

[Chapter Two]

Six Views of a View of a View of the Good

I. A Source of Difficulty

The compressed arguments of *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 directed against the Platonic view of the Good have been variously received—so much so, in fact, that they serve as a virtual Rorschach test for the philosophical predilections of Aristotle's readers. Indeed, this chapter has occasioned so remarkably divergent a set of responses that it has few rivals within the entire Aristotelian corpus. Even a brief review of its reception history uncovers an alarming degree of scholarly disarray concerning even its most basic claims; and that does not yet begin to address the more tangled critical question of their defensibility. Some scholars find its arguments utterly devastating, understanding them to refute the Platonic view of the good decisively and without room for any manner of retort; others, at the other end of the spectrum, regard Aristotle's arguments as woefully inadequate, even pathetic, as jejune attempts to refute a view the lineaments of which eluded Aristotle altogether. Still others are simply baffled by the entire affair.

Consider first, for instance, near one end of the spectrum, the estimable nineteenth-century Aristotelian commentator on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, J. A.

Stewart, speaking of Aristotle's evident attempt to topple Plato's view of the good:¹ 'It is difficult to understand a man of Aristotle's calibre attacking, as he does, a theory like this. . .' After all, observes Stewart, 'his own philosophy of human life, with its ideal of the θεωρητικὸς βίος [*theôrêtikos bios*, the contemplative life] and its doctrine of εὐδαιμονία [*eudaimonia*, happiness or human flourishing] as something not to be counted among particular good things (E. N. i. 7. 8), is in entire sympathy with it.'² Stewart frets, then, because as he reads the chapter Aristotle evidently assaults an Academic theory of goodness the basic precepts of which he himself roundly endorses. How could a man of Aristotle's calibre fail to grasp so patent an incongruity?

From a not too distant remove, however, we might be ourselves perplexed by Stewart's perplexity. For we might as easily accept straightaway, as a guiding exegetical principle, that Aristotle, being a philosopher of the calibre Stewart esteems him to be, manifestly, expressly, and with good reason distances himself from a view he introduces only to excoriate. After all, Aristotle repeatedly faults Plato for separating the Forms (*Met.* A9, 991b1-3, M 9, 1086a31-b14), and he, more pertinently, made a career of assailing Plato's univocity assumption, which, again,³ holds that a given philosophical

¹ The attempt is 'evident' rather than merely an attempt, since in Stewart's view we are better advised to understand Aristotle's target to be a lesser Academic like Speusippus, which would at least explain the grotesqueness of his apparent failure. Stewart (1892 vol. 1, 77) thinks that Plato, 'as distinguished from weak disciples, did not regard—could not have regarded' the Good to have the features attacked in *EN* i 6.

² Stewart (1892 vol. I, 74)

³ See 1 #

concept admits of a single, non-disjunctive essence-specifying account. On this approach, which Aristotle rightly understands Plato to embrace,⁴ just as all instances of water have the property of being-H₂O in common, so there is some feature, being-φ, which all and only instances of goodness have in common. Aristotle is hardly ‘in sympathy with this assumption.’ On the contrary, this is something Aristotle takes pains to assail overtly in *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6, contending that ‘goodness is meant in as many ways as being’ (τὰγαθὸν ἰσαχῶς λέγεται τῷ ὄντι; *EN* 1096a23-24; cf. *EE* 1217b25-27). This claim, when combined with a second contention of Aristotle’s, that being is meant in many ways (τὸ δὲ ὄν λέγεται μὲν πολλαχῶς; *Met.* iv 1, 1003a33-34), entails that goodness is meant in more ways than one and is thus not univocal. So, whatever more general sympathies he may have with Plato’s approach to goodness,⁵ Aristotle’s own deeply entrenched commitments evidently require him to proceed exactly as he does: he roundly rejects the Academic view he reproduces. What is puzzling about that?

If we step back from our own puzzlement, however, perhaps we can come to appreciate why a man of Stewart’s calibre might after all be puzzled by Aristotle’s axiological commitments. For our own judgments, no less than Stewart’s, are at least

⁴ See 1#

⁵ Stewart (1892, vol. 1, 74), surprisingly, ascribes to Plato and Aristotle in common an allegiance to a line of Goethe’s *Generalbeichte*, much beloved of the 19th c. British Aesthetes: “Im Ganzen, Guten, Schönen resolut zu leben,” is the ideal for Aristotle’s εὐδαίμων, no less than for Plato’s φιλόσοφος.’

partly conditioned by our answers to questions which have puzzled Aristotelian scholars for as long as there have been Aristotelian scholars. Some of these questions reflect assumptions we may be making about their precise character of Aristotle's arguments as well as about his intended target.

Indeed, it takes just a moment's reflection to observe that we ourselves have already encountered even in the last several paragraphs two very different potential sources of Aristotle's disenchantment with the view he recounts in *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6, namely *separation* and *univocity*. In so doing, we have also assumed, at least implicitly, that Aristotle's intended target is Plato, and not some lesser Academic, or perhaps even, as some have thought, some sort of melded portrait of lesser Academics, no one of whom merits individual recognition.⁶ Not everyone accepts these suppositions. Stewart for one is doubtful. His extreme puzzlement about the force of Aristotle's criticisms construed as an indictment of his fellow traveller Plato induces him to hypothesize that Aristotle's arguments are targeted not at Plato, but at the views

⁶ See Grant #

of lesser unnamed Academics,⁷ or perhaps Speusippus.⁸ This, he supposes, would relieve Aristotle of the unhappy charge of inexplicably excoriating a view whose commitments he himself embraces.

Perhaps, then, if we reflect on our own presuppositions, we may find that we do not really disagree with Stewart's evaluative judgments after all; we may as readily conclude that the theory targeted for criticism by Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 *understood one way* turns out to be uncomfortably close to his own positive theory, but, again, this only when understood in one way and not in some other. Perhaps, then, any disagreement we may have with Stewart, if in fact we have such a disagreement, concerns not the final evaluation of the relation between a Platonic and an Aristotelian axiology, but results rather from a disagreement about some associated matter, perhaps

⁷ See n. 1 above.

⁸ Stewart # suggests this as possible, but only tentatively, partly because he finds the arguments of *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 so dreadful. It is true that Speusippus is the only Academic actually named in the chapter, at *EN* i 6 1096b6. This mention is, however, locally deployed in a passage suggesting that Speusippus might be credited as following Pythagoras, who is also treated as having a view 'more plausible' (πιθανώτερον) than Plato's, in that it places the one and the good in the same column in a series of opposites (cf. *Met.* i 5, 986a22-27). The reference to Speusippus in the connection, in addition to being local, is obscure, as Flashar notes (1995, 57-78): 'It is scarcely possible for us still to establish what he means by saying that Speusippus, Plato's nephew and his successor as head of the Academy, adhered to this doctrine of Pythagoras. There is however an element of agreement in the fact that Speusippus did indeed abandon the Platonic identification of the one (*hen*) and the good (*agathon*). With the mention of Speusippus, Aristotle is now using an actual Academician to bear his attack on Plato, following here a procedure that is quite characteristic of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, i.e. deploying inconsistencies and contradictions within the criticized doctrine itself. It is not that Aristotle in any way shares the view of the Pythagoreans and Speusippus. . . ; he only refers to it as relatively 'more plausible' than the doctrine he had previously criticized.'

some doxographical question about the author of the theory he targets or some exegetical matter concerning the precise content of Aristotle's polemical arguments.

In sum, our disagreement with Stewart, if we have a disagreement with Stewart, might concern the character of the theory under scrutiny; the provenance of that theory; the precise source or sources of Aristotle's dissatisfaction with that theory; or, indeed, the commitments of Aristotle's own positive theory, the theory that is held by Stewart to be entirely in sympathy with the theory of the good Stewart understands Plato to hold. In principle Stewart may after all be right about the relations between theories he characterises, but wrong to make the ascriptions he makes; or perhaps he is right about the theory under attack but simply misconstrues Aristotle's critical arguments; or perhaps he is, after all, right to be puzzled. All of this needs to be disentangled.

II. Seven Questions about Aristotle's Metaphysics of Goodness

We prejudge these matters unless we first become clear about a nexus of interlocking questions pertaining to Aristotle's axiology and its relation to the theory he criticizes in *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6. These questions may be put easily and briefly, but we discover straightaway when reflecting on them that they intersect in ways making it impossible to answer them seriatim. The questions we must address include at least these seven:

- First, what is the view under attack? What are its precise commitments? Can those commitments in fact be discerned from the presentation of it given by Aristotle?
- Second, whose view is under attack? Plato's? Those of some other Academic, perhaps Speusippus or Xenocrates? Or is the view in Aristotle's sights some sort of composite Academic theory, attaching to no one champion in particular? (That is, is it an analogue to, say, Edith Hamilton's *Mythology*, which as a pastiche is rightly called 'Greek Mythology' even though no particular Greek at any particular time in fact believed it all?)
- Third, what are Aristotle's objections to this view? Are there several or only one? If there are several, is some one of them dominant?
- Fourth, what are Aristotle's critical arguments? How many are there?⁹

There follow three comparatively evaluative questions:

- Fifth, do Aristotle's arguments fairly and accurately represent the main commitments of the author, whether individual or corporate, whose views he characterises only to reject? Or are they in some measure distortions, introduced primarily to offer a foil to his own preferred axiology?
- Sixth, however that may be, are Aristotle's critical arguments compelling, as construed against the position he recounts? So, for instance, if we are

⁹ We have ourselves identified six primary arguments. For other assessments, see Chapter 1 §5.

antecedently attracted to the view that goodness is univocal, should we—
must we—abandon our views in favour of something more in line with
Aristotle's preferred axiology?

- Seventh, whether compelling or not, do Aristotle's critical arguments have consequences for our understanding of his own metaphysics of goodness? More to the point, do they place constraints on his own axiological commitments? If so, to what degree, if any, do these constraints have consequences for his deontological theory? For instance, to preview these issues only slightly, would a rejection of the univocity of goodness create difficulties for the form of commensurability of good things Aristotle seems to presuppose in his positive deontological theory?¹⁰

Needless to say, these questions commend still other questions, some of which themselves have implications for how we are to understand our original questions, again with the result that one cannot hope merely to march through them one following the other. For instance, how we approach the first, concerning the exact contours of the view under assault, will be conditioned in part by what we conclude regarding the fourth, probing the precise character of Aristotle's critical arguments. Then too, when we think about the fourth question by reflecting on Aristotle's formulations of his arguments, we must proceed with an eye on the first and second questions, which

¹⁰ This is a major contention of Oates (1963). We take up this issue below in Chapter #

query the provenance and commitments of the view under scrutiny, as well as on the sixth, about the final value of Aristotle's critical arguments. As we proceed to answer one, we see straightaway that these questions prove intricately interlacing.

That acknowledged, we may none the less begin by stating our final conclusions forthrightly in advance, though they will emerge only gradually from our consideration of these seven questions taken corporately: Aristotle's dominant criticisms target a recognizably Platonic thesis, that goodness is univocal, such that there is a single highest intrinsic good serving as a paradigm for all instances of goodness; he deploys six primary arguments against this thesis, several of which are augmented by ancillary arguments; his primary arguments are largely unsuccessful, but not therefore bereft of interest and value—they are in fact fascinating and instructive as discussions, raising permanently challenging questions in axiology. Further, their falling short of their mark is in a way a good result for Aristotle, since if they were successful, they would place undue pressure on his own axiological commitments. Although these pressures would not be immediately crippling for his deontological theory—and they are in fact pressures of which he is already himself plainly aware—they do force him to make some difficult decisions about commensurability. We may for our part appreciate that the dispute about axiology inaugurated in the Academy remains with us down to the present day, as more than an extended epilogue to the exchange which is our focus. In fact, the Academic dispute about goodness inaugurated by Aristotle requires us to

confront issues about the commensurability of goodness as they shape our approaches to practical rationality.¹¹

This last result already testifies to the depth and nuance of the axiological disputes and controversies engaged by the philosophers associated with Plato's Academy. One further benefit of reviewing these issues in their original context is that we are more likely to make progress in our own axiological disputes by focussing, as Plato and Aristotle did, on the inherently and inescapably metaphysical character of the questions pertinent to this area of value theory. To proceed otherwise is to engage axiology unmoored.

Inevitably some—or perhaps all—of these conclusions will prove controversial; they will likely in any event occasion both scholarly and philosophical dissent among those who may care to consider them carefully. Needless to say, these conclusions will prove only as credible as the detailed arguments marshalled on their behalf in the pages that follow. This is welcome to the extent that these discussions may accordingly add, however humbly, to the ongoing conversation about an Academic dispute which has

¹¹ In this last matter I find myself in rather stark disagreement with Allan (1963, 273): 'In both versions of his Ethics Aristotle engages near the beginning in a criticism both of a Platonic Idea of the Good (i.e., of a transcendent instance and pattern of good, which actively infuses goodness into other things) and of a universal concept of goodness; both are dismissed as having no direct or indirect application to political science, even if their existence should be granted (*Nicomachean Ethics* I 6, 1096 a 11 foll.; *Eudemian Ethics* I 8, 1217 a 18 foll.) What, you may wish to know, can be secured at this late date from a fresh examination of these passages? and if it is true that every enquiry aims at some good, I am obliged to try to answer. The gain will necessarily be one of historical understanding rather than of insight into living philosophical problems. . .'

never really left the academy, and which each generation must, urgently, rejoin in its own idiom.¹²

III. Five More Views of Aristotle's View of Plato's View of the Good

Like others of its kind, the academic dispute inaugurated in the Academy has remained in dispute not least because the issues it engages are deep, multi-faceted, even seemingly intractable. There are other reasons as well: due to the opacity and extreme compression of Aristotle's presentation, there are even disputes about what the dispute before us is about. Indeed, one need only look to the commentary tradition to appreciate that much of the voluminous discussion occasioned by the brief text of *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 has been at cross-purposes with itself. Exegetes, commentators, and philosophers (sometimes they are the same, sometimes not) have found the chapter endlessly fascinating, and have not shied away from hazarding answers to some or all of the seven questions tendered above. It is true that not many have addressed them all, though at least some have been assayed by many.¹³ Without attempting to present the

¹² This review is equally motivated by a desire to begin to realize the the scholarly *desideratum* articulated by Hartung, King, and Rapp, who, after providing a brief overview of the reception of Aristotelianism in the nineteenth century, observe: 'It is amazing that Aristotle's philosophy, which already substantially formed the intellectual world in the Middle Ages and Early Modern period up to the 18th century, would experience such intense reception yet again in the 19th century. It is a desideratum of future research to analyse this fact with a view to the historical differences between these very different phases of Aristotle reception' (2018, 5).

¹³ Some modern studies with bearing on our questions include: Ackrill (#), MacDonald (#), Brakas (#), Brüllmann (2007), Broadie and Rowe (2002), Gauthier and Jolif (1959), Kullmann (2007), Hardie (1965), Kosman (1968), Oates (1963), Richardson Lear (2004), Vranas 2005, Wieland (1976), Williams (1962), Santas (#)

status quaestionis—perhaps in any case there is more *ambages* than *status* in this area—it serves to survey some leading approaches to the dispute. We learn two things from doing so: (i) Aristotle’s readers divide rather sharply regarding the defensibility of his contentions; and (ii) evaluative disagreements in this domain turn on prior disagreements concerning what Aristotle actually contends, and, and since there is wide-spread disagreement here, Aristotle’s philosophical critics too often argue at cross purposes. That is to say, then, that some who think that Aristotle fails rather miserably may not in the end disagree with those who celebrate his triumph, because they turn out in fact to be evaluating altogether distinct claims. For this reason, our own approach to the commentary tradition must be measured.

To appreciate the situation we have inherited, we survey some of the strikingly discordant responses to Aristotle’s axiological arguments. We begin with Aspasius, in deference to the fact that his is the sole surviving ancient commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which is also, as it happens, the oldest surviving commentary on

any of Aristotle's works.¹⁴ We then retrace some historical steps towards this division towards our current situation.

(1) Aspasius: the First Extant Commentary

So far, then, we have two startlingly different assessments of Aristotle's arguments: (i) they are a glittering success; and (ii) they are embarrassments unworthy of the man. We might well wonder how sensible, well-educated readers can arrive at such polar opposites. It is not just that they disagree, which is common enough among philosophers, but these readers practically seem to be reading different texts. One natural question concerns the degree to which reception of *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 is a function of the temper of the times of those receiving it. One way to gauge this question

¹⁴ In speaking of the commentary tradition, I mean to include not only the Greek commentary tradition, but also the Latin tradition and also those commentaries written in modern languages. For whatever reason, the Greek commentary tradition is thin where the *Nicomachean Ethics* is concerned. There is only Aspasius (fl. first half of the 2nd c. a. d.), *In Ethica Nicomachea Quae Supersunt Commtenaria* (Heylbut, 1889). This work survives only incompletely (comments on books 1, 2, 4, 7, and 8). Alexander of Aphrodisias (fl. late second early 3rd century a. d.) produced a set of *Ethical Problems*, which take their cues from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but do not constitute a commentary and, more to the point, do not engage the axiological questions of *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6—even though Alexander does evince a crisp knowledge of issues pertaining to univocity and homonymy (esp. in Problem 8). There is a similar dearth in the Arabic tradition, a situation instructively investigated by Dunlop, in Akasoy and Fidora (2005). Although known in some measure through Boethius and Cicero in the Latin West, the situation is similar until things pick up much later in the Latin West, after the introduction of Aristotle's works to northern and western Europe in the twelfth century. Beginning then we begin to have original commentaries and also, thanks to the good offices of Roger Grosseteste, some reactions to the medieval Greek commentaries written by Eustratios of Nicaea, Michael of Ephesus, and an anonymous author in Constantinople. For Grosseteste's work as a translator and transmitter, see Nederman (1989), Bejczy (2008), and Jenkins (2009).

involves our stepping back a bit to see how this text was received in earlier periods of Aristotelian philosophy.

In the first extant commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which is also the first extant commentary of any work of Aristotle, Aspasius begins the tradition of reception cautiously. Assuming that the Aspasius who authored this commentary was the same Aspasius mentioned by Galen as ‘Aspasius the Peripatetic’ (*On the Affections of the Soul* VIII; cf. Porphyry, *vit. Plot.* 14), then he was active as a lecturer and writer in the first third or so of the second century AD.¹⁵ Although written as a more or less continuous commentary, with several unfortunate lacunae, including one in the middle of his treatment of our *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 (beginning at *In Eth. Nic. Quae Supersunt Commentarial Eth.* 13, 1),¹⁶ the work of Aspasius is primarily expositional and paraphrastic.¹⁷ He does not undertake to assess the work critically to any great extent, preferring, as he explains (100, 22-24), to restrict himself to making clear what may be

¹⁵ This is a conjecture, but not a foolish one. Barnes (1999) offers an engaging review of the evidence regarding Aspasius. He suggests, on what he rightly regards as still slighter evidence, a composition date of his commentary on the EN as falling ‘in or a little after 131’ (1999, 3).

¹⁶ This omission is rightly flagged by Konstan (2006, 190 n. 37). See also n. 42 below.

¹⁷ There are exceptions, mainly in the form of excursions on a topic suggested by Aristotle’s remarks. These tend to be more digressive than critical, as at *In Eth. Nic. Quae Supersunt Commentaria* 42, 7-47, 2.

murky or misleading. It is thus markedly unlike the more critically energetic enterprises we find later in the tradition.¹⁸

Even so, for that very reason it contains valuable information about an earlier attitude to Aristotle's criticisms. To begin, Aspasias was familiar with the works of Plato, mentioning them by name nine times, citing the *Republic* twice, the *Theaetetus*, *Laches*, and *Apology* once each by name,¹⁹ and offering two fairly clear references to the *Republic*²⁰ and a reference to the *Laws* as well.²¹ He was, however, no kind of Platonist. In particular, where his recounting of Aristotle's attacks on the Form of the Good are concerned, he presents as utterly unperturbed, as if merely recounting the views were sufficient to vouchsafe their merit.²² He reports Aristotle's arguments just as he understands them, offering little by way of expansion or assessment. He, in sum, writes as an appreciative partisan.

¹⁸ Barnes (1999, 24): 'A philosophical commentary of what species? and written for whom? As a first shot, I would be inclined to describe the commentary as paraphrastic in method and elementary in content; and I imagine that it was written for debutant philosophy students.'

¹⁹ *In Eth. Nic. Quae Supersunt Commentaria* 114, 23, 84, 27, 54, 23.

²⁰ *In Eth. Nic. Quae Supersunt Commentaria* 9, 29, 117, 4.

²¹ *In Eth. Nic. Quae Supersunt Commentaria* 46, 7.

²² Here too, in the context of assessing Aspasius' loyalties, Barnes (1999, 6), captures the tone exactly: 'In a celebrated passage in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle dismisses—not kindly—Plato's Form of the Good (1096a11-1097a14). Aspasius' commentary on this chapter is not fully preserved (11, 10, -14, 32); but there is no reason to suspect that the tone of the lost paragraphs differed from the tone of what has remained. And that tone is wholly uncritical: Aspasius betrays not the slighted embarrassment over Aristotle's attack on the citadel of Platonism; he does not intimate that Aristotle might perhaps be wrong.'

Partly for this reason, his procedure provides two sorts of useful evidence about the text. First, he divides up the text in a sensible, straightforward way; second, his approach is revealing precisely because it regards the basic cogency of its arguments as uncontroversial.

Despite one somewhat oddly and intrusively placed lemma,²³ Aspasius begins his discussion by stressing the separability of Forms. This is not a theme he much develops, however. Instead, he proceeds to recount the first two arguments—just as Grant will do much later—as intimately connected. Aspasius thinks that the *ad hominem* argument regarding a series of goods (*EN* i 6, 1096a17-23) draws its support from the doctrine of categories, and thus regards the second, categorial argument (*EN* i 6, 1096a23–9) as subordinate to the first, though he does not go so far as Grant in thinking the second ‘a mere repetition of the first.’²⁴ He offers a synopsis of the arguments in this way:

²³ Wittwer (1999) argues plausibly and with considerable detail that the lemmata in our text go all the way back to Aspasius. If that is correct, then the placement of the lemma from *EN* 1096a17-1097a13-14 just before *In Eth. Nic. Quae Supersunt Commentaria* 11, 15 instead of before 11, 10 is all the more puzzling. This is a case, however, where the reading of the lemma differs from the paraphrase in the text, as Wittwer notes (1999, 75-76). This is significant for our purposes, because it calls into question whether the *separation* is, from Aspasius’ perspective, Plato’s main mistake. There is some reason to doubt this, beyond the current placement of the lemma, since, as Kosman helpfully notes (2006, 190 n. 28), the citation of Aristotle here was added by a second hand in ms. Z.

²⁴ Grant (1885 vol. I, 209). In fact, Aspasius says, correctly, that though the arguments ‘seem to be the same. . .never the less they are not’ (12, 12-14), giving the perfectly adequate reason the first crucially involves a series and the second ‘has completely different premisses’ (12, 17; παντελῶς ἄλλας ἔχει τὰς προτάσεις).

The argument, speaking comprehensively, proceeds in this way: in cases where there is a prior and a posterior,²⁵ there is not Idea of these. In order to support the contention that there is a prior and posterior in the case of the Good, [Aristotle] distinguished how many ways the Good is said: because in the ten categories substance is said to be it is own right and a being, whereas the others are accidents, and what is in its own right is prior to accidents (11, 29- 12, 3).

He thinks, then, that the first argument, about priority and posterity, relies crucially on the categorial argument which follows it. This is a natural thought, but one we will have reason to question in due course.²⁶

Otherwise, his presentation of the categorial argument (*EN* i 6, 1096a23–9) is more or less straightforward, if not yet paraphrastic, as is his treatment of the argument from the diversity of sciences (*EN* i 6 1096a29-35). More noteworthy is his sympathetic treatment of Aristotle’s argument regarding the Good as a paradigm:

After these, he calls to mind an argument of theirs. They believe that knowledge of the Idea of the Good contributes to the goods that can be achieved in action.

²⁵ Del. οὐκ at 12, 3. Otherwise we have, as translated by Kosman (2006, 13): ‘The argument, taking it all together, runs as follows: those things in which there is not a prior and a subsequent have no ideal form.’ Yet we are precisely interested in those cases arranged where we have items arranged in a series of prior and posterior. Possibly, one could retain the οὐκ and translate, as against Kosman: ‘The argument, speaking comprehensively, proceeds in this way: in cases where there is a prior and a posterior there is not, ever, an idea of these.’ In that case, however, we would also want to delete Heylbut’s comma, with our text then reading : περιλαμβάνοντι εἰπεῖν ἔχει οὕτως· ἐν οἷς τὸ πρότερον καὶ τὸ ὕστερον οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδεμία ἰδέα τούτων.

²⁶ See # below for a discussion of this matter.

For by having that as a paradigm (παράδειγμα) we will also know things which are good for us, just as one knowing Socrates will also recognize someone similar to Socrates. He says that the argument is plausible, but that the sciences do not agree with it; for he says that they all aim at a particular good, since the peculiar goal of each science is its good, and none seeks after the Idea of the Good. For there is no advantage for a weaver, that is, a tradesman, or a doctor or a general gazing at the Idea of the Good for the purposes of coming to recognize his own goal (14, 13-21).

What is curious here is that the rejoinder seems to side-step rather than address the Platonist's argument head on. They offer a claim, namely that given that the Form of the Good is a paradigm (παράδειγμα) it can serve, well, as a paradigm for those seeking to determine some good achievable in action. In response, Aspasius observes, following Aristotle, that those actually engaging in the sciences find no advantage in so regarding it; or rather, he suggests, they would find no such advantage were they to so regard it. This leaves the precise claim unclear. Something is meant not to cohere or agree (ὁμολογεῖν) with scientific practice. Yet which is the offending claim of the Platonists is left unclear. Is it (i) that the Good is a paradigm or (ii) that, even granting that the Good is a paradigm, focussing upon its features would be useless for determining other, indexed goods. If (i), then we have once again a straight-forward axiological dispute. If (ii), then question that naturally arises: why not? If the Good is

in fact a paradigm, why would one fail to benefit upon turning to it for guidance? After all, just as Aspasius reports, knowing what Socrates looks like would be helpful, one might even suppose indispensable, for determining who, if anyone, actually looks similar to him. Put in these terms, Aspasius seems to be suggesting that craftsmen and scientists may either be looking for someone similar to Socrates without knowing what Socrates looks like, or might not be looking for any such thing, since there is no Socrates, and so no paradigm of being Socrates. If the former, it remains unclear what is implausible about the suggestion that knowing what Socrates looks like might help them identify anyone similar to him. On the contrary, this would seem to be great help—and so too, then, in the case of the Good.

The worry here is not that Aspasius or some other Peripatetic has no way of responding to this sort of counter; one can easily imagine some possible rejoinders. The point at present is rather that his commentary is truncated and limited in its support of Aristotle, shying away as it does from the development one might reasonably expect from a more philosophically engaged reader of Aristotle, especially the sort of partisan reader Aspasius aspires to be.

This, then, brings us to the second way in which Aspasius' commentary is useful: given its easy acceptance of Aristotle's primary contentions, it provides evidence from early in the tradition regarding how Aristotle's chapter was readily understood. In brief, Aspasius takes it as uncontroversial that Aristotle is targeting Plato in *Nicomachean*

Ethics i 6; he has a good sense about the individual argument units; he appreciates that the arguments are so brief as not to be free-standing; he nevertheless finds them successful in their aims; he identifies the root problem in the Platonist procedure to be separation (10, 14); and he grasps that the discussion is more than a digression, pointing out (not in this language) that the discussion ends by returning from an axiological consideration to a more limited focus on an indexed good, namely, the good for human beings (15, 1). Several of these theses, though left under-supported, will prove to be exactly right; others prove more difficult to accept.

(2) An Engaged Platonist of the Byzantine Era: Eustratius

For reasons which are somewhat hard to fathom, the Greek commentary tradition after Aspasius mainly ignored Aristotle's ethical writings,²⁷ primarily in favour of his *Categories*, *Physics*, and *Metaphysics*. The same holds true of the Arabic tradition. It is not until Eustratius, the Metropolitan Bishop of Constantinople, in the Byzantine era, more precisely in the early 12th c., that we have a full treatment of the work. Eustratius is careful and detailed, but also highly critical, writing from a

²⁷ After Aspasius, there is no commentary written in Greek until the twelfth century, and so, then, no commentary during the fertile period 200-600 AD, when Alexander, Simplicius, Philoponus and others produced monumental commentaries on others among Aristotle's works. Although not an exception, there is one work of relevance to mention, namely Alexander's *Ethical Problems*, which is a discussion of a set of thirty problems rather than anything approaching a commentary, though it does contain some modest exegesis of Aristotelian texts and brief explications of Aristotelian doctrine. For a discussion of this situation see Sharples (1990). He does not mention Plato in this work at all, though he refers to him very freely elsewhere, especially in his *Comm. in Aris. Met.*

Neoplatonic angle. Perhaps because of his own orientations, Eustratius begins his commentary with a workmanlike summary of Plato's conception of the Good; he wishes, fairly enough, to make explicit the view he understands Plato to hold and Aristotle to attack.

Although we have tried to follow his good example in offering a list of our own, for precisely the same reason,²⁸ it becomes clear on a moment's reflection that our view of Plato's view of the Good diverges from that of Eustratius in terms of idiom and emphasis, to say the very least—though they may be closer beneath the surface than that would suggest.

Eustratius ascribes the following theses to Plato (*in Nic. Eth.* 40. 4-17). The Good is: (i) the transcendent source of all things; (ii) the One; (iii) ineffable (ἄρρητον); (iv) something surpassing all things to an unlimited degree; (v) in itself non-discursive; (vi) super-substantial; (vii) something flowing forth into all good things, without proceeding from itself and without diminution to itself; (viii) something which causes all good things to exist, by dint of its own goodness; (ix) something which causes good things to be and to remain good without so willing, and without desire or deliberation, just as the sun, as essentially luminous, illuminates all before it by its own nature without seeking to do so; (x) the goal and end of all deliberative motion; (xi) what

²⁸ See 1 # above.

completes all things; and (xii) that which renders all good things good by being their end.

Armed with this understanding of the target view, Eustratius goes to work first recounting and then working to defang Aristotle's criticisms. Although plainly partisan in this way, his recapitulation of Aristotle's critical arguments proceeds with an admirable scholarly detachment. He treats the first argument, concerning Forms over series (*EN* i 6, 1096a17-23), as relying on a lemma endorsed by the Platonists themselves 'in cases in which there are a first and a posterior, in these cases there is no idea' (in *Nic. Eth.* 43, 2-3; ἐν οἷς τὸ πρῶτον καὶ ὕστερον, ἐν τούτοις ἰδέα οὐκ ἔστιν). He accepts, that is, Aristotle's ascription of the premiss to the Platonists themselves. He links ascription to the thought that in the case of species, all individuals participate in the species uniformly (or perhaps more clumsily 'as arranged in a common line'; ὁμοταγῶς). Nothing, for instance, is more or less a sparrow; all sparrows are, so to speak, arranged in a flat line in terms of their being sparrows, all arrayed equally beneath some superordinate genus, birds in general, perhaps. This is not so in the case of numbers; numbers are vertical rather than horizontal, in the sense that no number is essentially like any other number, at least not as each sparrow is like every other sparrow in terms of its essential definition. For this reason, then, Eustratius is pleased

to grant Aristotle the first premiss of his syllogism, allowing, then, that nothing arranged in a series merits a Form.²⁹

By contrast, he takes strong exception to the second premiss, that good things are arranged as numbers are arranged. He understands Aristotle to be offering this premiss effectively as an analogical extension of an unstable sort, and so also, like Aspasius before him, as relying crucially on the categorial arguments which follow. In fact, he does Aspasius—and even Aristotle himself—one better, by expanding on the point he takes the second premiss to be making. He thinks that it turns crucially on the thought that only accidents can participate in a non-uniform manner, whereas substantial beings participate, as with sparrows, always and necessarily in a uniform manner.

At first this interpretation may seem surprising. For one might reasonably think that this state of affairs should pose no problem for Aristotle: goodness can plainly be predicated accidentally. After all, people strive to be good. Some succeed, others fail. Strikingly, Eustratius takes a different view of the situation, bringing an interesting twist to the discussion. He reminds the reader that it is the Idea of the Goodness which is under discussion, not goodness as realized in this or that particular. The ideal Form of the Good, he intones, *is a substance*, and so not the sort of thing which could be good accidentally or to one degree or another; its goodness is complete and whole at every moment. It is true that good things can be more or less good. Yet, treating the scalarity

²⁹ He agrees with the first simple rendering we have offered in 1.IV. But see 3.# for greater development.

of good things as a reason to think that Goodness is scalar, he complains, is to mistake the copies for the paradigm of which they are copies (*in Nic. Eth.* 44, 3-12). In effect, he says, even if good things can be more or less good, the Good itself can be nothing of the sort. Goodness considered in itself is in fact anathema to scalarity of any kind.

So far, then, if this captures the gist of his response, Eustratius emerges as partisan in the extreme, and tendentiously so. He is certainly right to complain that Aristotle owes us a defense of his minor premiss, that good things are arranged in a series of prior and posterior members. Aristotle owes us, that is, a reason for believing that good things are like numbers, that the analogy to which he implicitly appeals obtains. This will remain so even after we have, if we have, granted the first premiss, that there are no Forms for series.

In this sense, Eustratius moves rather too quickly in his attempt to foreclose on the possibility that Aristotle might have a reason to posit priority and posteriority among good things in such a way as to generate the analogy with numbers he seeks.³⁰ Moreover, in retorting that the Form of the Good *is* a substance, Eustratius at best gainsays Aristotle's objection and at worst actively begs the question against him. In the first case, Aristotle does not, or does not directly,³¹ commit himself to the thesis that Goodness is a substance, treating it throughout his critical discussion as if it were a

³⁰ We develop and assess several such attempts in the 3.#

³¹ Eustratius may be thinking that Aristotle's commitment to a prime mover in *Met.* # 7-9 constitutes some such commitment; this would, however, require a protracted argument not given by Eustratius.

quality predicated of its bearers. In the second case, one may fairly complain, without taking sides in the debate, that the separate existence of the Good is at least partly what is at issue in this chapter.³² Consequently, also in question, on the assumption that being separate is a necessary condition of being a substance,³³ is precisely the issue of whether Goodness, or the Form of the Good, could plausibly be taken to be a substance.

Taking that all together, Eustratius's surprising reconstruction of the second premiss of Aristotle's argument from a series of goods underwhelms. This is not to say, however, that Aristotle is right to advance the contention he does. On the contrary, the construction Eustratius puts on his motivation, creatively polemical though it is, has at least the advantage of supplying *some* underlying motivation or other for Aristotle's surprising contention that good things are arranged in a series akin to the series of numbers. For, in truth, Aristotle's actual motives are a bit hard to fathom.³⁴ His reconstruction thus serves to bring into sharp relief one pressing question about this argument: why does Aristotle think that good things are arranged in a series with some good things prior to others, as the number three is prior to the number seven?

In a similar way, each of Eustratius's presentations and responses to Aristotle's criticisms shines a light on an important issue that Aristotle, or a defender of Aristotle's really does need to address. One particularly instructive presentation deals with

³² See, however, 3.# below

³³ See Fine #

³⁴ We take up this matter in detail in the next chapter.

Aristotle's fourth argument, concerning the idleness of speaking of 'the Good Itself' (*EN* i 6, 1096a34–1096b5). As we have seen,³⁵ the basic argumentative structure of Aristotle's complaint is reasonably clear, even though crucial details are left underspecified. Aristotle evidently takes exception to the Academic policy of appending '-itself' to various nouns and nominal adjectives, as if that were sufficient to reify an abstract object corresponding to a quality realised in the perceptual world. We view various large things—elephants, mountains, heavyweight wrestlers—but then noticed that being large in each case is context-sensitive. As against the largeness these perceptibles exemplify, there is also, according to Plato, a context-invariant paradigm, which we may term Largeness-Itself.³⁶ Generalizing, says Aristotle, the Platonists simply help themselves to this terminology across the board, appending 'itself' (αὐτό) to each thing (ἕκαστον) they care to reify, naming the resulting entity 'Each-thing Itself' (αὐτοἕκαστον) (*EN* i 6, 1096a34-35). They then complete their story by rendering 'Each-thing Itself' as somehow paradigmatic for each thing falling under it, and say that each of the context variant ϕ -things is ϕ just because it somehow imitates the context-invariant paradigm, ϕ -itself.

Aristotle lodges two complaints, one to the effect that the 'Good Itself' will fare no better than the hypothesised 'Human Itself' (αὐτο-ἄνθρωπος), since the accounts of 'being human' as applied to a random human and the so-called Human Itself will turn

³⁵ See 1.4 for a first presentation of the argument schema.

³⁶ See 1.1.8 for more on context invariance.

out to be the same, with the result that nothing will be gained by the Academic effort. Further, nothing will be procured in terms of the promulgated paradigmatic character if the ϕ -itself by treating it as something eternal: after all, nothing white is made any whiter by its being eternally so. By parity of reason, then, nothing of value is purchased by making the Good-Itself eternal. It is not thereby better than other good things; so, its being eternal gives us no reason to regard it as somehow paradigmatic. Taking these complaints together, Aristotle concludes that the postulation in this case, the Good-Itself, will be, as for every other putative ϕ -itself, wholly otiose.

Eustratius mounts a spirited defense, noting first, correctly, that the argument is in fact trained on all Forms, and so on the Form of the Good only as a special case (*in Nic. Eth.* 49, 22-24). He addresses Aristotle's first complaint frontally, demanding to know how it can be the case that a ϕ -thing can be ϕ in the same way as what is paradigmatically ϕ . So perplexing is this contention to him that he in fact falls into addressing the author of the complaint directly:

But how will the Good, oh Aristotle, be itself and be in like manner in what is immaterial and what is enmattered, in an image and in a paradigm, in what is simple and in what is complex, and in it what is [good] by way of participation and in what is not [good] by way of participation (*in Nic. Eth.* 49, 24-27)?

So far, at least, Eustratius does not himself show that ϕ cannot be predicated in like manner of ϕ -things and what is ϕ -itself, but he does at least rightly counter that

Aristotle owes us some justification for the claim that this will be so. From where Eustratius sits, this seems not only not obviously true but rather, on the contrary, obviously false: after all, if we were to say that Human-itself and a random human—an abstract entity and a material being—were human in exactly the same way, we would expect the abstract thing to wander about, eat, drink, and converse with its mates. Preposterous, thinks Eustratius.

What is more, he notes, still addressing Aristotle, ‘even according to you’ (καὶ κατὰ σέ; *in Nic. Eth.* 49, 30), a complete definition (ὅρος) of an enmattered, physical thing will make reference to the matter as well as the form.³⁷ So, as an *ad hominem* matter, Aristotle ought to accept the view, even if tendered only counterfactually, that abstract things, which are *ex hypothesi* immaterial, cannot share definitions with material beings—if, that is, as Eustratius understands Aristotle to maintain, the definitions of physical, material beings, must make reference to their essences and their essences include matter.

Finally, Eustratius offers an intriguing retort to Aristotle’s contention that white things are none the whiter for being long-lasting. He implicitly charges Aristotle with conflating two senses of ‘eternal’ (ἀίδιον), namely being timeless and being everlasting in time (τὸ πολυχρόνιον; *in Nic. Eth.* 50, 5). He fully grants that something long-lasting will not as a rule be ϕ in any way other than what is ϕ only for a short while. After all,

³⁷ Presumably Eustratius has the difficult discussion of Aristotle’s *Met.* Z 10-11 in view in making this ascription.

he observes, a long-lived human will be no more human than a human with a short life (*in Nic. Eth.* 50, 10-12). Yet what holds between long-lived humans and white things does not carry over to the differences obtaining between the ephemeral and the eternal, where the latter is understood to comprise only the atemporal (*in Nic. Eth.* 50, 10-15). In sum, 'the eternal and the ephemeral do not receive the same nature' even though, by contrast, the short- and long-lived precisely do receive the same nature (*in Nic. Eth.* 50, 23-26). Indeed, if there is some such thing as the White-Itself, it had better not be white, for then it would be both immaterial and material—a blunder, Eustratius opines, no Platonist need embrace. The upshot of Eustratius's retort, then, is to accuse Aristotle of foisting on the Platonist an obviously avoidable, plainly feeble mistake. As he informs us on behalf of them all, the Platonist Eustratius feels no compunction whatsoever to embrace Aristotle's complaint.

Here, too, we should not suppose that we have seen one philosopher vanquished by another. Rather, we should accord each philosopher the opportunity to develop further responses and retorts, and, in fact, such further developments to the dialectic are not hard to envisage. The point in the current context is rather that Aristotle's arguments have not always found an appreciative audience. Those, like Eustratius, who are underwhelmed by his polemics equally deserve their day in the court of dialectic. Needless to say, Eustratius, no less than Aristotle himself, is a partisan participant in this exchange. Still, when the courtesy of neutral assessment is granted

both parties, we find at a minimum that Aristotle's arguments require development and defense if they are to sway the impartial.

(3) A Committed Aristotelian: Thomas Aquinas

Although mainly neglected by subsequent generations of scholars working on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Eustratius's commentaries on *Nicomachean Ethics* i and vi were known and evidently studied with care by Thomas Aquinas, writing in the century after his death. They had been translated into Latin by Grosseteste,³⁸ and were cited by Aquinas across a fair number of his works.³⁹ He does not, however, enter into the spirit of the defense of Plato mounted by Eustratius. On the contrary, Aquinas offers a measured, careful, primarily appreciative set of comments on *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6. He also renders a judgment about their intended target and the fundamental basis of Aristotle's objections, both of which, upon careful inspection,⁴⁰ prove entirely apt.

Aquinas divides his treatment of the chapter into three lectures, marking what he takes to be its main divisions (*Comm. in Nic. Eth.* I, lect. 6, 7, and 8). The first lecture treats the first three arguments, concerning priority, the categories, and the sciences (*EN*

³⁸ For a discussion of Eustratius's influence on Aquinas, focussing primarily on his conception of happiness, see Gauthier (1969), Wieland (1981) and (1982), Thiry (1987), and Donato (2007).

³⁹ So, e.g. *Super II Sent.* d. 9, q. 1 a. 8; *Super III Sent.* d. 23, q. 1 a. 4, q1a. 2, ad. 3; d. 33, q. 2 a. 4, sol. 3. There are also a fair number of indirect references, which, though, not citing Eustratius by name, are clearly to his commentaries: *Super III Sent.* d. 23, q. 1 a. 4, q1a. 2, ad. 3; d. 33, q. 2 a. 4, sol. 3

⁴⁰ We revisit these questions below in #.

i 6, 1096a17–34); the second covers Aristotle’s discussion of the question of the possibility that the FOG is restricted to *per se* goods, and so, in effect, the remaining arguments of the axiological section of the chapter (*EN* i 6 1096a34-b29); and the third takes up the deontological arguments which round out the chapter (*EN* i 6 1096b30-1097a14), all of which Aquinas treats as counterfactual, as taking up the refuted hypothesis that there is a common notion of goodness and arguing that ‘even if there were, it would not lead to the contention that happiness is to be sought in accordance with it’ (*nunc ostendit quod etiam si esset, non pertineret ad propositum, ut scilicet secundum ipsam esset quaerenda felicitas; Comm. in Nic. Eth. I, lect. 8 §97*).

The first of the three lectures begins by trying to situate the chapter in what has preceded it. Aquinas does not think the discussion in *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 is a digression of any sort. Instead, he thinks that it is simply a continuation of Aristotle’s attempt to determine what happiness consists in, and that, having shown that it cannot reside in honour or pleasure, ‘he disproves the opinion of those placing it in a separated good’ (*improbat opinionem ponentium felicitatem in quodam bono separato; Comm. in Nic. Eth. I, lect. 6 §64*). He readily identifies the author of this theory as Plato, and speaks indifferently throughout his critique of ‘Plato’ and the ‘Platonists’, making clear along the way that he means to distinguish Plato from the historical Socrates (*Comm. in Nic. Eth. I, lect. 6 §78*), thus treating Socrates, the character in the relevant Platonic dialogues, as the mouthpiece for Plato’s views.

Given that he introduces Plato's view of the Good as one in which the good is separated, it would be natural to suppose that Aquinas understands Aristotle to take separation as his primary grounds for rejecting the Platonic approach. However natural, though, this supposition would be incorrect. In fact, the central—and most importantly correct—observation Aquinas offers in his discussion is precisely the opposite:

[H]e refutes the position of Plato, which says that the happiness of man consists in a certain common Idea or Form of the good. In regard to this, he does two things. First, he shows that there is no one common idea of the good.

Second. . .he shows that even if there were, human happiness would not consist in it. In regard to the first, he does two things. First, he shows that there cannot be one common Idea of good. Second . . .he examines the manner of speaking used by the Platonists when they talk about this Idea. In regard to the first, we must consider that Aristotle does not intend to refute the opinion in so far as Plato posited a separated good on which all goods would depend. In the twelfth book of his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle himself posits a certain good, separated from the universe, to which the whole universe is ordered as an army is ordered to the good of the general. He refutes the opinion in so far as Plato held that the

separated good is an Idea common to all goods (*Comm. in Nic. Eth.* I, lect. 6 §79).⁴¹

Aquinas understands Aristotle, rightly as will emerge, as focussing not on separation but on commonality. His immediate argument is *ad hominem*, in that he points out, reasonably enough, that Aristotle could do so only on pains of inconsistency. That is correct, as far as it goes, but there is corroborating evidence from within the chapter. The core arguments Aristotle offers are directed against univocity and commonality, not separation.⁴²

Two of Aquinas's discussions are of special note, the first concerning his understanding of the categorial argument (*EN* i 6, 1096a23–9) and the second regarding his approach to Aristotle's brief reflection on the sort of unity good things display in spite of their equivocality (*EN* i 6, 1096b26–29). The first shows how Aquinas appreciates the force of Aristotle's position in a way Eustratius or, much later, Grant, do not. The second, ushers in an intriguing question regarding the kinds of unity Aristotle may yet envision for goodness, despite his spirited anti-Platonism. This discussion is especially

⁴¹ . . . *improbat positionem Platonis dicentem quod felicitas hominis consistit in quadam communi idea boni. Et circa hoc duo facit. Primo ostendit, quod non est una communis idea boni. Secundo ostendit, quod etiam si esset, non consisteret in ea humana felicitas. . . Circa primum duo facit. Primo ostendit, quod non sit una communis idea boni. Secundo inquirat de modo loquendi, quo Platonici hanc ideam nominabant . . . Circa primum considerandum est, quod Aristoteles non intendit improbare opinionem Platonis quantum ad hoc quod ponebat unum bonum separatum, a quo dependerent omnia bona, nam et ipse Aristoteles in XII Metaphysicae ponit quoddam bonum separatum a toto universo, ad quod totum universum ordinatur, sicut exercitus ad bonum ducis. Improbat autem opinionem Platonis quantum ad hoc quod ponebat illud bonum separatum esse quamdam ideam communem omnium bonorum. (Comm. in Nic. Eth. I, lect. 6 §79).*

⁴² See 1.# above and, more fully, # below.

apposite, given Aquinas's understanding of the chapter as focussing primarily on commonality rather than separation.

Aquinas understands the categorial argument straightforwardly (*EN* i 6, 1096a23–9), in a manner wholly in keeping with our own first formulation.⁴³

To understand the of force [of Aristotle's second reason, *scil.* the categorial argument] it must be understood that Plato maintained that the Idea is the *ratio* and essence of all things that partake of the Idea. From this it follows that where there is no common nature of things neither can there be a single Idea. But there is no single common nature of the delineated categories, for nothing is predicated of them univocally. Good, however, just like being, with which it is convertible, is found in every category. Thus [in the category of] *quod quid est*, that is, substance, God, in whom there is no evil, is called good, and the intellect, which is always true, is called good. In quality, however, virtue, which makes the one having it good, (is called good); in quantity, however the mean, which is the good in everything subject to measure, is called good; in relation, however, it is the useful, that which is good relative to a proper end, that is called good; in when, a time, namely the opportune time, is called good; and in place, a location [for instance] somewhere suitable for walking, like a summer house, is called good. The same is clear for the other types as well. It is manifest, therefore, that

⁴³ See 1.5, §2 above.

there is not some single good, that is, some idea or common *ratio*, of all good things. Otherwise, it would be necessary that good would not be found in all the categories, but in one alone (*Comm. in Nic. Eth.* I, lect. 6 §81).⁴⁴

Simply put, ‘. . . is good’ can be predicated of items in various categories of being, which suffices to show that it is not univocally predicated, which in turn suffices to show that there is no single common nature, and so no FOG.

Although it hews fairly closely to Moerbeke’s narrowly literal translation, Aquinas’s presentation adds a series of brief explications and expansion to the text, indicating the grounds for which he things items in each of the categories mentioned merits the predicate ‘. . . is good.’ His basic thought is that in each category, there is a criterion legitimating the application of the predicate. Thus, in the the category of substance, God is called good as being utterly bereft of evil, while the intellect is called good in view of its inerrancy.⁴⁵ Similarly, a relative (*ad aliquid*) is called good when it

⁴⁴ *Ad cuius evidentiam sciendum est, quod Plato ponebat ideam esse rationem et essentiam omnium eorum, quae ideam participant. Ex quo sequitur, quod eorum quorum non est una ratio communis, non possit esse una idea. Sed diversorum praedicamentorum non est una ratio communis. Nihil enim univoce de his praedicatur. Bonum autem sicut et ens, cum quo convertitur, invenitur in quolibet praedicamento; sicut in quod quid est, id est in substantia, bonum dicitur Deus, in quo non cadit malitia, et intellectus, qui semper est rectus. In qualitate autem virtus, quae bonum facit habentem. In quantitate autem commensuratum, quod est bonum in quolibet quod subditur mensurae. In ad aliquid autem bonum est utile, quod est relatium in debitum finem. In quando autem tempus, scilicet opportunum, et in ubi locus congruus ad ambulandum, sicut dieta. Et idem patet in aliis generibus. Manifestum est ergo, quod non est aliquod unum bonum commune, quod scilicet sit idea vel ratio communis omnium bonorum: alioquin oporteret, quod bonum non inveniretur in omnibus praedicamentis, sed in uno solo (*Comm. in Nic. Eth.* I, lect. 6 §81).*

⁴⁵ Aquinas might be thinking of *intellectus* here as good *in so far as* it grasps the truth or of *intellectus* as operating properly, namely as comprehending or understanding.

conduces to the good, as being good for something, and a quality, like virtue, is good in so far as it makes its bearer good. This sort of presentation expands on what Aristotle himself says; he remains silent about the grounds for predicating goodness in each of the categories, merely noting that in fact it is. In Aquinas's slightly more committed view, if the grounds or criteria for predicating some predicate ϕ in divergent categories themselves diverge, then that is already reason for thinking that ϕ is predicated non-univocally in those instances. This further commitment seems open to question, and indeed will be questioned below,⁴⁶ but it does provide at least one possible route to establishing the non-univocity both Aristotle and Aquinas seek in the case of goodness.

After this mild expansion, however, Aquinas simply provides a crisp, clear version of the argument we have already identified as the key support for the categorial argument,⁴⁷ namely that if goodness were univocal, it would not be possible to predicate goodness across the categories. This too is an aggressive claim on the part of both Aquinas and Aristotle, contending as it does that a sufficient condition for the non-univocity of predicate ϕ is simply its being predicable in more than one category. This claim, too, can and will be challenged,⁴⁸ since, after all, one seems perfectly able to predicate '... is an instance of an ontological category' in a perfectly univocally manner

⁴⁶ See #

⁴⁷ See 1. IV above.

⁴⁸ See #

of items in diverse categories.⁴⁹ Be that as it may, it is fair to say that Aquinas is satisfied that he sees a compelling set of considerations in Aristotle's categorial argument. He accordingly regards it as successful in a way that Eustratius and others could not.

Aquinas also brings something of value to his commentary when he amplifies a second passage of Aristotle's discussion. This is the intriguing passage in which Aristotle reflects briefly on the forms of unity we might yet find across instances of goodness, equivocal though the predicate is (*EN* i 6, 1096b9-15). Recall that just before turning from the axiological to the deontological section of *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6, Aristotle issues a brief, somewhat conciliatory question: how is goodness to be spoken of, given that it is not homonymous by chance? It is not like '... is a heel' said of a bone in the foot and of a reprobate boyfriend.⁵⁰ Even if we agree that '... is good' as predicated of a mind and a location is equivocal, it seems plain that they are none the less somehow intimately connected. Aristotle provides two possibilities in the form of two questions, but then leaves the matter undeveloped: '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?' (*EN* i 6, 1096b27-28). The first is an instance of core-dependent homonymy⁵¹ and the second of analogy, whereby *a* bears

⁴⁹ I owe this example to Stephen Biggs, who offered it as an improvement on an example of my own given during a very profitable discussion of this argument at Iowa State University.

⁵⁰ Aristotle's own example is key or bolt (*κλείς*) which in Greek is predicated both of the clavicle and of the device for securing doors.

⁵¹ On core-dependent homonymy, see Shields (1999) Ch. #.

some relation *R* to *b*, in much the way that *c* bears *R* to *d*. So, for instance, to use Aristotle's own illustration, as the eyes are to the body, so the mind is to the soul.

Could good things be ordered in either of those two ways? Neither seems immediately promising, though surely some things can be said on behalf of either. As it turns out, Aquinas does just that. In fact, Aquinas treats core-dependent homonymy as comprising two sorts of co-ordinations, both distinguished from a third, analogy. He notices that things might be referred back to a single core in one of two ways, either as to a source (*principium*) or to an end (*finis*). In the first case, a uniform, a sword, and a horse may all be called 'military' as deriving from the same source (*principium*), namely their uses in a military context. In the second case, both medicine and diet may be called healthy, because of the diverse ways in which they contribute to the same end (*finis*), namely health.⁵² Perhaps, then, good may be ordered in one of these three ways.

Aquinas is understandably a bit tentative in his handling of this matter:

He thus says, therefore, that good is predicated of many things not in view of [their having] deeply differing accounts (*rationes*), as happens with things equivocal by chance, but in so far as all good things derive from one source (*principio*) or insofar as they are ordered to one end (*finis*). For Aristotle was not minded to hold that the separated good be an Idea and *ratio* of all goods but their principle and end. Or yet all things are called good rather according to

⁵² In fact, Aquinas also lumps urine into this category as well because it is a 'sign of health', but that seems a stretch at best.

analogy, that is, as having the same proportion, just as sight is the good of the body and the intellect is the good of the soul. He therefore prefers this third way, however, because it is comprehended according to goodness inherent in things. The first two ways, however, are comprehended according to a separated goodness, from which a thing is not in like manner properly denominated good (*Comm. in Nic. Eth. I, lect. 67 §96*).⁵³

Aquinas then is more determinate where Aristotle is less so, deciding on his behalf that the sort of unity he spies among good things derives, or derives primarily, not from one of the two modes of core-dependent analogy he distinguishes, as deriving from a source (*principium*) or as ordered to an end (*finis*), but rather from analogy. His reason, only very briefly stated, is that good things are not properly denominated good on the basis of core-dependent homonymy, or, at any rate, are better and more properly so denominated on the basis of analogy.

Here Aquinas begins to sketch an answer to a large, multivalent question which Aristotle raises but does not himself answer in *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6. It is a question looming in Aristotle's anti-Platonism and one Aristotle must unavoidably address: if

⁵³ *Sic ergo dicit, quod bonum dicitur de multis, non secundum rationes penitus differentes, sicut accidit in his quae sunt casu aequivoca, sed in quantum omnia bona dependent ab uno primo bonitatis principio, vel in quantum ordinantur ad unum finem. Non enim voluit Aristoteles quod illud bonum separatum sit idea et ratio omnium bonorum, sed principium et finis. Vel etiam dicuntur omnia bona magis secundum analogiam, id est proportionem eandem, quantum scilicet quod visus est bonum corporis, et intellectus est bonum animae. Ideo autem hunc tertium modum praefert, quia accipitur secundum bonitatem inhaerentem rebus. Primi autem duo modi secundum bonitatem separatam, a qua non ita proprie aliquid denominatur (*Comm. in Nic. Eth. I, lect. 67 §96*).*

not univocity, then what? That is, Aristotle shows himself unwilling to suppose that goodness is a chance homonym, that '... is good' in 'Socrates is good' and 'The virtue of charity is good' are related in a way that, for instance, '... is a bank' when said of the periphery of a river and a savings institution are not. The crucial question then becomes just how they might be related. Aquinas is uncharacteristically circumspect at first, as between core-dependent homonymy and analogy, but he does come down, in this passage at least, on the side of analogy, on the questionable grounds that analogical predications of being- ϕ treat ϕ as inherent in their bearers,⁵⁴ whereas core-dependent treatments regard them as non-inherent, as ordered to an end, for instance, which treats the good in question as extrinsic to the subject called good.

This is questionable not least because he himself has just explicated Aristotle's categorial argument by noting that in the category of relation (*ad aliquid*), 'it is the useful (*utile*), that which is good relative to a proper end, that is called good' (*Comm. in Nic. Eth. I, lect. 6 §81*). This is not to say that Aquinas blunders, but rather to highlight a difficulty immediately consequent upon Aristotle's categorial argument, a difficulty of which Aquinas, perhaps precisely given his own Aristotelian inclinations, is acutely aware. He at least highlights a problem which others have passed over in silence.

Taking that all together, then, we find in Aquinas a sympathetic, appreciative treatment of Aristotle's chapter, one seeking to offer at once an exposition and defense

⁵⁴ This is a problem to which we will return below, in #, offering an answer other than the option Aquinas prefers.

of Aristotle's anti-Platonism. Aquinas takes it for granted, that at the chapter *is* in fact anti-Platonic in intent, that Aristotle's target in these discussions is Plato and his immediate school, and he concludes that Aristotle's criticisms are by and large perfectly effective. He then notices, as he should, that a question arises in the wake—as he sees the matter—of Aristotle's success. How are good things, then, related to one another? How are they to be compared and ordered, *if* they are indeed to be compared and ordered? Plato's answer is simple enough: good things are to be measured by their relation to the FOG: the more they imitate it, the better they are. Plato has, in sum, a propinquity metric: the nearer x is to the FOG, the better x is. If that simple answer is too simple, as Aristotle implies it is, then what more complex metric will he develop to supplant it? Or will he be left in the wake of his criticisms denying that good things can be ordinally ranked except, perhaps, those indexed goods compared within a narrowly circumscribed domain?

These and other questions like them invite us, of course, to adopt an evaluative posture. As we have seen, in their different ways, both Eustratius and Aquinas offer views of the ultimate purport of Aristotle's criticisms. We will ourselves postpone these important questions until after we have had a chance to explore Aristotle's arguments in depth.

(4) Captious and Unreal: A Less Enthusiastic Reception in the 19th Century

There is a fair bit of ground between Aquinas and our next viewer, Alexander Grant, an Oxford-educated academic, educationalist, and civil servant of the mid- to late 19th century, who had been a Fellow of Oriel College and Classics Examiner at the University of Oxford before travelling to India to take up a civil service post. There he was an administrator and eventual Vice-Chancellor of the University of Bombay, before returning to the United Kingdom to serve as Principal of the University of Edinburgh, where he authored a spirited commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. While not a Platonist of Eustratius's variety, neither was he sympathetic to Aristotle's view of Plato's view of the Good. On the contrary, he took a rather dim view of the proceedings.

Grant begins by rightly marking a distinction between the axiological and deontological discussions of *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6, praising its deontic contentions but finding cause to assail its axiological arguments:

We may admit the general necessity for the logic of ethics of this discussion as to the realistic or nominalistic import to be attributed to the term—Good, and we may admit also the courteous terms in which it is introduced. But yet we shall find something unsatisfactory, and requiring explanation, in the arguments themselves which Aristotle proceeds to adduce.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Grant (1885, vol. I, 200).

These arguments Grant finds wanting—which is a pity, he suggests, because Aristotle might have concluded his assessment of Plato with a reasonably generated complaint had he restricted his remarks to the the deontological side of things:

Had Aristotle in the present case contented himself with denying the appropriateness of the ‘Idea of Good,’ or, in other words, of the νοητὸν ἀγαθόν [*noêton agathon*; the good as object of thought], as an ἀρχή [*archê*; a principle or source] for moral and Political science, the reasonableness of such a view must have been admitted.⁵⁶

Unfortunately, he does not so content himself, instead carrying on into the axiological concerns he advances, an overextension which earns him a tart rebuke from Grant.

Indeed, Grant grows rather acerbic when assessing Aristotle’s axiological arguments against the Form of the Good: ‘Everyone has felt the unsatisfactoriness of these arguments; they seem captious, verbal, unreal, and not to touch the point at issue.’⁵⁷

The first argument, contending that there are no Forms over series, including, then, the series of good things (*EN* i 6, 1096a17-23), says Grant, merely ‘seems to beg the question.’⁵⁸ Moreover, it incorrectly likens the manner in which subordinate and

⁵⁶ Grant (1985, vol. I, 207-208).

⁵⁷ Grant (1885 vol. I, 208). As a further testament to the variegated responses to this chapter, compare Flashar (1995, 62): ‘Aristotle feels personally tied to the representatives of the doctrine of Forms. His critique is deliberately and painstakingly directed at linking up with the assumptions of the criticized doctrine itself. It is never sharp or emphatic.’

⁵⁸ Grant (1885, vol. I, 208).

superordinate goods are related to the doctrine of ideal numbers discussed in *Metaphysics* xii 6. That is, the argument indefensibly treats a good which is good only relative to something superior to it as directly analogous to the sorts of structured and rigid succession relation we find obtaining between successive ideal numbers. Grant allows that ideal numbers would indeed lack a Form set over them, but thinks that to suppose this at all mirrors the sorts of relations relative goods manifest is an obvious mistake. It is, in fact, 'absurd to make the relativity of the relative good an immutable and permanent quality, which is for ever to distinguish it from the good in itself.'⁵⁹ Although truncated, his discussion thus makes effectively two points. First, the Platonists have good cause to deny Forms to ideal numbers, but, second, that even so Aristotle is wrong to attempt, rather feebly, to extend view of ideal numbers to good things, which are simply not related to one another as are the ideal numbers.

'The second argument,' says Grant, 'is a mere repetition of the first.'⁶⁰ This is the categorial argument (*EN* i 6, 1096a23–9), which denies that goodness can be predicated univocally across the ten categories of being. Grant's contention is surprising, but not inexplicable. One thought—although this is not what Grant in fact says—would be that the categories themselves form a kind of series, such that goodness could not be

⁵⁹ Grant (1885 vol. I, 209).

⁶⁰ Grant (1885 vol. I, 209).

predicated of the individual goods predicated in each category.⁶¹ What he does say in fact says suggests that he thinks that from the standpoint of priority and posteriority there is at root but one basic division in the categories, between the category of substance and all the remaining, non-substantial categories.⁶² So, they would form a rather short series, a series of two, and so would again prove to be utterly disanalogous to the series of ideal numbers. At any rate, this seems to be the purport of his contention that the argument merely recapitulates the first.

Still more surprising is Grant's contention that the third argument, from the diversity of the sciences (*EN* i 6, 1096a29–34), is yet again but 'a carrying out of the same objection.'⁶³ Perhaps even here, though, one can surmise a reason why Grant might suppose this is so. Many of the illustrations given in this argument appeal to categorial facts, for instance that goodness in the category of time differs as between the medical and military sciences; this would then be a way of reinforcing the point that the good is predicated differently in the non-substantial categories, a point Grant's Aristotle wants to make in order to reinforce the contention that there can be Forms set over items arrayed in a series.

⁶¹ This is in fact similar to a suggestion I myself made in Shields (2015), but, as we will see in Chapter #, the matter is in fact more complicated, as is shown in part by the order of presentation in the parallel discussion of *EE* i 10.

⁶² Grant (1885 vol. I, 209): 'Now these categories might all be reduced to substance and relation, and then the argument is, "You have good in substance, and good in different relations: can these be considered the same?"'

⁶³ Grant (1885 vol. I, 209).

That, though, is merely a hypothesis; in fact Grant does not develop his objection in sufficient detail to say determinately what he intends. Even so, it is clear that Grant finds all three of Aristotle's initial axiological arguments wanting: they variously beg the question and import commitments into Plato's account of the Good which he either nowhere accepts or even positively eschews. Much the same can be said, from Grant's point of view, about the fourth argument, alleging the idleness of appending 'itself' to an attribute ϕ in order to reify ϕ -ness into something called 'the ϕ -itself' (*EN* i 6, 1096a34–1096b5). Here, counters Graham, Aristotle's objection simply involves 'a misstatement of Plato's view, for it assumes the reality, the substantive and absolute existence of the particulars, and then speaks of the Idea or the Universal being appended to the end of the row, in order to explain them.'⁶⁴ His basic contention is that Aristotle misrepresents Plato's model for generating Forms, as if he were engaged in an inductive process, surveying all the particular ϕ -things only to postulate a Form ϕ at the end of the process. Aristotle's own method may be inductive, 'whereas Plato's point of view rather is that the Idea is prior to all the particulars; we do not obtain it inductively,' but are instead merely reminded of a given Form ϕ upon the sufficient experience of ϕ -things.⁶⁵

To make matters worse, Aristotle attempts to vouchsafe his criticism by observing that the Good would be no more good by being eternal, since 'the <Good

⁶⁴ Grant (1885 vol. I, 210).

⁶⁵ Grant (1885 vol. I, 210).

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, 1096b4-5). 'Another most captious objection,' observes Grant, 'almost unworthy of the gravity of a philosopher. . .'⁶⁶ Here, intones Grant, Aristotle implicates himself in a confusion with which Plato most definitely cannot be saddled, namely that of conflating something's being long-lasting, even infinitely long-lasting, and its being eternal. After all, notes Grant, something long-lasting is trivially temporal, while what is eternal is, by contrast, atemporal. This Aristotelian line of attack thus barely merits comment: 'Perhaps this argument need only be stated for its weakness to be seen.'⁶⁷ Generally speaking, then, Grant finds Aristotle's initial axiological arguments unworthy of serious consideration. He simply sets them aside, in one case pointing out that its mere restatement suffices to refute it.

Grant's treatment of Aristotle's initially conciliatory argument regarding the plurality of intrinsic goods (*EN* i 6, 1096b8–26) is somewhat more engaged. Recall, that in this passage Aristotle offers the Platonists a response to his criticisms, namely that perhaps the Form of the Good ranges over only things good in their own right, like honour, pleasure, and knowledge, such that it might yet be univocal where such goods are concerned. Aristotle, in response, denies that these goods are univocally good. Grant is unimpressed, noting that to answer this sort of question 'would require a very

⁶⁶ Grant (1885 vol. I, 210).

⁶⁷ Grant (1885 vol. I, 210).

deep and subtle investigation.⁶⁸ This Aristotle hardly provides, but instead merely gainsays, earning him another tart rebuke from Grant: ‘This appears to be mere dogmatism and a trifling with the question.’⁶⁹ Although there is some fairness to this response in the context of *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6, it remains perfectly open to Aristotle or a defender of his point of view to enter into the sort of deep and subtle investigation Grant understandably demands. Indeed, as we shall see, there is more to Aristotle’s response than Grant is willing to allow.⁷⁰

Grant rounds out his assessment of Aristotle’s axiological arguments in a somewhat biting manner, even while allowing that the brevity of the presentation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* might owe to its being a kind of summation of his earlier works, which, as he observes, were already in antiquity recognized for their contentious spirit (citing Proclus, *apud* Philoponus⁷¹). Their being mere summations would help explain their unworthiness, suggests Grant. Indeed, this way of casting the arguments would be at least modestly exculpatory, and ‘would explain to some extent the very crude and apparently superficial character of the arguments themselves.’⁷² As we have them,

⁶⁸ Grant (1885 vol. I, 211).

⁶⁹ Grant (1885 vol. I, 211).

⁷⁰ See # below for a consideration of this argument.

⁷¹ Something is amiss with Grant’s citation (213, n. 25). It should read: ‘

⁷² Grant (1885, vol. 1, 213).

however, far from hitting their intended mark, Aristotle's arguments fail dismally, as Grant, and, evidently, everyone known to him, had appreciated.

They fail, that is, as attempts to upend Plato's conception of the Form of the Good. Grant does in fact treat them as so targeted, but he is officially a bit circumspect on the question of Aristotle's primary focus. He splits the difference on the question of whether Aristotle's arguments are directed against Plato in particular or the Academy more generally: they are, he says, in form directed against the Academy as a whole, but their focus is surely Plato, and Plato's *Republic* in particular.⁷³ After crediting Aristotle's suggestion that Plato developed his commitment to the Forms in response to his own search for epistemically stable universals in the face of the ceaseless flux and impermanence of the perceptible world noted by Heraclitus,⁷⁴ Grant turns to his assessment of the arguments themselves, which as we have seen, he regards as dire; when he does so, he proceeds as if he understood them as unremittingly directed against Plato alone. So construed, Grant rates them so poorly that we can only be puzzled by Aristotle's performance: surely he could not have proffered them with an

⁷³ Grant (1885, vol. 1, 200): 'In form the controversy appears rather to be with the Platonists, with the rival school in the Academia, than with Plato himself; but yet so much prominence is given to the 'Idea of Good' in Plato's *Republic*, a work which was, beyond doubt, constantly present in the mind of Aristotle when he was writing his *Ethics*, that we cannot but think that the present passage has reference not only to the logic of the Academy generally but also to the ethical application of the 'Idea of Good' made by Plato himself.'

⁷⁴ Grant (1885, vol. 1, 201, cf. 159): 'Aristotle tells us that Plato's doctrine of Ideas rose from a union between the universal definitions of Socrates and the Heraclitean doctrine of the fleeting character of all objects of sense.'

earnest expectation of their being endorsed by anyone not already on side. There is Platonism and then there is Aristotelianism. In the end, Grant concludes, somewhat ruefully, 'These two views must stand for ever apart, and on each side there seems to be some degree of merit, and some degree of fault.'⁷⁵

(5) Gadamer

The question of the relative merits and faults of Platonic and Aristotelian axiology marches forward into the twentieth century, when Aristotle's criticisms received a celebrated reassessment by Gadamer. Like Grant, Gadamer offers an evaluative-forward presentation of Aristotle's critical discussions, but he is nowhere near as dismissive. Taking *Eudemian Ethics* i 8 as his core source,⁷⁶ mainly discounting the rather fractured state of the text,⁷⁷ Gadamer offers an extended assessment of the dialectic regarding the Good within the Academy in his *Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles*.⁷⁸ His work has inspired a new assessment of the issues to a broad

⁷⁵ Grant (1885, vol. 1, 2007).

⁷⁶ Gadamer (1978, 80).

⁷⁷ He does allow, however, that the argument pertaining to Forms and series, which he locates at *EE* i 8, 1218a1-15, must be extracted from a corrupt text: 'Heir kann der text von EE nicht in Ordnung sein' (1978, 84). He is surely right about that stretch of text, since there is an obvious lacuna at *EE* 1218a8. Oddly, however, his reasons for thinking so seem markedly unpersuasive, flowing as they do from some interpretative presuppositions rather than from the state of the text itself. Elsewhere, he seeks guidance from the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Magna Moralia*, citing precisely the problematic text of the *Eudemian Ethics*: 'Nun sind wir zum Glück nicht auf die unzuverlässige Grundlage des Textes der EE allein angewiesen. Die beiden anderen Traktate bestätigen daß der Ausblick ins Allgemeine immer naheliegt' (1978, 87)

⁷⁸ Gadamer (1978, Ch. IV).

audience already attuned not only to his early work on Greek Philosophy but to his own more widely read work in hermeneutics.

Gadamer observes, fairly enough and just as Aquinas had done before him, that Aristotle registers a concern about the unity of the good at the heart of his polemical discussion of Plato. Still, he foregrounds a feature Aquinas eschews as inoperative in the Aristotle's parallel treatment of *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6, namely that of the question of the good's being separate (χωριστόν).⁷⁹

Gadamer mainly sets aside detailed presentations or analyses of Aristotle's actual arguments. The value of his discussion resides not, then, in minute textual analyze. Rather, he investigates a worthwhile question concerning the degree to which Aristotle finds himself, perhaps *malgré lui*, beholden to Platonic presuppositions in his own conception of goodness. In particular, Aristotle stumbles, he implies, because he cannot resist the very idea he rejects, namely that the Good is somehow separate. In struggling to come up with an account of goodness which captures what Plato sought in separation without the separation itself, Aristotle, as Gadamer views him, winds up with a view which is somehow more Platonic than he might have wished. He understands him to be endeavoring to reject both Plato's ontological separation of the Good and Speusippus's mathematicization of it, only, however, managing to reconfigure it in his own theology:

⁷⁹ Gadamer (1978, 80, 83, 91-92).

A paradoxical result: it is not Plato's notion of separation that lives on in the Aristotelian 'Theology'. On the contrary: the ontology of φύσει ὄντα [*phusei onta*; beings in nature] and the whole of motion that these beings comprise, force Aristotle into a 'Separation' of his own, one that moves beyond the mathematical construal of the transcendence of the Good.⁸⁰

Gadamer's basic thought is that Aristotle's treatments in both the *Eudemian* and especially the *Nicomachean Ethics* aim primarily at undermining the existence of a separated Good, even while retaining a notion of goodness akin to Plato's in his own system, one which has, however, been subordinated to the natural world, the world of motion.

This dual rejection and retention eventuates, thinks Gadamer, in a bit of a problem for Aristotle. (He calls it a paradox, though in so speaking he can only, at best, be overstating the case.) The problem in which Aristotle finds himself results, suggests Gadamer, from his first overshooting his mark and then attempting to reign in the unintended consequences of his criticisms by appealing to some doctrine of analogy:

All the clearer is the 'ontological' problematic of 'the Good' in the EN. To be sure, here too the main argument, in which everything culminates, is the 'practical' uselessness of the Idea of 'the Good' (1096b33 ff.). But, again, even the refutation of the argument embeds an acknowledgement of the issue. It is stated

⁸⁰ Gadamer (1978, 92).

explicitly: εἰ γὰρ ἔστιν ἓν τι τὸ κοινῇ κατηγορούμενον ἀγαθὸν ἢ χωριστὸν αὐτὸ καθ'αὐτό [*ei gar estin hen ti to koinê(i) kaêgoroumenon agathon ê chôriston*; for if it is some one thing, a good predicated in common or separate something itself good in its own right. . .].⁸¹ All of the logical arguments against the good as common 'κατὰ μίαν ἰδέαν' [*kata mian idean*; according to a single Idea] (1096b25), the categorial argument as well as those dealing more in-depth with the Platonic distinctions of the καθ' αὐτὸ αἰετόν [*kath' hauto haireton*; what is chosen for its own sake] (1098b9) prove, as it were, uncomfortably much. It cannot turn out that 'good' is a pure equivocation, as if it were a complete accident that there is a common word for completely miscellaneous things. In this way, Aristotle, as it were, also undercuts himself.

He then proceeds to note that despite his rejection of univocity, Aristotle feels the need to wonder how good things are related, offering, but not developing, two possibilities, namely analogy and a kind of source dependence—neither of which is ideally suited to what he needs. Altogether, then, Gadamer makes primarily two points in treatment of Aristotle's criticisms: first that all of the arguments of *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 culminate in the uselessness of the Form of the Good, and second that in proceeding as he does, Aristotle undercuts his own way forward. In particular, his rejection of univocity lands

⁸¹ Gadamer breaks the quotation there, but seems to proceed to comment on the apodosis as well. The whole sentence reads: 'For even if the good is one and predicated in common, or is something separate, something good itself in its own right (χωριστὸν αὐτὸ 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.'

him in difficulty, because it forces him into an uncomfortable position regarding equivocity as regards his own positive theory.

Each of these claims is problematic.

On the first point, nothing in the chapter requires that all of the axiological arguments culminate in the closing deontological remarks. While the text as we have does not absolutely preclude this reading, it is difficult to see why Gadamer thinks this must be so. By overemphasizing the role of separation in the chapter—the centrality of which we have already seen Aquinas call into contention, and rightly⁸²—Gadamer supposes that Aristotle is constrained by his own natural philosophy to re-introduce a sort of surrogate separability which plays the organizing role in that realm which Plato’s Form of the Good had played overall. Aristotle does not proceed in this way, however; and the more or less forced motivation Gadamer ascribes to him has no prominent place in the argument structure of the chapter before us.

Gadamer’s second point is subtler and more interesting, but no less problematic as put. He sees Aristotle as bringing some difficulty upon himself by rejecting Platonic univocity. Here Gadamer is initially on target. As we have seen, Aristotle appreciates that his rejection of univocity places a burden on him to explain how good things are related to one another, since they are plainly not all called good simply by chance (*ἀπὸ τύχης*; *EN* 1 6 1096b26-27), in the way that the word ‘club’ might denote a heavy stick or

⁸² See 2. 3. 3.

a social gathering place for the young. Aristotle, Gadamer observes, cannot tolerate such rank ambiguity in his treatment of the goodness of sundry good things. Aristotle recognizes this, as he himself mentions two possible ways forward, though he does not develop them: analogy and multiplicity deriving from a single source, presumably then, analogy and some version of core-dependent homonymy. Gadamer swiftly saddles him,⁸³ without textual warrant, with analogy, and then adds that the kind of analogy in question can only be what was later called, by Cardinal Cajetan among many others, the analogy of proportionality.

We will visit this issue later,⁸⁴ but for now it is important to note only that the analogy of proportionality is effectively a species of mathematical analogy, such that there is some relation R which a bears to b in domain₁ and c bears to d in domain₂, even while their domains are distinct, so that, e.g. 50p is to one pound sterling as a half liter is to a liter. The R in question which each bears in its domain is $1/2$. Armed with this thought, Gadamer sees Aristotle as again constrained by his own critical conduct to embrace a thesis he would prefer to abjure, namely the Academic principle, promulgated by Speusippus but criticized by Aristotle when reviewing the mathematically structured ontology of the Pythagoreans, that mathematical structures provide the basic principles (ἀρχαί) of reality. He must do so, Gadamer implies,

⁸³ Gadamer (1978, 91): 'Wenn er in der NE die reine Analogiegleichheit ausdrücklich bevorzugt. . .'

⁸⁴ See #

because otherwise he would have no recourse but to embrace the very univocity he seeks to undermine in Plato's account of goodness. This is the sense in which Aristotle undercuts himself, as Gadamer sees things, as he manoeuvres to hobble the Academic conception of goodness in preference to his own.

Now, all these contentions sweep by rather quickly in Gadamer's treatment. One can say, on his behalf, that there is a genuine problem occasioned by Aristotle's rejection of Platonic univocity; but it is not the problem Gadamer foists on him. Aristotle recognizes that if univocity fails, then we need to supply an alternative short of rank equivocity. Fortunately, as he notes, there are intermediary positions, including some version of analogy and some manner of core-dependent homonymy to which Aristotle might yet avail himself. As he makes clear in *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 itself, Aristotle plainly appreciate this situation. There, however, he stops. In this chapter he simply does not take a stand on this question and so *a fortiori* does not take the stand that Gadamer understands him to take. If, however, his thought is that Aristotle cannot but accept analogy, or indeed, proportional analogy, then Gadamer is mistaken. Moreover, Gadamer has not really bothered to make a case beyond bald assertion. It seems best, then, to set aside the speculations.

None of this is to suggest, however, that Gadamer has brought nothing to the long discussion of Aristotle's anti-Platonism about the good. On the contrary, he raises a clear and welcome way one crucial question that Aristotle's exegetes tend to slide

past, namely the question of what condition Aristotle finds himself in on the assumption that his criticisms of Plato are cogent. One such question, hinted at but then treated only peremptorily by Gadamer is this: if Aristotle's axiological arguments are sound, and if, in particular, his arguments against the univocity of goodness prevail, how will he be in a position to treat the goods he needs to treat as commensurable as commensurable? The Platonic view of the Good has an easy— perhaps, some will say, an unduly easy—answer: what is good is good by reference to the *paradeigma* of goodness,⁸⁵ the Form of the Good, and the closer something approaches the paradigm, the better it is. That is Plato's answer. How shall Aristotle proceed?

The point in posing this question is not that Aristotle has no response available to him.⁸⁶ It is rather to observe, just as Gadamer observes, that Aristotle's criticisms, if successful, carry requirements in their wake. These requirements are at root axiological, but also arise at the intersection of the axiological and the deontological.

(6) A Laudatory Reception in the Late 20th Century

So far we have seen a range of attitudes towards Aristotle's arguments against the Academic conception of goodness. Some, like Eustratius and Grant, energetically reject them; others, like Aquinas, warmly welcome them. Let us close our tour of the reception of Aristotle's arguments, on a positive note by considering a highly laudatory

⁸⁵ See 1. 1. vii above.

⁸⁶ We consider one speculative possibility below in Chapter #

assessment, one which also proves to be mainly in keeping with the general tenor of present-day discussions:

Aristotle's seven arguments against the universal Good are condensed in seventy-four lines of Greek text, perhaps the most succinct and incisive ethical-metaphysical critique of the concept of Good to be found anywhere in the history of philosophy. Together they constitute a necessary step in Aristotle's design for a new ethics, dismantling the Platonic architectonic in order to refashion his own humanistic study of the particular good for man, without which first negative effort the very concept of a non-universal Good would be incomprehensible.⁸⁷

This remark owes to Jacquette, who offers a non-scholarly but perfectly workmanlike review and presentations of Aristotle's arguments in *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6. Jacquette reads in Aristotle's arguments a great advance, a sort of *sine qua non* for humanistic ethics. Others are similarly enthusiastic: to some, Aristotle's remarks seem even to prefigure Wittgenstein's doctrine of family resemblance, thus displaying a remarkably prescient suspicion of the inveterate philosophical habit of 'craving for generality' in the face of difference and divergence.⁸⁸ On this approach, Aristotle's remarks serve as a corrective to a Plato's own unfortunate tendency in this regard and then also as a

⁸⁷ Jacquette (1998, 321-322)

⁸⁸ See, e.g., Trabattoni (2013).

liberating reorientation in ethics, casting off the arid abstractions of Plato in favour of the variegated goods we seek in the conduct of our human lives.

Jacquette focusses on two features of Aristotle's refutation and reorientation. His basic conclusions are clearly stated: (i) Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 contains seven arguments; (ii) these arguments are not only successful but incisively so; (iii) they play a key, indeed indispensable role in the advance of ethical theory; (iv) they manage to do so by decisively refuting Plato's metaphysics of goodness and in particular the central role play in that metaphysics by the Form of the Good; (v) they do so more specifically by undermining the conception of goodness as universal; and (vi) as a result Aristotle is able, for the first time in the history of thought, to identify a notion of a particular sort of indexed goodness, 'the particular good for man', which identification in turn underwrites a humanistic turn in ethics.

Although he does not so say in so many words, Jacquette credits Aristotle not only with rejecting the putative *universality* of the Form of the Good, but also, and more importantly, with rejecting its *impersonality*. He stresses that the good Aristotle identifies is a 'particular good *for man*', that is, in our terms, an indexed as opposed to an absolute good. This, in Jacquette's view, is the linchpin of Aristotle's re-orientation towards a new approach to ethics, a *sine qua non* in fact, making possible a humanistic inquiry. In his view, Aristotle's axiological opposition ushers forward a liberating axiology which in turns makes possible a new deontological ethics, rightly focussed on

an indexed good, *the good for human beings*. This is the good we seek in life; we care, as we should care and perhaps can only care, about this indexed good, the good for human beings. Aristotle's arguments make this focus possible and permissible; we need only, as he shows, remove our gaze from the absolute good, which we in fact fail to see, for it is not there to be seen. In its place, we focus on the features of the good for humans, which, as Aristotle proceeds to argue, is readily ascertainable from an informed investigation into the human function.

All told, Aristotle's efforts in *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 represent a resounding success and a great advance in the history of ethics. We should be grateful.

IV. Conclusions

Taking stock, we find ourselves confronted with a discomfiting jumble of attitudes in the history of the reception of *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6. Some praise its arguments with unbridled enthusiasm, crediting them even with redirecting the history of ethics; others find them so bad as to be embarrassing, even to the point of supposing that they could not have been directed against Plato. So feeble are they, this set holds, that Aristotle must have had some other, lesser figure in mind when he developed and deployed them. As they rightly imply, Aristotle's arguments might in principle be terrible arguments if intended to be directed against Plato, but reasonable sorts of arguments if taken to be targeted elsewhere. After all, the problem of evil would be a

pathetic argument trained upon the existence of Zeus, but certainly makes a case to be answered when directed against the existence of an omnipotent, omnibenevolent, omniscient god. Still, most see Aristotle's argument as directed against Plato, or Plato primarily and the Academics who followed him more generally.⁸⁹ Certainly these latter are right-minded if they think that the judgment that Plato *cannot* be Aristotle's intended target should not be founded upon their presumptive weaknesses. After all, any such conclusion requires determining first that Aristotle's arguments are in fact weak; as we have seen, this is already a hotly disputed matter.

This is why we have first found it useful, following the good example of Eustratius, to set out Plato's own view of the Good. Doing so allows us at least to ask

⁸⁹ Flashar (1995, 57) regards the mention of Speusippus as a mere surrogate for Plato: 'With the mention of Speusippus, Aristotle is now using an actual Academician to bear his attack on Plato, following here a procedure that is quite characteristic of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, i.e. deploying inconsistencies and contradictions within the criticized doctrine itself.' The matter is complicated, however. Aristotle noticeably does not name Plato in the central chapter in which he assails the Academic conception of goodness, *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6, speaking instead only of those who introduced, or perhaps, those who *embraced* (*hoi komisantes*, EN 1096a17) the theory of Forms and mentioning by name only Speusippus (EN 1096b7), Plato's nephew and successor as head of the Academy. Some (e.g. Stewart (1892)) think that the presumption is more than contentious, but is in fact positively false, holding instead that Aristotle fails to mention Plato for the very good reason that he is talking not about him or his views, but rather about the views of Speusippus or Xenocrates, or perhaps of the other, lesser members of the Academy. This judgment is motivated in part by the thought that Aristotle's criticisms cannot be directed against someone whose views about the final good Aristotle in fact shares (e.g. Stewart (1892 vol. I, 74)). Three obstacles militate against this view. First, Stewart is wrong to suppose that Aristotle finds Plato's conception of goodness congenial in the relevant respects. Second, Speusippus, contrary to the view of Diogenes (*Vitae* iv 1), seems to have been one of the Academicians who in fact rejected Plato's theory of Forms; still less, then, was he one of those who introduced or promulgated it. Third, the evidence is tenuous, but Speusippus seems to have rejected in particular the principle of causal synonymy (that only ϕ things can cause non- ϕ things to become ϕ) relied upon by the author in Aristotle's sights (*Met.* 1028b21, 1072b31, 1091a34).

whether we may identify the theses targeted in Aristotle's arguments as among those Plato himself embraced. Thereafter, if this prove so, we may also ask whether Aristotle's arguments hit their mark.

With this much frame-setting, we may now turn to an in-depth analysis of each of these arguments in turn, with an ultimate goal of determining their individual and collective worth.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ As we do so, we will find an observation of Flashar (1995, 63) proving true: 'An ongoing school discussion about the doctrine of Forms can be detected behind the formulations of this chapter. Especially in the second part (from 1096b8), objections are formulated, questions raised and critically answered. The formulations here are not always polished to a high degree. Many points only become fully comprehensible if Aristotle's statements are supplemented from other sources.'