

[Chapter Ten]

Goodness *qua* Goodness: a Concluding Scientific Postscript?

If goodness is a cause and source (ἀρχή) of the goodness of good things, then it explains their goodness without its being the case that all good things are good in just the same way. As a core-dependent homonym, goodness exhibits sufficient unity to stave off a prospect Aristotle rightly eschews, namely that good things are merely equivocally good, are homonyms by chance (ἀπὸ τύχης). There remains a question as to whether the order core-dependent homonymy affords suffices for the sorts of commensurability Aristotle requires in his deontology, but it seems fair to agree that he has moved a good distance towards recovering the kind of commensurability that, whatever else the defects of this axiology may have been, Plato had for free. If there has been a rapprochement with Plato, then, it has not been in the direction of reinstating univocity by

another name; it has rather been to recover commensurability in the absence of univocity, given by core-dependent homonymy.<sup>1</sup>

The mechanism for recovery has, however, introduced an intriguing prospect, not one that Aristotle avails himself of in our extant texts, at least not directly. This is that as there is a science and being *qua* being so there is—or could be, or somehow must be—a science of goodness *qua* goodness. In various places, Aristotle yokes goodness and being together, denying that either admits of a science (*EE* i 8, 1117b33-35), evidently since there is no single genus of either.<sup>2</sup> Yet consistent with this denial is Aristotle’s introduction of a science of being *qua* being (τὸ ὄν ᾗ ὄν; *Met.* Γ 1, 1003a21-23), which he implies is made possible by the fact, or alleged fact,<sup>3</sup> that though non-univocal being (τὸ ὄν) is a core-dependent homonym. If it now emerges that goodness (*Met.* Γ 2, 1003a33b10), like being is a

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<sup>1</sup> Given various controversies about Aristotle’s development in general and his development in theology in particular, perhaps it should be made clear that this talk of ‘rapprochement’ is not intended to agree with either Jaeger (1936, Chs. Six and Eight) or von Arnim (1931) regarding Aristotle’s attitudes towards Plato’s theology or to Platonism more generally, where that is construed as a question regarding which periods of his life he embraced which Platonic doctrines or of which of his doctrines he accepted, rejected, or accepted in modified form. See Guthrie (1933 and (1934) regarding this set of questions. Here the term is intended doctrinally: if we have the sense that Aristotle.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Chapter Five §II on the requisites of Aristotelian science (ἐπιστήμη).

<sup>3</sup> See Shields (1999, Chapter Nine) for doubts about this putative fact.

core-dependent homonym, then the way is paved for a parallel science of goodness *qua* goodness.

## I. The Case Against a Science of Goodness *qua* Goodness

Let us first consider Aristotle's express denial:

Just as being is not something one concerning the things mentioned [viz. items across the categories], neither is the good something one; nor is there a single science of being or of the good (*EE* i 8, 1217b33-35).<sup>4</sup>

The reasoning is familiar, although its expression merits scrutiny.

The denial of its being one is here regarded as sufficient for there being no single science (ἐπιστήμη μία) of either being or goodness, although this is not an inference Aristotle draws expressly. Instead, he simply makes the observation as a sort of extension from the denial of its being something one (ἐν τί). This is, however, something we should expect if that denial is in effect a denial of univocity, for either being or goodness. If we expect a science to range over a single domain, and a single domain of science to constitute a single genus, then

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<sup>4</sup> ὥσπερ οὖν οὐδὲ τὸ ὄν ἐν τί ἐστι περὶ τὰ εἰρημένα, οὕτως οὐδὲ τὸ ἀγαθόν, οὐδὲ ἐπιστήμη ἐστὶ μία οὔτε τοῦ ὄντος οὔτε τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ (*EE* i 8, 1217b33-35).

we can appreciate why there should be no science of goodness, just as there is no science of being (*APo.* 92b14, *Top.* 121a16, b7-9; cf. *Met.* 998b22).

Even so, the matter is slightly complicated by the fact that Aristotle sometimes suggests that there is after all a genus of goodness. So, most directly, for instance, in *Categories* 11, in a discussion of contraries (ἐναντία), he contends:

‘It is necessary that all contraries must either be in the same genus or in contrary genera, or be themselves genera. For white and black are in the same genus (for their genus is colour), and justice and injustice are in contrary genera (for of one the genus is virtue and of the other the genus is vice); but good (ἀγαθόν) and bad (κακόν) are not in one genus, but turn out to be themselves genera of certain things (*Cat.* 11, 14a19-25; cf. *Top.* 121a2, 123b10, 124b11-14, *APr.* 48b22-25; *Met.* 1018a25-35, 1055a3-33).<sup>5</sup>

Here the good is introduced as a genus along with the bad, as illustrating the third disjunct Aristotle introduces for contraries: either they are in the same

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<sup>5</sup> ἀνάγκη δὲ πάντα τὰ ἐναντία ἢ ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ γένει εἶναι ἢ ἐν τοῖς ἐναντίοις γένεσιν, ἢ αὐτὰ γένη εἶναι· λευκὸν μὲν γὰρ καὶ μέλαν ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ γένει (χρῶμα γὰρ αὐτῶν τὸ γένος), δικαιοσύνη δὲ καὶ ἀδικία ἐν τοῖς ἐναντίοις γένεσιν (τοῦ μὲν γὰρ ἀρετῆ, τοῦ δὲ κακίας τὸ γένος), ἀγαθὸν δὲ καὶ κακὸν οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν γένει, ἀλλ’ αὐτὰ τυγχάνει γένη τινῶν ὄντα (*Cat.* 11, 14a19-25).

genus, contrary genera, or are themselves genera. He does not, however, expand upon why he supposes that good and bad are genera.

His doing so is surprising, if he thinks that every genus comprises entities with a single, shared essence. It is, however, an immediate consequence of his denial of univocity that there be no such essence for good things. So, unless the view articulated in *Categories* 11 uses 'genus' in a non-technical sort of way, to mean, roughly, 'kind of thing', as in 'one kind of person is impatient, another is antsy', then either he has contradicted himself or changed his view about goodness.<sup>6</sup>

In a way, however, we may bracket that issue, since at present we are operating on the assumption that Aristotle's contention in *Eudemian Ethics* i 8 that there is no science of the good is correct. We are further assuming that he offers this judgment for the sound reason that where there is no commonality, there is not single genus, and where there is no single genus, there is no science.

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<sup>6</sup> Ackrill (1963, 111) is judicious: "Good and bad are not in a genus': does Aristotle mean that they are not in any *ordinary* genus (but fall immediately under a category), or that they are not in any one category because 'good' like 'being' occurs in all the categories. . .? If the latter is Aristotle's point he does not express it very well by saying that good and bad 'are themselves genera'."

This allows him to treat goodness as immediately parallel to being: since there is no genus in either case, neither is there a science (ἐπιστήμη) for either being or goodness. Accordingly, as he says, there is no science of either being or the good (*EE* i 8, 1217b33-35).

If the parallel is apt, one can tease out the categorial implications to which Aristotle adverts in both *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 and *Eudemian Ethics* i 8, and which he sees as grounding his denial of a single science. The argument in the case of being, put more fully, amounts to this:

- (1) Every science has principles which are necessary, invariant, and explanatorily basic (NIE).
- (2) A property  $\phi$  is (NIE) only if  $\phi$  is (i) predicated *per se* (καθ' αὐτό) of the members of its domain and is, in fact (ii) essential to them.
- (3) A property  $\phi$  is predicated *per se* (καθ' αὐτό) and essential only if  $\phi$  is (or is subordinate to) a generic property.
- (4) Being (τὸ ὄν) is not a genus; so, being is not a generic property.
- (5) Hence, nothing is (or is subordinate to) being (τὸ ὄν).
- (6) Hence, no science is a science of being (τὸ ὄν).

One may, then, formulate precisely the same argument as regards the good:

- (1) Every science has principles which are necessary, invariant, and explanatorily basic (NIE).
- (2) A property  $\phi$  is (NIE) only if  $\phi$  is (i) predicated *per se* (καθ' αὐτό) of the members of its domain and is, in fact (ii) essential to them.
- (3) A property  $\phi$  is predicated *per se* (καθ' αὐτό) and essential only if  $\phi$  is (or is subordinate to) a generic property.
- (4) Goodness (τὸ ἀγαθόν) is not a genus; so, goodness (τὸ ἀγαθόν) is not a generic property.
- (5) Hence, nothing is (or is subordinate to) goodness (τὸ ἀγαθόν).
- (6) Hence, no science is a science of goodness (τὸ ἀγαθόν).

This, then, is the case against there being a single science of the good: it is neither a genus nor subordinate to a genus and so is not predicated *per se* (καθ' αὐτό) of the members of any genus.

## II. A Model for Goodness *qua* Goodness

It is worth specifying the case against the prospective science of goodness *qua* goodness in at least this much detail, because doing so brings into sharp relief how a proposed science of goodness *qua* goodness would need to proceed.

Whatever his reservations about a science of being, Aristotle sees his way clear to announce and pursue a science of being *qua* being in the beginning of *Metaphysics* Γ: 'There is a science (ἐπιστήμη) which studies being *qua* being (τὸ ὄν ἢ ὄν), and the attributes belonging to it in its own right' (*Met.* Γ 1, 1003a21-22). Different scholars have adopted different attitudes towards this announcement. Some, noting that the existence of a science of being *qua* being is strictly consistent with the denial of any science of being, have thought this announcement does not reflect a change of mind on Aristotle's part.<sup>7</sup> Others have seen it as a reversal, to be explained on broadly developmental grounds and yet others have found it simply inexplicable.<sup>8</sup> Still, whether consistent or inconsistent, and if inconsistent, whether a reversal explained by Aristotle's development, for local purposes we must note that Aristotle embraces a science of being *qua* being, the denial, or near denial, of which is paired with his denial of

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<sup>7</sup> So, e.g., Guthrie (1981, 206-207), though he leaves the matter undeveloped: 'The existence of a science of being *qua* being, or ontology, so triumphantly affirmed and reaffirmed in the *Metaphysics*, appears at first sight to be contradicted by a passage from the *Eudemian Ethics* [scilicet 1217b33ff]. . . It may be significant that he says only that there is no single science of being (to on) not of being *qua* being (*to on hê(i) on*).' Code (1996) develops this suggestion to good effect.

<sup>8</sup> Some especially noteworthy contributions: Brentano (1962/1975), Jaeger (1923/1948), Owens (1983), Leszl (1975), Ross (1924), Aubenque (1962), and Mansion (1976).



a single science of goodness. The denials, in fact, come in the same clause of the same sentence (*EE* i 8, 1117b33-35).

The question thus lies near as to whether there is available to him a sibling science of goodness *qua* goodness, a science which co-ordinates the varieties of goodness and allows normal explanatory relations between core and non-core instances of goodness, in the way that beings which are categorially non-primary are explained by a categorially more fundamental form of being, substance (οὐσία), in virtue of their exhibiting metaphysical dependencies upon primary being. The interest in sketching this sort of science, if there is such a science to be sketched, is threefold. First, the the question already imposed implicitly: is such a science in principle possible? Second is a question of systematicity. We have already suggested that goodness construed as a core-dependent homonym represents a sort of rapprochement to Plato's austere univocity assumption for goodness. If a science (ἐπιστήμη) of the good is available to Aristotle in his own terms, he will be in a position to buttress his case that commensurability is available in the absence of univocity. Third is the related but distinct matter of value co-ordination as Aristotle understands it. One picture of Aristotle's axiology has him promoting an extreme form of value pluralism, whereby each

form of goodness is locally indexed, to a determinate kind, often or even always a functional kind,<sup>9</sup> with no need or even interest in addressing the fragmentation of value as matter of concern. If his occasional remarks about value coordination can be given some heft, then his suggestion that goodness is a cause or source (ἀρχή) can be vouchsafed (*Met.* Λ 10 1075a34-b2; *Rhet.* 1364a9; cf. *EN* 1002a2-4, 1095a26-28; *EE* 1218b7-11).

One way forward is to sketch the sort of science Aristotle envisages for being *qua* being (τὸ ὄν ἢ ὅν) and then to determine whether its implicit framework provides space for an analogous science of goodness *qua* goodness (τὸ ἀγαθόν ἢ ἀγαθόν). Because the matter of the character of Aristotle's science of being *qua* being is inherently controversial and permanently contested, the

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<sup>9</sup> Aristotle on more than one occasion articulates a functional determination thesis, according to which an individual will belong to a kind or class *F* if and only if it can perform the function of that kind or class. Hence, according to this thesis, it is both necessary and sufficient for *a*'s being a member of kind *F*. See, e.g. *Meteor.* 390a10-15; *GA* 734b24-31; *Met.* 1029b23-1030a17; *Pol.* 1253a19-25. If this thesis is accepted in its full generality, then Aristotle will be constrained to treat all kinds as functional kinds, each with its own functional good; he would not, however, be thereby constrained to treat all goods as functional goods.

sketch here will perforce be partisan and partial.<sup>10</sup> Even so, if successful, it will provide *a* model, if not the only possible model.

In the beginning of *Metaphysics* Γ, Aristotle calls attention to his apparatus of core-dependent homonymy almost immediately after introducing the science of being *qua* being. He says:

It falls to one science to study not only things that are spoken of in virtue of one thing, but also things that are called what they are relative to one nature (*Met.* Γ 1, 1003b12-14; cf. *Met.* 1004a24-15).

The thought is that studying being in general implicates us in studying the nature of being, which study is best undertaken by focussing on its primary instance, namely substance (οὐσίᾳ), the primary instance of which is the unmoved mover. Hence, the primary focus of being *qua* being might well be this, the most exemplary being. This exemplary being Aristotle identifies as the final cause of all existence (*Met.* Λ 7, 1072b1-3). This, then, would give some content to Aristotle's brief suggestion that the prime mover is 'universal because it is first' (*Met.* E 1, 1026a30-31): it is the core instance of being, and

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<sup>10</sup> The sketch of a science of being *qua* being agrees with the treatment of Shields (2012), from which it draws. Fuller articulations and defenses of the sketch offered here may be gained by consulting that work.

because all being ultimately depends upon it, the prime mover attains a kind of universality in its primacy. So, the science of being *qua* being, in the end, studies the primary being, as most fundamental.

It would be wrong, however, to infer from this focus of study that the science of being *qua* being studies the prime mover as its sole object, that its domain was limited to this one being. On the contrary, and this will be crucial for thinking about parallels with goodness, being *qua* being studies all of being, all beings, seeking, as in any science, to specify the causes in the domain of study.<sup>11</sup> When the causes of all beings are specified, they will include the core-instance of being, a result which more or less tumbles out directly from the framework of core-dependent homonymy: since every non-core instance of being is such that its account asymmetrically makes reference to the account pertaining to the core instance which is its source (ἀρχή), it follows that a specification of

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<sup>11</sup> This is a point understood and put with clarity by Aquinas (*Comm. in Met.*, prol.): 'Although this science studies the three things mentioned earlier [scil., first causes, maximally universal principles, and separate substances], it does not study any of them as its subject, but only being in general. For the subject of a science is the thing whose causes and attributes are studied; and it is not the very causes of the genus which are themselves under investigation. For cognition of the cause of some genus is the end which investigation in a science attains.'

the causes of the members in the domain of the science—all beings—will need to advert to the core instance of being.

How it serves as their source (ἀρχή) is a matter of some delicacy, but, as we have seen, we do find Aristotle specifying the prime mover as a final cause, and in that connection we also observe him teasing out its correlative goodness:

That there is that for the sake of which (τὸ οὐ̄ ἐνεκα) among the immobile things this distinction makes clear: that for the sake of which <both> that *for whom* (τινί) and toward which (τινός),<sup>12</sup> of which the first <is moved> and the second is not. <The end> initiates motion as an object of love, and it initiates the motion of other things by those being moved. If, then, something is moved, it can be otherwise. Accordingly, if <something's> actuality is its primary local motion, then in this respect at any rate it can be other than it is, in place, but not also in substance. Since there is something which initiates motion without itself being moved, being in actuality, this can in no way be other than it is. For local motion is primary among motions, and of this < sort of motion, local motion, the

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<sup>12</sup> The distinction is *cui* and *cuius*: if a doctor heals a patient, then her action is for the sake of the patient, the beneficiary (*cui*), but that at which it aims is health, the benefit (*cuius*). When the doctor is her own patient, then and only then is she the beneficiary of the benefit at which her action aims. Cf. *Phys.* 194a35: *DA* 415b2, 20.

primary type> is circular motion; and this is the sort of motion that the primary mover initiates. Hence, the primary mover exists necessarily; and insofar as it exists necessarily, it exists in a fine sort of way (καλῶς), and in this way it is a source (ἀρχή). For what is necessary <is meant> in these many ways: as what is by force because contrary to impulse; as that without which the good (τὸ εὖ) cannot exist; and as what cannot be otherwise but is necessary without qualification.—It is on this sort of source (ἀρχή), therefore, that heaven and nature depend.<sup>13</sup>

We will return to the normative character of the end introduced in this passage presently, but in laying out the model, we need note primarily this: the source (ἀρχή) is a source as that for the sake of which (τὸ οὐ ἕνεκα), and is indeed that for the sake of which in only one of the two ways of being such, namely as that at

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<sup>13</sup> ὅτι δ' ἔστι τὸ οὐ ἕνεκα ἐν τοῖς ἀκινήτοις, ἢ διαίρεσις δηλοῖ· ἔστι γὰρ τινὶ τὸ οὐ ἕνεκα <καὶ> τινός, ὧν τὸ μὲν ἔστι τὸ δ' οὐκ ἔστι. κινεῖ δὴ ὡς ἐρώμενον, κινούμενα δὲ τᾶλλα κινεῖ. εἰ μὲν οὖν τι κινεῖται, ἐνδέχεται καὶ ἄλλως ἔχειν, ὥστ' εἰ [ἢ] φορὰ πρώτη ἢ ἐνέργειά ἐστιν, ἢ κινεῖται ταύτη γε ἐνδέχεται ἄλλως ἔχειν, κατὰ τόπον, καὶ εἰ μὴ κατ' οὐσίαν· ἐπεὶ δὲ ἔστι τι κινουὺν αὐτὸ ἀκίνητον ὄν, ἐνεργεία ὄν, τοῦτο οὐκ ἐνδέχεται ἄλλως ἔχειν οὐδαμῶς. φορὰ γὰρ ἢ πρώτη τῶν μεταβολῶν, ταύτης δὲ ἢ κύκλω· ταύτην δὲ τοῦτο κινεῖ. ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἄρα ἐστὶν ὄν· καὶ ἢ ἀνάγκη, καλῶς, καὶ οὕτως ἀρχή. τὸ γὰρ ἀναγκαῖον τοσαυταχῶς, τὸ μὲν βία ὅτι παρὰ τὴν ὁρμήν, τὸ δὲ οὐ οὐκ ἄνευ τὸ εὖ, τὸ δὲ μὴ ἐνδεχόμενον ἄλλως ἀλλ' ἀπλῶς. —ἐκ τοιαύτης ἄρα ἀρχῆς ἦρτηται ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ φύσις (*Met.* Λ 7, 1072b1-14).

which a process or action aims, as a benefit to be acquired, and not as a subject on whom a benefit is bestowed.

This begins to specify the way in which a science of being *qua* being (τὸ ὄν ἢ ὅν) can cite a being as a cause and source of other beings. This is apposite, since as he says even at the start of his *Metaphysics*: ‘It (wisdom, or first philosophy) must be a science (ἐπιστήμη) of first principles and causes (ἀρχαὶ καὶ αἴτια)’ (*Met.* 982b9-10; cf. *Met.* 1003a31-2); n.b. that source, ἀρχή, is often used also in the sense of cause, αἴτιον: *Met.* 983a29, 990a2, 1013a17, 1025b4, 1042a5, 1069a26). In order to determine what ‘being *qua* being’ is *and* what ‘the attributes belonging to it in its own right’ are (*Met.* Γ 1, 1003a21-22), Aristotle specifies the features all beings have, of necessity, as beings, and not in so far as those beings are specific kinds of beings—physical, mathematical, living, non-living, natural, artifactual, and so on.

What pertains to beings as beings in their own right, contends Aristotle, in summary, is just this: (i) beings are as beings logically circumscribed—they are, as beings, subject to the principle of non-contradiction; (ii) beings are as beings categorially delineated—beings occur in determinate categories; and (iii) beings

are as beings modally enmeshed—all beings are either actual or potential.<sup>14</sup> He implies, then, that since one being is unmoved and necessarily invariant and yet in a position to cause other beings to move as an end in the sense of being their beneficiary, as being loved (ὡς ἐρώμενον), other beings are explicated with reference to it.

This then provides in effect a response to our argument against a science of being qua being: Aristotle denies (3), the claim that property  $\phi$  is predicated *per se* (καθ' αὐτό) and essential only if  $\phi$  is (or is subordinate to) a generic property. Core-dependent homonymy suffices for science.

This presentation is intended not as a full defense of Aristotle's conception of the science of being *qua* being (τὸ ὄν ἢ ὄν), nor even as a defense of the proposal as the best or only interpretation of his approach to that science. It has rather been to provide a model of a science of goodness *qua* goodness, by providing a framework within which such a science can be articulated. One crucial contention of this model, above all others, should be kept in view: according to this proposal, the core instance of being is a cause and a source of the *per se* (καθ' αὐτό) features of all beings, as beings.

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<sup>14</sup> See Shields (2012) for an exploration of these traits.



### III. The Model Applied

In justifying the application of the model to the projected science of goodness *qua* goodness, two observations are key. First, as we have just seen, the conception of the core instance of being, the prime mover, is already norm-importing: it causes motion as being loved (ὡς ἐρώμενον), and does so in the sense of being a benefit for the beneficiaries it moves. Aristotle does not expostulate on the sort of benefit provided, but this, though worthy of speculation, need not deter us at present. The first point is, to emphasize, that the core instance of being is a source and cause as worthy of being loved. Since it cannot be otherwise, it must also be necessarily so.

Second, when setting the conditions for the science sought in the realm of metaphysics, Aristotle is already perfectly alive both to the thought that the science sought, first philosophy, also called wisdom, is not only a science of being, but a science of a normatively laden being, and so equally a science of what is good:

One choosing most of all knowledge for its own sake will choose most of all what is most of all a science. This is the sort of science which is of what is most of all knowable; but primary things and causes are most of

all knowable (for it is because of these and through these that other things are known—and it is not the case that these are known through the things lying under them). But the most sovereign science, that is, the one sovereign over any subordinate science, is the one making known that on account of which each thing is to be done; but this is the good of each thing, and generally this is the best thing in every nature. From all the things said, then, the name <of the science> being sought <scil. wisdom> applies to this same science; for it is necessary that this <science, wisdom> is able to study the first sources and causes; for the good (τάγαθόν), too, that for the sake of which (τὸ οὐ ἔνεκα), is one of the causes' (*Met.* Γ 2, 982a3-b10)<sup>15</sup>

This final point makes explicit what is already said more figuratively in the contention that the prime mover initiates motion as an object of love: it is a final cause, and, thus, a good for each thing.

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<sup>15</sup> ὁ γὰρ τὸ ἐπίστασθαι δι' αὐτὸ αἰρούμενος τὴν μάλιστα ἐπιστήμην μάλιστα αἰρήσεται, τοιαύτη δ' ἐστὶν ἢ τοῦ μάλιστα ἐπιστητοῦ), μάλιστα δ' ἐπιστητὰ τὰ πρῶτα καὶ τὰ αἷτια (διὰ γὰρ ταῦτα καὶ ἐκ τούτων τᾶλλα γνωρίζεται ἀλλ' οὐ ταῦτα διὰ τῶν ὑποκειμένων), ἀρχικωτάτη δὲ τῶν ἐπιστημῶν, καὶ μᾶλλον ἀρχικὴ τῆς ὑπηρετούσης, ἢ γνωρίζουσα τίνος ἔνεκέν ἐστὶ πρακτέον ἕκαστον· τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶ τὰγαθὸν ἕκάστου, ὅλως δὲ τὸ ἄριστον ἐν τῇ φύσει πάσῃ. ἐξ ἀπάντων οὖν τῶν εἰρημένων ἐπὶ τὴν αὐτὴν ἐπιστήμην πίπτει τὸ ζητούμενον ὄνομα· δεῖ γὰρ ταύτην τῶν πρῶτων ἀρχῶν καὶ αἰτιῶν εἶναι θεωρητικὴν· καὶ γὰρ τὰγαθὸν καὶ τὸ οὐ ἔνεκα ἐν τῶν αἰτιῶν ἐστίν (*Met.* Γ 2, 982a3-b10)

This passage neither states nor implies directly that the science of being *qua* being is or is in alliance with some other science, a science called goodness *qua* goodness. It does, however, draw our attention to a central feature of the objects of first philosophy, namely that the causes it identifies are in themselves good. Since, as we have already seen, the prime object of being *qua* being is a cause and source of the being of other beings, and is invariant and necessarily what it is, we can appreciate that its being good is likewise a necessary and invariant feature of it. Since goodness is a cause ( $\alpha\lambda\tau\iota\omicron\nu$ ) and source ( $\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi\eta$ ), and these are essentially relational notions, this goodness must be the cause and source of something. Here is a hypothesis: it is the cause and source of the goodness of other things, including those things which are good, but could be otherwise.<sup>16</sup>

One reason for thinking that these sciences cannot be the same is just that Aristotle does not think that all things that exist have a final cause: some things happen by chance and other things happen with purposeless regularity (*De Interp.* 18b7, 19a19; *APo.* 87b19; *Phys.* 196b18-22; *Part. An.* 676b160677b10; *Gen.*

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<sup>16</sup> Here one may note: Aristotle is elsewhere attracted, for better or worse, to a version of the *causal synonymy thesis*, that necessarily, x causes y to be  $\phi$  only if x is itself  $\phi$  (*Gen. et Corr.* 323b33-34; *Met.* 1032b1-12, 1034a22-3, a26-7, 1074a4-5).<sup>18</sup>

*An.* 778b29-b6; *Met.* 1027b23, 1034b4; *DA* 415a28). In this respect, the tendency of some later Aristotelians to read into these passages a doctrine of transcendental terms, according to which predicates predicated of all beings across all categories, and therefore convertible in the sense of being necessarily co-extensive, is misguided.<sup>17</sup>

Even so, there is a point in their suggesting that goodness and being march in close step: both are transcategorical and both serve as principles and sources of the members of the individual categories which exemplify them, if in their different ways (as Aristotle would have it). In particular, if we think of good things on the model of beings, and of goodness on the model of being, we can see how a parallel science will proceed in both cases. As applied to goodness, the science modelled on being *qua* being treats the goodness of non-core instances of

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<sup>17</sup> Even so, the development sheds enormous light on the current discussion. For a detailed investigation, see Aertsen (2012). Much later in the tradition, we find surprising anti-Aristotelian, anti-Neoplatonic figures such as Bertholdus de Mosbruch, Eckhart's successor as leader of the *studium generale* of the Dominicans in Cologne, developing a self-described 'agathology' intended to put on display the pre-eminence of Plato. Interestingly, Bertholdus finds a fellow traveller in Eustratius (on whom see Chapter Two §III.2 above). It is clear that Berthold would have been unimpressed by the rapprochement suggested in this chapter and the last: Plato and Aristotle, he informs us, 'do not enter in concordance' on this point. See Berthold of Moosburg, *Expositio super Elementationem theologiam Procli, Expositio tituli I* (ed. Pagnoni-Sturlese / Sturlese), Preamble C.

being explicated, only and of necessity, by appeal to the core instance of goodness, which is good invariantly and necessarily.

One can see, then, a response to an argument against such a science rejecting the demand that each science requires a domain stitched together by a single essence constituting a single genus. The projected science of goodness *qua* goodness can no less than the science of being *qua* being deny the third premiss of the argument intended to block both sciences equally: it too can deny (3), the claim that property  $\phi$  is predicated *per se* (καθ' αὐτό) and essential only if  $\phi$  is (or is subordinate to) a generic property. Core-dependent homonymy provides the wanted rejoinder. It will follow that the conclusion, (6), arrayed equally against both sciences, namely that there can be no a science of being (τὸ ὄν) or goodness (τὸ ἀγαθόν), remains unproven.

It follows, then, as far as these considerations are concerned, the science of goodness *qua* goodness is possible.

To this one may add that this science is, so to speak, *more possible* than a science of being. That is, once one looks closely at Aristotle's more technical, taxonomical arguments against a science of being, we find that they fall flat when

extended to the putative science of goodness. This argument is stated in

Metaphysics B 3, as follows:

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 either for the species of the genus to be predicated of their own *differentiae* or for the genus to be predicated <of its own *differentiae*> in the absence of its species. Hence, if either one or being is a genus, no *differentia* will either be or be one. However, unless they are genera, they will not be principles, if indeed the genera are principles.

(*Met.* B 3, 998b21–28).<sup>18</sup>

Aristotle's argument here, which emerges in an aporetic context, is reasonably straightforward, though streamlining slightly for clarity:

- (1) Suppose being and one are genera.
- (2) Every *differentia* of a genus (a) exists and (b) is one.

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<sup>18</sup> οὐχ οἷόν τε δὲ τῶν ὄντων ἓν εἶναι γένος οὔτε τὸ ἓν 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 οικείων διαφορῶν ἢ τὸ γένος ἄνευ τῶν αὐτοῦ εἰδῶν, ὥστ' εἴπερ τὸ ἓν γένος ἢ τὸ ὄν, οὐδεμία διαφορὰ οὔτε ὄν οὔτε ἓν ἔσται. ἀλλὰ μὴν εἰ μὴ γένη, οὐδ' ἀρχαὶ ἔσσονται, εἴπερ ἀρχαὶ τὰ γένη (*Met.* B 3, 998b21–28).

- (3) Hence, (a) the *differentiae* of being will (i) exist and (ii) be one; and (b) the *differentiae* of one will (i) exist and (ii) be one.
- (4) If (3a.i), the genus 'being' will be predicated of its *differentiae*.
- (5) If (3b.ii), the genus 'one' will be predicated of its *differentiae*.
- (6) It is not possible for a genus to be predicated of its own *differentiae*.
- (7) Therefore, neither (3) nor (4) is true.
- (8) Hence, either (1) or (2) is false
- (9) Premiss (2) is true.
- (10) Hence, our original supposition (1), that being and one are genera, is false.
- (11) Hence, neither being nor one is a genus.

The crucial claim here is (6), that it is not possible for a genus to be predicated of its own *differentia*.

Why should this be proscribed? Aristotle is evidently generalizing on a thesis of *Topics* vi 6, to the effect that no genus can be predicated of the *differentiae* falling under it (*Top.* vi 6, 144a31–b3). In general, this seems correct: to say, for instance, that 'rational', the *differentia* differentiating human beings from other animals, is itself an animal, yields gibberish, namely 'rational is an animal'.

Whether or not this general principle can be generalized is debatable,<sup>19</sup> but in the present context that is by the bye. For the argument against the genera pertains only to being and one (ε τὸ ἕν καὶ τὸ ὅν), and not to goodness (τὸ ἀγαθόν). Nor is it at all clear how it could: the claim, that ‘rationality is good’, or ‘rationality is a good’, whether true or false is hardly nonsensical. Indeed, and on the contrary, it seems true. It follows, then, that these sorts of technical, taxonomical arguments, whatever their dispositive force in that arena, fall hard where goodness is concerned.

Again, then, we find that a science of goodness *qua* goodness is at the very least possible.

#### IV. Systematicity and Value Co-ordination

This so far sets a distressingly low bar for this science sought. If there is no in principle impediment to there being a science of goodness *qua* goodness, neither is therefore any reason to embrace one. Here, however, we should return to our original impetus for entertaining such a prospect: a rejection of univocity

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<sup>19</sup> Shields (1999, 253-255) argues that it cannot, but cf. Waitz (1844–6, ii, 500) and Zingano (2010).



carries with it a threat of ungovernable pluralism consequent upon a goodness so fractured that even intracategorical commensurability recedes.

Now, one would not require a science of goodness *qua* goodness to stave off intracategorical incommensurability. This is because the apparatus of core-dependent homonymy allows for commensurability across sub-ranges of a predicate without demanding complete co-ordination. To illustrate, perhaps ‘. . .is organic’ affords one instance of core-dependent homonymy across a range of natural farming techniques and another, discrete instance of core-dependent homonymy across a range of living bodies and organs, even in the absence of any further co-ordination between the two families of predicates. So, in principle, the predicate ‘. . . is good’ might admit of a variety of discrete families of core-dependent homonyms, perhaps one even in each of the categories, or, perhaps less finely grained across a range of functional goods, a range of moral goods, a range of political goods, and so forth. If so, then perhaps that is all the value commensurability we should need or want.

Even so, one might legitimately wonder whether Aristotle himself would be satisfied with that sort of value fragmentation; by the same token, one might

wonder whether he would be constrained to accept that much, simply in virtue of his anti-Platonic polemic.

The answer to the second concern turns partly on the question of the possibility of a science of goodness *qua* goodness, which we have already settled, and then also on the question of whether that avowedly possible science could deliver commensurability across value domains. That, then, is the task before us.

As for the first concern, whether Aristotle himself would be satisfied with a high degree of value pluralism, it seems not. At any rate, one observes in Aristotle a strong tendency to resist the kinds of value fragmentation his rejection of univocity might be thought to beget. Three passages, two very brief, seem to have this purport. The first is his expression of worry in *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 we have already encountered and discussed.<sup>20</sup> Having denied univocity, Aristotle quite appropriately poses a question for himself: ‘But how, then, is goodness spoken of?’ (ἀλλὰ πῶς δὴ λέγεται; *EN* i 6, 1096b26). He then dismisses the question as pertaining to a more exact sort of discussion: ‘But presumably one should leave these matters aside for now; for speaking accurately concerning them belongs more appropriately to another [branch] of philosophy’ (*EN* i 6

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<sup>20</sup> See Chapter Seven §VI for a discussion of this expression of concern.

1096b30-31).<sup>21</sup> We do not possess these more accurate discussions in his extant corpus. This is unfortunate, since Aristotle is right: this would be a good discussion to have, and to have more accurately in the appropriate branch of philosophy. Since the issue is axiological, the suitable branch seems to be metaphysics.

Second, there is the casual sort of remark we find for instance in the *Rhetoric* i 7, which sets out to treat, for rhetorical purposes the topic of relative use and relative value. As he notes, often enough two people agree that two things are useful, but then disagree about which of the two is more useful. He accordingly recommends that 'one must speak concerning <what makes one good thing> the better good and <what makes one useful thing> more useful' (*Rhet.* i 7, 1363b6-7; λεκτέον περὶ τοῦ μείζονος ἀγαθοῦ καὶ τοῦ μᾶλλον συμφέροντος). He observes in this connection:

Since we call the good both what is itself desirable for its own sake and not for the sake of another, and that at which all things aim, and what someone would choose if they had acquired understanding (νοῦς) and practical wisdom (φρόνησις), and also that which is productive or

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<sup>21</sup> ἀλλ' ἴσως ταῦτα μὲν ἀφετέον τὸ νῦν· ἐξακριβοῦν γὰρ ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ἄλλης ἂν εἴη φιλοσοφίας οἰκειότερον (*EN* i 6 1096b30-31).

preservative <of the good>, or the sorts of things which attend upon it, while the end is that for the sake of which other things <are>, and we call the good *for* someone what has been done in respect of these things relative to oneself . . . (*Rhet.* i 7, 1963b12-18, accepting Kassel's seclusion).<sup>22</sup>

Here Aristotle again seems to mention an absolute good contrasted with an indexed good, to indicate his normal apparatus of core-dependent homonymy, and to do so in the service of determining how various good things are to be ranked relative to one another, how to determine, that is, which of two goods is 'more good' (or 'the better good'; *μείζονος ἀγαθοῦ*).

In the context of making this sort of determination, Aristotle offers a perfectly general observation regarding the ordinal ranking of goods, one which seems utterly domain-insensitive:

And what is <good> in its own right is more choiceworthy than what is not <good> in its own right, for instance, strength is better than what is

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<sup>22</sup> ἐπεὶ οὖν ἀγαθὸν λέγομεν τό τε αὐτὸ αὐτοῦ ἕνεκα καὶ μὴ ἄλλου αἰρετόν, καὶ οὐ πάντ' ἐφίεται, καὶ ὁ νοῦν ἄν καὶ φρόνησιν λαβόντα ἔλοιτο, καὶ τὸ ποιητικὸν καὶ τὸ φυλακτικόν, ἢ ᾧ ἔπεται τὰ τοιαῦτα, τέλος δέ ἐστίν οὗ ἕνεκα τὰ ἄλλα, αὐτῷ δὲ ἀγαθὸν τὸ πρὸς αὐτὸν ταῦτα πεπονθός. . . (*Rhet.* i 7, 1963b12-18, accepting Kassel's seclusion).

wholesome, since <what is wholesome> is chosen not on account of itself while the other <strength> is; and is just what it is to be good (ὅπερ ἦν ὁ ἀγαθόν).<sup>23</sup> And should something be an end, it <is better than> what is not an end, for the one is chosen for the sake of another, and the other for the sake of itself, for instance exercise is chosen on account of bodily well being. And what stands less in need than another of other things <is better>, for it is more self-sufficient (αὐταρκέστερον). What stands less in need is that which needs additionally fewer or more easily gotten things. And whenever this (A) cannot be without that (B), or cannot come into being without that (B), whereas that (B) <can be or come into being> without this (A), then the one not needing anything (B) is more self-sufficient, so that it appears to be the better good (μείζονος ἀγαθοῦ). So too should something be a source (ἀρχή) or a cause (αἴτιον), while something else is not a source or a cause, <it will be the better good> because of the same reason [*scil.* that it is more self-sufficient]; for without

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<sup>23</sup> One must proceed cautiously with talk of definitions and accounts in the current context, but the Revised Oxford Translation is not wrong: ‘. . . and this was our definition of the good.’

a cause or source, nothing can exist or come into existence (*Rhet.* i 7, 1363b38-1364a13).<sup>24</sup>

Here Aristotle articulates a principle of independence, which is cast in causal and source-dependent terms. What is causal is more independent than what it causes, and what is a source is more independent than that of which it is a source; and what is more independent is more self-sufficient (*αὐταρκέστερον*); and, finally, what is more self-sufficient, is the better good (*μείζονος ἀγαθοῦ*).

One might try to pigeonhole these principles, making them domain-dependent or indexed in some way. That is not, however, the way Aristotle expresses them.

Let this suffice for now, then, on the question of Aristotle himself would wish to embrace any extreme degree of value pluralism. This leaves, then, our second concern, whether Aristotle is constrained by his own anti-Platonic

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<sup>24</sup> καὶ αἰρετώτερον τὸ καθ' αὐτὸ τοῦ μὴ καθ' αὐτό, οἷον ἰσχὺς ὑγιεινοῦ· τὸ μὲν γὰρ οὐχ αὐτοῦ ἔνεκα, τὸ δὲ αὐτοῦ, ὅπερ ἦν ὁ ἀγαθόν. κὰν ἢ τὸ μὲν τέλος, τὸ δὲ μὴ τέλος· τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἄλλου ἔνεκα, τὸ δὲ αὐτοῦ, οἷον τὸ γυμνάζεσθαι τοῦ εὖ ἔχειν τὸ σῶμα. καὶ τὸ ἦττον προσδεόμενον θατέρου [ἢ] ἑτέρων· αὐταρκέστερον γὰρ ἦττον δὲ προσδεῖται τὸ ἐλαττόνων ἢ ῥαόνων προσδεόμενον. καὶ ὅταν τότε μὲν ἄνευ τοῦδε μὴ ἦ, ἢ μὴ δυνατὸν ἦ γενέσθαι, θατέρον δὲ ἄνευ τούτου, αὐταρκέστερον [δὲ] τὸ μὴ δεόμενον, ὥστε φαίνεται μείζον ἀγαθόν. κὰν ἢ ἀρχή, τὸ δὲ μὴ ἀρχή, κὰν ἢ αἴτιον, τὸ δ' οὐκ αἴτιον, διὰ τὸ αὐτό· ἄνευ γὰρ αἰτίου καὶ ἀρχῆς ἀδύνατον εἶναι ἢ γενέσθαι (*Rhet.* i 7, 1363b38-1364a13).

polemic, whether he welcomes it or not, to embrace only domain indexed commensurability.

If we have already vouchsafed the possibility of such a science, the question remains as to whether it would be fit for purpose. This question is, in the end, effectively just this question: would a science of goodness *qua* goodness provide a domain-independent notion of goodness, with a non-indexed good at its core, such that it affords a principle of commensurability in the absence of univocity?

We may hazard one such principle, developed from the sorts of remarks Aristotle offers in *Rhetoric* i 7. Suppose, then, that we have a core-dependent analysis of goodness. To recall,<sup>25</sup> the fourth and fifth clauses of this account hold: (iv) necessarily, if *a* is the core instance of goodness, then *b*'s being good stands in one of the four-causal relation to *a*'s being good; and (v) *a*'s being good is asymmetrically responsible for *b*'s being good. We now see how this can be generalized, when grafted into a prospective science of goodness *qua* goodness, so as to yield some content for the *principle of degree of dependence* proposed earlier.

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<sup>25</sup> See Chapter Nine § IV for the introduction of this account.

On the hypothesis of such a science, proceeding in the manner of being *qua* being as rendered legitimate by a core-dependent homonym in lieu of a univocal genus of goodness, we note that all non-core instances of goodness depend upon the non-indexed core of goodness along the axis of one or more of the four causal dependence relations, each of which will involve in this connection a form of account dependence. Given that what is more self-sufficient (αὐταρκέστερον) is more good, or the better good, or simply, better (μείζονος ἀγαθοῦ), one can offer a fully general principle of commensurability across all instances of goodness:

*Principle of Degree of Dependence:* where *a* and *b* are non-core instances of goodness, then: (i) *a* is better than *b* if *a* is more self-sufficient in the degree of its account-dependence than *b* is; (ii) *b* is better than *a* if *b* more self-sufficient in the degree of its account-dependence than *a* is; and (iii) if neither *a* nor *b* is more or less self-sufficient in its degree of account-dependence than the other, then *a* and *b* are equally good.

Degree of account-dependence is given in the manner specified in *Rhetoric* i 7, namely causally and in terms of source-dependence, both of which are asymmetric in the manner required for account-dependence in every instance of core-dependent homonymy.



To illustrate with a case perhaps favourable to Aristotle's way of thinking: is it better now to exercise or to practice the viola? Both are good activities, because both are productive of things which are good in their own right, namely health and beauty. Health and beauty in turn are good, because they too stand in an account-dependent relation to goodness itself. If either activity is more or less self-sufficient than the other, than it will be better, and so more choiceworthy. We should not expect such rankings to be fixed and static, however, since degree of dependence can itself be context-sensitive and categorially delimited. That much, however, is true of Plato's propinquity metric as well: in context  $c_1$  exercise may be closer to the Form of the Good than is practice, even though the opposite obtains in context  $c_2$ .

There might be in either approach formidable epistemic impediments to producing a secure ordinal ranking. To the extent that this is so, Aristotle's animadversions against the practical utility against the Form of the Good as a deontological principle might equally apply here. Still, the question at the moment is whether, in a more exact setting, one might in principle find oneself in a position to make reflectively rational rankings. If so, then Aristotle will be justified in maintaining, as he does, that 'whether one is to do this or that is

already the work of reasoning—and it is necessary that measuring take place by one measure; for one pursues the best' (*DA* iii 11, 434a7-9)

Even if equally beset with epistemic impediments to their implementability, the two axiologies now in view are not equal in their degree of complexity. Whatever its deontic utility, Plato's propinquity metric is simple. By contrast, the principle of derivation dependence afforded by the proposed science of goodness *qua* goodness, given as it is in terms of core-dependent homonymy, is formidably complex. One might accordingly have the impulse to favour Plato's approach. Here, though, one must step lightly. Whether simplicity tells in favour of one axiology or the other is not a matter of theoretical expedience: the value structure that obtains is either simple or it is not, and that is a matter for the world to decide.

## V. Concluding Considerations

One will look in vain for that Aristotelian treatise which opens with the heralded announcement: 'There is a science (*ἐπιστήμη*) which studies goodness *qua* goodness (*τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἢ ἀγαθόν*), and the attributes belonging to it in its own right' (*Περὶ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ* A 1, 1463a1-3). This is a pity, since we might have

expected one, given Aristotle's passing comment amidst his axiological investigations of *Nicomachean Ethics* i 6 that such a discussion requires the greater exactitude to be found in a discipline other than ethics (*EN* i 6 1096b30-31; cf. *EN*1094b13, 1098a27, 1102a25, 1103b34-a7, 1131b1, 1164b27), where this is precisely the sort of precision we expect in science (ἐπιστήμη) (*APo.* 71b9-7214).

Such exactitude befits axiology, not deontology. One cannot infer on that basis, however, that axiological investigations would be, because exact, permanently barred from having deontological import. In the present circumstance, we have been wondering whether in general one can expect rational deliberation to offer preferences reflecting ordinality in values given independently of unmoored desires. Both Plato and Aristotle suppose that one can at least in principle arrive at such rationally governed preferences, and this despite the deep differences on the question of the univocity of goodness dividing them.

One instruction to take away from their similarity in the midst of this difference: it is wrong to infer directly from the denial of the univocity of goodness to a kind of value pluralism rendering commensurability out of bounds. We are not entitled to infer from the non-univocity of the good to the

sorts of value pluralism enshrined in claims that all good things bear at most family resemblances to one another. There is a *tertium quid* between the extremes of austere Platonism and a chaotic value pluralism, namely core-dependent homonymy. If the value structure reflected in the core-dependent homonymy of the good extends across all domains of goodness, and across all indexed goods altogether, then there is after all a subject matter for a science of goodness *qua* goodness: good things just in so far as they are good. This science, like any other science, seeks to articulate the causes and sources of all good things, not *qua* human or *qua* artifactual or *qua* functional, but simply *qua* good.