

The Categories of Being

May they all be good?

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 μέτριον, καὶ ἐν τῷ πρὸς τι τὸ χρήσιμον, καὶ ἐν χρόνῳ καιρὸς, καὶ ἐν τόπῳ δίαίτια καὶ ἕτερα τοιαῦτα), δῆλον ὡς οὐκ ἂν εἶη 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 Question of Categories

- * In how many ways is being said?
- * This question makes sense only against the backdrop of an articulated category theory.
- * Aristotle's contention:
- * 'Of things said without combination, each signifies either: (i) a substance (*ousia*); (ii) a quantity; (iii) a quality; (iv) a relative; (v) a where; (vi) a when; (vii) being in a position; (viii) a having; (ix) an acting upon; or (x) a being affected' (*Cat.* 1b25–27).
- * What are these categories categories of?

Two Approaches

- * Realism (broadly Aristotelian): a system of categories specifies the highest, irreducible kinds of beings there are—these beings populate an objective, mind-independent reality.
- * Conceptualism (broadly Kantian): a system of categories specifies those features of our conceptual scheme which are *a priori* necessary for the possibility of any cognition of objects—these objects are partly constituted by our own rational psychologies or deep conceptual schemes.

Conceptualism vs. Realism

- * 'It was an enterprise worthy of an acute thinker like Aristotle to search for these fundamental concepts. But as he did so on no principle, he merely picked them up as they came his way, and at first he produced ten of them, which he called categories (predicaments). Afterwards he believed that he had discovered five others, which he added under the name of post-predicaments. But his table still remained defective' (*Critique of Pure Reason* A81/B107).
- * 'Kant, it is well known, did not put himself to much trouble in discovering the categories' (Hegel, *Logic* §42).

Let's Be Realistic

- * Realistic Category Theory seeks to transcend the bounds of experience, yielding unverifiable, even unintelligible taxonomies of reality.
- * A Bad, if Seductive (broadly Kantian) Argument
 1. Our thought about the world is always and of necessity mediated by our own conceptual scheme.
 2. If (1), then all objects of study are at least partly constituted by features of our own conceptual scheme.
 3. If (2), then realistic category theory—any attempt to characterize the structure of the world as it is in itself and outside of our own conceptual scheme—is doomed to failure.
 4. So, any enterprise in realistic category theory is doomed to failure.

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.

Questioning (5)

(5) holds:

- * 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).
- * What can be said on behalf of this crucial premiss?

One Possibility

1. Goodness is predicated of x in c_1 and of y in c_2 (where c_1 and c_2 are distinct categories of being). [E.g. we say 'god is good', where god is in the category of substance; and 'virtue is good', where virtue is in the category of quality.]
2. Necessarily, if ϕ is predicated of x in c_1 and of y in c_2 (where c_1 and c_2 are distinct categories of being), then any account ($\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$) of ϕ as it is predicated of x will diverge from any account of ϕ as it is predicated of y .
3. If accounts of ϕ diverge in distinct applications, then ϕ is non-univocal in these applications.
4. So, goodness is non-univocal.

Why (2)?

* (2) holds:

* Necessarily, if ϕ is predicated of x in c_1 and of y in c_2 (where c_1 and c_2 are distinct categories of being), then any account ($\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$) of ϕ as it is predicated of x will diverge from any account of ϕ as it is predicated of y .

* An apparent counterexample:

* Socrates is white.

* The quantity of flesh equal to Socrates' left arm is white.

* Another:

* Xanthippe is a woman.

* The slave is a woman.

Two possibilities for (2)

- * Reject it outright.
 - * In this case, we must seek an alternative grounding for our original (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).
- * Seek some restricted version:
 - * Necessarily, if ϕ (where ϕ is an evaluative, or scalar, or normative, or . . .) is predicated of x in c_1 and of y in c_2 (where c_1 and c_2 are distinct categories of being), then any account ($\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$) of ϕ as it is predicated of x will diverge from any account of ϕ as it is predicated of y .

An Alternative Grounding

- * Perhaps the theory of categories simply makes vivid that goodness is never predicative, but always ascriptive.
- * Recall Geach:
 - * ‘There is no such thing as being just good or bad [that is, no predicative ‘good’], there is only being a good or bad so and so’.— (1956, 65).

One Geachean Development

1. Goodness is never predicative and always attributive.
2. If (1), there is no trans-categorial predication of goodness.
3. If (2), then, necessarily, goodness is always predicated intra-categorically.
4. So, necessarily, goodness is always predicated intra-categorically.
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 being), then any account ($\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$) of goodness as it is predicated of x will diverge from any account of ϕ as it is predicated of y .
6. [= the relevant instantiation of (2)] 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 being), then any account ($\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$) of goodness as it is predicated of x will diverge from any account of ϕ as it is predicated of y .

Necessarily Attributive

- * Why (1)? Why is goodness always attributive?
- * Widely held: (1972, 32-52.); Blackburn (1985, 15); Wong (1984, 101) [against Moore's Platonism]; and Foot (1985).
- * N.b. the issue is not whether goodness is sometimes attributive; the issue is whether it is *only and always* attributive.

Recall Geach's Arguments

- * The words 'good' and 'bad' function like an *alienans* adjective, but an adjective can be *alienans* only if its is attributive.
- * In predicative cases, one can detach the predicate and deploy it in inference.
 - * If she has an old red car, then she has a red car.
 - * If he's a good thief, it does not follow that he's good.
- * Conversely, one can 'pool' information when the predicative use is in view.
 - * If her car is red and old, then she has an old red car.
 - * If he is a thief and good, we cannot infer that he is a good thief.
- * If 'good' were predicative then it would be hopelessly homonymous.

From Attributive to Predicative

* Attributive:

* x is a good $\phi =_{df}$ x is an exemplary ϕ , perhaps because x does what ϕ s are expected to do, in an exemplary manner or to an exemplary degree.

* Predicative:

* x is good $=_{df}$ x is exemplary, perhaps because x does what things are expected to do in an exemplary manner or to an exemplary degree.