is none the less concerned in *Nicomachean Ethics* only with an indexed notion of goodness, namely *the good for human beings*,⁵³ then a further question comes to the fore: how should we conceive the relation he sees, if any, between the absolute and indexed conceptions of goodness as he sees them? Our answer to this question, too, will have implications for how we understand his attitude towards the Platonic good. In particular, does he object to its character as absolute as opposed to its being indexed? If so, is this his primary complaint?

III. An Axiological Interlude in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

⁵³ In his instructive study of these topics, Brüllmann (2011, 12 n. 6) contends on the basis of *EN* 1102a13–15 that the good outside expressly Platonic contexts in *EN* I is *always* and without exception the best or highest good for human beings.

This last question concerning the main focus of Aristotle's complaint, though crucial to our study, becomes quickly vexing. In one way, we have a wealth of detail to consider as we approach it, because Aristotle pauses in the middle of his preliminary discussions of the highest good in *Nicomachean Ethics* i to consider and reject a view of the good which is resolutely absolute, namely (some version of) the Platonic view of the Good. This view Aristotle rejects several times over, by denying that goodness is 'something common, universal, and one' (κοινόν τι καθόλου καὶ ἓν, *EN* i 6, 1096a28). His reasons for going down this path are, however, hotly disputed, and have tended to divide his readers, both interpretatively and evaluatively.

This is in part because most of Aristotle's objections to the Platonic view of the Good are primarily axiological rather than deontological in character, and are for this reason inherently abstract and complex. Further, when Aristotle levels a criticism against the axiological features of the Platonic view of the Good, our assessment of their worth perforce brings us into contact with some broader themes in both Plato's and Aristotle's metaphysics and thus into some themes which equally divide their readers, again no less interpretatively than evaluatively.

In speaking of the *axiological* versus the *deontological* features of Plato's and Aristotle's investigations into the good, we are using the term 'axiology' to designate a family of concerns in the metaphysics of value, including but not limited to questions such as: What is intrinsic value? Which things have intrinsic value? Are there

irreducibly distinct kinds of goodness? Are all good things commensurable? Are all values commensurable? Ordinally rankable? Comparable? Is value additive? Organic?

While no doubt carrying indirect consequences for how we ought to conduct our lives, these sorts of questions are never the less importantly distinct from such comparatively practical normative questions as: 'What is my duty in this situation?' 'How should I act when called upon to sacrifice my interest?' 'How ought I to live my life?' As a point of further clarity, this last question reminds us that the word 'deontology' too has broad and narrow uses: narrow, when contrasted with consequentialism as a normative theory, and broad when contrasted with axiology. Here we are using the term in its broad sense.⁵⁴

With just this much by way of preliminary stage setting, we are in a position to become clearer about the primarily axiological character of Aristotle's criticism of the Platonic account of goodness. To be sure, he does raise some objections pertaining to its relevance to the conduct of our lives (*EN* i 6, 1096b35-1097a14). He raises these objections, however, as a sort of addendum, as a targeted response to someone who might wish to insist, as Plato himself does (*Parm.* 132c12-d4), that the Good must serve as a sort of paradigm (*paradeigma*), such that it will equip those with knowledge of it to recognize more readily the indexed good-for-us which is our concern in normative ethics. After all, one might suppose that 'by possessing this paradigm, we will also

⁵⁴See , for instance, Oates (1973: 15-16, 49, 130).

know those goods that are good for us, and by coming to know them, we will be able to hit upon them' (παράδειγμα τοῦτ' ἔχοντες μᾶλλον εἰσόμεθα καὶ τὰ ἡμῖν ἀγαθὰ, κὰν εἰδῶμεν, ἐπιτευξόμεθα αὐτῶν; *EN* i 6, 1097a1-2). Although we will certainly investigate these criticisms as well, we note here that they expressly depart in character from the primary complaints of the chapter, which mainly prescind from practical matters altogether, focussing instead, again, on the axiological features of the view under scrutiny.

These deontological questions emerge as a sort of coda to the core of *Nicomachean Ethics* i 7 inasmuch as they move away from its primarily axiological character. The chapter is thus primarily an axiological interpolation into an avowedly deontological treatise, dedicated to the question of the good for human beings with a principal eye on the question of how we ourselves might become good (*EN* i 2 1094b11-13, ii 2 1103b27-31, x 9 1179b1-10).

Aristotle introduces his axiological discussion this way:

We had presumably better consider the universal <good> and run through the puzzles concerning what is meant by it—even though this sort of investigation is unwelcome to us, because those who introduced the Forms are friends of ours. Yet presumably it would be the better course to destroy even what is close to us, as something necessary for preserving the truth—and all the more so, given that

we are philosophers. For though we love them both, piety bids us to honour the truth before our friends (*EN* i 6 1096a11–17).

This rich passage, whose last sentence is reminiscent of a similar remark of Plato's,⁵⁵ leads us in many directions, but, for now, let us focus on one of them only: the subject of inquiry.

Strictly, so far Aristotle has said only that he had presumably better consider the universal (*to kathalou*);⁵⁶ it becomes clear soon enough, however, that he has universal *goodness* in his sights (*EN* i 6, 1096a19-25). In proceeding in this manner, it is already clear that the view of the good Aristotle intends to address is an Academic theory of the good. The theory owes to his friends (φίλοι; *EN* i 6, 1096a13), the ones who introduced or embraced the theory of Forms. Even so, Aristotle proceeds, as is customary for him, by characterising the view of his friends in his own idiom; the technical term he uses to describe the Academic theory of the good, 'universal' (*to kathalou*), is a word current

⁵⁵ This may be intentional or not, but Aristotle's contention here is immediately reminiscent of a remark Plato makes about Homer, after expressing his own reluctance to criticise a poet beloved of him since his youth: 'Still,' he says, 'a man's honour is not preferred to the truth' (*Rep.* x 595b7-c2).

⁵⁶ Some will note that his exhortation might be milder: 'we had *perhaps* (ἴσως) better. . .' Aristotle's language here should not, however, be taken to indicate tentativeness. Aristotle's use of the word ἴσως varies, just as does our use of our word 'presumably'—sometimes strengthening, sometimes qualifying, sometimes neutral. So, e.g. *Met.* A 6, 987a26 seems plainly intended to push a point forward. In the present context, any reluctance Aristotle may have stems, he informs us, from personal affection; but as he promptly also informs us, this affection does not dissuade him from taking up the topic. He thus evidently recognises this matter as sufficiently philosophically important to override his personal reluctance. One question thus concerns why he thinks it should be engaged. To be clear, he does *not* say that it is to be considered simply because those who developed a view pertinent to it are friends of his. On the contrary, this is the source of his disquiet.

only in non-technical use in earlier writers and is most notably not attested at all in the Platonic corpus.⁵⁷ We will in due course want to reflect on the cogency of his doing so, but first it is important to situate Aristotle's chapter in its proper metaphysical framework within *Nicomachean Ethics* i.

The first crucial point is that if it presents itself as an interlude, *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 does not therefore present itself as a digression. At any rate, it does not present itself as a digression if a digression is an interruption leading one pointlessly away from a main line of investigation, some manner of byway however charming or engaging, at best tangentially related to the main theme of the work. For, on the contrary, this chapter does have an immediate relevance to the discussion of the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

This may be obscured by the chapter's opening. Just as Aristotle indicates, *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 is a temporary redirection of topic. Further, the following chapter expressly redirects the discourse back to the dominant thread of *Nicomachean Ethics* i: 'But let us return (ἐπανέλθωμεν) to the good being sought. . .' (*EN* i 7, 1097a15), where that good is precisely *eudaimonia*.

The chapter does, then, have the character of a framed interlude. One may thus ask: what sort of interlude is it? More importantly, why does it occur just where it occurs in the flow of the first book? Does it contribute anything to our understanding of

⁵⁷ See n. 21 above #.

Aristotle's positive doctrine, or is it mainly a kind of ground clearing, preparing the way for a proper, useful investigation of the human good? Or, worse, is it merely a self-indulgent swipe, gratuitously treating the Academics to some pointless eristic for sport?

To answer these sorts of questions, we must return to the chapter's primarily axiological character. Briefly put, *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 is an axiological interlude in a deontological treatise. It is, moreover, an axiological interlude which makes perfect sense in its present location, because *Nicomachean Ethics* i finds Aristotle attempting to determine the highest good, or the highest good for human beings, and he has before him a singular candidate for just such a good: namely, the Platonic view of the Good, according to which there is a universal good, a good which, if it exists, is implicated always and everywhere goodness occurs, and which, to paraphrase a remark of Plato's in the *Euthyphro*, is that Form whose presence *makes* good things good.⁵⁸ As we have seen, on the Platonic view, the Good is implicated in the goodness of good things at least in the sense that it is a *paradigm* of goodness, such that all good things are good by dint of their imitating the Good itself in some measure or other.⁵⁹ It is in this way, at least, a cause of the goodness that good things manifest. This is noticeably just how Aristotle introduces his predecessors leading into *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6, though, again,

⁵⁸ *Euthyphro* 6c-e.

⁵⁹ More will be said about imitation below, but already it is important to note that *contra* Patterson's (#) otherwise valuable study, an imitation of *x* need not be a *non-x*. While it is true that a photograph of a panting man is not itself panting, a (colour) photograph of a green vase is itself green.

without naming names: ‘Some used to think that beyond these many good things there is some other good, something good in its own right, which is the cause (αἴτιον) of the goodness of all these good things’ (EN i 5, 1095a26-28).

Accordingly, if it turns out that there is such a good, then it qualifies as a candidate for being the good to be sought in *Nicomachean Ethics* i. After all, Aristotle himself opens the work arguing that all action aims at something good (EN i 3, 1094a1-3), and then adds in the second chapter that all action is eventually subordinate to some final good, which is the best good:

If, then, (i) there is some end in the sphere of our actions which we wish for because of itself and (ii) because of which we wish for other things, and (iii) we do not choose everything because of something else—for, if we do, things will proceed in this way to infinity, so that desire will be empty and futile—then clearly this would be the good, that is, the best good (τὰγαθὸν καὶ τὸ ἄριστον) (EN i 2, 1094a17-21).

Focussing on this best good, he then reasonably asks, ‘Will not knowledge (γνῶσις) of it have decisive significance with respect to our manner of life?’ (EN i 2, 1094a22-23).

Since we care in our deontological reflections about the course our lives should follow, if our respected friends have a candidate proposal for a guiding principle which can play a central role in determining the direction of our lives, presumably we should investigate their suggestion. Moreover, if it turns out to be as advertised, then we

should turn our attention to it. If, by contrast, we determine that there is no such good, either because we find it as described incoherent or otherwise as simply non-existent, then we should return to the good we are seeking having left their suggestion by the wayside. We should then pursue the good as *we* understand it, in our own terms, and as delimited and undergirded as appropriate by our own metaphysical framework.

An investigation of the good promulgated by our predecessors might take any number of directions, but if we think their proposal founders already in its metaphysical presuppositions, we may safely set their view aside on just these grounds. This is a further sense, then, in which the *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 is an axiological interlude: it comprises a brief, concentrated inquiry into the metaphysics of value, holding in abeyance deontological questions about how one ought to conduct one's affairs. If we agree that there is such a good as our friends submit, then we will also want to admit that knowledge (γνῶσις) of it will be of great moment for the course our lives should take. Again, by contrast, if there is no such good, then any further discussion of it would be for our purposes plainly otiose.

Importantly, if this general characterisation of the basic orientation of *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 is apt, then there are already consequences for our assessment of Aristotle's own preferred approach to the metaphysics of goodness. After all, he has his own deontological and axiological concerns. If there is no such good as the good posited by the Platonic View—perhaps, for instance, because there is no such thing as a

non-indexed good, or because goodness is multivalent such that there are many irreducibly distinct kinds of goodness—then, again, there will be ramifications for the possible contours of Aristotle’s positive deontology.⁶⁰

To preview just one possible ramification: if goodness is, as against the Platonic view, non-univocal, and commensurability among goods requires univocity, as Aristotle himself sometimes contends (*Top.* i 15, 107b13-17), then good things will not be readily brought into rational orderings or preference rankings. Fairly plainly, however, this is something Aristotle regularly and rightly, even unavoidably, does in his own deontological investigations in *Nicomachean Ethics* i and elsewhere. To be clear, the point of this passing preview is not at present to raise an objection to Aristotle’s procedures,⁶¹ but rather indicate one way in which the axiological interlude of *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 shapes and constrains the rest of the work. Just as his rejection of the Platonic view frees him to develop his own axiology, so it constrains the possible directions that axiology may take; and with those constraints come still more constraints

⁶⁰ Here we may readily both agree and disagree with Flashar (1995, 68): ‘Aristotle did indeed abolish the independence of practice from theory, but in his hierarchy of values and gradations of being he remains a Platonist to a greater extent than his critique would suggest.’ He may be right about the degree to which Aristotle remains a Platonist without also being right about his having severed practice and theory.

⁶¹ This issue is explored in detail below, in Chapter #. Cf. Oates (1973, ix), who prefaces his work *Aristotle and the Problem of Value* by reporting: ‘The first step in my investigation was to examine the entire corpus of Aristotle’s writings in the effort to identify all the important passages in which he became involved, either explicitly or implicitly, in the question of value or, as I have called it from time to time, the “phenomena of evaluation.” . . . [T]hese texts have been analyzed and interpreted in order to try to validate the major thesis of the book, namely, that Aristotle when he faced the question of value was frequently inconsistent or even incoherent.’

on the possible contours of his own deontology make take. Aristotle plainly cannot, with justice, first criticize Plato and then presuppose, however tacitly, any of the very features rendered problematic by his own critical postures.

IV. A View of a View of the Good: Aristotle's Axiological Reaction to Plato

With just that much spade work, we may reproduce Aristotle's view of the Platonic view in its entirety, as it emerges in *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6. We relegate a presentation of the parallel discussion of *Eudemian Ethics* i 8 to an appendix, not because it is less important—for it is on some points much more important and on other points, if not as important, none the less usefully corrects some impressions *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 might otherwise leave—but because the text of that chapter is in a miserable state, requiring a good deal of conjectural reconstruction before it may be presented for evaluation. The notes to Appendix One offer some reasons for the reconstruction presented there and assumed throughout.

By contrast, the text of *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 is in reasonably good shape. Even so, it contains its own obscurities and exegetical challenges. The translation offered here breaks the text into sections representing its primary organizational divisions, and thus, inevitably, rests upon some controversial decisions about the argumentative structure of the chapter. According to the text as divided, the chapter contains seven primary

arguments;⁶² although not universally agreed, this number is justified in the discussions to follow. While unavoidably reflecting some disputable decisions, the divisions offered here do reflect the dominant arguments deployed by Aristotle. He begins with some preliminary matters which we have already encountered, and then offers a series of arguments punctuated by some hypothesized rejoinders.

Although prescinding from offering any argument, the preliminary material of the chapter sets the tone in important ways:

i. Preliminary Introduction

We had presumably better consider the universal <good> and run through the puzzles concerning what is meant by it—even though this sort of investigation is unwelcome to us, because those who introduced the Forms are friends. Yet presumably it would be the better course to destroy even what is close to us, as something necessary for preserving the truth—and all the more so, given that we are philosophers. For though we love them both, piety bids us to honour the truth before our friends (*EN* i 6, 1096a11-17).

Thereafter, the chapter is more or less continuous, striving to exercise the demands of philosophical piety by attacking the Platonic view of the Good on multiple fronts, first

⁶² This controversy is reflected in the fact that even careful scholars disagree about how many arguments the chapter contains. Joachim (1951, 37-47) finds four, as does Stewart (1892, vol. 1, 70); Grant (1885, vol. 1 208) identifies four, though with only a partial overlap with Stewart's and Joachim's four, while Flashar (1995, 65-69) reads five. Jacquette reconstructs and discusses seven (1998, 321)

by means of three direct arguments and thereafter by considering some proposed Platonic responses. It ends by returning its dominant axiological considerations to some purported deontic shortcomings in Plato's metaphysics of goodness.

The remainder of the translation divides the chapter into its main polemical divisions for ease of reference:

ii. No Forms over the Prior and Posterior

Those who advanced this view did not produce Ideas for those cases in which they said there was a prior and a posterior; and this is the very reason they did not furnish an Idea in the case of numbers. Yet the good is spoken of in the <category of > *what it is* (τί ἐστὶ; *scil.* substance), and in quality and in relative; and what is in its own right, that is, substance, is by nature prior to the relative, for this seems to be an offshoot and something co-incident with being, so that there would be no common idea over these (*EN* i 6 1096a17-23).

iii. Goods across the Categories

Further, since good is meant in as many ways as being is meant: in [the category of] what something is [*scil.* substance], for instance god and reason (νοῦς); in quality, the virtues (αἱ ἀρεταί), in quantity, a fitting amount (τὸ μέτριον); in relative, the useful (τὸ χρήσιμον); in time, the opportune (καιρός); in place, an abode (δαίτια); and other such things <in the other categories>, it is

clear that the good cannot be something common, universal, and one (κοινόν τι καθόλου καὶ ἓν). For if it were, it would be used meaningfully not in all of the categories,⁶³ but rather in one only (EN i 6 1096a23-29).

iv. The Diversity of the Sciences

Further, if indeed there is a single science of things corresponding to a single Idea, then <if there were a single Idea, goodness> there would also be some one science of all good things; but as things are there are many sciences even of things falling under a single category. For instance, concerning the opportune <in the category of time>, in the case of war, <the science is> generalship, while in the case of sickness it is medicine; and concerning the fitting amount <in the category of quantity>, in the case of food <the science is> medicine, while in the case of exercise it is gymnastics (EN i 6 1096a29-35).

v. The Idleness of Speaking of 'the Good Itself'

⁶³ Alternatively: 'for then it would be spoken of not in all of the categories, but rather in one only' (οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἐλέγετ' ἐν πάσαις ταῖς κατηγορίαις, ἀλλ' ἐν μιᾷ μόνῃ). Although it is conventional (and understandable) to translate Aristotle's stock locution *pollochōs legomenon* (πολλαχῶς λέγεσθαι) as 'spoken of in many ways', this risks giving the misleading impression that it is the good which is being spoken of, not other things, as good. The current passage especially makes clear that Aristotle wants to make the point that '. . . is good' can be meaningfully predicated of items in all the categories. Whether this shows that goodness therefore cannot be univocal is a further matter, to be investigated below, in Chapter 4.#.

Someone might also raise a difficulty as to what in the world they mean to be saying <in speaking of> 'Each-thing Itself' (αὐτοέκαστον), since the account of human is one and the same in 'Human Itself' (αὐτο-ανθρώπων) and in human, for in so far as each is human, they differ not at all. If this is so, neither will the <Good Itself and the good differ> in so far as each is good. Moreover, the <Good Itself> will not be *more* good by being eternal, since <a white thing> lasting a long time will be none the whiter than one lasting but a day (EN i 6, 1096a34-b5).

vi. Relative Praise for the Pythagoreans and Speusippus

The Pythagoreans would seem to have a more plausible view of this [scil. the good], placing the One as they do in the column of good things. What is more, Speusippus seems to have followed their lead here. But let us leave these matters for another discussion (EN i 6, 1096b5-8).

vii. A Platonic Rejoinder Considered and Rejected

A certain dispute concerning what has been said <by us about the good> comes into view, however, because of the fact that the arguments given [by the Platonists] did not concern every good; rather <only> goods pursued and loved

in their own right were spoken of as corresponding to one form (καθ' ἐν εἶδος), whereas those productive of these, or somehow preservative of them or preventative of their contraries, were spoken of <as good> because of these and in a different way.

It is clear, then, that [on the account of the Platonists, good things] would be spoken of in two ways (διττῶς): as things good in their own right (καθ' αὐτά) and as things <said to be> good because of these (διὰ ταῦτα).

Let us, then, once we have separated them from those which <serve as mere> contributors, investigate whether things good in their own right (καθ' αὐτά) are spoken of as corresponding to a single Idea (κατὰ μίαν ιδέαν).

But which sorts of goods should one regard as good in their own right? Or are these those pursued even when taken on their own, as for instance prudence, seeing, certain pleasures, and honours are? For even if we pursue these because of something else, one would never the less regard them as goods in their own right.

Or is it that nothing except the Idea [of the Good is good in its own right], with the result that the Form (τὸ εἶδος) will be pointless?

But if there are other [things good in their own right alongside the Form of the Good], then the account <of goodness> will need to be shown to be the same for all of them, just as the account of whiteness in snow and in a pigment

(ψιμυθίον) is the same.⁶⁴ But the accounts of goodness as it pertains to honour, intelligence, and pleasure are different and divergent (ἕτεροι καὶ διαφέροντες), precisely in the way in which they are good. It is not the case, then, that the good is something common corresponding to a single Idea (τὸ ἀγαθὸν κοινόν τι κατὰ μίαν ἰδέαν) (*EN* i 6, 1096b8-26).

viii. A Conciliatory Concern

But how, then, is goodness spoken of? For it does not seem akin to those things which are homonymous by chance. Is it, then, spoken of [like those instances of homonymy] where all things derive from one thing or contribute to one thing? Or is it rather spoken of by analogy? For as sight is to body, so reason is in the soul, and, in general, as one thing is in another so a different thing is in yet another (*EN* i 6, 1096b26-29).

ix. Deontological Considerations Re-introduced

⁶⁴ Aristotle is here speaking of a kind of lead (ψιμυθίον) used for whitening the face; it would have been worn, for instance, by actors on the stage. This word ψιμυθίον is usually translated as 'white lead' but that gives a slightly wrong emphasis for Aristotle's example.

But presumably one should leave these matters aside for now; for speaking accurately concerning them belongs more appropriately to another [branch] of philosophy; same again regarding the Idea <of the Good>. For even if the good is one and predicated in common,⁶⁵ or is something separate, something good itself in its own right (χωριστὸν αὐτό τι καθ' αὐτό), it is clear that this would not be achievable in action or able to be acquired by a human being; yet that is the sort <of good> now being sought.

Perhaps, though, it might seem better for someone to come to know this [scil. the Idea of the Good], with reference to the goods that can be achieved in action or acquired—since by having this paradigm we shall know better those goods which are good for us (τὰ ἡμῖν ἀγαθὰ; *EN* i 6, 1097a2-3) and if we know about these we will be better able to attain them.

While this argument does have a certain amount of plausibility, it would seem to be at variance with the [actual practice of] the sciences. For all sciences, while aiming at some good and paying heed to what is lacking, leave knowledge of the <this sort of> good by the wayside. And yet if it were such a great

⁶⁵ Reading ἔστιν ἓν τι καὶ κοινῇ κατηγορούμενον ἀγαθὸν for ἔστιν ἓν τι τὸ κοινῇ κατηγορούμενον ἀγαθὸν, as in the OCT, which yields instead 'For even if the good is something one predicated in common.' Probably Aristotle is being careful to distinguish questions of unity from questions of common predication, which would reflect sensitivity to the sort of distinction drawn between features (iii) and (iv) in our presentation of the Platonic View of the Good above, in §1. I.

resource, it would be unreasonable of craftsmen to be ignorant of it and not even to pay it any heed.

Moreover, it is hard to figure how a weaver or a carpenter will be benefited in his own craft by knowing this Good itself (τὸ αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἀγαθόν), or how someone who has beheld this Idea (ὁ τὴν ἰδέαν αὐτὴν τεθεαμένος) will be more versed in generalship or more of a skilled physician. For a doctor evidently does not even consider health in this way [*scil.* abstractly—let alone the Good abstractly], but considers instead the health belonging to a human, or rather, presumably, the health belonging to *this* human, for he treats one human at a time.

Let just this much be said concerning these matters. (*EN* i 6, 1096b35–1097a14).

V. The Arguments of *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6

We may now present the argumentative spine of Aristotle's view of the Platonic view of the good. The chapter contains five primary axiological arguments, followed by two deontological arguments which serve to return the treatise to its main focus.

We develop them in detail in the chapters to follow, sometimes amplifying and sometimes correcting them by reference to discussions elsewhere, most notably those given in the parallel passage of *Eudemian Ethics* i 8, and to a lesser extent, *Magna Moralia*

i 1.⁶⁶ As we present them, they hew as close to the text as possible, in some cases, though, providing slight expansions intended to tease out their initial force.

(1) No Forms over Series (*EN* i 6, 1096a17-23)

1. Where things F_1, F_2, \dots, F_n are related as prior and posterior (πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον), there is no Form F -ness set over them.
2. Good things are related as prior and posterior.
3. So, there is no Form Goodness set over good things.

On behalf of (2) Aristotle adverts, at least glancingly, to the theory of categories, thus yielding as an ancillary argument on behalf of the second premiss:

1. Beings in the category of substance (οὐσία) are called good.
2. Beings in the categories of (a) quality (ποιός) and (b) relative (πρὸς τι) are called good.
3. Substances (οὐσίαι) are prior in nature (πρότερον τῇ φύσει) to qualities and relatives.

⁶⁶ There is considerable dispute about the relation of these two works, in both time and value. For a survey of some of the issues, see Kenny (1978), who holds, controversially, that the *EE* is both later and better than the *EN* (cf. Allan (1961) and Irwin (1980)). Briefly, the present work proceeds on the assumptions that the *EE* is earlier but not therefore worse than the *EN*, even though the *EN* represents a more mature phase of Aristotle's ethical thinking. They seem to have been produced for different audiences, with the result that the *EN* is written in a less technical style and thus omits some forms of wanted technical argumentation where the *EE* is more forthcoming.

4. If substances are prior to the other categories of being, and if ϕ is predicated of substances and beings in the other categories of being, then the ϕ substances are prior to the ϕ non-substances.
5. So, good things are related as prior and posterior.

As we will see below, in Chapter Three, both of these arguments, despite their initial brevity, prove remarkably complex.

(2) An Argument from the Categories (*EN* i 6, 1096a23–9)

The second argument relies more fully on the doctrine of the categories, and has been regarded by some scholars as the pre-eminent argument of the chapter.⁶⁷ In its briefest form, this passage suggests an arrestingly simple argument:

1. Goodness is meant in many ways ($\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota\ \pi\omicron\lambda\lambda\alpha\chi\tilde{\omega}\varsigma$) if, and only if, being is meant in many ways ($\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota\ \pi\omicron\lambda\lambda\alpha\chi\tilde{\omega}\varsigma$).
2. Being is meant in many ways ($\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota\ \pi\omicron\lambda\lambda\alpha\chi\tilde{\omega}\varsigma$; *Met.* 1003a33-34).
3. Hence, goodness is meant in many ways ($\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota\ \pi\omicron\lambda\lambda\alpha\chi\tilde{\omega}\varsigma$).

The basic idea of this argument is plain enough: goodness tracks the homonymy of being. Since being is meant in many ways, so too, then, must the good be homonymous.

⁶⁷ So Ackrill (#). See also MacDonald (#).

Needless to say, there is plenty of room for questioning each of these premisses. When we scrutinize the passage, however, we find Aristotle arguing more directly for a negative for a negative thesis than a positive one. The following argument receives most attention in this section of text:

1. There are ten categories of being (or, for that matter, there are n categories of being, where $n > 1$).
2. If (1), there are irreducibly distinct kinds of beings.
3. So, there are irreducibly distinct kinds of beings.
4. It is possible to predicate goodness of items in these various categories. (One may say, that is, 'x in c^1 is good' and 'y in c^2 is good' and 'z in c^3 is good' and so on for the n categories of being).
5. If goodness were univocal, it would not be possible to predicate goodness across the categories in this way. (For if goodness were something universal, common and single, 'it would not be spoken of in all the categories, but in one only'; *EN* i 6, 1096a28–9).
6. Hence, goodness is not univocal.

One crucial question concerns (5) in this supporting argument: why should bare transcategorical predication be sufficient for non-univocity? Or is there something more standing behind this premiss, generating non-univocity indirectly?

These and like questions are pursued in Chapter Four.

(3) An Argument from the Diversity of the Sciences (*EN* i 6, 1096a29–34)

1. Goodness is univocal only if there is (or can be) a single science of goodness.
2. Every science (*ἐπιστήμη*) is set over a single, non-disjunctive domain Δ .
3. Hence, if goodness is univocal, there is a single, non-disjunctive domain Δ of good things.
4. If there were a single, non-disjunctive domain Δ of good things, goodness would not be meant differently intra-categorially.
5. Goodness is meant differently even intra-categorially.
6. Hence, there is no single, non-disjunctive domain Δ of good things.
7. Hence, goodness is not univocal.

This argument is tricky: it is difficult to state in a non-question begging way. Still, the general source of Aristotle's complaint seems clear enough, as rooted in some facts about scientific practice. Roughly, if goodness were as projected by the Platonic View, we would not expect to find a variety of different sciences pertaining to the goods as they show up even within various categories. Yet good things even within the category of time, a category evidently chosen more or less randomly, already exhibit a diversity of scientific treatments. Generalship treats the good in the category of time where warfare is concerned, while medicine treats the good where health is concerned. That these are manifestly different sciences already reflects a diversity of goods, even

intracategorially. Thus, there being no single domain Δ of good things even within a category, there is plainly no super science of all good things, across all the categories of being.

This argument is examined in detail in Chapter Five.

(4) The Idleness of Speaking of 'the Good Itself' (*EN* i 6, 1096a34–1096b5)

The argument of this passage is difficult to bring into sharp focus; it might be developed in several different ways. Indeed, there may be several arguments indicated, each requiring amplification. One possible formulation takes the gist of the complaint, as a first approximation, to be concerned with paradeigmatism:

1. For each Form ϕ , the Platonists append 'Itself', yielding 'the ϕ -Itself' in order to mark off ϕ as paradigmatically ϕ .
2. Adding 'Itself' to ' ϕ ' yields something paradigmatically ϕ only if it (a) adds something distinctive to ϕ or (b) renders ϕ more explanatorily efficacious by rendering it eternal.
3. Not (2a): Adding 'Itself' to ' ϕ ' adds nothing distinctive to ' ϕ ', since, on the contrary 'the account of human is one and the same in 'Human Itself' ($\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\alpha\nu\theta\rho\acute{\omega}\pi\omega$) and in human, for in so far as each is human, they differ not at all.' (*EN* i 6, 1096b1-2).

4. Not (2b): Adding 'Itself' to 'φ' adds nothing by rendering φ eternal, since 'the <Good Itself> will not be *more* good by being eternal, since <a white thing> lasting a long time will be none the whiter than one lasting but a day' (EN i 6, 1096b3-5).

There is much to contest in this reconstruction, both as a reconstruction, and, on the assumption that it captures the main purport of Aristotle's complaint, as an effective criticism of Platonic paradeigmatism. These issues provide the point of departure for Chapter Six.⁶⁸

(5) A Dilemmic Argument from the Plurality of Intrinsic Goods (EN i 6, 1096b8–26)

This long stretch of text portrays itself not as a direct argument against the Platonic View of the Good, but rather as a crushing retort to an intelligent response put into the mouth of the Platonists. The response Platonist-proffered response is apparently imagined to be somewhat concessive on the part of the Platonists: they are represented as agreeing, at least implicitly, that goodness, if not multiply meant, is meant in at least two ways (διττῶς; 1096b13): there are things good in their own right (καθ' αὐτά) and things in one way or another conducive of things good in their own right, either by producing them, or preserving them, or by removing impediments lying opposed to them (τὰ δὲ ποιητικὰ τούτων ἢ φυλακτικά πως ἢ τῶν ἐναντίων

⁶⁸ See also 2. # for a brief discussion of Eustratius's distinctive take on the argument.

κωλυτικά; 1196b11-12). The idea, put in these terms, is that the Platonists had only ever envisaged a single Form for things good in their own right, for per se, or as we shall say, *intrinsic goods*—though that notion itself will need to be specified with care.⁶⁹ At least these sorts of goods qualify as univocally good because they are all ‘such as to be pursued and loved for themselves or in their own right’ (τὰ καθ’ αὐτὰ διωκόμενα καὶ ἀγαπώμενα; EN 1096b10-11).

As we will see,⁷⁰ in proceeding this way, Aristotle is here implicitly appealing to his own doctrine of core-dependent homonymy, in effect offering the Platonists a kind of rejoinder founded in his own metaphysical apparatus.⁷¹ Whether or not this is a hygienic way of engaging them, Aristotle offers a riposte to their rejoinder, one with far-reaching consequences for his own axiology and deontology. In outline, Aristotle’s argument takes the form of a dilemma:

1. Either (a) there are many intrinsic goods, or (b) one only, viz. the Form of the Good.
2. If (1b), then the notion of intrinsic goodness will play no role and the FOG will be otiose.

⁶⁹ See below # for a discussion of the contrast between intrinsic and non-intrinsic goods to which Aristotle here appeals.

⁷⁰ See below 6.#

⁷¹ The matter is more complicated, however, since there is some evidence that at least one other member of the Academy, Speusippus, had also embraced the apparatus of homonymy. See Barnes #. In the extant writings of Plato, however, the word ‘homonymy’ appears only in its non-technical sense of ‘namesake’. See Shields (1999 #) for a discussion of this evidence.

3. If (1a), then the accounts of ‘... is good’ as it applies across the range of intrinsic goods will be either univocal or homonymous as regards that range of good things.
4. In fact, the accounts of ‘... is good’ as it applies to these sundry intrinsic goods differs, ‘precisely in the way in which they are good’ (οἱ λόγοι ταύτη ἢ ἀγαθά; *EN* 1096b24-25).
5. So, if (1a), goodness will be homonymous across the range of intrinsic goods (and there will be no univocal FOG).
6. So, either (a) goodness is homonymous (and there is no univocal FOG) or (b) the FOG is otiose.

Here too there is some obscurity about the precise contours of Aristotle’s argument, but it seems clear that he means to saddle the Platonists with an unpalatable set of alternatives.

One question about this strategy: does it prove too much, if it proves anything at all? That is, Aristotle here seems to embrace a very fine-grained conception of the multivocity of goodness, so much so, in fact, that it may threaten his own deontological procedures. This question will be taken up in two phases, in Chapter Seven.

(6) The Practical Irrelevance of the Form of the Good (*EN* i 6, 1096b35–1097a13)

Aristotle closes out the chapter by re-introducing some deontological considerations pertinent to the Platonic view of the good. Even so, in this section Aristotle offers a number of contentions pertinent to the relation of the axiological and deontological features of the Platonic view of the Good to one another, and so also, by implication, to his own as well.

He begins by conceding, counterfactually from his perspective, that the good is something, as the Platonic view maintains, separate and good itself in its own right (*χωριστὸν αὐτό τι καθ' αὐτό*; *EN* i 6, 1096b32-34;). He then maintains that such a good would be useless, that it would be unattainable by a human being, and so irrelevant to the deontological enterprise in which he is now engaged.

Strikingly, he offers the Platonist precisely the rejoinder one would expect, given their view: the Good envisaged is a paradigm (*παράδειγμα*) and could serve as a guide for human conduct. More exactly, if our goal is to attain some indexed goods, those things which are good *for us* (*τὰ ἡμῶν ἀγαθὰ*; *EN* i 6, 1097a2-3), then we can only be assisted in our efforts: if we know, for instance, what makes these goods good, then we will be able to identify them more readily; and if we can identify them more readily, we will then also more readily attain them. So, still on the assumption that there is a separate good, and adding to this the natural thought that goods instrumental to this derive their goodness from it, knowledge of it can only help us in our quest to attain the goods we seek.

Aristotle initially accords this response the respect it merits: he concedes that it is plausible (*πιθανότης*; *EN* i 6, 1097a3); but he then proceeds to reject it on the grounds that it is at variance with the actual conduct of the sciences and crafts. If it really did exist, and if it really were a paradigm, then we would expect those pursuing things which are good for us, like doctors and carpenters, to pay it heed. As things are, they do not. Indeed, suggests Aristotle more strongly, they are right to proceed just as they do, for it is not at all clear what consideration of so abstruse a principle could offer them. Thus, even if indulgently considered to exist as a paradigm of goodness, the Form of the Good, from the standpoint of practical rationality, would be idle.

Taking that altogether, in the closing deontic section we find Aristotle offering an argument along the following lines:

1. A separate, non-indexed good would be useful to the attainment of the good we seek, namely our good, the good for human beings, only if it could be known in such a way that it would serve as a useful paradigm of goodness.
2. If such a good were available as a paradigm, then (a) one would expect scientists and craftsmen to be mindful of it, and (b) one could readily imagine how the sciences and crafts could avail themselves of their (prospective) knowledge of it.

3. In fact, neither (2a) nor (2b) obtains: the sciences in fact do not proceed with a view to any such such paradigm , and there is no clear reason to suppose that they should or, indeed, could.
4. Hence, a conjectured separate, non-indexed good would not be useful to the attainment of the indexed good we seek, namely the good *for us*.

The argument plainly reintroduces deontic considerations, and also seeks to exploit a distinction between absolute and indexed goodness.

So construed, however, the argument introduces a number of complications, some resulting from its proceeding on two tiers simultaneously. On one level, it seems a straightforward appeal to the actual practices of the sciences, such that Aristotle's point might be construed as an appeal to the *phainomena*: if we observe how, for instance, doctors doctor, we do not notice them advertent in their practice to the good. Yes, they seek the good for us (τὰ ἡμῖν ἀγαθὰ; *EN* i 6, 1097a2-3); but they do not appear guided, even implicitly, by attending to the (putative) Good Itself.

At the same time, there is another, modal level: he contends that even on the assumption of the existence of a separated Good (χωριστὸν αὐτό τι καθ' αὐτό; *EN* i 6, 1096b33), 'it would not be achievable in action or able to be acquired by a human being' (*EN* i 6, 1086b33-34). Here the stakes are higher, since the argument rests not merely on an appeal to the *phainomena*, no matter how compelling such an appeal might be, but a claim to the effect that a separated Good would be permanently unattainable

by human beings. This claim raises the bar of proof considerably, since to secure it Aristotle will need to specify some reasonable conditions of attainment and then explain why human beings are precluded from reaching it. Here it is noteworthy that he himself will later, in another context, allow that human beings can and should aim at contemplating the highest objects available to them, evidently including centrally god, as their highest end (*EN* x 7, 1177a19–21; cf. *Met.* xii 7 and 9).⁷²

We consider these and related complications in Chapters Eight.

VI. Concluding Considerations

Aristotle's criticisms of the Platonic View of the Good are variegated and nuanced, though also, unfortunately, very tersely stated. Assessing them involves first recovering and expanding them, though this is a task already fraught with hermeneutical complexity and controversy. There is a temptation, indulged too often in the long tradition of considering these texts, to read Aristotle's arguments through the lens of a presumed eventual evaluation of their final force. Those antecedently sympathetic to Plato are apt to find them wanting; those confident of Aristotle's critical success tend to find them near enough devastating.

While it would be churlish to suppose that all exegetes have succumbed to temptations of these sorts, one can detect an unusual level of refracted reading among

⁷² On Aristotle's use of the verb 'to contemplate' (*θεωρεῖν*) in this connection see Eriksen (1976) and Roochnik (2009).

the scholars and philosophers who have engaged Aristotle's critical texts. It behoves us, then, in so far as we may be able, to avoid this temptation by holding in abeyance our own eventual appraisal of Aristotle's arguments; we should bring the arguments themselves into focus without prejudging their ultimate force. To the extent that we may succeed in doing so, and no further, will we be in a position to determine whether the Platonic View remains a viable option after Aristotle's onslaught.

As we have already intimated, and as we will see in detail in the next chapter, opinions around this question divide rather sharply.