Intrinsic Goods, Attributively Construed

A Dilemmic Argument and its Consequences

The State of Play

* Having finished the categorial argument and considered the arguments from the sciences, we (Aristotelians) take ourselves to have established:

    * That goodness co-varies with being, such that:

        * goodness is spoken of in (at least) ten ways.

    * In fact, that goodness is intra-catgorially homonymous, such that:

        * even within a single category (say time) goodness is predicated non-univocally, so that:

        * goodness displays more extensive non-univocity than being

    * Even if, as arguments from the sciences seek to establish, goodness were some thing common (κοινός), it would be none the less *not* something universal or separate, with the result that:

        * There would be no FOG.

Our Friends Retort

* We were thinking only, in effect, that there is a single Form only for intrinsic goods (τὰ καθ᾽ αὐτὰ ἀγαθά)

* 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).

More exactly

* But let us discuss these matters elsewhere; an objection to what we have said, however, may be discerned in the fact in these accounts all goods (περὶ παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ τοὺς λόγους) have not been mentioned, but that the goods that are pursued and loved for themselves are called good by reference to a single Form, while those which tend to produce or to preserve these somehow or to prevent their contraries are called so by reference to these, and in a different sense. Clearly, then, goods must be spoken of in two ways, and some must be good in themselves, the others by reason of these.

* ἀλλὰ περὶ μὲν τούτων ἄλλος ἔστω λόγος· τοῖς δὲ λεχθεῖσιν ἀμφισβήτησίς τις ὑποφαίνεται διὰ τὸ μὴ περὶ παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ τοὺς λόγους εἰρῆσθαι, λέγεσθαι δὲ καθ' ἓν εἶδος τὰ καθ' αὑτὰ διωκόμενα καὶ ἀγαπώμενα, τὰ δὲ ποιητικὰ τούτων ἢ φυλακτικάμενα καὶ ἀγαπώμενα, τὰ δὲ ποιητικὰ τούτων ἢ φυλακτικά πως ἢ τῶν ἐναντίων κωλυτικὰ διὰ ταῦτα λέγεσθαι καὶ τρόπον ἄλλον. δῆλον οὖν ὅτι διττῶς λέγοιτ' ἂν τἀγαθά,καὶ τὰ μὲν καθ' αὑτά, θάτερα δὲ διὰ ταῦτα (EN 1096b -14)

Our Friends?

* It seems odd to think that Plato should hold such a view—if, at any rate, we understand the view reported in one, entirely natural way:

  * Intrinsic, or *per se*, goods are those things which are *pursued and loved for themselves or in their own right* (τὰ καθ᾽ αὑτὰ διωκόμενα καὶ ἀγαπώμενα; *EN* 1096b10-11):

    * *x* is a *per se* (καθ᾽ αὑτό) good =$_{df}$ *x* is pursued or loved for its own sake (again, *per se* or καθ᾽ αὑτό)

      * The immediate concern is not the circularity, but rather the thought implicit in the definition that:

        * *x* is good =$_{df}$ *x* is pursued or loved

  * This hardly seems a Platonic way of thinking of the good.

The FOG

* The FOG is a simple, univocal, non-natural (?), indefinable, irreducible, non-indexed property.

  * The FOG is goodness *simpliciter.*

Subjective and Objective Goods I

* Korsgaard (1986, 486):

* 'Subjectivism identifies good ends with or by reference to some psychological state. It includes the various forms of hedonism as well as theories according to which what is good is any object of interest or desire.'

    * 'The attraction of subjectivist views is that they acknowledge the connection of the good to human interests and desires. Most things that are good are good because of the interest human beings have in them, an interest that can be explained in terms of the physiological and psychological constitutions of human beings and the other conditions of human life.'

* 'Objectivism may be represented by the theory of G. E. Moore. According to Moore, to say that something is good as an end is to attribute a property, intrinsic goodness, to it. Intrinsic goodness is an objective, nonrelational property of the object, a value a thing has independently of anyone's desires, interests, or pleasures.

    * 'The advantage of objectivism is that it explains certain of our beliefs about the good that a subjectivist account cannot readily accommodate. We believe that people sometimes fail to care about what is good and sometimes have interests in or desires for things that are not good.'

Subjective and Objective Goods II

* The FOG is an objective good *only if* its goodness is an intrinsic feature wholly independent of the intentional/affective/reactive state of any subject *S*.

* The FOG is a subjective good *only if* its goodness is a relational feature partially constituted by some intentional/affective/reactive state of some subject *S*.

Platonic?

* On the account mooted by Aristotle here, Platonic goodness evidently comes out as a *subjective* good.

* Santas (1986, 97):

  * 'The relation between goodness and rationality, or reason and the good, has been a disputed issue in the history of ethics. In the most recent and perhaps most sophisticated theory of good that we have, that of John Rawls, goodness is defined in terms of rational desire.'

  * 'A second, related issue is raised by Hume's three most famous statements about the rôle of reason in conduct : "Reason is and ought only to be the slave of the passions . . . It is not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger... It is as little contrary to reason to prefer my own acknowledged lesser good to my greater.".' (*Treatise*, pp. 415-6)

  * 'On these two issues it would be difficult to find a writer who is more opposed to Hume and Rawls than Plato.'

How so?

* 'Plato believed that human reason can discover, independently of human desires and passions, what is good and what the good is, and that rationality in conduct consists in acting according to these discoveries of reason. If this is so, then contra Rawls what is rational to want, choose or do is to be explicated in terms of what is good (or thought to be good), not vice versa. And contra Hume, though reason can be made the slave of the passions (according to Plato anyway, if not Socrates), it is not true that it ever ought to be. Reason can discover, independently of the passions, that the evil of the destruction of the whole world can outweigh any good that can come from scratching my finger, and so such a preference can be contrary to reason. And the preference of my own acknowledged lesser good to my greater is as irrational as any preference can ever be. Indeed it might be thought difficult to understand the very notion of rational preference unless it were for the agent's own acknowledges greater good, real or apparent.'

A Possible Resolution

* Plato:

  * The Good every soul pursues and does everything for its sake, divining what it is and yet flummoxed and not grasping sufficiently what it is. . .

  * Ὃ δὴ διώκει μὲν ἅπασα ψυχὴ καὶ τούτου ἕνεκα πάντα πράττει, ἀπομαντευομένη τι εἶναι, ἀποροῦσα δὲ καὶ οὐκ ἔχουσα λαβεῖν ἱκανῶς τί ποτ' ἐστὶν. . .(*Rep.* 505510-e2)

* Aristotle:

  * *x* is good iff *x* is (to be) pursued and loved by every soul.

  * Nec. (*x* is good iff *x* is (to be) pursued and loved by every soul).

* The report would then be:

  * extensional rather than intensional

  * correct, if misleading.

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 ποῖα θείη τις ἄν; ἢ ὅσα καὶ μονούμενα διώκεται, οἷον τὸ φρονεῖν καὶ ὁρᾶν 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 ᾗ ἀγαθά. 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 ταύτῃ ᾗ 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 Second Horn

* According to the second horn:

    * There are sundry *per se* goods, viz. intelligence, seeing, certain pleasures and honours (τὸ φρονεῖν καὶ ὁρᾶν 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 ταύτῃ ᾗ ἀγαθά)

* It follows that the predicate '. . .is good' is homonymous across these applications.

* So, generalising, across any range of intrinsic goods α_1 . . α_n, the predicate '. . .is good' attaches to these goods homonymously.

Why should this be so?

* One possible reason: the predicate '. . .is good' is, as Geach urges, spurious.

    * '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).

    * That is, every sentence of the the structure:

        * x is good

    * is implicitly an abridged sentence of the form

        * x is a good φ.

* That is, goodness is always attributive and never predicative.

Two Closing Worries

* Given that x and y are commensurably φ only if *x* and *y* are univocally φ, no two intrinsic goods are commensurably φ.

    * This result is intolerable.

* Given that inference patterns are legitimate only when predicates are predicated univocally, and given that attributive uses of 'good' are non-exportable to predicate positions, for any two intrinsic goods we cannot infer from '*x* is good' and '*y* is good' to '*x* and *y* are good', where goodness is something common (κοινός).

    * Just as I cannot infer from 'Her singing is sharp' and 'His knife is sharp' to 'There is something common to her singing and his knife.'

    * So I cannot infer from 'Pleasure is good' and 'Virtue is good' to 'There is something common to virtue and pleasure.'

        * This result is unfortunate.

On the contrary

* If 'good' were always attributive, it would be hopelessly homonymous.

* That is, if for every intrinsic good φ, the account of 'good' in 'φ is good', or 'x is a good φ' were "different and divergent, precisely in the way in which they are good things (ἕτεροι καὶ διαφέροντες οἱ λόγοι ταύτῃ ᾗ ἀγαθά), then no two good things would have the same account (λόγος) in respect of their goodness.

* Suppose that were false: then there would be a single account (λόγος) for various good things.

* One could then infer from:

    * 'x is a good φ' and 'y is a good ψ'

    * that 'x is good' and 'y is good' and thence to

    * 'x and y are good'.

    * In such a case, the inference would be licensed only of the account (λόγος) of 'good' were the same in both instances.