

## [Chapter Four]

### Goodness Across the Categories

In some ways, the deepest and most difficult argument of *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 is the categorial argument (*EN* i 6 1096a23-29), which attempts to yoke goodness to being and to infer that since being cannot be predicated univocally across all ten Aristotelian categories, neither can goodness. Here too, although concisely stated, Aristotle's argument proves remarkably complex. This complexity derives in the first instance from the fact that Aristotle's remarks about the homonymy of being are themselves vexed and hotly disputed. So, it is simply not possible to appeal to an established understanding of that doctrine by way of exporting and applying it to the case of goodness. Even so, given that being and goodness co-vary, we can at least use some features of his remarks on being across the categories to explicate his attitude towards the non-univocity of goodness. Indeed, although there has been less of an emphasis on the opposite direction, one can perhaps learn some things about the homonymy of being as it pertains to the doctrine of categories from Aristotle's characterizations of goodness in *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 and *Eudemian Ethics* i 8.

#### I. The Arguments: One Dominant and One Ancillary

Aristotle's appeal to the doctrine of categories is, on the surface at least, transparent:

Further, since good is meant in as many ways as being is meant—in [the category of] what something is [*scil.* substance], for instance god (θεός) and reason (νοῦς); in quality, the virtues (αἱ ἀρεταί), in quantity, a fitting amount (τὸ

μέτριον); in relative, the useful (τὸ χρήσιμον); in time, the opportune (καιρός); in place, an abode (δίαιτα); and other such things <in the other categories>—it is clear that the good cannot be something common, universal, and one (κοινόν τι καθόλου καὶ ἓν). For if it were, it would be used meaningfully not in all of the categories,<sup>1</sup> but rather in one only (EN i 6 1096a23-29).

The conclusion appeals to a fact about meaning, or of ‘being spoken of’ (ἐλέγετο), across the categories and infers therefrom the final thought that the good cannot be something common, universal, and one (κοινόν τι καθόλου καὶ ἓν).

The first clause of the sentence establishes a framework by claiming a co-variance of goodness and being: the good is meant in as many ways as being. Since we know that being is meant in many ways, so too must goodness be meant in many ways. This does not provide the argument of the passage itself, but does express an important connection: since goodness is meant in as many ways as being is meant, and being is meant in many ways (λέγεται πολλαχῶς; *Met.* Γ 4, 1003a33-34), so too must goodness be meant in many ways.

A neutral reader will naturally wonder two things. First, why suppose that being is meant in many ways? What, moreover, does this claim contend? Second, why suppose that goodness is meant in as many ways as being?

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<sup>1</sup> Recall the alternative given in Chapter One n. #: ‘for then it would be spoken of not in all of the categories, but rather in one only’ (οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἐλέγετ’ ἐν πάσαις ταῖς κατηγορίαις, ἀλλ’ ἐν μιᾷ μόνῃ). See that note for further explication.

Let us call this second claim the *co-variance contention*. When we adhere closely to the passage before us, we see that Aristotle does not argue directly for the co-variance contention, beyond offering a series of illustrations of predications of goodness across the categories and then observing that its intercategoryal predicability suffices to show that goodness is non-univocal. In effect, then we are given a dominant argument followed, very briefly, by an ancillary argument.

The dominant argument is this:

- (1) Goodness is meant in as many ways as being is meant.
- (2) (Being is meant in more than one way.)
- (3) So, goodness is meant in more than one way.
- (4) So, 'it is clear that the good cannot be something common, universal, and one' (κοινόν τι καθόλου καὶ ἓν).

Notice that this argument has a negative conclusion: it does not establish the co-variance contention, but rather, and more centrally for Aristotle's ultimate purposes in *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6, concludes that goodness is *not* univocal.

The bulk of the passage is given over to a series of illustrations of predications of goodness in various categories, followed by an observation concerning the consequences of those illustrations. Together they yield an ancillary argument, which in effect supports (1) of the dominant argument without entailing it. Rather strictly, it establishes only half of the co-variance thesis, which is to say that it entails (3), an

interim conclusion of the dominant argument, namely the claim that goodness is meant in more than one way. The ancillary argument:

- (1) The predicate ' . . . is good' is predicated of items in sundry categories, including the categories of substance, quality, relative, time, place, and 'other such things' <in other categories>.
- (2) If goodness were univocal, it would be predicated in one category only.
- (3) So, goodness cannot be something univocal.

Thus construed, the argument is once again superficially simple. Its complexity surfaces, however, as soon it is asked why being univocal is sufficient for being restricted to predications within a single category. Coming to terms with the argument thus requires our determining two matters, namely, first, the connection between transcategorical predication and univocity, and, second, the purport of the illustrations offered. We consider these two matters in the following two sections, taking the second first, turning to the first thereafter.

## II. Goodness across the Categories: a Predicational Approach

Neither premiss of the ancillary argument of this section is unproblematic, though the first is less difficult than the second. As stated, it simply seems to report a predicational practice: we call items in various categories good. Put slightly more formally, items in diverse categories equally receive the predicate ' . . . is good.' One

says 'god is good' and then also 'virtue is good' and so forth. This much may seem uncontroversial; but as we shall see, this uncontroversial assumption proves to be a source of difficulty.

To begin, though, this seems the most natural way of taking Aristotle's illustrations.<sup>2</sup> So, we begin with this approach. Taken at face value, Aristotle seems merely to be offering a minimally factive observation. That is, Aristotle first observes our predicational practices and then reports what he sees. So far, then, he may seem on firm ground. We say, for example, that god (θεός) is good and that reason (νοῦς) is good. These are instances of predications of goodness within the category of 'what something is' or substance. In the same way, as Aristotle notes, we say that this time is good, because it is opportune (καιρός), or that this abode (δίαυτα) is good, for whatever reason we like; in so speaking we predicate '. . . is good' of items in the categories of time and place. So on for the remaining categories.

Already, though, even within this natural or obvious way of taking Aristotle's examples, we can fathom four very different sorts of underlying motivations. First, Aristotle may simply be making an uncomplicated, unadorned observation to the effect that the predicate '. . . is good' is predicated of subjects in various categories.<sup>3</sup> Second,

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<sup>2</sup> This construal agrees with Ackrill (1977, 17), who holds that this is the 'most obvious' way to take the text. It is not, however the only possible way.

<sup>3</sup> This is the approach reflected very clearly in the original Oxford Translation of Ross (1915), and then also, if in a less pronounced manner, in the Revised Oxford Translation of Barnes (1984). This interpretation is adopted directly in Urmson (1988, 23) and Santas (1989, 150).

he might be after something more technical, as some have supposed,<sup>4</sup> in the direction of essential predication or definitional specification. Although not suggested in any direct way in the text, this sort of restricted predicational reading might be thought to address an inadequacy in the first approach. The same might be said for a third possibility, which treats the predications as importantly distinct because of their relying on distinct criteria of application.<sup>5</sup> Finally, fourth, we might look to Aristotle's own method for uncovering non-univocity in predicational contexts, namely the procedure he outlines in *Topics* i 15.

First, then, starting with the thought that the examples in our text are, as they seem to be, straightforward instances of predictions of subjects in various categories. Further, let us suppose our examples are more or less random: among the substances we call good, god and reason spring to mind. We might equally have said, however, Socrates or souls are good, or that military leaders are good, or that this bumble bee or that statue is good. On this way of thinking, we are simply reporting, as is true, that we predicate goodness of substances, but saying or implying nothing further. On the other hand, we might be illustrating, or attempting to illustrate something not at all random, namely that certain sorts of substances, like god and reason, receive the predicate '...good' among all substances because they are the best sorts of substances. Again, on this approach, we would be saying that among all qualities, the virtues receive the

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<sup>4</sup> This is the approach of Hardie (1980, 56), following Joachim (1962, *ad loc.*).

<sup>5</sup> This interpretation owes to Ackrill (1977).

predicate '... are good' because they are especially good qualities, unlike, say, '... is red' or ... is vituperative.' Same again for time, where amongst times the opportune is good, whereas the premature is bad and a trice or an instant is neither good nor bad. While it is not clear that this approach can be fully generalized, one can admit it as a variation of the first approach, which simply reports some practice, random or studied, predicating '... is good' of items various categories.

Although they vary in their details, these proposed restrictions all have something in common, namely that they take the examples given as simple, uncomplicated monadic predications. This simple approach has at least two exegetical advantages. It is, first of all, an entirely natural reading, one very close to the text. It also looks forward in an agreeable way, since the second premiss of our ancillary argument, that if goodness were univocal, it would be predicated in one category only, seems to pair readily with this sort of reading. This simple reading of the first premiss thus flows from the text and leads directly into the premiss which follows.

Unfortunately, so understood Aristotle's ancillary argument is entirely underwhelming. For it seems all too easy to produce counterexamples to the first premiss construed in this simple and direct way.<sup>6</sup> There are plenty of predicates which seem to be predicable of items in various categories in a transparently univocal way.

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<sup>6</sup> So Irwin (1981, 539): 'We might as well say that 'amusing' or 'strange' is multivocal [and hence non-univocal—CS] because both substances and qualities can be amusing or strange.'

For example, one can predicate of every entity, in every category ‘. . . is a member of a category.’<sup>7</sup> It is hard to see how this predicate can be anything but univocal in these applications.

If this sort of made-up predicate is thought to be too artificial, other, more natural predicates are equally available.<sup>8</sup> Thus, one can predicate ‘. . . is white’ of both a substance and a relative, of Marcus, a human being, and of Marcus, a slave. Or, again, one can predicate ‘. . . has mass’ of a quantity and a substance, for instance, of ten kilos of marble and of statue of Aristogeiton. To the likely response that one can predicate ‘has mass’ of a quantity only if it is already a substance, for instance a statue of Aristogeiton, one may simply reject the contention. A quantity of marble might be a statue of Aristogeiton; but it might be nothing but a quantity of marble, even a quantity of marble still indeed unmined in the side of a quarry. Further, Aristotle is himself perfectly prepared to predicate qualities of qualities, including the qualities they are: ‘when someone says, when a white colour is set before him, that what is set before him is white or a colour, he states what it is and signifies a quality’ (*Top.* i 9, 103b31-33).<sup>9</sup> He goes on to make the same point about quantities (*Top.* i 9, 103b33-35). So, there seems

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<sup>7</sup> Thanks to # for this example.

<sup>8</sup> Irwin (1981, 539) offers several: ‘we might as well say that ‘amusing’ or ‘strange’ is multivocal because both substances and qualities can be amusing or strange.’ See also MacDonald (1989, 158-159). Woods (1982, 66): ‘There seems to be little to be said for the view that ‘visible’ is not applied in sense to substances, qualities, quantities and relations. Aristotle nowhere enunciates such a principle, nor he does not seem to employ it explicitly elsewhere.’

<sup>9</sup> ὅταν δὲ χρώματος λευκοῦ ἐκκειμένου φῆ τὸ ἐκκείμενον λευκὸν εἶναι ἢ χρώμα, τί ἐστι λέγει καὶ ποιὸν σημαίνει (*Top.* i 9, 103b31-33).

little point in trying to deny that at least some predicates can be predicated univocally across the categories.

This of course does not entail that all predicates can be predicated univocally across the categories. Perhaps some can and others cannot, and '... is good' is among those that cannot. If this were to be the thought undergirding Aristotle's categorial argument, one would need some principle by which one could determine when predicates can be predicated univocally and when they cannot. Perhaps such a principle could be articulated, but it is difficult to regiment in advance which predicates are predicable across the categories and which not, unless, of course, we have an already articulated principle of restriction at our disposal. Then, however, we would no longer be in the situation we find ourselves at present, of merely noticing and reporting a simple predicational practice whereby a single predicate is predicated of disparate subjects across the categories.

Considerations of this general sort have inclined some readers to suppose that Aristotle's examples are examples not of predication in general, but of a specific sort of predication, namely essential predication.<sup>10</sup> There are several ways one might advance this interpretation, but we may begin with a favourable sort of example. Suppose one

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<sup>10</sup> See n. 4 above. Hardie (1989, 57) elaborates: Aristotle's examples 'are not simply propositions in which good is a predicate asserted of various subjects; they are definitions. The predicate expresses the essence, or part of the essence, of the subject; and it is, therefore, inevitably in the same category as the subject.'

predicates '... is good' of god yielding the statement 'god is good.' It would be too difficult to observe that god is not only good, but essentially good. The value of offering this observation in the context is that one might then move to the thought that as an essential predicate '... is good' is definitional of god, and then one step further to the thought that '... good' is here implicitly being thought of as *identical* with god. Yet if the good is identical with god, and god is a substance, then the good, in this application, must also be a substance. If this same pattern obtains in predications in other categories, then we could conclude that '... is good' as predicated in the various categories of being simply could not be the same, because in one instance it would be identical with a substance, and in another a quality (a virtue, ἡ ἀρετή) and in another a place (an abode, ἡ δίαυτα), and so on. Since, necessarily, no substance is quality and no quality is a quantity, and so forth across the categories, the predicate '... is good' must be non-univocal. It signifies different things in different predications.

This interpretation has at least the advantage of attempting to come to terms with the failings of the first predicational interpretation, which, though closer to the text as we have it, succumbs to a fairly direct objection. Unfortunately, the second predicational account fails even more swiftly: it is simply not the case that '... is good' expresses part of the essence of the times or places or relatives or qualities mentioned. The proposal does not generalize beyond the case of substance, and even then it is a bit of a strain. It is utterly unclear why a Platonist, or anyone else, should think that

'reason ( $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ ) is good' expresses an essential predication, that '. . . is good' is part of the definition of 'reason' ( $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ ). In sum, then, although one can appreciate the need to restrict the predicate in some categorially limiting way, an attempt to salvage the predicational interception by an appeal to essential predication fails.

A more promising strategy treats the predicate '. . . is good' across the categories as a quality in all cases, but as a straightforwardly non-univocal predicate. Here the suggestion is that we can glean the non-univocity of the predicate by noticing that the criteria on the basis of which it is applied differs from category to category in such a way that the predicate itself cannot be the same in each application.<sup>11</sup> Here the thought may be variously developed,<sup>12</sup> but the basic idea is straightforward: if a predicate '. . . is  $\phi$ ' is applied to different subjects according to discernibly different criteria of application, then  $\phi$  is non-univocal in these applications. Thus, to begin again with an example favourable to this approach, if one says that 'Her prose is more safe than stunning' presumably the criterion of application is that her prose is cautious and dull. If, by contrast, one says 'He is safe to secure a third term' or 'They returned safe from a perilous journey' the criteria would be in the first instance his being more or less guaranteed to win and in the latter their being free from harm. Since these criteria of

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<sup>11</sup> This is the suggestion of Ackrill (1977).

<sup>12</sup> The discussion in the present text partly abbreviates the fuller discussion in Shields (1999) but supersedes it where the two disagree.

application vary, so too does the significance of the predicate. In these uses, then, '... is safe' is non-univocal.

The same sort of case can be made for '... is good' in Aristotle's applications. The criterion for saying that 'god is good' might be that god is an exemplary kind of substance, while 'the virtues are good' because virtues are the best kind of quality and 'an opportune moment is good' because an opportune moment, unlike an unfortunate moment, is the best kind of time. Where the criteria of application of the predicate vary so widely, so too must the meaning of the predicate '... is good' differ. Further, since the criteria are constrained to differ, deriving as they do from distinct categories, we can equally conclude that the variance of criteria is necessary and not contingent. Taken together, then, the variance of criteria commend or even require non-univocity.

Unfortunately, this development of Aristotle's suggestion, though a promising way to address our initial worry about predicational approaches generally, succumbs to a different sort of problem. To begin, we should note that 'criterion' might be understood in this argument in two very different ways: (i) epistemically, so that when  $k$  is a criterion of  $x$ ,  $k$  provides a ground for making a knowledge or belief claim ('One criterion of rancidness in olive oil is a sort of petroleum odor.');

(ii) metaphysically, so that the notion of being a criterion is effectively a point about constitution ('One criterion of adequate reading light is a colour temperature of 3,000-5,000 Kelvin.'). The

two approaches yield different arguments, but neither suffices to establish non-univocity.

If we suppose that the notion of being a criterion is epistemic, then we can see that difference of criteria of application, even of categorially rooted difference of criteria, do not suffice to establish non-univocity. One sort of example involves the predicate ‘. . . is hot.’<sup>13</sup> We instruct a child that when the burner on a stove is red, the stove is hot. When we see steam hissing out of a car’s engine, we know that the engine is hot. If a cauldron of water is boiling over, we believe its contents are hot. Perhaps if we learn that a hiker is missing in the Mojave desert at noon, we believe that she is in danger because the place where she is lost is hot. Then again, if a piece of metal is too near the fire, we will avoid touching it, because we believe it is hot. These various criteria drawn from different categories of being—quality (being red), place (in the Mojave), relative (near the fire). Yet they do not give us any ground whatsoever to treat the predicate ‘. . . is hot’ as non-univocal across these applications.

Suppose, however, that the notion of criterion at play in this reconstruction is metaphysical rather than epistemic. Then perhaps the approach is more promising. In some, cases, at least, the suggestion seems apt. Consider, for instance, the predicate ‘. . . is hard’. What constitutes hardness in the case of stone is density, whereas what constitutes hardness in the case of mathematical problems is difficulty, and what

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<sup>13</sup> This example derives from MacDonald (1989, 158), to whose treatment of Ackrill’s (1977) approach I am indebted.

constitutes hardness in personality is being callous and lacking in empathy. Since these are very different qualities—being difficult is not all the same thing as being lacking in empathy which is not the same thing as being dense, that is, as having a high ratio of mass to volume—it would seem to follow that ‘. . . is hard’ across these applications is not the same quality. Hence, difference in criterion, metaphysically construed, will after all suffice for non-univocity.

This approach is much more promising, but it too runs into difficulty. Its difficulty is best seen by moving first to the fourth and final predicational interpretation. This final approach has the advantage of deriving most decisively from Aristotle’s own stated approach to establishing non-univocity. This is a topic Aristotle takes up in *Topics* i 15. In that chapter he begins by making a point immediately germane to our question about goodness:

Regarding the number of ways <in which a term is meant>, one should not only treat <the fact that> terms are meant in different ways, but should also endeavor to provide their definitions (λόγους). For instance, <one should not merely note that> justice and courage are said to be good in one way while what is wholesome and what is healthful are said to be good in another, but also that the former are so called because of how they themselves are, whereas the latter are

so called because they are productive of something [*scil.* health] and not because of how they themselves are. Similarly also in other cases (*Top.* i 15, 106a1-8).<sup>14</sup>

Aristotle suggests here that one should not merely report the fact that in some cases the predicate ‘. . . is φ’ is meant in one way and in other cases another, but that for the purposes of conducting dialectic it behoves one to go further, to provide the definitions of the predicates in their sundry applications. In this case, the predicate ‘. . . is good’ not only attaches to courage and justice in one way, and to the healthful and the wholesome in another, but, as their definitions in these applications will reveal, in the first pair they are predicated as intrinsically good and the latter as instrumentally. This will serve the interests of dialectic, presumably because it will among other things allow us to identify mistakes in argumentation and then also, in a constructive vein, to avoid missteps resulting from conflating distinct meanings of the same predicate.

In the current context, however, the relevant point is that we establish non-*unovcity* in predication by displaying the definitions or accounts (λογοί) of terms. So, in the cases at hand, we have four predications of ‘. . . is good.’

1. Justice is good.
2. Courage is good.
3. What is wholesome is good.

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<sup>14</sup> τὸ δὲ ποσαχῶς, πραγματευτέον μὴ μόνον ὅσα λέγεται καθ’ ἕτερον τρόπον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς λόγους αὐτῶν πειρατέον ἀποδιδόναι, οἷον μὴ μόνον ὅτι ἀγαθὸν καθ’ ἕτερον μὲν τρόπον λέγεται δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἀνδρεία, εὐεκτικὸν δὲ καὶ ὑγιεινὸν καθ’ ἕτερον, ἀλλ’ ὅτι καὶ τὰ μὲν τῷ αὐτὰ ποιὰ τινα εἶναι, τὰ δὲ τῷ ποιητικὰ τινος καὶ οὐ τῷ αὐτὰ ποιὰ τινα εἶναι. ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων (*Top.* i 15, 106a1-8)

4. What is healthful is good.

Aristotle does not provide the accounts he mentions, but makes clear that he supposes that when the accounts are displayed, they will at a minimum reveal the following structure:

1. Justice =<sub>df</sub>  $\phi^*$ —where  $\phi^*$  is an intrinsic property of justice.
2. Courage =<sub>df</sub>  $\phi^{**}$ —where  $\phi^{**}$  is an intrinsic property of courage.
3. Wholesome =<sub>df</sub>  $\psi^*$ —where  $\psi^*$  is a relational property, pointing to the good obtained by presence of the wholesome.
4. Healthful =<sub>df</sub>  $\psi^{**}$ —where  $\psi^{**}$  is a relational property, pointing to the good obtained by the presence of the healthful.

Presumably the good in question in (3) and (4) is health itself. One question regarding the goodness uncovered in (1) and (2) pertains to the question of whether the intrinsic good revealed pertaining to justice and courage are meant to be non-univocal. Aristotle does not need that to be the case for the argument implicitly offered here to succeed, but, as we shall see, he will later in *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 argue for a extremely fine-grained intension for the goodness pertaining even to these intrinsic goods.<sup>15</sup>

Aristotle proceeds in the same chapter to recommend several methods for determining when a predicate ‘. . . is  $\psi$ ’ is non-univocal. He specifies a whole series of techniques, some highly technical, others rather less so. These include, in summary

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<sup>15</sup> See Chapter One § 5 (5) above, together with the fuller discussion of 7 § # below.

fashion, adapting the text somewhat, since some of the examples in Greek do not translate readily into English:

- A test of contraries (*Top.* i 15, 10 a9-35): If  $\phi$  in 'a is  $\phi$ ' and 'b is  $\phi$ ' have different contraries then  $\phi$  is non-univocal in these applications. Thus, in one sort of case the difference is obvious, since the oppose of *fine* (τὸ καλόν) in 'The house is fine' is 'The house is decrepit' and, similarly the opposite of 'The animal is fine' is 'The animal is ugly'. So, '. . . is fine' as it is predicated of animals and houses, is non-univocal.
- A lack of parallelism of contrariety (*Top.* i 15, 106a35-b2): If  $\phi$  in 'a is  $\phi$ ' has a contrary whereas 'b is  $\phi$ ' has none, then  $\phi$  is non-univocal in these applications. Thus, '. . . is pleasurable' has a contrary in the case of 'Desire satisfaction is pleasurable' (namely '. . . is painful'), whereas it has none in 'Meeting a dear old friend by chance is pleasurable.' So, '. . . is pleasurable' is non-univocal in these applications.

Others methods are more technical, involving specifications of intermediaries rather than contraries, or specifications of categorial relations of superordination and subordination. All of the methods have a common sort of structure, however, namely that of determining contextually whether various applications of a term march in step in larger contexts of appraisal. When they do not, that is a reason to regard the term as non-univocal.

One method presented in *Topics* i 15 is, however, especially pertinent to our categorial argument in *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6. Aristotle offers a test for homonymy which coheres narrowly with the categorial argument even to the point of employing the same illustrations:

Consider also the kinds (τὰ γένη) of categories (κατηγοριῶν) falling under a term, whether they are the same in all cases. For if they are not the same, it is clear that what is said is homonymous. For instance, the good (or the good thing; τὸ ἀγαθόν) in the case of food is what is productive of pleasure, whereas in medicine it is what is productive of health; in the case of the soul it is said of a certain quality, for instance moderate or courageous or just, and likewise in the case of a human. Sometimes <it is used in the category> of time, as when said in the case of the opportune (ἐν τῷ καιρῷ);<sup>16</sup> for what is opportune is said to be good. Often <it is used in the category of> quantity, for instance as applied to the fitting amount (ἐπὶ τοῦ μετρίου); for the fitting amount is also said to be good. Consequently, the good is homonymous (*Top.* i 15, 107a3-12).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Reading οἷον τὸ ἐν τῷ καιρῷ for οἷον τὸ ἐν τῷ καιρῷ ἀγαθόν at 107a9, accepting a proposed deletion of Maguinness (1947), also accepted by Brunschwig (1967).

<sup>17</sup> Σκοπεῖν δὲ καὶ τὰ γένη τῶν κατὰ τοῦνομα κατηγοριῶν, εἰ ταῦτά ἐστιν ἐπὶ πάντων· εἰ γὰρ μὴ ταῦτά, δηλὸν ὅτι ὁμώνυμον τὸ λεγόμενον. οἷον τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἐν ἐδέσματι μὲν τὸ ποιητικὸν ἡδονῆς, ἐν ἰατρικῇ δὲ τὸ ποιητικὸν ὑγείας, ἐπὶ δὲ ψυχῆς τὸ ποιᾶν εἶναι, οἷον σώφρονα ἢ ἀνδρείαν ἢ δικαίαν· ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ ἀνθρώπου. ἐνιαχοῦ δὲ τὸ ποτέ, οἷον τὸ ἐν τῷ καιρῷ· ἀγαθὸν γὰρ λέγεται τὸ ἐν τῷ καιρῷ. πολλάκις δὲ τὸ ποσόν, οἷον ἐπὶ τοῦ μετρίου· λέγεται γὰρ καὶ τὸ μέτριον ἀγαθόν. ὥστε ὁμώνυμον τὸ ἀγαθόν (*Top.* i 15, 107a3-12).

Here we have an argument for the non-univocity of the good which closely parallels the procedure given in a more truncated fashion in *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6.<sup>18</sup>

This presentation makes more explicit that the good is itself predicated of items falling in various categories, and that this is already, in Aristotle's view, a sufficient condition for homonymy. Since homonymy is sufficient for non-univocity,<sup>19</sup> a term's being predicated of items in different categories is sufficient for non-univocity. Taken one way, though, this argument simply devolves into the first, simple predicational interpretation already rejected. The simple predicational interpretation has the unfortunate result of being too profligate; it yields non-univocity where none accrues. This is because it relies on the unrestricted principle that if the predicate '... is  $\phi$ ' is applied to items in more than one category of being '... is  $\phi$ ' is non-univocal in those applications. To repeat the most straight forward example, let '... is  $\phi$ ' be 'is a member be a category of being'.

Taken in a more restricted way, however, the categorial argument of *Topics* i 15 is more promising. In this more restricted way, it has a lot in common with the third,

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<sup>18</sup> Smith (1997, 97) suggests that though parallel, Aristotle's aim in the *Topics* is slightly more modest: 'The discussion of the senses of 'good' closely resembles a position stated in each category, and thus there cannot be a single Platonic Idea of goodness. In the present text [*Topics* i 15], Aristotle advances the more modest claim that since 'good' is applicable to things in *several* categories, it must be equivocal.' In the terms employed above, Aristotle is here arguing for homonymy, but not yet the co-variance thesis.

<sup>19</sup> Indeed, in some cases homonymy simply is non-univocity. On the relation of Aristotle's shifting uses of the word 'homonymy' (ὁμώνυμον) to one another, see Shields (1999). In the current discussion, it is noteworthy, as Smith (1997, 97-98) observes, that with the exception of 107a34, Aristotle at this point in the chapter switches without comment from speaking of a term's being meant in many ways (λέγεται πολλαχῶς) to its being homonymous (ὁμώνυμον).

criteriological approach to the predicational interpretation of the categorial argument of *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6. This is the metaphysical notion of 'criterion', according to which we establish cross-categorial non-univocity by pointing out that what constitutes being- $\phi$  in one context is not the same as what constitutes being- $\phi$  in another, as when '. . . is hard' is constituted by difficulty in the case of a mathematical problem and by a lack of empathy in the case of a person. Applied here, the point would be that the good, that is, the good thing ( $\tau\acute{o}$  ἀγαθόν) shifts from category to category; in one case it is a quality, another an action, another a time, and so forth. One might then suppose that since *what is good* differs in these different categories, the good is not the same throughout. From this one might carry on to infer that '. . . is good' is differently applied in these categorially diverse cases.

There is, unfortunately, a problem common to these two approaches. At any rate, there is a problem so long as this approach is understood as a species of the predicational interpretation. For now the argument becomes:

- (1) If '. . . is  $\phi$ ' is predicated of disparate  $\phi$ -things in distinct categories  $c_1 \dots c_n$ , then what it is to be  $\phi$  in these predictions will vary in account ( $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$  λόγῳ).
- (2) If what it is to be  $\phi$  varies in account ( $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$  λόγῳ) across a range of predications, then '. . . is  $\phi$ ' is non-univocal across these applications.
- (3) So, if '. . . is  $\phi$ ' is predicated of disparate  $\phi$ -things in distinct categories  $c_1 \dots c_n$ , then '. . . is  $\phi$ ' is non-univocal across these applications.

(4) It is the case that '... is good' is predicated of disparate good things in categories  $c_1 \dots c_n$ .

(5) So, '... is good' is non-univocal across these applications.

Put in these terms, the flaw surfaces directly: (1) is false.

In fact, (1) shows how both the constitutive sense of the criteriological approach and the categorial approach go awry: they equally conflate the extension of '... is good' with the intension of '... is good'.<sup>20</sup> We can and should fully grant that the good things in the various categories (= the extension of '... is good') are different accounts. What it is to be opportune, something good item in the category of time, and what it is to be virtuous, something good in the category of quality, are entirely different. That is the account ( $\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ ) '... is opportune' is altogether distinct from the account of '... is virtuous'. Same again for 'opportune moment' and 'virtue'. Still, from this it does not follow that '... is good' as applied to these disparate items diverge in account.

There is, moreover, no possibility of our thinking that 'opportune' and 'virtuous' are homonymous, since they fail a necessary condition of being non-univocal, namely that they be the same in homophonic or orthographic type. As Aristotle says:

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<sup>20</sup> This is the main and fair verdict, put in different terms, of Woods (1982, 67), commenting on the parallel argument of *Eudemian Ethics* i 8: 'Nothing in the argument attributed to Aristotle rules out the possibility that some single character whose presence in items in any of the categories leads to their being described as goods: to be a good will be to be a substance which is  $\phi$  or a quality which is  $\phi$ , etc. If so, it will be natural to identify goodness with  $\phi$ ness, a single character possessed by all goods, even though to be a good will vary according to the category of item involved.'

Things are said to be homonymous when they have only a common name (ὄνομα), and the account (λόγος) of being corresponding to the name is different (*Cat.* 1, 1a1-2).<sup>21</sup>

By contrast:

Things are said to be synonymous when both the name (ὄνομα) and the account (λόγος) of being corresponding to the name are the same (*Cat.* 1 1a6-7).<sup>22</sup>

Briefly, then Aristotle's statement of what univocity requires in *Categories* 1 remains perfectly pellucid:<sup>23</sup>

- Univocity (= synonymy):  $\phi$  is univocal =<sub>df</sub> there exists a single, non-disjunctive, essence-specifying account of  $\phi$ .<sup>24</sup>
- Multivocity (= homonymy):<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ὁμώνυμα λέγεται ὧν ὄνομα μόνον κοινόν, ὁ δὲ κατὰ τοῦνομα λόγος τῆς οὐσίας ἕτερος (*Cat.* 1, 1a1-2).

<sup>22</sup> συνώνυμα δὲ λέγεται ὧν τό τε ὄνομα κοινόν καὶ ὁ κατὰ τοῦνομα λόγος τῆς οὐσίας ὁ αὐτός (*Cat.* 1, 1a6-7).

<sup>23</sup> This account recapitulates with abbreviations and minor deviations the analysis of homonymy offered in Shields (1999, Chapter One). I here, for purposes of continuity, speak of 'univocity' instead of synonymy and non-univocity instead of multivocity. These are, however, inconsequential linguistic variations.

<sup>24</sup> See also Chapter 1 §1 (ii) above for an account of Platonic univocity, together with an explication of why disjunction is to be eschewed in an essence-specifying account.

<sup>25</sup> This identification leaves aside an important question, not germane to our current purposes, of whether multivocity (λέγεται πολλαχῶς) and homonymy (ὁμώνυμον) are co-extensive. See Shields (1999) for an argument that they are. See also n. 19 # above for the interchangeability of these terms in *Topics* i 15.

- Negatively:  $\phi$  is multivocal =<sub>df</sub> there does not exist a single essence-specifying account of  $\phi$ .
- Equivalently, on the assumption that  $\phi$  at least admits of an account, in more positive terms:
- $\phi$  is multivocal =<sub>df</sub> there are two or more essence-specifying accounts of  $\phi$ .

The question thus becomes whether the predicate ‘... is good’, as it turns up in different categories of being, perforce has divergent accounts across those instances. As we already seen, nothing requires this.

Taking that all together, it appears that the fourth attempt at a predicational interpretation of the categorial argument, together with the metaphysical version of the third, criteriological interpretation, falls short of establishing Aristotle’s anti-Platonic conclusion. To be sure, we have not determined that the predicate ‘... is good’ *must* apply univocally to items in the diverse categories of which it is predicated, which is, after all, the Platonist assumption.<sup>26</sup> Rather, we have argued more modestly that this assumption is not precluded by the bare fact of intercategoryal predication. Since it requires at least this negative conclusion, so far Aristotle’s categorial argument falls short of its intended mark.

### III. Goodness across the Categories: Non-predicational Approaches

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<sup>26</sup> See Chapter 1 §1 (ii) above.

The failure of the predicational approach, which is the most natural understanding of Aristotle's own presentation, counsels that we consider an alternative approach, one which, although not immediately on the surface of Aristotle's remarks,<sup>27</sup> might be thought to be lurking not far below. This is the purport of an intriguing remark of Alexander of Aphrodisias, which has also been echoed in modern times.<sup>28</sup> In fact, however, as we shall see, taken one way, this approach collapses into the predicational approach, but with an important twist. Taken another way, it is a more radical proposal, one which effectively denies that '... is good' is a predicate at all.

We begin, then, with the intriguing suggestion of Alexander, commenting on Aristotle's categorial argument:

He says it is necessary to consider the genera of the predicates (τὰ γένη τῶν κατηγοριῶν) under which things with the same name fall, that is, the categories (κατηγορίας); these are the highest genera. He says it is necessary to consider the categories predicated of the things signified under the names set forth, whether the same <categories> are predicated with respect to all of the things signified under the name. For if things signified under the same <name> fall

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<sup>27</sup> This observation coheres with the tenor of Ackrill's (1977, 20) assessment of the non-predicational approach of Kosman (1968).

<sup>28</sup> Kosman (1968, 173): 'What the language of the passage appears instead to suggest is that God and intelligence, the virtues, etc., are meant not to be subjects, but rather to be *predicates*.'

under several categories and several categories are predicated of it, it will be homonymous, as in the case of the good (ὡς ἐπὶ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ).<sup>29</sup>

The passage presents several difficulties, but is suggestive all the same.

One way of understanding Alexander's point involves changing the order of predication. Instead of taking '... is good' as a predicate, one can, upon analysis, determine the category of the good thing—of the the virtue or the soul, for instance—and then proceed to determine *its* category. We see upon inspection, that these fall into different categories; and we infer on that basis that the good is non-univocal. The idea would then be that we have a sort of two-stage process: we first establish the extension of the predicate '... is good' and then, as it were, hold the predicate itself in abeyance.

That is, instead of saying:

- The opportune (καιρός) is good.
- The soul (ψυχή) is good.
- The abode (δίαιτα) is good.

We say:

- The opportune (καιρός) is a good time.
- The soul (ψυχή) is a good substance.

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<sup>29</sup> Δεῖν φησιν ἐπισκοπεῖν καὶ τὰ γένη τῶν κατηγοριῶν, ὑφ' ἧς ἔστι τὰ ὑπὸ ταὐτὸν ὄνομα, τοῦτ' ἔστι τὰς κατηγορίας· ταῦτα δὲ ἔστι τὰ ἀνωτάτω γένη. δεῖν δὲ φησι καὶ τὰς τῶν σημαινομένων ὑπὸ τῶν ὀνομάτων τῶν προκειμένων κατηγορουμένας κατηγορίας ἐπισκοπεῖν, εἰ κατὰ πάντων τῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ ὀνόματος σημαινομένων αἱ αὐταὶ κατηγοροῦνται· ἂν γὰρ ὑπὸ πλείους κατηγορίας ἢ τὰ σημαινόμενα ὑπ' αὐτοῦ καὶ πλείους αὐτοῦ κατηγορῶνται, ὁμώνυμον ἔσται, ὡς ἐπὶ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ (Alex. *in Top.* 105. 19-25).

- An abode (δίαιτα) is a good place.

This, suggests Alexander, ushers in multivocity.

One can fathom two ways this might be so. The first effectively treats ‘. . . is good’ as a predicate after all, but in such a way as to disguise its actual meaning.<sup>30</sup> This would be a way, perhaps, of saying that the accounts of ‘. . . is good’ differ in just the way predicates are meant to differ in order to establish non-univocity. For when one gives an account of ‘. . . is good’ when predicated of an abode, what one in fact predicates is ‘is a good place’. More fully, we provide an account of the predicates as given:

- The opportune (καιρός) is a good time.
- The soul (ψυχή) is a good substance.
- An abode (δίαιτα) is a good place.

So that we have, for instance:

- The opportune (καιρός) is a temporally-good-thing.
- The soul (ψυχή) is a a substantially-good-thing.
- An abode (δίαιτα) is a placewise-good-thing.

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<sup>30</sup> There seems to be some (productive) confusion on this point in Kosman (1968), who suggests both that ‘. . . is good’ is not predicated, and also that it is predicated but only by disguising a distinct predicate (1968, 174): ‘The instances that Aristotle gives, then, are not the subjects of exemplary predicative statements [that is, he is not saying ‘God is good.’—CS], but rather the predicates of such statements. They make clear that the multivocity of “good” is exhibited not only in the fact that many sorts of things may be said to be good, but more in the fact that predicates of radically different type are in fact disguised means of predicating the good in radically different senses.’

Of course, these paraphrases are awkward, but that does not preclude their being correct.

An immediate issue, however, concerns why a neutral observer, even one who embraces the theory of categories, should be constrained to accept these periphrastic accounts. One reason might be that there is no general predicate ‘. . . is good’, so that any attempt to extract one would be doomed to fail. That response, however, is plainly question-begging in this context: we are trying to determine why there is or can be no univocal predicate ‘. . . is good’ and so cannot appeal to the non-existence of such a predicate in our argument. Failing some other route, this way of developing Alexander’s suggestion falls short. The theory of categories itself does not constrain us to embrace the non-univocity of goodness.

This leads, however, to a second way of understanding Alexander’s suggestion. This would be the slightly more difficult, but also more promising suggestion that ‘. . . is good’ is not a disguised predicate: it is not a predicate at all. One reason for thinking this might be that predications of ‘. . . is good’ are necessarily misleading—and indeed strictly false until paraphrased appropriately. In one way, the thought here need not be overly complicated. The idea would be that certain linguistic predicates require paraphrase in order to ascertain their truth-makers.

Two sorts of examples are apposite.

First, we say:

- The average Swede has 1.6 children.

If this is true, it is not because there is some individual named by the definite description 'the average Swede' who has not one child or two, but rather 1.6 child, but rather because the total number of children divided by the number of Swedes of child-rearing age equals 1.6. So, though there is a predicate '... has 1.6 children', a sentence featuring as a predicate is true, if true, in virtue of a complex state of affairs which most manifestly does not feature actual fractional children. Similarly, then, when we predicate '... is good' we are saying something not expressed in the surface grammar of the sentence, but something requiring a paraphrase of the general form 'x in category  $c_1$  manifests  $\phi$ ', where  $\phi$  is some category-specific feature, a feature manifested by at most one category of being. If something is good as a place, in so far as it is place, in cannot be in the same sense good as a substance, in so far as it is a substance. For, necessarily, no place is a substance. Thus, when we look to the truth makers of our predictions, we find that we must paraphrase, and indeed paraphrase away the seeming predicate '... is good.'

As a second sort of example, we say:

- This rubber ball is red.

One permissible paraphrase, acceptable and even preferable to a realist about universals might be:

- This ball instantiates redness.

Redness, as intended in the paraphrase, is an abstract mind- and language-independent universal, the sort of entity which can be wholly present in multiple locations at once. Suppose, however, that we have on independent grounds come to conclude that there are no universals, and perhaps even no abstract entities beyond sets. Then we will offer a very different sort to paraphrase:

- This ball is a member of the set of red things.

Here again we will find the truth maker of our sentence, if it is true, not in the realization of some abstract, univocal property, redness, by some ball, for though there are balls there are no such properties. Consequently, we have needed to resort to a paraphrase strategy, once which leads away from the predicate, treating it not even as a predicate disguising another predicate, but rather as a shorthand and misleading way of saying something about a subject, namely a red ball. What we are saying of it, as our paraphrase reveals, is that it is a member of a set. The predicate ‘. . . is red’ has been paraphrased away.

This, then, is a second way of understanding Alexander’s somewhat cryptic remark: ‘For if things signified under the same <name> fall under several categories and several categories are predicated of it, it will be homonymous, as in the case of the good (ὡς ἐπὶ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ)’ (#). Here it appears that the good thing is the subject of a prediction, where the predicate is ‘. . . is a *c*’, where *c* names the category in question. If paraphrase in this direction is required, then there will be some force pushing us away

from the predicate ‘... is good’ and in the direction of some good thing or other—just as in the case of ‘... is red’, according to the set-theoretic nominalist, which predication pushes us to the set of red things and away from some universal or other.

Here again, however, we run into a now predictable problem. This is not that the argument so construed obviously fails, but rather that it does not obviously succeed. If we take the situation with the nominalistic paraphrase of ‘... is red’ as illustrative, then we would need in the case of ‘... is good’ what the nominalist takes as independently given in the case of ‘... is red’, namely a reason for thinking that there is no universal available to serve as the truth maker of (seeming) predications of ‘... is good’. If the categories taken by themselves could generate such a reason, the categorial argument would be decisive. Unfortunately, it does not. We have then arrived, at best, at a stalemate.

To put these findings more generally we can consider the following simple argument, which is the schema of the ancillary argument we have been assaying, now in summary form:

- (1) If we predicate ‘... is  $\phi$ ’ of objects  $o_1 \dots o_n$  in categories  $c_1 \dots c_n$ , then  $\phi$  is univocal only if  $\phi$  admits of a univocal account.
- (2) The predicate ‘... is good’ is predicated of objects  $o_1 \dots o_n$  in categories  $c_1 \dots c_n$ .

(3) The predicate '... is good' does not admit of a univocal account in these applications.

(4) Hence, the predicate '... is good' is non-univocal in these applications.

We grant (1), and we stipulate (2), at least as a matter of linguistic practice. We have in effect, then, been trying to determine why the doctrine of categories suffices for (3). So far, we have found no compelling reason for supposing that it does.

Some strategies accept that we have genuine instances of predication across the categories and have tried show how the doctrine of categories itself precludes univocal predication. Others have contended rather that in fact Aristotle's argument does not rest on any sort of prediction of '... is good.' Instead, the good things in different categories were held to be the subjects of prediction. Still others have suggested that the seeming predication was indeed a predication of goodness, but a in fact a seeming predicate, '... is good' disguising some other predicate, like '... is a marvellous sort of place.' When the disguise comes off, we find not goodness predicated, but something else altogether, something revealed in the truth maker which makes the sentence expressed true. So, the predications involve paraphrases; but again, we have been hard pressed to see how the doctrine of categories alone forces rather than merely invites paraphrases. In our last formulation, deriving from Alexander, we have concluded that one way forward would be to force a paraphrase on independent grounds, for reasons consistent with the doctrine of categories and perhaps even recommended by it without

being strictly required by it. Evidently, without such an independently forced paraphrase, the best we can say is that the categorial argument is incomplete.

We turn now to an attempt to complete the argument.

#### IV. Geach's Gambit

'[T]here is no such thing as being just good or bad, there is only being a good or bad so and so.'<sup>31</sup> So says Geach, and in so speaking, contends, with an intended Aristotelian penumbra, that there simply can be no univocal predication across the categories.<sup>32</sup> His thesis stakes a clearer and bolder claim than we have seen so far, however. He does not say that the predicate '... is good' is really several predicates; he does not say that the predicate '... is good' disguises some other predicate; he does not say that '... is good' is predicated differently according to different criteria in different contexts. Rather, he says that there is not such predicate. The predicate '... is good' always functions as an attributive adjective and never as a predicative adjective.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Geach (1956, 34). More fully: 'Even when 'good' or 'bad' stands by itself as a predicate, and is thus grammatically predicative, some substantive has to be understood; there is no such thing as being just good or bad, there is only being a good or bad so-and-so. (If I say that something is a good or bad *thing*, either 'thing' is a mere proxy for a more descriptive noun to be supplied from the context; or else I am trying to use 'good' or 'bad' predicatively, and its being grammatically attributive is a mere disguise. The latter attempt is, on my thesis, illegitimate.)

<sup>32</sup> Geach (1956, 35, 40, 41, 42). More generally, as Pigden notes (1990, 147): 'Geach's project is Aristotelian. From a consideration of what it is to be a man, he wants to derive a notion of a good man.'

<sup>33</sup> Geach (1956, 33): 'I can now state my first thesis about good and evil: 'good' and 'bad' are always attributive, not predicative, adjectives.'

If this is correct, then Aristotle will have accomplished the negative thesis of his ancillary categorial argument not by demonstrating that ‘. . . is good’ is non-univocal in virtue of its being multivocal. Rather, he will have been in a position to establish that ‘is clear that the good cannot be something common, universal, and one (κοινόν τι καθόλου καὶ ἕν; *EN* i 6 1096a27-28) in view of its not being anything at all.

Geach’s position has the advantage of forcing paraphrase of linguistic predications of ‘. . . is good’. He realizes, of course, that people say things like ‘This young *Heldentenor* is really good.’ and ‘I don’t care for their manicotti but their pizza is good.’ When people speak this way, they are perforce conveying something more restricted, that ‘S is a good *Heldentenor*’ or that ‘This restaurant makes good pizza.’ That is, every seeming predicative use of ‘. . . is good’ is in fact a disguised attributive use.

The distinction between predicative and attributive uses of adjectives with which Geach is working is reasonably straightforward. As a syntactic matter, attributive adjectives tend to occur before the noun they modify and predicative adjectives after:

- Attributive: The yellow lorry blocked the roadway.
- Predicative: Her speech was boring.

Most adjectives, by this syntactic test, can function as either. Some, however, are strictly attributive, including, for instance, ‘mere’, ‘former’ and ‘main’. We can say:

- The former occupant was . . .

but cannot say:

- The occupant was former. . .

Attributive adjectives tie closely with the nouns they modify and are, so to speak, not readily detachable from them. Put linguistically, then, Geach's point is that each time we say:

- 'x is good'

we are committed to a paraphrase of the form

- 'x is a good  $\phi$ ' or 'a good  $\phi$  is always  $\psi$ '.

There is, accordingly, a metaphysical correlate: there is no absolute good, only indexed goods.<sup>34</sup>

Herein lies the philosophical significance of Geach's claim, as well as its relevance to Aristotle's ancillary categorial argument. One might have thought that 'good' functions as both an attributive and a predicative adjective. Geach disagrees; and when he does, he articulates a thesis very much like the thesis expositors of Aristotle's categorial argument offer, namely that nothing is *simply good*. Everything which is good is a good something or other.<sup>35</sup> Any attempt to abstract a single predicate '... is good' from these attributive uses yields a philosopher's fiction. Looked at from

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<sup>34</sup> See Chapter One § II for indexed vs. non-indexed conceptions of goodness.

<sup>35</sup> Perhaps the clearest example comes from Woods (1982, 67), when explicating the categorial argument of *EE* i 8: 'Aristotle's thought was that for some things, to be good is to be (a case of) justice, for others to be good is to be the right amount, and similarly in the other cases.' Further, '... judgements of the form "X is a good" are most plausibly regarded as analysable into statements of the form "X is a thing which is good. . ."'

this perspective, Aristotle is simply calling attention to the attributive nature of the good.<sup>36</sup>

For our purposes, then, Geach's argument is best regarded as an argument of the following form:

- (1) Goodness is never predicative and always attributive.
- (2) If (1), there is no transcategorial predication of goodness.
- (3) If (2), then, necessarily, goodness is predicated, if predicated at all, intracategorially.<sup>37</sup>
- (4) So, necessarily, goodness is predicated, if predicated at all, intracategorially.
- (5) If (4), then necessarily, if goodness is predicated of  $x$  in  $c_1$  and of  $y$  in  $c_2$  (where  $c_1$  and  $c_2$  are distinct categories of value), then any account (λόγος) of goodness as it is predicated of  $x$  will diverge from any account of  $\phi$  as it is predicated of  $y$ .
- (6) Hence, necessarily, if goodness is predicated of  $x$  in  $c_1$  and of  $y$  in  $c_2$  (where  $c_1$  and  $c_2$  are distinct categories of value), then any account (λόγος) of goodness as it is predicated of  $x$  will diverge from any account of  $\phi$  as it is predicated of  $y$ .

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<sup>36</sup> Again, Woods is exemplary when commenting on the parallel argument of *EE* i 8 (1982, 67): 'The point will then be that to be a good consists sometimes in being a certain sort of substance, sometimes a certain sort of quality, sometimes a certain sort of quantity; it follows from this that there can be no abstractable generic feature common to all goods. . .'

<sup>37</sup> This issue is explored below in Chapter Seven §6 and in Chapter Nine §4.

The point of mentioning the possibility of intracategorical predications, although it is out of step with Geach's greater objective, is that we are here thinking only of the role such an argument might play in Aristotle's ancillary categorial argument. Furthermore, as we shall see, there is some point in trying to retain an intracategorical predicate '...is good' even in the absence of a transcategorical predicate '... is good.'<sup>38</sup>

If the conclusion (6) is correct, then any account (λόγος) of a linguistic predication of '... is good' will necessarily return a paraphrase given in terms of an attributive notion of goodness. So, we will have been given a reason why paraphrase is necessary and not merely possible. We will thus have moved beyond a stalemate and acceded the soundness of Aristotle's ancillary categorial argument.

The important premiss, then, is (1), the claim that goodness is never predicative and always attributive, and this, of course, is Geach's distinctive contribution to the debate. What can be said on behalf of (1)? Geach offers three arguments for the conclusion that goodness is always attributive and never predicative, the second two of which are effectively mirror images of one another.<sup>39</sup> The first is an argument from the purported fact that 'good' functions as an *alienans* adjective; the remaining two rely on combinatorial features of the adjective which cohere rather nicely with some of Aristotle's uses of 'good' (ἀγαθός) as indexed.

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<sup>38</sup> This issue is explored below in Chapter Seven §6 and in Chapter Nine §4.

<sup>39</sup> Pigden (1990) offers a clear presentation and convincing refutation of Geach's claims. As he notes, however, despite the frailty of Geach's arguments, his claim about goodness has won wide support. See Williams (1972, 32-52), Wong (1972), Blackburn (1985), Foot (1985).

The first argument begins with the observation that 'good' functions as an *alienans* adjective, and adds to that observation that only attributive adjectives can be *alienans*. So, 'good' must be attributive. The idea of an *alienans* adjective is that it can make the meaning of what it modifies other than what it would be unmodified: a *forged* banknote is not a banknote, a *decoy* duck is not a duck, and a sofa made of *artificial* leather is not made of leather. Here Geach's thought is that 'good' and 'bad' travel together, and that since 'bad' is *alienans*, so must good be *alienans*, and thus both attributive. Bad food is under one interpretation spoiled food; spoiled food is, however, not food, because spoiled food, food bad in this sense, does not nourish.

The argument laid bare, then, is: (i) if 'bad' is *alienans*, then so is good; (ii) bad is *alienans*; so, (iii) good is *alienans*; (iv) if an adjective  $\phi$  is *alienans*, then  $\phi$  is attributive; so, (v) 'good' is attributive.

This argument is multiply terrible. The first premiss is merely asserted; the second premiss is false if it means 'always *alienans*' and inadequate otherwise; the fourth premiss is false if it means 'always attributive' and inadequate otherwise; and its final conclusion is thus either false or inadequate. No one has denied, not Plato, not anyone else, that 'good' is sometimes indexed and so sometimes non-predicative. In order to make his case, Geach must show that 'good' is never predicative. Again, he says: ' 'good' and 'bad' are always attributive, not predicative, adjectives.'<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Geach (1956, 33).

The second and third arguments fare little better. We treat them together. Here Geach's idea is that we spy the attributive character in the combinatorial behaviour of the adjective. If an adjective is predicative then one can combine and separate it freely from its neighbours and also deploy it in inferences of various sorts. This is, however, not true of 'good'. We say:

- She has an old red car. So, she has a red car.

The same again for 'old'. So, 'old' and 'red' may be used predicatively.

By contrast, we cannot say:

- He's a good thief. So, he's good.

Conversely, one can pool information when the predicative use is in view. We say:

- Her car is red and her car is old. So, she has an old red car.

By contrast, again, we cannot say:

- He is a thief and he is good. So, he is a good thief.

Perhaps when we call him good, we are in the context of speaking of him as a fencer.

His being a good fencer does not make him a good thief.

All of this linguistic data is apt. What argument does it commend? Geach seems to be arguing in this way: (i) the adjective 'good' cannot be pooled or detached and deployed in inference; (ii) if it cannot be pooled or detached and deployed in inference, then 'good' is attributive; (iii) if it is attributive, then 'good' is not predicative; so, (iv) 'good' is not predicative.

The conclusion is unobjectionable, unless it means 'is never predicative', in which case (iii) must be (iii\*): if it is attributive, then 'good' is never predicative. In that case, however, (ii) must be (ii\*): if it can never be pooled or detached and deployed in inference, then 'good' is always attributive and never predicative. Finally, (i) will not connect suitably with (ii\*) unless it is understood as making the modality universal: (i\*) the adjective 'good' can *never* be pooled or detached and deployed in inference.

Now again the argument looks feeble. To begin, again, no one doubts that 'good' is sometimes indexed and indeed sometimes attributive. So, (iii\*) is false: possibly an adjective is attributive and also predicative. Indeed, this is actual and not at all uncommon. So, the argument thus developed is unsound.

Further, the examples Geach provides seem apt as far as they go, but that does not give us any reason to suppose that 'good' can never be pooled or detached and deployed in inference. Indeed, some predications of '. . . is good' seem to have precisely the opposite to Geach's intended outcome. If Peter thinks that an act of kindness is good, it does not follow that he must be thinking of it as good *as* an act of kindness; perhaps he thinks that all acts of kindness are good, but that this act of kindness, though an act of kindness, is paltry as acts of kindness go. Moreover, the following seems a perfectly sensible inference: Beelzebub is a bad old god; so, Beelzebub is bad. Heading in the other direction, pooling: the novel *The Way Things are Now* is both good and highly readable; so, *The Way We Live Now* is a good highly readable novel. It is thus

difficult to infer anything substantive from Geach's linguistic observations pertaining to pooling and detaching.

To be clear, and to conclude, this issue should not be confused with the separate question of whether all goods are indexed goods, whether, that is, there is no absolute good or goodness *simpliciter*. What Geach is arguing specifically is that '... is good' is never predicative, and that consequently, whenever one sees such a linguistic prediction, one is constrained to paraphrase it into some manner of attributive good. If this were so, Aristotle's ancillary categorial argument would be afforded the kind of closure it needs to establish its negative conclusion. Goodness would not be 'something common, universal, and one' (κοινόν τι καθόλου καὶ ἓν; *EN* i 6 1096a27-28), because this could be so only if there were a purely predicative use of '... is good'. Geach has not shown that there is not.

This brings us back, then, to the place we began: the ancillary categorial argument fails to secure the non-univocity of goodness. From the fact that '... is good' is predicated of objects in diverse ontological categories of being we cannot infer that it is non-univocal.

## V. Goodness and Being: the Co-variance Contention

We have focussed thus far on the ancillary categorial argument, in any effort to determine whether the doctrine of the categories gives us a good reason to accept the

negative contention that goodness is non-univocal. We have seen reason to doubt that Aristotle offers us a compelling argument for this conclusion; we have not, however, understood this shortcoming to vindicate the Platonism under scrutiny. So far, then, we have at best a statement.

We have also noted, however, that Aristotle's ancillary categorial argument, even if sound, falls short of establishing the first premiss of his dominant argument, namely the co-variance contention, that 'the good is meant in as many ways as being' (τὰγαθὸν ἰσαχῶς λέγεται τῷ ὄντι; *EN* i 6, 11026s23-24). It falls short because goodness might be non-univocal without marching exactly in step with being. This seems to be, however, Aristotle's exact contention: he says it is meant in 'as many ways' (ἰσαχῶς) as being.<sup>41</sup>

This suggests, then, that Aristotle's co-variance contention draws from another source, and is introduced into the dominant categorial argument as already established. The presentation in *Eudemian Ethics* i 8 is slightly fuller here, but only slightly. It does, however, add one crucial claim:

The good is said in many ways, indeed in as many ways as being. For being, as it has been delineated in other writings, signifies in one case what something is

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<sup>41</sup> The word ἰσαχῶς is evidently an Aristotelian coinage; at any rate it does not appear in Greek before him. In fact, it occurs only 42 times in the entire canon, nine of them in Aristotle and the vast majority of them thereafter in commentaries on this passage. In Aristotle, it occurs in four works: *Top.* iv 4, 125a15, 163a14 viii 12; *Met.* Δ 1, 1013a16, Δ 18, 1022a19, I 2, 1053b25 (being is said in as many way as unity; λέγεται δ' ἰσαχῶς τὸ ὄν καὶ τὸ ἕν), 1054a14; N 2, 1089a27 (not being is said in as many ways as the categories; μὴ ὄν ἰσαχῶς ταῖς κατηγορίαις λέγεται); *EN* i 6, 1096a23; *EE* i 8, 1217b26. In each of these uses, the meaning seems to be 'in exactly as many as' and not 'at least as many as'.

(τί ἐστὶ), in another a quality, in another a quantity, in another a time, and beyond these in being moved and initiating motion, and the good <is said> in each of these modes, in substance (ἐν οὐσίᾳ) reason and god, in quality the just, in quantity a fitting amount, in time the opportune, and teaching and being taught where motion is concerned. Just as being (τὸ ὄν) is not something one concerning all of the things mentioned, so neither is the good (τὸ ἀγαθόν); nor is there a single science of either being or the good.<sup>42</sup>

The examples track those given in the parallel of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, with some noteworthy variations, though the general purport is the same.

What is added is the claim that being is not something one (ἐν τί), coupled with the claim that there is no science (ἐπιστήμη) of either being or the good. Aristotle's reservations about a science of being, then, carry over to the possibility of a science of the good. Although fraught with developmental questions about the possibility of a unified science in the absence of a genus,<sup>43</sup> we may say for now, as a default position,

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<sup>42</sup> πολλαχῶς γὰρ λέγεται καὶ ἰσαχῶς τῷ ὄντι τὸ ἀγαθόν. τό τε γὰρ ὄν, ὥσπερ ἐν ἄλλοις διήρηται, σημαίνει τὸ μὲν τί ἐστὶ, τὸ δὲ ποιόν, τὸ δὲ ποσόν, τὸ δὲ πότε, καὶ πρὸς τούτοις τὸ μὲν ἐν τῷ κινεῖσθαι τὸ δὲ ἐν τῷ κινεῖν, καὶ τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἐν ἐκάστη τῶν πτώσεων ἐστὶ τούτων, ἐν οὐσίᾳ μὲν ὁ νοῦς καὶ ὁ θεός, ἐν δὲ τῷ ποιῶ τὸ δίκαιον, ἐν δὲ τῷ ποσῶ τὸ μέτριον, ἐν δὲ τῷ πότε ὁ καιρός, τὸ δὲ διδάσκον καὶ τὸ διδασκόμενον περὶ κίνησιν. ὥσπερ οὖν οὐδὲ τὸ ὄν ἐν τί ἐστὶ περὶ τὰ εἰρημένα, οὕτως οὐδὲ τὸ ἀγαθόν, οὐδὲ ἐπιστήμη ἐστὶ μία οὔτε τοῦ ὄντος οὔτε τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ (*EE* i 8, 1217b25-35)

<sup>43</sup> We explore these issues in Chapter Ten.

his view is that each science ranges over a single domain, unified under a single genus.<sup>44</sup>

Aristotle never develops the theme that there is no genus of the good,<sup>45</sup> but he does insist in various passages that there is a science of the being only if there is a genus of being (*APo.* ii 7, 92b14, *Top.* iv 1, 121a16, b7-9; cf. *Met.* B 3, 998b22), and concludes, since in his view that there is no genus of being, there is no science of being. In denying there is a science of the good in virtue of the transcategorial predication of the good, he seems to be relying on the same sort of inference pattern: there is a science of the good only if there is a genus of the good, and since the good is not its own genus, there is no science of the good. We would expect, then, Aristotle's concerns about goodness across the categories to mirror rather closely his concerns about being across the categories.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> We consider the domain dependence of the sciences when considering the argument from the sciences below, in Chapter Five.

<sup>45</sup> The discussion of *APr.* i 36 48b10-28 speaks of a genus of the good, but it seems only in the context of a non-committal illustration. He says, for instance, at 48b24-26: 'If that of which a science is is the genus, and there is a science of the good, the conclusion is that the good is a genus' (εἰ δ' οὐ ἔστιν ἐπιστήμη, γένος ἐστὶ τοῦτο, τοῦ δ' ἀγαθοῦ ἔστιν ἐπιστήμη, συμπέρασμα ὅτι τὰγαθόν ἐστι γένος). He does not affirm the antecedent. A discussion in the *Topics* iv 3, 123b1-11 is more complicated. There we do seem to approach a commitment to a genus of the good, though, again, if less obviously, the claim emerges in the context of an illustration.

<sup>46</sup> Woods (1982) is again apposite, though the focus on 'ambiguity' gives the wrong emphasis: '. . . the correct interpretation must take proper account . . . of the fact that Aristotle seems to regard the ambiguity of 'good' as in some way parallel to the ambiguity of 'be' . . .' To put his point in a less linguistic idiom: the proper account must take account of the fact that goodness and being co-vary in signification.

If this is correct, we are presented with a highly abstract taxonomical question: why is there no genus of the good? Aristotle's reasons, however debatable,<sup>47</sup> for thinking that being is non-univocal thus present us with another angle on the question of his categorial argument regarding goodness. Aristotle's argument that there is no science of being turns crucially on the question of whether there is genus of being. He thinks there is not, but his reasons for insisting upon this are obscure and widely contested.<sup>48</sup> One argument emerges in *Metaphysics* B, in an aporetic passage concerning principles:

If the universal is always more of a principle, then it is clear that the highest among the genera <will be principles>. For these are said of all things (λέγεται κατὰ πάντων). There will be, consequently, as many principles of beings as there are primary genera, so that both being and one (τό τε ὄν καὶ τὸ ἓν) will be principles and substances, for these, most of all, are said of all beings. But neither one nor being can be a single genus of beings. For it is necessary that the differentiae of each genus be and that they each be one; yet it is impossible for the species of a genus to be predicated of their own differentiae or for the genus without its species to be predicated <of its own differentiae>. Hence, if either one or being is a genus, no differentia will either be or be one. Yet unless they

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<sup>47</sup> Shields (1999, Chapter Nine) considers five distinct arguments for the homonymy of being.

<sup>48</sup> The best single focussed discussion of this topic is Loux (1973).

are genera, they will not be principles, if indeed the genera are principles (*Met.* B 3, 998b17–28).<sup>49</sup>

It emerges in passages of this sort that Aristotle's reasons for denying that being is a genus are at root concerns about the possibility of predicability in various abstract taxonomical contexts.

One point of note for the current investigation is that he denies either being or good can be a genus for one such taxonomical reason: since one and being are readily predicated of the *differentiae* falling under them (we can say that *rationality* is and is one and that *being terrestrial* is and is one), then neither can be a genus at all. For, says Aristotle, 'it is impossible for the species of a genus to be predicated of their own *differentiae* or for the genus without its species to be predicated <of its own *differentiae*>.' The general principle, then, is this, coming in two parts: (i) no species can be predicated of its own *differentia*; and (ii) no genus can be predicated of a *differentia* without its species being specified. Thus, where (i) is concerned: one cannot say, e.g. 'Rationality is a human' and where (ii) is concerned, one cannot say, e.g.

'Rationality is an animal', though one could say 'A rational human is an animal'. These

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<sup>49</sup> εἰ μὲν γὰρ αἰεὶ τὰ καθόλου μᾶλλον ἀρχαί, φανερόν ὅτι τὰ ἀνωτάτω τῶν γενῶν· ταῦτα γὰρ λέγεται κατὰ πάντων. τοσαῦται οὖν ἔσσονται ἀρχαί τῶν ὄντων ὅσαπερ τὰ πρῶτα γένη, ὥστ' ἔσται τό τε ὄν καὶ τὸ ἐν ἀρχαί καὶ οὐσίαι· ταῦτα γὰρ κατὰ πάντων μάλιστα λέγεται τῶν ὄντων. οὐχ οἷόν τε δὲ τῶν ὄντων ἐν εἶναι γένος οὔτε τὸ ἐν οὔτε τὸ ὄν· ἀνάγκη μὲν γὰρ τὰς διαφορὰς ἐκάστου γένους καὶ εἶναι καὶ μίαν εἶναι ἐκάστην, ἀδύνατον δὲ κατηγορεῖσθαι ἢ τὰ εἶδη τοῦ γένους ἐπὶ τῶν οἰκείων διαφορῶν ἢ τὸ γένος ἄνευ τῶν αὐτοῦ εἰδῶν, ὥστ' εἴπερ τὸ ἐν γένος ἢ τὸ ὄν, οὐδεμία διαφορὰ οὔτε ὄν οὔτε ἐν ἔσται. ἀλλὰ μὴν εἰ μὴ γένη, οὐδ' ἀρχαί ἔσσονται, εἴπερ ἀρχαί τὰ γένη (*Met.* B 3, 998b17–28).

sorts of predications he regards as either false or, more likely, as simply nonsensical.<sup>50</sup>

So, if we have a principle to this effect applying to goodness as well, then we would be in a position to support the co-variance contention independently.

It is, however, difficult to see any immediate or direct application of this taxonomical principle to goodness. In particular, whatever its merits in the case of being and oneness,<sup>51</sup> it is difficult to see how the good, on the assumption that goodness is a genus, it does not seem necessary to predicate '... is good' of the differentiae falling under it. That is, a short version of the taxonomical argument regarding being and the one is this:

- (1) Necessarily, every differentia is one and is a being.
- (2) If (1), then every differentia has '... is one' and '... is a being' predicated of it.
- (3) If every differentia has '... is one' and '... is a being' predicated of it, then if one and being are genera, they will be predicated of their own differentiae.
- (4) No genus is predicable of its own differentiae.
- (5) Hence, neither being nor one is a genus.

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<sup>50</sup> See *Topics* vi 6, 144b4-9: 'Similarly, one must inquire also whether the species or anything below the species is predicated of the differentia. For this is impossible, since the differentia is said of a wider range <of things> than the species. Further, if it is to be predicated <of the differentia, it will follow that> the differentia is a species, since what is predicated of it is one of the species. For if man is predicated of it, it is clear that the differentia is a man.' Cf. *Top.* vi 6, 144a36-37, 144b1-3.

<sup>51</sup> Shields (1999, Chapter Nine § 8) raises some questions about the defensibility of this principle as applied to being and unity.

The basic idea is that since every differentia is and is one, there is no escaping the predication of the proposed genera of their differentia.

Will this argument apply to goodness as well? It will, but only on the assumption that what is said in premiss (1) in respect of being and oneness can also be said of goodness. There is a subsequent tradition in Medieval philosophy of treating the predicate '... is good' as a transcendental term, co-extensive of necessity with '... is a being', '... is one', and '... is true'.<sup>52</sup> To the extent that this tradition introduces '... is good' (*bonum*) as on par with being and oneness as derived from Aristotle, it tends to focus precisely on the categorial argument of *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 as evidence for this conclusion. The tradition is surely justified in so far as it locates the co-variance contention in this passage: Aristotle states it.

Our current question is the prior question, however, as to why he states it, together with the evaluative question as to whether he is justified in maintaining it, given these reasons. So far, however, the answer to this second question cannot be affirmative, if, that is, the answer to the first is that he is constrained to jettison (1), the claim that necessarily, every differentia is one and is a being, to goodness as well. Plausibly, anything which is one, of necessity, and, trivially, anything which is, again of necessity. Until such time as we have developed a highly technical notion of the predicate '... is good', however, nothing seems necessitated regarding the necessary

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<sup>52</sup> See Wolter (1946), Kluxen (1964), MacDonald (1991), Gracia (1992), Darge (2004), Aarsten (2012). For a clear primary text, see Aquinas i I-II 94.

co-extensivity of ‘... is good’ with ‘... is a being’ and ‘... is one.’ More to the point, nothing in the categorial argument, contrary to the understandable tendency of the subsequent tradition to locate that doctrine in this passage, provides any grounds for accepting it. On the contrary, co-extensivity contention is here deployed as a principle established elsewhere; its grounding, however, is not easily ascertained from the initially plausible grounding treating being and one as genera which Aristotle offers in the *Metaphysics* and *Topics*. There we have taxonomical barriers that do not readily emerge, if they emerge at all, in the case of goodness.

We are left, then, wondering why Plato, or a neutral party, should accede to the claim that ‘the good is meant in as many ways as being is meant ways as being’ (τὰγαθὸν ἰσαχῶς λέγεται τῷ ὄντι; *EN* i 6, 11026s23-24).

## VI. Concluding Considerations

These investigations into the categorial argument of *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 have not been intended to refute Aristotle on behalf of Plato or the Platonist; nor have they, looked at from the other angle, sought to vindicate Plato or Platonism from the Aristotelian onslaught. They have rather attempted to come to terms with Aristotle’s categorial argument, and have found it rich, complex, and demanding. One can appreciate that Aristotle is in this passage not simply offering a self-contained argument to be explicated with ease and assessed for merit. His argument is evocative, beginning

a discussion it does not finish; it draws on technical machinery it does not reproduce and so invites further investigation into not only Aristotle's axiology but also into his metaphysics more widely. Thus far, unfortunately, our foray into these broader areas has not managed to produce a clear or decisive reason for acceding to his conclusion. Nor has it, to be clear, refuted the argument we have investigated. One can see here, as elsewhere in *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6, a formidable argument whose final appraisal awaits further investigation.

Part of this investigation inevitably leads us into Aristotle's conception of science (*ἐπιστήμη*) and the requisites of explanation in the realm of the good. His next argument propels us further into that domain.