

# The Metaphysics of Goodness

Four Claims about A Claim about a Claim about the Good

# A Claim about the Good

- \* In the case of things known, one is to say, then, that not only is their being known present to them because of the good, but that both their existence and their being is present to them because of that, though goodness is not being, but is still further beyond, surpassing being in dignity and power (509b6-10).
- \* Καὶ τοῖς γινωσκομένοις τοίνυν μὴ μόνον τὸ γινώσκεισθαι φάναι ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ παρεῖναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ εἶναί τε καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν ὑπ' ἐκείνου αὐτοῖς προσεῖναι, οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ' ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος.

# The Claim

- \* Goodness is not being, but is still further beyond, surpassing being in dignity and power. (*Rep.* 509c8-10)
- \* οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ' ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος.

# Some Assumptions Undergirding this Claim

- \* The Good is *objectively* given, not subjectively constituted.
- \* The Good is, in fact, a *Form*.
- \* Goodness is *univocal*.
- \* All good things are *commensurable*, or, more weakly, *ordinally rankable*, in terms of their goodness (in terms of their being- $\phi$ ) .

# Goodness as Objective

- \* Goodness is subjective =<sub>df</sub> x's being good *constitutively* depends on the psychological attitudes or responses an observer S has towards x.
- \* In particular, x's being good might be thought to consist in x's being *valued* by S, where x's being valued consists in x's being *desired* by S.
- \* Goodness is objective =<sub>df</sub> x's being good is not subjective.

# Goodness is a Form

- \* The FOG is thus an abstract, mind- and language-independent entity, which as all of its intrinsic properties essentially.
- \* It is also something, to use Aristotle's word participable (μεθεκτόν).
  - \* 'Forms, if there were any, could not be available for non-substances, since each of them must be μεθεκτόν' (*Met.* 1079a25-26; cf. *Met.* 990b28, 1040a27)
  - \* εἰ ἔστι μεθεκτὰ τὰ εἶδη, τῶν οὐσιῶν ἀναγκαῖον ἰδέας εἶναι μόνον.
- \* It is thus also a paradigm (παράδειγμα) for all good things.
  - ❖ 'What appears most clear to me at least is this: while Forms are just as παραδείγματα set in nature, other things are similar to them and are likenesses; and this partaking of the forms is for the others nothing other than their resembling them' (*Parm.* 132c12-d4)
  - ❖ μάλιστα ἔμοιγε καταφαίνεται ὧδε ἔχειν· τὰ μὲν εἶδη ταῦτα ὥσπερ παραδείγματα ἐστάναι ἐν τῇ φύσει, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα τούτοις εἰκέναι καὶ εἶναι ὁμοιώματα, καὶ ἢ μέθεξις αὕτη τοῖς ἄλλοις γίγνεσθαι τῶν εἰδῶν οὐκ ἄλλη τις ἢ εἰκασθῆναι αὐτοῖς.

# Goodness is Univocal (I)

\* In a linguistic mode:

\* We are in the habit of assuming one Form for each set of many things to which we give the same name (*Rep.* 596a).

\* In a mixed mode:

\* ‘So, tell me this: is it your view that, as you say, there are certain Forms whose names these other things have through getting a share of them as, for instance, they came to be like by getting a share of Likeness, large by getting a share of Largeness, and just and beautiful by getting a share of Justice and Beauty?’

\* ‘It certainly is,’ Socrates replied (*Parm.* 130e-131a).

# Goodness is Univocal II

- \* Univocity:

- \*  $\phi$  is univocal =df there exists a single, non-disjunctive, essence-specifying account of  $\phi$ .

- \* Multivocity:

- \* Negatively

- \*  $\phi$  is multivocal =df 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 =df there are two or more essence-specifying accounts of  $\phi$ .

- \* A winning instance:

- \* water =<sub>df</sub> H<sub>2</sub>O



# Goodness is Univocal III

\* In a linguistic mode:

\* Whenever we apply 'good' to  $x$  and  $y$ , then there is something, the predicate *goodness*, which  $x$  and  $y$  share.

\* Whenever we correctly apply 'good' to  $x$  and  $y$ , then there is something, the predicate *goodness*, which  $x$  and  $y$  share (and in virtue of which  $x$  and  $y$  are correctly characterised as good).

\* In a metaphysical mode:

\* Whenever  $x$  and  $y$  are good, there is something, *goodness*, in which  $x$  and  $y$  share, in virtue of which  $x$  and  $y$  are good.

# Commensurability

- \* A point of terminology: people speak of value *commensurability*.
- \* By this they should mean that there exists a common cardinal measure between of items of value.
- \* Usually, they mean something weaker, namely *ordinal rankability*.
  - \* All good things fall somewhere in an order from first to  $n^{th}$ .
  - \* One corollary: for all  $x$  and  $y$ , if  $\phi x$  and  $\phi y$ , then either: (i)  $x$  is more  $\phi$  than  $y$  (=  $x$  is better than  $y$ ); (ii)  $y$  is more  $\phi$  than  $x$  (=  $y$  is better than  $x$ ); or (iii)  $x$  is as  $\phi$  as  $y$  (=  $x$  and  $y$  are equal in respect of their goodness).
- \* Sometimes, people mean something weaker still, namely that all good things are comparable as good things.

# That Claim Again

- \* 'The Good is not being, but surpasses it in dignity and power'
- \* οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ' ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος; *Rep.* 509c5-8).

# This Claim Noted

- \* Among the wise, some used to think that besides these many goods there is some other good that is something in its own right (τι καθ' αὐτὸ εἶναι), and also causes all these goods to be good things (*EN* i 4 1095a26-28).
- \* ἔνιοι δ' ᾤοντο παρὰ τὰ πολλὰ ταῦτα ἀγαθὰ ἄλλο τι καθ' αὐτὸ εἶναι, ὃ καὶ τούτοις πᾶσιν αἰτιὸν ἐστὶ τοῦ εἶναι ἀγαθὰ.

# A Claim about this Claim

- \* 'It is clear that it [*scil.* the good] could not be something common, universal and one' (*EN* i 6, 1098a27-28)
- \* δῆλον ὡς οὐκ ἂν εἴη κοινόν τι καθόλου καὶ ἓν

# Four Claims about this Claim about a Claim about the Good (I)

- \* 'Aristotle's seven arguments against the universal Good are condensed in seventy-four lines of Greek text, perhaps the most succinct and incisive ethical-metaphysical critique of the concept of Good to be found anywhere in the history of philosophy. Together they constitute a necessary step in Aristotle's design for a new ethics, dismantling the Platonic architectonic in order to refashion his own humanistic study of the particular good for man, without which first negative effort the very concept of a non-universal Good would be incomprehensible.' (Jacquette, 1998, 321-322)

# Four Claims about this Claim about a Claim about the Good (II)

- \* 'It is difficult to understand a man of Aristotle's calibre attacking, as he does, a theory like this. . .' After all, Stewart observed, 'his own philosophy of human life, with its ideal of the θεωρητικὸς βίος, and its doctrine of εὐδαιμονία as something not to be counted among particular good things (E. N. i. 7. 8), is in entire sympathy with it.' (Stewart, 1892 vol. I, 74)
- \* 'Everyone has felt the unsatisfactoriness of these arguments; they seem captious, verbal, unreal, and not to touch the point at issue' (Grant, 1885 vol. I, 208).

# Four Claims about this Claim about a Claim about the Good (III)

- \* We must consider that Aristotle does not intend to reject the opinion insofar as Plato maintained a separated good on which all good would depend. In the twelfth book of the *Metaphysics* . . . Aristotle expressly mentions a good, separated from the universe, to which the whole universe is ordered as an army is ordered to the good of its general. He does reject the opinion insofar as Plato held that the separated good is an idea common to all goods (Aquinas, *In Eth. Nic.* VI. 79. 34).



# The Intended Target: Univocity?

- \* Aristotle says that the good is meant in as many ways as being (ἐπεὶ τὰγαθὸν ἰσαχῶς λέγεται τῷ ὄντι; *EN* 1096b23-24).
- \* He also says that being is meant in many ways (τὸ δὲ ὄν λέγεται μὲν πολλαχῶς; *Met.* 1003a33).
- \* Together these remarks entail that the good is meant in many ways (λέγεται πολλαχῶς).

# *Topics i 15: Tests for Non-Univocity*

- \* Univocity:
  - \*  $\phi$  is univocal =<sub>df</sub> there exists a single, non-disjunctive, essence-specifying account of  $\phi$ .
- \* Multivocity:
  - \* 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  $\phi$ .
- \* Test of Contraries
- \* Paraphrase Test

# Paraphrase Test

- \* Phillippe is sharp.
- \* Before beginning work each day, the chef makes sure her knives are sharp.
- \* Starring as Violetta, Mirella Freni had some pitch problems, often singing sharp.
- \* If we paraphrase these occurrences of *sharp*, we end up with:
  - \* Phillippe is *intelligent*.
  - \* Before beginning work each day, the chef makes sure his knives *have a beveled edge suitable for cutting*.
  - \* Freni had some pitch problems, too often singing *higher than the designated pitch*.
- \* Since these are not intersubstitutable *salva veritate*, the original predicate is multivocal.

# Applied to Goodness

- \* Predicating goodness:

- \* The new Heldentenor singing at Bayreuth this year is really very good.
- \* On a hot afternoon, ice-cream is always good.
- \* From the standpoint of justice capitalism is tolerable, while only socialism is a positive good.

- \* Applying the paraphrase test, we have:

- \* The new Heldentenor singing at Bayreuth this year *sings uncommonly well*.
- \* On a hot afternoon, ice-cream is always *tasty and refreshing*.
- \* From the standpoint of justice capitalism is tolerable, while socialism is the only *just socio-economic system*.

- \* Again, if there is any doubt, any attempt to substitute paraphrase for paraphrase yields nonsense. One simply cannot say, for instance:

- \* From the standpoint of justice capitalism is tolerable, while socialism is tasty and refreshing.

# A Platonic Rejoinder

- \* '... is good' may admit of a second-order univocity
- \* Compare: '... is poisonous.'
  - \* Neurotoxins are *poisonous*.
  - \* Potassium chloride is *poisonous*.
- \* One might offer as paraphrases:
  - \* Neurotoxins paralyse the nervous system in seconds.
  - \* Potassium chloride quickly stops the heart by inhibiting cellular activity required for muscle contractions.
  - \* Univocity remains viable:  $x$  is a poisonous =<sub>df</sub>  $x$  is a substance whose absorption causes death or distress to a biological organism
  - \* N.b the causal character of this higher-order univocity, which seems well-suited to Aristotle's teleological framework

# Four Theoretical Arguments from *ENi 6*

- \* Goodness as Implicated in an Ordered Series
- \* Goodness as Co-varying with Being
- \* Goodness and the Diversity of Sciences
- \* A Dilemmic Argument regarding *Per Se* Goods

# To the Categories

- \* Further, since the good is meant in as many ways as being is—for it is meant in what-it-is, for example as god and mind; in quality, the virtues; in quantity, a suitable amount; in relative, the useful; in time, the propitious; in place, a location; and in the others other such things—it is clear that the good cannot be something universal, common, and single. For if it were, it would not be spoken of in all the categories, but in one only (*EN* 1096a23–9).
- \* τι δ' ἐπεὶ τὰγαθὸν ἰσαχῶς λέγεται τῷ ὄντι (καὶ γὰρ ἐν τῷ τί λέγεται, οἷον ὁ θεὸς καὶ ὁ νοῦς, καὶ ἐν τῷ ποιῷ αἱ ἀρεταί, καὶ ἐν τῷ ποσῷ τὸ μέτρον, καὶ ἐν τῷ πρὸς τι τὸ χρήσιμον, καὶ ἐν χρόνῳ καιρὸς, καὶ ἐν τόπῳ δίαίτα καὶ ἕτερα τοιαῦτα), δῆλον ὡς οὐκ ἂν εἴη κοινόν τι καθόλου καὶ ἓν· οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἐλέγετ' ἐν πάσαις ταῖς κατηγορίαις, ἀλλ' ἐν μιᾷ μόνῃ.

# A Short Version

\* According to this first, very general argument, 'Goodness is meant in as many ways as being' (*EN* 1096a23-24). Since, according to Aristotle, being (*to on*) is multivocal (*Met.* 1003a33-34), so too is goodness. Hence, we have the following simple argument:

(1) Goodness is meant in many ways (λέγεται πολλαχῶς) if, and only if, being is meant in many ways (λέγεται πολλαχῶς).

(2) Being is meant in many ways (λέγεται πολλαχῶς).

(3) Hence, goodness is meant in many ways (λέγεται πολλαχῶς).



# A Medium Version

- (1) There are ten categories of being (or, for that matter, there are  $n$  categories of being, where  $n > 1$ ).
- (2) If (1), there are irreducibly distinct kinds of beings.
- (3) So, there are irreducibly distinct kinds of beings.
- (4) It is possible to predicate goodness of items in these various categories. (One may say, that is, 'x in  $c_1$  is good' and 'y in  $c_2$  is good' and 'z in  $c_3$  is good' and so on for the  $n$  categories of being).
- (5) If goodness were univocal, it would not be possible to predicate goodness across the categories in this way. (For if goodness were something universal, common and single, 'it would not be spoken of in all the categories, but in one only'; *EN* i 6 1096a28–9).
- (6) Hence, goodness is not univocal.

# The Purport of the Argument

- \* In establishing this result, the argument takes the form of a standard Aristotelian argument for non-univocity:
  - \* The accounts of the predicate  $\phi$  as it applies to instances  $a_1 \dots a_n$  are distinct; if so, then  $\phi$  is non-univocal across these applications; so,  $\phi$  is non-univocal across these applications.
  - \* In this case, the predicate is good and the instances  $a_1 \dots a_n$  are items drawn from diverse categories of being. Again, since there are ten categories of being, there will be ten accounts of the predicate good.
- \* This is why Aristotle concludes that 'goodness is meant in as many ways as being' (τὰγαθὸν ἰσαχῶς λέγεται τῷ ὄντι; *EN* 1096a23-24; cf. *EE* 1217b25-27).
- \* N. b. that thus far the argument makes no appeal to functional goodness, and so proceeds without being alert to the thought that the good-for-man is distinct from the good-for-fish (*EN* 1141a22-23; cf. *Met.* 1020b23-25).

# The Diversity of Sciences

- \* Further, when many things correspond to a single Idea there is also a single Idea for them; so, there should also be a single science (μία τις ἐπιστήμη) of all good things. As things are, however, there are many sciences of good things even under a single category, for instance, the science of the propitious in war is generalship whereas the science of the propitious in sickness is medicine, while the science dealing with moderation in the case of food is medicine whereas the science dealing with moderation as regards what is injurious is gymnastics (*EN* 1096a29-34).
- \* ἔτι δ' ἐπεὶ τῶν κατὰ μίαν ιδέαν μία καὶ ἐπιστήμη, καὶ τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἀπάντων ἦν ἂν μία τις ἐπιστήμη· νῦν δ' εἰσὶ πολλαὶ καὶ τῶν ὑπὸ μίαν κατηγορίαν, οἷον καιροῦ, ἐν πολέμῳ μὲν γὰρ στρατηγικὴ ἐν νόσῳ δ' ἰατρικὴ, καὶ τοῦ μετρίου ἐν τροφῇ μὲν ἰατρικὴ ἐν πόνοις δὲ γυμναστικὴ.

# The Purport of this Argument

- \* Within the category of time, we say that the propitious (καιρός) is good.
- \* But then observe further that the propitious in war consists in a time's being the right moment to attack, whereas the propitious in medicine consists in a time's being the right moment to initiate a given treatment.
- \* So, even within the category of time propitious is homonymous.
- \* Aristotle seems to have in mind here the sort of case he elsewhere characterises as especially difficult to notice. In cases of such nuance, Aristotle claims, 'homonymy creeps in unnoticed' (*Top.* 107b6), because one homonymous term is nested within another.
- \* Here, good is homonymous, because in some applications it means virtuous and in others it means propitious, but upon closer inspection, we find that *propitious* too is homonymous, since sometimes it means *advantageous* and other times it means simply *appropriate*.
- \* Presumably, the nested homonymy is transitive, so that we find the ways of being good multiplying with each iteration.

# Our Friends Retort

- \* We were thinking only, in effect, that there is a single Form only for intrinsic goods (τὰ καθ' αὐτὰ ἀγαθὰ)
- \* All such goods are univocally good (EN 1096b8-16).
- \* All such things qualify as univocally good because they are all *such as to be pursued and loved for themselves or in their own right* (τὰ καθ' αὐτὰ διωκόμενα καὶ ἀγαπώμενα; EN 1096b10-11).

# Aristotle's Reaction

- \* Which goods should one regard as goods in their own right (καθ' αὐτά)? Those pursued even when considered individually, like intelligence, seeing, certain pleasures, and honours? For even if we pursue these because of something else, one would none the less regard them as goods in their own right. Or is nothing good in its own right beyond the Idea (ἰδέα) <of the Good>? If the latter, the Form (εἶδος) <of the Good> will be otiose. If the former, and these are counted as among things good in their own right, then the account of goodness (τὸν τἀγαθοῦ λόγον) in all of them will need to be shown to be the same, just as the account of whiteness is the same in snow and in white lead. But the accounts of goodness as it belongs to honour, intelligence, and pleasure are different and divergent (ἕτεροι καὶ διαφέροντες), precisely in the way in which they are good things. It is not the case, then, that the good is something common corresponding to a single Idea (τὸ ἀγαθὸν κοινόν τι κατὰ μία ἰδέαν) (EN 1096b16-26).
- \* καθ' αὐτὰ δὲ ποία θείη τις ἄν; ἢ ὅσα καὶ μονούμενα διώκεται, οἷον τὸ φρονεῖν καὶ ὄραν καὶ ἡδοναί τινες καὶ τιμαί; ταῦτα γὰρ εἰ καὶ δι' ἄλλο τι διώκομεν, ὅμως τῶν καθ' αὐτὰ ἀγαθῶν θείη τις ἄν. ἢ οὐδ' ἄλλο οὐδὲν πλὴν τῆς ἰδέας; ὥστε μάταιον ἔσται τὸ εἶδος. εἰ δὲ καὶ ταῦτ' ἐστὶ τῶν καθ' αὐτά, τὸν τἀγαθοῦ λόγον ἐν ἅπασιν αὐτοῖς τὸν αὐτὸν ἐμφαίνεσθαι δεήσει, καθάπερ ἐν χιόνι καὶ ψιμυθίῳ τὸν τῆς λευκότητος. τιμῆς δὲ καὶ φρονήσεως καὶ ἡδονῆς ἕτεροι καὶ διαφέροντες οἱ λόγοι ταύτη ἢ ἀγαθὰ. οὐκ ἔστιν ἄρα τὸ ἀγαθὸν κοινόν τι κατὰ μίαν ἰδέαν.

# The Structure of this Dilemma

- (1) Either (a) there are many intrinsic goods, or (b) one only, viz. the Form of the Good.
- (2) If (1b), then the notion of intrinsic goodness will play no role and the FOG will be otiose.
- (3) If (1a), then the accounts of ‘. . . is good’ as it applies across the range of intrinsic goods will be either univocal or homonymous as regards that range of good things.
- (4) In fact, ‘. . . is good’ as it applies to these sundry intrinsic goods differs ‘precisely insofar as they are good’ (οἱ λόγοι ταύτη ἢ ἀγαθά).
- (5) So, if (1a), goodness will be homonymous across the range of intrinsic goods (and there will be no FOG).
- (6) So, either (a) goodness is homonymous (and there is no FOG) or (b) the FOG is otiose.

# The Purport of this Argument

- \* According to the second horn:
  - \* There are sundry *per se* goods (τὸ φρονεῖν καὶ ὄρᾶν καὶ ἡδοναί τινες καὶ τιμαί).
  - \* The accounts of the predicate ‘...is good’ differs as it applies across the range of these *per se* goods are ‘different and divergent, precisely in the way in which they are good things (ἕτεροι καὶ διαφέροντες οἱ λόγοι ταύτη ἢ ἀγαθά)
- \* It follows that the predicate ‘...is good’ is homonymous across these applications.
- \* So, generalising, across any range of intrinsic goods  $\alpha_1 \dots \alpha_n$ , the predicate ‘...is good’ attaches to these goods homonymously.



# Homonymy and Commensurability

- \* Further, we should observe at the same time whether terms are meant so as to admit of a more [or less] or so as to be used similarly, for instance in the cases of loud voices and loud garments, or sharp flavours and sharp sounds. For neither of these is said to be loud or sharp in the same way and neither admits of a more [or less]. Accordingly, loud and sharp are homonymous. And neither admits of a more [or less]. For all synonyms are commensurable (συμβλητόν), since they will be meant so as to admit of a more [or less] or will be used similarly (*Top.* 107b13-17)
- \* Ἔτι εἰ μὴ συμβλητὰ κατὰ τὸ μᾶλλον ἢ ὁμοίως, οἷον λευκὴ φωνὴ καὶ λευκὸν ἱμάτιον, καὶ ὀξύς χυμὸς καὶ ὀξεῖα φωνή· ταῦτα γὰρ οὔθ' ὁμοίως λέγεται λευκὰ ἢ ὀξεῖα, οὔτε μᾶλλον θάτερον. ὥσθ' ὁμώνυμον τὸ λευκὸν καὶ τὸ ὀξύ. τὸ γὰρ συνώνυμον πᾶν συμβλητόν· ἢ γὰρ ὁμοίως ῥηθήσεται ἢ μᾶλλον θάτερον
- \* Whatever is not synonymous is, in every instance, incommensurable (ἄλλ' ὅσα μὴ συνώνυμα, πάντ' ἀσύμβλητα). For example, why is it that no pen, wine, or musical scale is sharper than any one of the others? It is because whatever is homonymous is incommensurable (ὅτι ὁμώνυμα, οὐ συμβλητά) (*Phys.* 248b7-9).
- \* ἄλλ' ὅσα μὴ συνώνυμα, πάντ' ἀσύμβλητα. οἷον διὰ τί οὐ συμβλητόν ποτερον ὀξύτερον τὸ γραφεῖον ἢ ὁ οἶνος ἢ ἡ νήπη; ὅτι ὁμώνυμα, οὐ συμβλητά.

# A Principle of Commensurability

- \* COM: The predicate  $\phi$  as it occurs in 'a is  $\phi$ ' and 'b is  $\phi$ ' is commensurable in terms of  $\phi$ -ness if, and only if,  $\phi$  is synonymous in these applications.

# A Problem for Aristotle?

## I. COM

2. So,  $x$  and  $y$  are commensurable as  $\phi$ -things only if  $x$  and  $y$  are univocally  $\phi$ .
3. No two intrinsically good things are univocally good.
4. So, no two intrinsically good things are commensurably good.
5. Aristotle's programme in practical ethics is viable only if various intrinsic goods (e.g. honour and pleasure) are commensurable as good.
6. Hence, Aristotle's programme in practical ethics is undermined by his anti-Platonic commitment to non-univocity.