Homonymy and the Comparability of Goods in Aristotle

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

HOMONYMY AND THE COMPARABILITY OF GOODS IN ARISTOTLE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN PHILOSOPHY

BY
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CHICAGO, IL
DECEMBER 2018
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank everyone who made this dissertation possible. First, I would like to thank my intellectual mentors as an undergraduate: Dr. Paul Custer, Dr. Michael Deckard, and Dr. Richard Von Dohlen. Without their training and encouragement, I would not have pursued graduate education in philosophy in the first place. I would also like to thank Dr. Richard Kraut for serving as an outside reader and providing many detailed and valuable comments on earlier drafts of the dissertation. I especially owe gratitude to my director, Dr. Julie Ward, who has spent the last eight years pushing me to be a more meticulous reader of Aristotle, and who always had confidence in me, even when I did not have much confidence in myself.

I would also like to thank Loyola University Chicago and the Arthur J. Schmidt Foundation for supplying the funds that enabled me to complete my research and writing. Thanks are also due to my friends in the Philosophy Department, who could always be counted on for rigorous discussion of ideas, on the one hand, and much needed camaraderie and relaxation on the other.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my family, especially my mother, Alice Duncan, who has been consistently supportive throughout this long and challenging process.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Works by Aristotle

An. Post.  Posterior Analytics
Cat. Categories
DA De Anima
DC De Caelo
EE Eudemian Ethics
EN Nicomachean Ethics
GA Generation of Animals
GC Generation and Corruption
HA History of Animals
Met. Metaphysics
Meteor. Meteorology
MM Magna Moralia
PA Parts of Animals
Phys. Physics
Po. Poetics
Pol. Politics
 Rh. Rhetoric
Top. Topics

(All translations are from the Revised Oxford Edition unless otherwise indicated.)

Works by Other Authors

Comm. In Eth. Aspasius’ Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics
Comm. In Top. Alexander of Aphrodisias’ Commentary on the Topics
DV Thomas Aquinas’ De Veritate
De Nom. Thomas Cajetan’s De Nominum Analogiae
EHU David Hume’s An Enquiry Concerning Human Nature
In Eth. Nic Thomas Aquinas’ Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics
Protrep. Iamblichus’ Protrepticus
ST Thomas Aquinas’ Summa Theologiae
INTRODUCTION

Aristotle is committed to the thesis that the good is homonymous, or “spoken of in many ways.” The homonymy of the good plays a major role in his critique of Platonism about goodness: he argues that there could only be a Form of the good if the term “good” signified a single nature, common to all good things. But since different kinds of good things require different accounts specifying what it is for them to be good, there can be no Form of the good. These points will, no doubt, be familiar to most students of Aristotle. What is less often recognized, however, is that Aristotle’s commitment to the homonymy of the good is in tension with his tendency to think of goods as comparable with one another; in particular, with his tendency to think of the whole cosmos as a hierarchy of value.

The problem I want to draw attention to is helpfully formulated as an inconsistent triad of theses that Aristotle endorses about goodness, homonymy, and comparability. We may call the three theses in question 1) “the homonymy of the good,” 2) “the incomparability of homonyms,” and 3) “the comparability of goods.” I will call the inconsistency among these three theses “the incomparability problem.” I argue that the problem is potentially quite severe; unless the inconsistency can be resolved somehow, it threatens the coherence of Aristotle’s entire approach to value. Let us examine each thesis in turn.

First, the homonymy of the good. For Aristotle, a term is applied “homonymously” to two things if the definition that corresponds to that term differs in each application. For example, a knife and a musical note are homonymously sharp, because what it is for a knife to be sharp
differs from what it is for a note to be sharp. Aristotle argues that “good” is said homonymously of many different good things. He does not, of course, hold that every good thing is homonymous with every other, such that no two good things are good in the same sense. That position that would arguably be absurd.\(^1\) However, as I will try to show in chapter two, he does hold that there are a vast number of senses of “good.” For example, as I understand him, Aristotle would hold that the goodness of a good human being is distinct from the goodness of a good horse, or good book, good meal, good deed, etc.

The incomparability of homonyms is the principle that if two things are homonymous in a certain respect they are not comparable in that same respect. To return to the earlier example, since the sharpness of a knife is a different attribute from the sharpness of a musical note, they are not comparable with respect to sharpness (cf. *Top.* 107b12-17; *Phys.* 248b7-15). It makes no sense to claim that a knife is sharper or less sharp than a note, nor does it make any sense to claim they are equally sharp. On the contrary, they are incommensurable with respect to sharpness. Since there is no single feature, *sharpness*, which is shared by, for example, F sharp and a steak knife, it is not readily intelligible to say that the steak knife has that feature to a higher degree. Similarly, if two goods are homonymous with respect to their goodness, it should not be possible to claim that one of them is better than the other, or that they are equally valuable—they will simply be incomparable as goods.

However, Aristotle generally seems to think that different goods are comparable. Indeed, passages throughout the corpus suggest that Aristotle thinks of the whole universe as an

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\(^1\) Although Chris Shields comes close to attributing it to Aristotle; he argues that Aristotle is committed to the thesis that every kind of intrinsic good is homonymous with every other (Fractured 101). I will advance a critique of his interpretation in chapter three.
axiological hierarchy; a single scale of better and worse. In a fragment from the lost De Philosophia, for example, Aristotle provides an argument that sums up his hierarchical view of reality in highly general terms: “where there is a better there is a best. Since, then, among existing things one is better than another, there is also something that is best, which will be the divine” (F 16 R³). Since texts throughout the corpus confirm that Aristotle continues to think of the universe as an axiological hierarchy throughout his career, it would be unwise to dismiss this fragment as a product of Aristotle’s youthful Platonism. We can even discern the basic contours of the hierarchy: Aristotle thinks that being is better than non-being (GC 336b28-29), living things are better than inanimate things (GA 731b29), sublunary living things differ among themselves in their degree of value (with human beings at the top) (e.g. GA 736b30-31; EN.1141a20-1141b 2), celestial things are better than terrestrial things (EN 1141a20-1141b2, PA 21ff.), and god is the best thing of all (Met. 1072b29-31).

Passages like these lend credence to Arthur Lovejoy’s claim that Aristotle played a central role in devising the principles that constitute the idea he famously calls “the Great Chain of Being.” Lovejoy argues that Aristotle was especially instrumental in formulating the “principle of unilinear gradation;” the principle which states that all things in the universe are arranged in “a single order of excellence” or perfection (Lovejoy 59). Insofar as he accepts this principle, Aristotle holds that every being in the cosmos can be placed into a single ranking of better and worse. Admittedly, Aristotle never explicitly endorses the principle of unilinear

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²Lovejoy famously argues that the idea of the great chain of being is constituted by three principles: “the principle of plenitude,” “the principle of continuity,” and “the principle of unilinear gradation.” He claims that Aristotle rejects the principle of plenitude, but plays a major role in formulating the two latter principles. Although I suspect that Aristotle might actually be willing to accept some version of the principle of plenitude, this is of little consequence to my argument. When I discuss Aristotle’s acceptance of the great chain of being throughout this dissertation, I will be referring primarily to the principle of unilinear gradation.
gradation as a general truth, but there seems to be sufficient textual evidence to attribute that position to him nevertheless. At the very least, Aristotle’s evaluative comparisons cut across classes of things which we would expect him to hold to be good in different senses of the term, and which we would thus expect him to claim are incomparable with respect to their goodness. We can see clearly, therefore, why unqualified versions of the three theses we have been discussing entail a contradiction. If goods are homonymous, and homonyms are incomparable, then goods cannot be comparable. It seems, then, that if Aristotle’s theory of goodness is to be coherent, he would need to reject or at least modify one (or more) of the three positions that generate our inconsistent triad.

The problem posed by our inconsistent triad, which I will henceforth call the “incommensurability” or “incomparability problem,” has received surprisingly little attention in the literature. I know of only three commentators that address the incomparability problem directly and explicitly: Martha Nussbaum, Francisco Gonzalez, and Chris Shields. In my view, none have provided workable solution to the problem. Nussbaum seems to conclude that Aristotle’s hierarchical view of the cosmos is ultimately in irresolvable tension with his usual, species-relative approach to value. She thinks of it as a Platonic element Aristotle never quite manages to exorcise from his thought. Gonzalez devotes a paper to examining a similar issue concerning the comparability of pleasures that differ in kind and remarks on the fact that there is an analogous problem concerning the good. Unfortunately, the solution he provides for pleasure would not work if transposed to goodness. Chris Shields has provided the most comprehensive

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3Some contemporary philosophers distinguish between incommensurability and incomparability, but Aristotle does not. I will use the terms interchangeably throughout this dissertation. See chapter three, note 4 for more on the distinction and its relation to Aristotle.
exploration of our problem that has appeared in the literature so far. He is not optimistic that it can be solved, and argues that it threatens to “fracture” Aristotle’s conception of goodness, perhaps beyond repair. Briefly examining the positions of at each of these commentators will help bring our problem into sharper relief.

In *The Fragility of Goodness*, Nussbaum argues that Aristotle’s considered view is that we cannot construct, and should not attempt to construct, a general account of goodness that would enable us to rank lives of different kinds of beings as better or worse than one another (Fragility 374). In her view, Aristotle holds that such an account would be impossible because he “emphatically asserts that the goodness of lives is, and must be, a species relative matter” (Nussbaum Fragility 292). Each species has its own characteristic form of functioning and the life of an individual living thing counts as good or bad to the extent that it achieves and perfects the form of functioning proper to it. Yet, she acknowledges that there are a number of passages which contradict Aristotle’s general prohibition on cross-species evaluative comparison; passages which “rank the available lives in the universe in terms of their value or goodness, placing divine life at the top” (Fragility 373).

In my view, Nussbaum frames the problem too narrowly. She focuses on the trans-specific comparison of the value of lives, and thus does not fully recognize that the problem is much more general. Any two bearers of goodness that are homonymous should be evaluatively incomparable. This certainly includes the lives of different species of plant and animal, but also extends well beyond that domain. Nevertheless, the evaluative incomparability of different lives is an important specific instantiation of the more general problem that I will grapple with in this
dissertation. It is relevant, therefore, that Nussbaum thinks the problem has no real solution: for her, there are two incompatible strands in Aristotle’s thought (Fragility 374-377).

Although Nussbaum does not offer a solution to the problem, she does offer something of an explanation for why Aristotle falls victim to it. Namely, “ethical Platonism of some sort exercised a hold over Aristotle’s imagination in one or more periods of his career” (Fragility 377). Although the main thrust of his thought is diametrically opposed to the Platonic project of providing species-independent criteria of goodness, Aristotle is nevertheless “in some ways deeply attracted” to that project (ibid.). She argues that we should not be disappointed in Aristotle’s inconsistency, therefore. It shows that he is taking the Platonic position very seriously and trying (albeit unsuccessfully) to incorporate it into his own thought. This is a worthy way for a great philosopher like Aristotle to grapple with the doctrines of his teacher.

I contend that Nussbaum’s explanation is inadequate. One problem is that it lets Aristotle off the hook too easily, exculpating him from a serious conceptual problem at the heart of his axiology. Perhaps more importantly, however, it obscures the extent to which the great chain of being is a genuinely Aristotelian tenet. Nussbaum seems to imply that the most plausible Aristotelian response to our inconsistent triad would be to reject the trans-specific comparability of goods. On her account, the bulk of Aristotle’s ethical theorizing depends on the thinking of value as species-relative. Furthermore, she argues that there is a compelling, “anthropocentric” ethical perspective to be found in Aristotle that embraces the incommensurability of values (Nussbaum Fragility 294-297). On Nussbaum’s interpretation, he deviates from that position occasionally when he feels the force of Platonism. And although she praises Aristotle for taking his teacher’s views seriously, one gets the distinct impression that she strongly prefers the
anthropocentric theory she takes to be distinctively Aristotelian. Excising the Platonic deviations would, no doubt, make Aristotle’s theory more consistent and appealing from Nussbaum’s perspective.

In my view, Aristotle’s belief in the great chain of being is not something that can be dismissed as a result of Aristotle’s ill-advised, lingering attachment to Platonism and then cordoned off from the “real” Aristotelian position. On the contrary, conceptualizing the cosmos as hierarchical is just as characteristically Aristotelian as it is Platonic. As Lloyd Gerson has argued, Plato and Aristotle share the conviction that universe is an explanatory hierarchy which is, at the same time, an evaluative hierarchy. Most obviously, both posit a single, ultimate explanatory principle of reality (the Form of the Good for Plato, the unmoved mover for Aristotle) and conceive of that principle as the ultimate standard of “moral and aesthetic evaluation” (Gerson 33-34). Things are good or beautiful in virtue of their “proximity” to the first principle, bad or ugly in virtue of their “distance” from it.

It is implausible, therefore, for Nussbaum to downplay Aristotle’s commitment to the great chain of being. If Aristotle thinks that the hierarchical structure of reality is both explanatory and axiological, then every time he discusses the search for first principles or the subordination of one science to another, he is implicitly thinking about the cosmos as constituting a single scale of goodness. With this in mind, it should not be surprising that Aristotle frequently characterizes the objects of higher sciences as better, nobler, more honorable, or more divine than that of lower sciences (e.g. DA I,1; Met. I, 2 & VI, 1; PA I, 5). It seems to me, therefore, that some version of the principle of unilinear gradation is absolutely central to Aristotle’s vision of reality; we cannot remove it from his thought without serious
distortion and we cannot save him from inconsistency by downplaying his commitment to it. Thus, if Nussbaum is correct that, in the final analysis, Aristotle is guilty of inconsistency, then his theory of goodness has a more fundamental problem than she acknowledges.

Francisco Gonzalez’s “Aristotle on Pleasure and Perfection” is all the more relevant, therefore, because he develops a solution to a homologous problem about the comparability of pleasures. Aristotle famously argues that pleasures differ in kind (eidos) and not merely in degree. He holds, for example, that contemplative pleasure is simply a different sort of thing from gustatory pleasure. On the face of it, this thesis would imply that “one cannot in a hedonistic calculus compare the two pleasures as being different amounts of the same thing” (Gonzalez 141). And yet, Aristotle does compare pleasures of different kinds. It is particularly important to him that we can rightly call contemplation the most pleasant activity. Gonzalez recognizes that Aristotle’s conception of goodness poses a problem with the same structure (144n6). If his solution in the case of pleasure is compelling, then perhaps there is reason to hope that the same solution could be applied, mutatis mutandis, to goodness.

Unfortunately, whether or not Gonzalez’s account succeeds in reestablishing the comparability of pleasures, it cannot do the same for goodness. Briefly, Gonzalez argues that completeness (to teleion) provides the criterion by which homonymous pleasures can be compared (144). That is, if one pleasure is more complete than another it may be called “more pleasant” than the other, even if the two are not pleasant in the same sense. Completeness, in turn, is analyzed in terms of the condition of the relevant perceptual faculty and that of its object. An “activity of sensation will be most complete when its subjective and objective conditions are the best possible” (Gonzalez 151). For example, a maximally keen sense of sight viewing the
best possible visible object (whatever that turns out to be) would be the most complete visual pleasure. Thus, we can compare homonymous pleasures based on the differences in the excellence of the faculties involved in pleasant experiences, on the one hand, and the goodness of the objects of those faculties, on the other.

At this point it should be clear why Gonzalez’s solution will not restore comparability to homonymous goods, even if it does restore comparability to homonymous pleasures. First, his analysis of the completeness of pleasure depends on a subject-object structure that is not necessarily present in the case of goodness. If I wanted to claim, for example, that god is better than a human being, Gonzalez’s analysis would require me to find relevant subjective and objective conditions, analogous to the conditions of a perceptual faculty and a perceptual object, and evaluate the character of each. It is not clear what those conditions would be. Goodness, unlike pleasure, is not always constituted by the relation between a subject and an object. As such, it appears that Gonzalez’s procedure for comparing homonymous pleasures relies on a distinctive feature of pleasures which goods need not have.

Second, and more importantly, Gonzalez’s solution presupposes the comparability of homonymous goods in order to make sense of the comparability of homonymous pleasures. Since a pleasurable experience is complete to the extent that its faculties and corresponding objects are good, we must presuppose that we can rank the value of the objects of perception and thought. For example, Gonzalez’s analysis would imply, rightly in my view, that one major reason that contemplation is the most pleasant activity is that one of its possible objects is god, the best thing in the cosmos. Thus, an account of the comparability of goodness in Aristotle is conceptually prior to the comparability of homonymous pleasures. Far from solving the problem
of incommensurable goodness, Gonzalez’s analysis makes it even more pressing: if Aristotle’s position on the comparability of goods is ultimately incoherent, then his position on the comparability of pleasures will also be incoherent (assuming Gonzalez’s interpretation is correct, at least).

Chris Shields, the commentator who has examined the incommensurability problem in the greatest depth, does not provide any more reason to hope that Aristotle’s view can be made coherent. In chapter three, I will examine Shields position in detail. For now, it is enough to note that he finds Aristotle’s arguments for the homonymy of goodness unconvincing and thinks that incommensurability problem is both severe and unresolved. He argues that “Aristotle faces a problem of his own making: a serious commitment to the homonymy of the good threatens genuine incommensurability among those very values Aristotle seems otherwise disposed to bring into ordinal rankings” (109). Shields never quite states, but strongly implies, that the most plausible way out of the incommensurability problem is to reject the homonymy of the good. The homonymy of the good is not strictly required for him to reject a Platonic Form of the Good, and reverting to a non-homonymous conception of goodness would enable him to make his characteristic evaluative comparisons consistently and intelligibly.

Shield’s view is, in a certain respect, a mirror image of Nussbaum’s: whereas Nussbaum thinks Aristotle ought to reject the great chain of being and embrace the incomparability of goods, Shields thinks Aristotle ought to reject the homonymy of the good to preserve their comparability. Similarly, Shields’ solution would also be a major revision of Aristotle’s theory. He acknowledges that Aristotle has a “serious commitment” to the homonymy of the good; insofar as Shields implies that Aristotle ought to reject it, he holds that the Aristotelian theory of
goodness is incoherent as it stands. Hence, both Shields and Nussbaum suggest, in different ways, that Aristotle cannot avoid the incommensurability problem without giving up one of the fundamental principles of his theory of the good. Meanwhile, rather than resolving the difficulty, Gonzalez inadvertently reveals that it threatens to infect Aristotle’s theory of pleasure as well. These are not happy conclusions. I will attempt to develop a new approach to the incommensurability problem that can avoid them.

Recall that the three principles which generate the incomparability problem are 1) the homonymy of the good 2) the incomparability of homonyms and 3) the comparability of goods. Nussbaum suggests that Aristotle should reject 3), while Shields thinks he would be better off rejecting 1). I will develop two alternative interpretations, both of which, I argue, do a better job of preserving the essential features of Aristotle’s theory of the good than Nussbaum and Shields’ readings do. The first interpretation, which I call the “s-comparable solution” (for reasons that will become clear below), restricts the scope of 1) and 3) so that Aristotle is not guilty of inconsistency. The second, which I call the “p-comparable solution,” takes Aristotle to reject 2), the incomparability of homonyms.

To see the basic strategy of the s-comparable solution, recall that Aristotle does not hold that every good is homonymous with every other. Two good human beings would be good in the same sense, for example, so we could compare their goodness without violating the incomparability of homonyms. One way Aristotle’s position could be made consistent, therefore, is if he were to hold that the comparability of goodness extends just as far as its univocity does. For example, if he were to hold “good” is said in two senses, he could hold that every good thing in the first sense is comparable with every other good in that sense, and all good things in the
second sense are also comparable with one another, but no good in the first sense is comparable with any good in the second sense.

Although restricting the comparability of the good so that it is coextensive with its synonymy would involve departing from the principle of unilinear gradation to a certain extent, it is an attractive option insofar as it would allow Aristotle to hold fast to the incomparability of homonyms and allow for a significant amount of comparability among goods. The main issue with the solution is that Aristotle holds that “good” has many more than two senses; indeed, in chapter two I will argue there are indefinitely many ways of being good in his view. And yet, he appears to think he is entitled to make evaluative comparisons which cut across things which would be good in different senses. In order for the s-comparable solution to work, Aristotle would need to posit some single sense in which oak trees, horses, humans, gods, etc. are good. That is, in addition to the type of goodness that is proper to oak trees, etc., Aristotle would need to hold that there is a distinct kind of goodness which every being on the scale of nature possesses to a greater or lesser degree. Aristotle never explicitly claims that there is such a trans-specific sense of “good,” but I will assess the extent to which his theory leaves room for one.

Alternatively, if there is no single, trans-specific sense of “good” for Aristotle, or if he holds that the comparability of goodness extends beyond its univocity on other grounds, he would need to reject or modify the incomparability of homonyms. In order for that move to be at all plausible, he would need to give an account of the conditions under which homonyms can be compared; an account which does not permit us to compare, say, the sharpness of F sharp and a steak knife, but does permit us to compare the goodness of a horse with the goodness of a god. In fact, I claim that he provides just such an account in the *Protrepticus*, which I use as the textual
basis for the p-comparable solution. In my view, the p-comparable solution is superior to the s-comparable solution. However, since some readers may harbor doubts about the authenticity and/or maturity for the *Protrepticus*, I do not rest my entire argument on it. Instead, I develop both solutions side by side. Either strategy, in my view, provides a more appealing response to the incommensurability problem than any that has been offered in the literature thus far.

A brief outline of the main line of argument I will pursue may help readers orient themselves. In chapter one, I look at Aristotle’s theory of homonymous predication in general. I engage with classic and contemporary literature on how that theory should be interpreted and how it relates to his views of signification and definition. I also discuss the various forms of connected homonymy that Aristotle analyzes: analogy, core dependence, and seriality. The first chapter will clarify what it means to think of goodness as homonymous and lay out the different conceptual tools Aristotle has at his disposal to explain the relations among homonymous goods.

In Chapter Two, I examine the homonymy of goodness, specifically. I argue that, for Aristotle, the good is homonymous at three distinct levels: the transcendental, the trans-specific, and the intraspecific. Transcendental homonymy is that which results when “good” is applied to beings that belong to different categories, i.e. different *summa genera*. For example, Aristotle would argue that a time cannot be good in the same sense that a substance can. Trans-specific homonymy occurs when “good” is applied to beings which are members of distinct goodness-fixing kinds. The goodness of a good horse, for example, is not the same as the goodness of a good person, or a good knife. Finally, goodness is intraspecifically homonymous when different things are good for a being of single species in different senses. Aristotle argues, for example, that pleasure is not a human good in the same sense that intelligence is. The main aim of chapter
two is to clarify the shape of the problem Aristotle faces. If his theory is to allow for the comparability of goodness, it must address the obstacle of homonymy in three distinct levels.

In Chapter Three, I turn my attention to the only commentator in the literature who has given sustained attention to the incommensurability problem, Chris Shields. As we saw above, Shields is not optimistic that the problem can be solved; he heavily implies that Aristotle would have been better served if he had abandoned the homonymy of goodness and instead thought of the good as a “second-order” and “multiply-realizable” synonym. I defend Aristotle from some of Shields’ objections, critique the way he frames the incommensurability problem, and try to make room for optimism that it can be solved. Whether my optimism can be vindicated, however, will ultimately depend on finding resources in Aristotle that render the problem tractable, and using those resources to articulate a solution; a task I carry out through the remainder of the dissertation.

In Chapter Four, I take a closer look at Aristotle’s position on homonymy, synonymy and comparability and attempt to demonstrate that there are, in fact, resources for addressing the incommensurability problem in Aristotle. I argue that Aristotle is not as committed to the incomparability of homonyms as he at first seems to be. In particular, I draw attention to a passage from the *Protrepticus* in which Aristotle argues that a certain, circumscribed class of homonyms are comparable. I suggest that Aristotle should be understood as arguing that there are two forms of comparability, “s-comparability” for synonyms, and “p-comparability” for homonyms that fall into an ordered series of priority and posteriority. I anticipate that interpreting the mature works of the Aristotelian corpus on the basis of the *Protrepticus* will be controversial. Therefore, in the final two chapters, I develop two alternative lines of thought, one
which makes use of p-comparability, and another which assumes that s-comparability is the only kind Aristotle recognizes.

In Chapter Five, I develop the two lines of thought with respect to the comparability of transcendentally and intraspecifically homonymous goods. I argue that these two levels pose an especially difficult problem for the s-comparable solution. Ultimately, I argue that if we reject p-comparability, we must bite the bullet and concede that transcendentally and intraspecifically homonymous goods are not commensurable. On the other hand, I argue that both forms of homonymy seem tailor-made for the p-comparable solution. Although some tricky questions remain concerning the interaction between the two levels of homonymy, p-comparability generally offers an elegant way of restoring comparability to homonymous goods across categories and within species.

In Chapter Six, I provide s- and p-comparable solutions at the trans-specific level. If Aristotle does not accept p-comparability, I argue that his best hope for avoiding trans-specific incommensurability is to posit a substantial sense of the term “good.” That is, to hold that a horse and a human, for example, can be univocally good qua substances, even if they are equivocally good as members of their respective, specific kinds. I attempt to reconstruct what substantial goodness would consist in if Aristotle recognized it.

Alternatively, if Aristotle recognizes p-comparability, he could hold that different species vary in their level of goodness in accordance with their place in the cosmic, teleological order. This solution assumes that some kinds of substances in Aristotle’s cosmos are teleologically subordinated to others; an assumption that has been repudiated by certain commentators in recent years who argue for an “immanentist” position on Aristotle’s teleology. I briefly review the
highlights of that debate and provide a new defense of the “interactionist” position that the p-comparable solution requires. If interactionism is the correct reading of Aristotle’s teleology, and if Aristotle accepts p-comparability, then it is open to him to explain the comparability of trans-specifically homonymous goods in terms of their relations of teleological sub- and super-ordination. For example, horses, humans and gods are homonymously good, but gods are better than humans and humans are better than horses. This is because horses are for the sake of humans who are for the sake of gods.

Ultimately, however, I argue that the p-comparable solution to the trans-specific homonymy of goodness is not so different from the s-comparable solution. The teleological ordering of nature (and super-nature) seems to be grounded in the very same features that would constitute substantial goodness if Aristotle recognized such a thing; the teleologically superordinate substances are also those which would be better in the substantial sense. For example, if Aristotle believes in substantial goodness, gods would be substantially better than humans who would be substantially better than horses. Consequently, the two solutions converge to a significant extent in their approach to trans-specific homonymy.

Although the incommensurability problem poses a serious challenge to Aristotle’s theory of value, I contend that he has promising avenues for responding to it. Taken together, the six chapters of this dissertation aim to provide the most comprehensive exploration to date of this important, but seldom recognized problem and to advance a new proposal about how that problem can be solved. Chris Shields argues that, when faced with the incommensurability problem, “Aristotle’s *summum bonum* threatens to fracture into so many scattered shards, each of which glistens under Plato’s sun, but none of which glistens any more or any less than any other”
(Shields Fractured 109). I will attempt to show that, on the contrary, Aristotle has the resources to argue that although the value in the universe is constituted by many different natures, different “shards” as it were, those shards are not scattered about at random, but are ordered together in an intelligible and unified whole.
CHAPTER ONE

ARISTOTLE’S THEORY OF HOMONYMOUS PREDICATION

Homonymy and Synonymy in the Categories

Aristotle defines homonymy and synonymy in chapter one of the *Categories*. He says that things are said to be homonymous when they have a name in common, but the definition of being (*logos tēs ousias*) that corresponds to that name differs (*Cat. 1a1*). This means, I take it, that two things, \( x \) and \( y \), are homonymous with respect to a certain name, \( F \), if and only if \( x \) and \( y \) are both called \( F \), but what it is for \( x \) to be \( F \) differs from what it is for \( y \) to be \( F \). Aristotle gives the example of the name “animal,” which can be applied to both a human and a picture (1a3).\(^1\) Though both are called “animals,” what it is for each thing to be an animal differs, and the account we would need to give to specify what being an animal is for each would differ. Thus, a human and a picture are homonymous with respect to their being animals.

Two things are said to be synonymous, on the other hand, when they share a name and the definition of being that corresponds to that name is the same (*Cat. 1a6*). That is, two things, \( x \) and \( y \), are synonymous with respect to a certain name, \( F \), if and only if they are both called \( F \) and what it is for \( x \) to be \( F \) is the same as what it is for \( y \) to be \( F \). Aristotle’s example is humans and

\(^1\)There are two ways we might understand Aristotle’s example. Many commentators take Aristotle to be talking about a human and a picture of a human, which could both be called “animals” legitimately, but not in the same sense. Alternatively, Ackrill points out that “\( zōon \)” was also used as an idiom for any kind of image or picture (not just those of animals) (71). See Herodotus’ *Histories* 4:88 for a good example of the term being used this way. While either interpretation of Aristotle’s example will serve to illustrate his point, calling a picture of anything at all an animal would seem to be a case of unconnected homonymy while a calling picture of a human an animal would presumably be some kind of connected homonymy. Thus, which interpretation of “\( zōon \)” we favor might have some bearing on whether we ought to go for a moderate or extreme interpretation of the passage as a whole. These competing interpretations are discussed below.
oxen are synonymous with respect to being animals, since the name “animal” applies to both of them and the account of what it is to be an animal is the same for each (1a8-11).

Notice that Aristotle classifies the things which are signified by words as synonymous or homonymous rather than the words themselves. Modern readers who are accustomed to thinking of synonymy and homonymy as features of words may find this perplexing or cumbersome. However, I would argue that analyzing homonymy/synonymy in terms of things-named rather than the names themselves is no mere idiosyncrasy: it is a reasonable approach given Aristotle’s interest in distinguishing different ways a single term can correspond to one or more accounts of being.

If Aristotle had defined homonymy and synonymy as features of words but retained his focus on definitions of being, he would need to give an account according to which a homonym is a word that can be used to signify multiple definitions of being while a synonym is a word that only signifies one definition of being. It is obvious upon reflection that this distinction would not be very useful for Aristotle’s purposes: since nearly every word can be used in more than one way (i.e. can signify more than one definition of being) Aristotle would be hard pressed to find a single example of a synonym in this sense. Furthermore, analyzing homonymy in terms of the things named by a certain term forces us to attend to the way(s) a particular term is used when it is predicated of some specific pair of things. It allows Aristotle to query, not just whether some term can be used to pick out different accounts of being. Rather, Aristotle’s approach queries whether a word is being used to pick out one or multiple accounts of being in a specific set of predications. For example, Aristotle’s analysis helps us see more than the general fact that the term, “animal,” can be used to pick out more than one definition of being. Rather, it shows that
“animal” picks out a single definition when applied to a human and an ox, on the one hand, but two definitions when applied to a human and a picture.

Since the effect of analyzing homonymy and synonymy in terms of things named rather than names is to focus our attention on particular instances in which a word is predicated, it is legitimate for Aristotle to use the *adverbial* form of synonymy and homonymy to describe names (as he often does; e.g. *Cat*. 3a35). That is, he can, without loss of meaning, say that “animal” is *said synonymously* of a human and an ox, rather than saying that a human an ox are synonymous (with respect to their being animals). Both expressions indicate that the word “animal” is being used to pick out a single definition of being when applied to humans and oxen respectively. For this reason, I disagree with Chris Shields’ claim that *Generation and Corruption* 322b29-32 “clearly and indisputably refers to words [onomata] as homonymous” and, thus, gives us reason to doubt that Aristotle consistently applies his *Categories* definition of homonymy, which classifies things rather than words as homonymous (Order 13). In the passage Shields refers to, however, Aristotle only says that many words are *said homonymously*, which is importantly different from saying that many words are homonymous; the former is consistent with the *Categories* account of homonymy while the latter is not. With this in mind, it seems to me that Aristotle adheres fairly consistently to his canonical definition of homonymy throughout the corpus, typically referring to things as homonymous (with respect to some common predicate) or to words as said homonymously.

Before moving on to some of the scholarly controversies about different aspects of homonymy and synonymy in Aristotle, it will be useful to clarify some of the terminology I will be using throughout the dissertation. Firstly, in addition to the Greek-derived “synonymy” and
“homonymy,” I will also use their Latin-derived equivalents, “univocity” and “equivocity.” As I will be using the terms, there is no distinction in meaning between “synonymy” and “univocity” or between “homonymy” and “equivocity”—I only use the different terms for stylistic variation or to match the idioms of the commentators I will be discussing. Accordingly, following Aristotle’s general practice, I will not describe terms as equivocal or univocal, rather, I will describe things as univocal or equivocal with respect to a certain term, or describe terms as predicated univocally or equivocally of two or more things.

I will, however, describe terms as “multivocal,” which I use as an equivalent for Aristotle’s expression “thing said in many ways” (pollachōs legomenon). On one appealingly simple interpretation, multivocity (unlike equivocity or univocity) is exclusively a property of terms (or phrases) rather than the things to which those terms refer, since the things to which terms refer are not “said” at all, let alone said in many ways. If we interpret Aristotle in this way, multivocity is the property a term has when it can be used to signify more than one definition of being, with each definition signified by some $F$ being a different way in which $F$ is said. It would follow from this that non-linguistic things cannot be multivocal, although they can be univocal or equivocal, while words can be multivocal, but they cannot be univocal or equivocal. For example, two animals can be univocal or equivocal (with respect to their animality), but cannot be multivocal, while the word “animal” can be multivocal, but cannot be univocal or equivocal (although it can be said equivocally or univocally of two animals).

However, some commentators argue that Aristotle’s use of “said in many ways” does not conform to this simple picture. Joseph Owens, for example, claims that, like equivocity, multivocity is also (primarily) about non-linguistic things rather than the words that refer to
them. Specifically, he argues that we should interpret “pollachōs legomena” as “things expressed by the same word in ways that vary according to form or definition” (115). On this reading, when Aristotle says “F is said in many ways,” he does not usually mean “the word ‘F’ is said in many ways,” rather he is employing a kind of shorthand for “the things called F are said to be F in many ways.” Owens concedes that Aristotle also refers to words as “said in many ways,” but argues that the multivocity of non-linguistic things is primary and occurs more frequently (114n31). Similarly, Julie Ward argues that “legetai” is ambiguous—sometimes it means “said,” in which case a “pollachōs legomenon” is a word with several senses, other times it means “called”, in which case “pollachōs legomena” are things which are called by a name in several different ways (Homonymy 57). Unlike Owens, Ward does not claim that one of the senses of “legetai” is primary, but she does argue that Aristotle alternates between these two senses in his discussions of “to posachōs,” “the how many ways” something is said.

Ward makes a convincing case that “said in many ways” is at least sometimes used to characterize non-linguistic things. However, when I discuss these issues, I will consistently use “multivocity” to talk about words that are said in many ways and “homonymy”/ “equivocity” to talk about the different beings named by multivocal words. Non-linguistic multivocity, as Owens understands it, is indistinguishable from equivocity. On his reading, in most cases “F is said in many ways” is just another way of saying that various F-things are homonymous. Since it will be more useful to have a term to describe the linguistic side of homonymous predication (a single word used in multiple ways), rather than yet another term to describe the non-linguistic side (multiple natures named by a single word), I will treat multivocity as a property of terms rather than a property of their referents.
Moderate and Extreme Readings of Homonymy

One interpretive question that arises about Aristotelian homonymy concerns how much of a difference in the definitions of being is required before a set of predications counts as homonymous. Terence Irwin helpfully distinguishes a moderate position and an extreme position we might take on this issue (Homonymy 524). On a moderate reading, any difference at all in the definition of being is (necessary and) sufficient for homonymy. According to this interpretation, Aristotle intends for synonymy and homonymy to constitute an exhaustive classification of the types of predication: for any two things of which a single term is predicated, that term must either be predicated of them synonymously or homonymously. However, the moderate view does leave room for Aristotle to acknowledge different kinds of homonymy. More specifically, he can allow cases of unconnected homonymy in which the definitions of being signified by the term have nothing in common (e.g. “bat” in “baseball bat” and “vampire bat”) as well as a wide range of connected homonyms where the definitions have overlapping features in common. I take it that core dependence, analogy, and Wittgensteinian family resemblance would all count as species of connected homonymy on a moderate reading of Aristotle’s account.²

The extreme view, on the other hand, takes Aristotle to hold that homonyms can have nothing but the name in common, and thus their corresponding definitions cannot share any features at all. According to this reading, all homonyms would be unconnected homonyms. As a

²Shields denies that Aristotle “regards either homonymy or analogy as species of one another” (10n3). In my view, this is technically correct, but misleading. If we accept the moderate interpretation of homonymy (as Shields does), then it follows that when a single predicate names two analogous but non-identical natures, we have a case of homonymous predication. See section V for my argument for this claim. The classic account of family resemblance comes from Philosophical Investigations § 65-70. There Wittgenstein describes the phenomenon in which a single term can be applied to a class of things with overlapping features, but no single feature is common to every member of the class. By listing it here, I do not mean to imply that Aristotle makes use of a concept like family resemblance, but only that there is logical space for it in his analysis of homonymy.
result, the classification between homonymy and synonymy cannot be considered exhaustive—the various types of non-synonymous predication with overlapping definitions are to be understood as distinct genera of predication, rather than species of homonymy.

I implicitly presuppose that the moderate reading is correct when I speak of the “homonymy of the good”: since Aristotle argues that there is some kind of connection among the definitions signified by the predicate “good,” the various things called “good” would not count as homonyms at all on the extreme reading (EN 1096b26-30). In my view, this presupposition is supported (on balance) by the evidence: I would argue that Nicomachean Ethics V, 1 shows especially clearly that Aristotle recognizes a range of connected homonyms. Further, most of the prominent commentators, including Irwin (Homonymy 529), Shields (Order 40), and Ward (Homonymy 17) agree that the moderate view is correct. It must be acknowledged, however, that there is some evidence in favor of the extreme view: Aristotle does say that homonymous things have “only a name in common” (Cat. 1a1), and in at least one important passage, when Aristotle wants to indicate that the definitions of non-synonymous things have significant connections with one another he says that the term is “said in many ways but… not homonymously” (Met. 1003a34, my translation).³

Fortunately, the truth of the moderate view will not be crucial to any of my arguments because the dispute between the extreme and moderate views is largely a verbal one. Both the moderate and the extreme reading agree about the basic shape of the spectrum on which synonymy and homonymy fall; they simply disagree about which parts of that spectrum merit the

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³In order to make this passage from the Metaphysics consistent with the moderate interpretation, we must assume that Aristotle really only means to rule out unconnected homonymy. Assuming the moderate reading is correct, it seems to me that Aristotle is either being inconsistent or compressed and misleading in this passage.
name “homonymy.” More precisely, both views agree that there are three broad classes of predication: 1) a class in which a shared name signifies a single definition of being (synonymy), 2) a class in which a shared name signifies at least two completely different definitions of being, and 3) a class between 1 and 2 in which a shared name signifies at least two distinct, but connected definitions of being. The moderate view holds that both 2) and 3) both qualify as homonymy, while the extreme view holds that only 2) is homonymy and that 3) either constitutes a different genus or is constituted by several different genera. As I have already indicated, I will use the terminology of the moderate view throughout this dissertation. I will assume, for example, that many different good things are (connected) homonyms with respect to their goodness. However, I intend for it to be possible to make everything I argue for consistent with the extreme view, given some minor terminological changes.4

Homonymy and Word Meanings

Another interpretive question which is a matter of scholarly debate concerns the extent to which homonymy and synonymy have to do with the sense or meaning of terms. An intuitive way of cashing out Aristotle’s examples of synonymous and homonymous predication is to say that “animal” is said of a human and an ox in the same sense of the term while it only applies to a human and a picture in different senses of the term. Some commentators, notably G.E.L. Owen, take this to be an essentially accurate way of cashing out Aristotelian homonymy. We might call

4For example, some readers may be more familiar with terminology derived from medieval philosophy, which is arguably based on a version of the extreme reading of the Categories. For instance, Thomas Aquinas (e.g. In Met. BK IV, 1, n. 535) and Henry of Ghent (Summa art. 21 q.2) reserve “equivocity” for unconnected homonymy and refer to connected homonymy as “analogy.” Using this terminology, the central problem I am exploring is whether Aristotle can consistently hold that “good” is predicated of things that have different natures analogically, but that those same things can be unqualifiedly better and worse than one another in a way that would require “good” to be predicated of them univocally. While there is nothing objectionable in this idiom per se, readers should keep in mind that Aristotle does not use the term “analogy” to refer to connected homonymy in general, but only to a specific class of connected homonymy.
this a “semantic interpretation” of homonymy: some terms have multiple senses and when a single predicate is applied to two subjects in two senses, that term is predicated homonymously of them.

Irwin, however, objects that this is very misleading way of describing Aristotelian homonymy since, in his view, Aristotle is not concerned with the meaning of terms at all. Advancing what we might call a “realist interpretation” of homonymy, Irwin points out that the definitions of being that correspond to terms are not dictionary definitions that specify the meaning of the word to which they correspond; rather, they are real definitions that specify the essence of the thing to which the word refers (Irwin Signification 246). A word is used homonymously, not when it is said in two senses, but when it picks out different natures or properties, which is compatible with the word’s being said in a single sense. One particularly relevant example he gives is that “a good knife is sharp, a good argument is cogent; but surely we need not recognize two senses of ‘good’ here” (Irwin Homonymy 539). Aristotle would certainly say that good arguments and good knives are homonymous with respect to their goodness, but he would not therefore need to say that “good” predicated of them in different senses according to Irwin. Aristotle’s aim in investigating homonymous uses of terms is to discern the different ways in which a word maps on to reality, not to discern how many entries a word should have in a dictionary or translation manual.

Irwin’s critique of the semantic interpretation has considerable force—it is hard to deny that definitions of being are much more metaphysically robust than most contemporary philosophers of language take word meanings to be. However, recently some commentators have attempted to reconcile elements of the semantic interpretation with Irwin’s realist critique. More
specifically, they have attempted to show how Aristotle can be interpreted in such way that
differences in the natures signified by a term can amount to a difference in the term’s sense.
Accordingly, on these interpretations, Aristotle’s theories of signification and homonymy would
simultaneously be about linguistic meaning and about the way language relates to reality. For
instance, Deborah Modrak has argued that Irwin’s critique tacitly assumes a “use conception” of
meaning. If we instead think of meaning as an intentional property, that is, a property of a mental
state’s directedness toward features of world in a way that specifies a determinate extension of a
term, then we can say that differences in natures signified by a term just are differences in the
term’s sense (Modrak 24-25). Chris Shields (whose engagement with Irwin will be discussed in
more detail below) reaches a similar conclusion by a different route—he argues that if we relax
the distinction between concepts and properties, we can say that (at least in certain important
cases) the essence a term signifies is identical with the term’s meaning (98).

Throughout the dissertation, I will speak of homonymy and multivocity in terms of
differences in sense, but in doing so I do not intend to signal that am siding with semantic
interpreters like Owen rather than realist interpreters like Irwin. Indeed, I find Irwin’s critique of
Owen compelling; in my view, the relevant question is whether Aristotle can be understood as
having a theory of word meaning in spite of the fact that homonymy is in the first instance about
the differing natures of things with the same name. However, for the sake of my current project I
leave this question open. Whether or not Aristotle has a theory of word meaning, he does speak
of words as being “said in many ways.” I use “sense” as a helpful shorthand to indicate a
particular way in which a word is said. I take it that, at least in most cases, the different ways in
which a term is said correspond to the different definitions of being that are signified by that
term. So, with apologies to Irwin, I will use “sense” in such a way that good knives and good arguments will not be good in the same sense (since what it is for a knife to be good is different from what it is for an argument to be good). However, I leave as an open question whether the different ways in which a word is said (and the different definitions of being to which a word corresponds) actually amount to differences in sense, as sense is understood by modern philosophers of language.

Forms of Connected Homonymy: Analogy

If the moderate reading is correct, then Aristotle’s account of homonymy in the *Organon* leaves room for, but does not analyze various forms of predication in which a single term names distinct but related natures. And if this is true, then an important way of refining and filling out the theory would be to offer an account of the various species of connected homonymy. While Aristotle never attempts to give an exhaustive list of the different kinds of connected homonymy, he does provide analyses of several particularly important kinds, namely, analogy, *pros hen* or “core dependent” predication, and seriality. These types are especially important for understanding Aristotle’s views on the equivocity of goodness, since Aristotle proposes the first two as possible candidates for the relation between the different natures signified by the predicate “good” (*EN* 1096b26-30). He does not explicitly mention seriality in the same passage, but there is some evidence that might think that some of the senses of good stand in serial relations to one another. Accordingly, let us examine these three types of connected homonymy in turn.

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5Terms that signify but do not name to any real being (like Aristotle’s example, “goatstag”) may be an exception to this. See below for more discussion of the goatstag case.
Some readers might resist the very idea of classifying analogy as a type of homonymy. The medieval terminology mentioned in note four above might be one source of this resistance. Thomists (among others) often use “analogy” to designate a tertium quid that is an intermediate category between univocity and equivocity, rather than a type of equivocity. As I indicated earlier, this difference is, for the most part, merely a terminological rather than substantive one and it need not detain us. However, there is a second objection that might be more troublesome. Chris Shields denies that that Aristotle “regards either homonymy or analogy as species of one another” (Order 10n3). Shields does not elaborate on what he means by this claim, but I can think of two ways we might interpret it. On the one hand, he might simply mean that there are analogies among things are not signified by a common predicate. And since sharing a name is a necessary condition for being homonymous, it follows that analogy is not a species of homonymy. Interpreted in this way, Shields claim is both true and unobjectionable, as we will see below.

On the other hand, Shields might be making the stronger claim that analogous predication is not a species of homonymy. That is, he might be arguing that even if $F$ is said analogously of $A$ and $B$, it might nevertheless be said non-homonymously of them. If we assume that the moderate interpretation of homonymy is correct, denying that analogous predication is a kind of homonymy would entail that analogous synonymy is possible. In this section, I will try to show that this second interpretation of Shields’ claim cannot be right; even if analogous synonymy were a logically coherent notion (which is doubtful) it would be of no interest to Aristotle. To see why this is so, let us take a closer look at Aristotle’s conception of analogy.
As Joseph Owens points out, Aristotle develops his conception of analogy by borrowing the notion from mathematics and then extending it so that it may apply to non-quantitative features of reality as well (123). In Greek mathematics, an analogy consist in two equal ratios between two numbers, e.g. 2:4 :: 3:6. Aristotle defines analogy at a more general level: “By the analogous, I mean whenever the second is related to the first as the fourth is to the third” (Po. 1457b16-18).

Aristotle’s expanded definition of analogy retains two important formal features of mathematical analogies. First, there must be at least four relata in order for an analogous relation to obtain. The claim “A is analogous to B” implies that there is some C and some D completing the analogy. Second, the relation between the first and second relata must be identical to that between the third and fourth. In mathematical analogies, this amounts to saying that one of the ratios is reducible to the other, or that they are both reducible to some third ratio. However, on Aristotle’s definition, an analogy can be constructed, not just from numbers, but from any four beings at all, including beings that fall into different categories from one another (Met. 1093b18-21). Given this diversity of possible relata, the two identical relations between the two pairs of terms in a non-mathematical analogy will typically not be reducible to two equivalent ratios. Aristotle never attempts to specify what exactly replaces equal ratios in non-quantitative

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6 An important qualification to this requirement is that, at least in some cases, it is possible to form an analogy using repeating terms. Aristotle explicitly allows that, in “continuous proportions,” the inner terms of an analogy may repeat, as in 2:4 :: 4:8 (EN 1131b1). He does not specify whether this is the only case in which terms may be repeated; it would seem that he ought at least to allow that the outer terms may repeat as well, as in 2:1 :: 4:2.
analogies, or delimit what kinds of relation between non-quantitative things are required for a genuine analogy to obtain—perhaps he thinks any pair of identical relations will do.\(^7\)

Aalogies, then, in Aristotle’s general sense, are constituted by relations among existing things. The class of analogy thus includes relations among words or concepts, but it is by no means limited to such relations. On the contrary, most of the examples of analogies are relations among objective features of reality, rather than conceptual or linguistic relations. For example, the straight is to length as the level is to surface (\textit{Met.} 1093b20), sight is to the eye as \textit{noûs} is to the soul (\textit{Top.} 108a11), and bronze is to a statue as formless matter is to hylomorphic composites (\textit{Phys.} 191a8-10). I take Aristotle to be claiming that these things stand in analogous relations to one another prior to and independently of our thinking or speaking about them.

Since analogy is a relation among (typically non-linguistic) things, it is not, in the first instance, a kind of predication. For this reason at least, Shields is right to deny that Aristotle thinks of “either homonymy or analogy as species of one another” (Order 10n3). However, even if it is not itself a kind of predication, analogy gives rise to a kind of predication which arguably is a kind of connected homonymy. Specifically, analogous predication occurs when two or more natures which stand in analogous relations to one another are signified by a single name. To understand how this form of predication works, it will be instructive to examine some of Aristotle’s examples of it.

One prominent use of analogous predication that Aristotle discusses is as a way of constructing metaphors in literary contexts. In the \textit{Poetics}, he gives the example that a wine cup

\(^7\)Reading him this way has the advantage of accommodating the diversity of Aristotle’s examples of analogy, but also has the disadvantage of allowing that trivial relations can constitute analogies. For example, Dinosaurs are to John F. Kennedy as Socrates is to Aristotle insofar as dinosaurs existed before Kennedy and Socrates existed before Aristotle, and so the relation of \textit{existing-before} obtains in both.
is to Dionysus as a shield is to Ares (Po. 1457b20). Because the cup and the shield stand in an analogous relation to one another, we may analogously apply the name of one to the other, for example, using the expression “the shield of Dionysus” to refer to his cup. Obviously, Ares’ shield and Dionysus’ shield are not univocal with respect to being shields. However, it is not mere equivocation to call the cup a shield, on Aristotle’s view, presumably because the cup is an implement that is emblematic of Dionysus in the same way that the shield is an implement that is emblematic of Ares.

Analogous predication may also be employed in more scientific contexts according to Aristotle. For example, in the opening chapter of Generation of Animals, Aristotle explains that plants (and some animals) do not have a distinction of sexes. Some of these plants and animals, however, have analogues of sexual difference such that we may analogously attribute sexes to them. For instance, Aristotle claims that there are certain species of plants, such as fig trees (sukai), in which some members of the species bear fruit while others bear no fruit themselves but contribute to the ripening (to pettein) of the fruit on the plants that do (GA 715b16-24). So, when we apply the predicate, “male,” for example, to a cat on the one hand and a fig tree on the other, we are applying the predicate analogously. Although what it is for a fig tree to be male is not the same as what it is for a cat to be male, the male fig tree stands in the same relation to fig tree reproduction as the male cat stands to cat reproduction, namely, it contributes to the generation of offspring in an organism other than itself.8

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8Presumably male fig trees only play an ancillary role in fig tree reproduction, rather than being a necessary precondition for it; otherwise they would qualify as being univocal with respect to their maleness, since the definition of the male in animals is “that which is able to generate in another” (GA 716a14-15).
In light of these examples we are in a better position to formulate a more precise definition of analogous predication and to assess whether it is a species of connected homonymy. Let $F$ stand for a predicate that is common to two subjects, $x$ and $y$. Let $A$ stand for the nature signified by $F$ when it is predicated of $x$ (i.e. what it is for $x$ to be $F$), and let $C$ stand for the nature signified by $F$ when it is predicated of $y$ (i.e. what it is for $y$ to be $F$). I propose that analogous predication as Aristotle understands it is to be defined as follows: Predicate $F$ is said analogously of two subjects, $x$ and $y$, if and only if $A$ stands in the same relation to some $B$ as $C$ stands to some $D$.

This analysis provides us with a strong *prima facie* case that analogous predication is a species of connected homonymy. Connected homonymy occurs when two distinct but related natures are signified by the same predicate, and analogy would seem to be a prime candidate for securing both the necessary distinction and relation between the signified natures. When $F$ is said of $x$ it signifies nature $A$, and when it is said of $y$ it signifies nature $C$. Assuming $A$ and $C$ are not identical to one another, this entails that $F$ is not said univocally of $x$ and $y$. However, since $A$ and $C$ stand in identical relations to $B$ and $D$ respectively ($A:B :: C:D$), the definitions and natures signified by $F$ in the two predications will have a crucial feature in common that prevents $x$ and $y$ from being accidentally homonymous with respect to $F$.

If Shields wanted to maintain that analogous predication is *not* a species of homonymy, he might object that Aristotle’s account of analogous predication (as I have construed it) does not, in fact, rule out the possibility that natures $A$ and $C$ are identical to one another. If $A$ and $C$ can be identical, then it is possible for a predicate to be said synonymously and analogously of
two subjects at the same time. It follows that analogous predication is not a species of homonymy at all, but rather cuts across the distinction between synonymy and homonymy.

This objection can only go through if it is possible for a nature to be analogous to itself. This seems absurd on the face of it, but is it possible on Aristotle’s account? Perhaps. Consider the following example: Cat:Dog :: Cat:Horse. Cat in the A space has the same relation to Dog as Cat in the C space has to Horse, namely, the relation of being in the same genus as, since cats are in the same genus as both dogs and horses, namely animal. It would seem, then, that “cat” can be predicated univocally of two subjects even while fulfilling the requirements for analogy I set out above. If the predicate “cat” is applied to two cats, it signifies the same nature in both cases and is thus said univocally. However, it would seem that “cat” is also applied analogously to those two cats, since the nature, Cat stands in the same relation to both Dog and Horse and is therefore analogous to itself.

Is this a genuine counterexample that shows that analogous predication is not a species of homonymy? I suspect that Aristotle would reject that Cat:Dog :: Cat:Horse constitutes a genuine analogy, and thus would reject that “cat” is ever said analogously of two feline animals. However, it is not clear that his analysis rules out the analogy in question. As we saw in note six above, Aristotle allows that the terms of an analogy may repeat (EN 1131b1). In the context, it is clear that he has in mind analogies where the inner terms (B and C) repeat (e.g. Cat:Animal :: Animal:Living Substance), rather than analogies where A and C (or B and D) are identical. However, he does not set down any restrictions specifying when it is permissible to repeat a term in constructing an analogy. In the absence of any such restrictions, it seems that Aristotle inadvertently leaves open the possibility of analogies that generate analogous synonymy. Even
worse, without any restrictions on term repetition, his definition permits utterly trivial
“analogies” in which the same term is repeated four times (e.g. Cat:Cat :: Cat:Cat).

As such, it seems likely that Aristotle would want to amend his account of analogy in
such a way that the two inner terms (e.g. Cat:Animal :: Animal:Living Substance) or the two
outer terms may repeat (e.g. Cat:Animal :: Siamese:Cat), but no others may. This would rule out
the possibility of something standing in an analogous relation to itself and would consequently
rule out the possibility of things being at once synonymous and analogous with respect to a
certain predicate. Thus, if we accept this amendment, it follows that Aristotelian analogous
predication is a species of homonymy. Even if we resist amending Aristotle’s account in this
way, however, it is clear that Aristotle is interested in analogous predication only insofar as it is a
kind of connected homonymy. In the contexts where Aristotle is led to employ analogous
predication, he sees it as an important way in which distinct properties signified by a multivocal
term can have significant metaphysical connections to one another. Analogous synonymy, even
if it existed, would not be of any theoretical interest to Aristotle—if exactly the same property is
signified by two uses of $F$, the fact that the property signified by $F$ stands in the same relation to
two other properties is not relevant to an inquiry about $Fs$ in the same way it would be if $F$
signified multiple properties. For this reason, even given an unaltered version of Aristotle’s
account, the sort of analogy that is relevant to the inquiry into the nature of goodness will be a
kind of connected homonymy.

**Forms of Connected Homonymy: Core Dependence**

Another sort of connected homonymy Aristotle analyzes is “pros hen” or (as some
commentators refer to it) “core dependent” homonymy (Shields Order 103; Ward Homonymy
87). Although Aristotle sometimes contrasts things that are “pros hen legetai” (literally “said in relation to one”) with homonyms (e.g. Met. 1003a34), pros hen predication is a type of homonymy insofar as it involves a single predicate that corresponds to more than one definition or nature. What is distinctive about pros hen homonymy, however, is that when things are pros hen homonymous with respect to a certain term, the various natures signified by that term exhibit a kind of systematic ordering toward a core. More specifically, the different natures named by the multivocal predicate stand in a relation of asymmetric dependence to some single nature.

Aristotle famously argues that being is homonymous in a core dependent way, but he illustrates how core dependence is supposed to work with the less contentious examples of the healthy and the medical (Met. 1003a35-1003b5). Everything called “healthy,” he claims, is so called because of its relation to health. Some things are healthy because they preserve health, others because they produce it, are indicators of it, or are receptive of it (Met. 1003a35-1003b1). Aristotle does not give any examples of these different uses of “healthy” but they are easily supplied. Healthy diets or exercise regimens might be called “healthy” because they preserve or produce health. Healthy appetites or complexions might be healthy in that they indicate health. As Shields points out, “receptive” (dektikon) is a term Aristotle frequently uses to describe some matter’s ability to take on a form (Order 114). Accordingly, it would seem that parts of the body or the body as a whole would be an example of something that is receptive of health, since they are the material substratum in which the form, health, is realized.

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9Shields argues that “healthy appetite” will not work as a core-dependent use of “healthy,” evidently because he thinks it means nothing more than “large appetite” (which can, in many cases, be detrimental to health) (Order 119). But when the appetite of a convalescing patient is described as “healthy,” this is typically to indicate that it is a sign of the patient’s improving health, and would thus be a paradigm case of this sense of “healthy.”
Similarly, everything called “medical” is so called because of its relation to the art of medicine. Some things are called medical because they possess the medical art, others because they are naturally suited (euphues) to it, and others still because they are a function of it (Met. 1003b2-4). Aristotle does not say, but we might add, that at that at least one thing is called “medical” because it simply is medicine, namely the medical art (cf. Met XI, 3 1061a1). Here we have a case where one of the senses of a term directly names the core nature around which the other senses are organized. We might, therefore call the way “medical” is used in “medical art” the core sense of “medical,” since the account of what it is for the other things to be medical must make reference to what it is for an art to be medical, i.e. they must make reference to medicine. For example a person might have a medical mind either in the sense that she possesses the knowledge and skills that constitute the medical art, or in the sense that she has a natural aptitude for acquiring that knowledge and those skills. Likewise, an operation or a course of treatment could serve an example of something called “medical” because it is a function of the medical art.

In both the healthy and the medical, the distinct definitions of being of the things which are homonymously $F$ converge on a core nature, $N$, such that each account of what it is to be $F$ must make reference to $N$. The relation between the core and the periphery is also asymmetric in that we can give an account of what it is to be $N$ without referring to the account of what it is to be $F$. The single exception, of course, is when $F$ has a core sense and thus, what it is to be $F$ (in one sense of $F$), is simply to be $N$. In this case, the definitions of $F$ and $N$ will be identical. For example, there will be no single account of what it is to be healthy, but each different account of being healthy will make reference to health. However, we will not need to give an account of
what it is for a complexion, for example, to be healthy in giving an account what health is. Likewise, there will be no single account of being medical, but all the different accounts will make reference to the art of medicine. And again, we do not need to give a definition of “medical” in “medical mind” in order to define “medicine,” the art. The definition of “medical” in “medical art” however, will be identical with the definition of “medicine,” since what it is for an art to be medical is simply for it to be medicine.

Some commentators also take Aristotle’s theory of pros hen predication to imply that all core dependent multivocals must have a core sense; that one use of the multivocal predicate must be primary while the others are secondary, such that the account of what it is to be $F$ in any secondary sense must make reference to what it is to be $F$ in the primary sense. Shields, for example, argues that “if we provide accounts of ‘healthy’ in ‘healthy practice,’ ‘healthy complexion,’ ‘healthy glow,’… [etc.] we will need to relate them all to some one principle. There must, therefore, be a base sense or base case of being healthy which is in somehow prior to all of these derivations” (Order 105-106).

It seems to me that Shields’ inference here is fallacious. Aristotle is clear that the “one principle” to which all healthy things are related is health itself. Aristotle does not claim (and does not need to claim) that health is the base sense of the predicate “healthy.” The fact that the senses of the term “healthy” are organized around health is already sufficient to show that “healthy” is pros hen. Aristotle gives no indication that there is an additional necessary condition that the term “healthy” must signify health in one of its senses. Indeed, in English at least, it is
doubtful that “x is healthy” ever means “x is health.”

Shields suggests that the sense “healthy” has in “healthy person” might be the core sense of the term, but this will not do (Order 106). A healthy person is healthy because he possesses health, not because he is health. The latter is what would be required if “healthy” in “healthy person” were the single principle organizing the other senses of the word.

Shields’ characterization of pros hen homonymy is, no doubt, influenced by Aristotle’s most prominent example of it, namely, being. “Being,” unlike “healthy,” conforms to the primary sense/secondary sense model of core dependence that Shields develops. The core principle around which the senses of “being” (to on) are organized is substance (ousia). And since some things are said to be because they are substances, substance is one of the natures that is signified by the term “being” (Met. 1003b7). In the case of being, therefore, the single nature around which the senses of a predicate are organized is a nature that is signified by that same predicate in one of its senses. However, as the example of the healthy shows, this condition will not hold for all pros hen multivocals. In some cases, the single nature that organizes the senses of a term will not itself be signified by that same term (as health itself is never directly signified by the term “healthy”). In these cases, although the senses of a word will all be organized around a core, that core will not itself be a sense of the word. Consequently, the fact that a term lacks a primary sense does not entail that the things named by these terms fail to exhibit core

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10 Even if we attempted to construct a strange and artificial expression like “health is healthy” to serve as the needed primary sense, it is not clear that this expression would be equivalent to the tautologous “health is health.” Perhaps a synthetic property identification like, “Metabolic state x is healthy” would be a more promising candidate, but even this case is dubious. Calling a metabolic state “healthy” is a very misleading way of saying that it just is health. To draw on a famous example from 20th century philosophy of language, this would be analogous to saying that “H2O is watery” to mean “being water is identical to being H2O.” Admittedly, Shields’ assumption that core dependence always involves a primary sense is arguably more plausible in Greek. This will be discussed below.
dependence—there need not be a core sense of \( F \), so long as there is a core nature around which the various senses of \( F \) are organized.

Shields’ assumption that pros hen predication always involves core and peripheral senses of terms is reflected in his formal definition of core dependence: “\( a \) and \( b \) are homonymously \( F \) in a core dependent way iff: (i) \( a \) is \( F \); (ii) \( b \) is \( F \); and either (iii a) the account of \( F \) in ‘\( b \) is \( F \)’ necessarily makes reference to the account of \( F \) in ‘\( a \) is \( F \)’ in an asymmetrical way, or (iii b) there is some \( c \) such that the accounts of \( F \)-ness in ‘\( a \) is \( F \)’ and ‘\( b \) is \( F \)’ necessarily make reference to the account of \( F \)-ness in ‘\( c \) is \( F \)’ in an asymmetrical way” (Order 104).\(^{11}\) If we apply this formulation to Aristotle’s example of the healthy we get something like this: a diet and a complexion are homonymously healthy in a core dependent way because the account of “healthy” in “healthy complexion” and “healthy diet” both necessarily make reference to the account of “healthy” in “healthy person” in an asymmetrical way. While it may be true that the account of a diet’s healthiness will make reference to the healthiness of a healthy person, this is not a claim that Aristotle ever makes. Rather, Aristotle would claim that the account of a diet’s healthiness must make reference to health.

At this point, I should admit that Shields has a strong rejoinder to my objections open to him: in classical Greek, it is natural to form abstract nouns by using the neuter form of the corresponding adjective. So, to kalon, for example, may be translated as “the beautiful” or simply as “beauty.” Shields could argue that because of this feature of Greek, the abstract noun usage of an adjective may supply the core sense for any multivocal adjective whose various

\(^{11}\)This is Shields’ first and least detailed formulation of the definition of core dependence. He offers four others that build on it (the last of which will be considered below), but this formulation is particularly important since it lays the groundwork for the other four and establishes that core dependence must be understood in terms of primary and secondary senses.
senses are ordered toward a core nature. So for example, although “x is healthy” is never equivalent to “x is health,” it is more intelligible to claim that “x is healthiness [to hugienon]” can be equivalent to “x is health [hugieia].” This amounts to saying that although “healthy” does not signify the core nature when it functions as an adjective, it can signify that nature when it functions as an abstract noun. Thus, we may retain the primary sense/secondary sense model of core dependence; “healthy” is not a counterexample to it after all, and other apparent counterexamples could be handled in the same way.

I would raise two points in response to the rejoinder I have just sketched: first, the appeal to the abstract noun function of neuter adjectives may serve to ensure that all pros hen multivocals will have primary and secondary senses. But this appeal can only do so at the cost of making pros hen analysis largely dependent on an idiosyncratic feature of the Greek language. Consider, for example, the fact that the English adjective “healthy” cannot directly signify health in the way the Greek equivalent in its abstract noun usage can. As a consequence, “healthy” will turn out to be a core dependent multivocal in Greek but not in English. This is an odd consequence because Aristotle’s goal in developing core dependent analysis is to get at the ontological structure that underlies the different uses of a multivocal term; the structure whereby all healthy things derive their healthiness from their relations to health, for example. That structure is just as discernable in English as it is in Greek, and so it seems out of place to analyze core dependence in such a way that “healthy” in English will not qualify as core dependent. Admittedly, I doubt Aristotle was at all concerned with developing an analytical tool that functions in languages other than Greek. Nevertheless, I take it that Shields’ analysis of core dependence serves to make it less universally applicable than it otherwise would be.
Secondly, even if it is true that all core dependent multivocals (in Greek) have a primary sense/secondary sense configuration, it does not follow that this configuration is the defining condition of core dependence that Shields takes it to be. When Aristotle gives his general characterizations of pros hen multivocity he simply does not talk about it in terms of primary and secondary senses. On the contrary, he says that the terms are said in many ways but “in relation to one thing and some single nature,” (pros hen kai mian tina phusin) or “in relation to one principle” (pros mian archēn) (Met. 1003a34). Again, a few lines later, they are described simply as “things said in relation to one nature” (pros mian legomenōn phusin) (Met. 1003b14, my translation). I suggest we take Aristotle at his word: the defining character of core dependent terms is not that they have one primary sense and that the other senses are posterior to it. It is rather that all the senses of the term are organized around one nature. It might also be the case that one of the senses will also name the nature, and thus be the primary sense. But even so, the primary sense/secondary sense structure will be a derivative feature of core dependence and need not be built into our precisely formulated definition specifying what core dependence is.

Consequently, Shields’ definition needs to be revised if it is to be more faithful to Aristotle’s text. More specifically, it needs to reflect the fact that the single principle to which core dependent homonyms refer is, first and foremost, a core nature. There may also be a core sense of a predicate, namely, those cases in which one of the ways the predicate is used is to name the core nature. I propose the following revision: \(a\) and \(b\) are homonymously \(F\) in a core dependent way iff: (i) \(a\) is \(F\); (ii) \(b\) is \(F\); and either (iii a) there is some nature, \(N\), such that the accounts of \(F\)-ness in “\(a\) is \(F\)” and “\(b\) is \(F\)” necessarily make reference to \(N\) in an asymmetrical way, or (iii b) the account of \(F\)-ness in “\(a\) is \(F\)” is the same as the account of \(N\), and the account
of $F$-ness in \( b \text{ is } F \) must make reference to the account of $F$-ness in \( a \text{ is } F \) in an asymmetrical way.

In my view, this definition is more adequate because it can accommodate both core dependent homonyms that have core senses as well as those that lack them. Healthy complexions and healthy diets, for example, are core dependent because the accounts of the healthiness of each must make reference to health (not because there is some $c$ such that they must make reference to the account of healthiness in \( c \text{ is healthy} \)), and thus they fulfill condition (iii a). On the other hand, a medical mind and the medical art are core dependently homonymous because the account of what it is for the medical art to be medical is the same as the account of what being medicine is, and because the account of a medical mind’s medical-ness must make reference to the art of medicine, thus fulfilling (iii b).

However, there is reason to think that this formulation is too abstract to capture the nature of \textit{pros hen} homonymy adequately. Shields argues that an account of core dependence needs to specify more precisely the types of relations that must obtain between the core and the peripheral senses of a term if two homonyms are to count as \textit{pros hen}. An account that fails to do this leaves itself open to what he calls “the problem of profligacy,” that is, the problem of paradigmatically unconnected homonyms meeting the conditions for core dependence (Shields Order 107). Since we can construct a “dummy relation” between any two uses of a word, the worry is that we can make an all-too plausible case that nearly every use of a term has some kind of (asymmetric) definitional overlap with some other use of that term. For example, we might say that a healthy salary is “the sort of salary which provides the material conditions for pursuing a healthy life” (\textit{ibid.}) Intuitively, this use of “healthy” does not appear to have a close enough
relation to the core nature, health, to count as a core dependent use, but it is not obvious that it can be ruled out on the definition of core dependence I have offered.

What Aristotle needs, then, is some way of narrowing the criteria homonyms must meet if they are to count as pros hen; some way of screening out the excessively remote relations which, if they were sufficient to constitute core dependence, would make pros hen predication too broad and permissive a category to be a useful analytical tool. Aristotle never explicitly specifies what kind of relations must hold between core and periphery, but, following the scholastic commentator Cajetan, Shields argues that the needed specification is implicit in Aristotle’s text. He suggests that Aristotle thinks the secondary instances of a core dependent must stand in one of the four causal relations to the primary instance. Shields calls this thesis the “four causal core primacy” and provides a precise articulation of it as follows: “F CCP: Necessarily, if (i) a is F and b is F, (ii) F-ness is associatively [i.e. core-dependently] homonymous in these applications, and (iii) a is a core instance of F-ness, then b’s being F stands in one of the four causal relations to b’s being F” (Order 111). Shields argues that FCCP has the considerable virtues of both “develop[ing] naturally” out of Aristotle’s examples of core dependence and of winnowing out the unwanted “junk relations,” thus solving the problem of profligacy (Order 111). Many of Aristotle’s examples obviously involve causal relations: things which are healthy in the sense of being productive of health are healthy because they are efficient causes of health. Likewise, since Aristotle does not think that something must be a sufficient condition for the production of an effect in order to be an efficient cause that which preserves health also counts as an efficient cause of it (Order 113). The healthy body is the material cause of health in that it is the matter which receives the form,
health, and is thus “receptive of health” (Order 114). As for final causes, Shields suggests that a medical instrument is medical because its function is medical (Order 112). This means, I take it, it is directed toward an end that is set by medicine, and is thus ultimately directed toward the ends of medicine itself.

Formal causation is a much more difficult case for FCCP. This is because if \( a \) is \( F \), \( b \) is \( F \), and \( a \)’s \( F \)-ness is the formal cause of \( b \)’s \( F \)-ness, then it would seem that \( a \) and \( b \) are synonymously \( F \), since they share a single form or nature corresponding to the predicate, \( F \). And since non-synonymy is obviously a prerequisite for \emph{pros hen} homonymy, it would seem that a formal causation relation between two uses of a term is logically incompatible with core dependence. Shields acknowledges this difficulty and concedes that there are no clear examples of core dependence by formal causation in the Aristotelian corpus (Order 117). However, he points out that Aristotle recognizes a non-standard kind of formal causation and argues that this kind would allow for two things to be homonymously \( F \), while one thing’s \( F \)-ness is the formal cause of the other’s. The relevant kind of formal causation is the kind that occurs in sensory perception, in which a sense faculty takes on the form of the sensible object without its matter (Shields Order 116). At least according to most interpretations, Aristotle is not saying that the sense organs come to exemplify the qualities that are sensed—a person’s eyes do not become red when she looks at something red, for example. Yet the sensible object (the color) is (in some sense) the formal cause of the perceiver’s sensation. The existence of this kind of formal causation at least creates the logical space for things which are core-dependently related by formal causation.
In addition to cohering with Aristotle’s examples, FCCP also has the advantage of narrowing the scope of core dependent homonymy so that trivial relations among different natures signified by a given term will not suffice for core dependence. To return to our earlier example, a healthy salary, for example, does not share a form with health and is not the material out of which health is composed. Health is not the final cause of such a salary, nor is it the final cause of health. Healthy salaries are not produced by health, nor do they produce it or tend to produce it. Therefore, although the healthiness of a healthy salary bears some remote relation to the core nature, health, it is not one of the four causal relations that would qualify it as a genuinely core dependent use of “healthy.”

Julie Ward finds FCCP to be a promising way of specifying the kinds of relations that are included in core dependent homonymy, but she takes issue with two aspects of Shields’ presentation of the causal account. First, she argues that Shields fails to show that formal causation ought to be included among the relations that can obtain between the core and its derivations (Ward Homonymy 81). Ward allows that sense perception involves the kind of non-standard formal causation that Shields describes, but she denies that this can serve as an adequate model for a formal-causal relation between core dependently homonymous things (Homonymy 82). Non-standard formal causation is *sui generis*, applying only to sense perception, or to the genus of mental states at the broadest. Non-mental states do not engage in the kind of representational encoding that is characteristic of the formal causation involved in sense perception. Thus, non-standard formal causation cannot be of any use in explaining relations between homonyms (unless, presumably, one of the homonyms is itself a mental state) (Ward
Homonymy 83). Ward concludes that formal causation should not be included among the kinds of causes that connect homonyms to a core (ibid.).

Ward also argues that Shields’ account fails to explain adequately the way in which the core is prior to the derivative senses of a term (83). Shields resists claiming that the priority of the core is a causal priority because the causal relations between the core and periphery can run in either direction: healthy diets efficiently cause health, for example, while healthy complexions are efficiently caused by health (Shields Order 122). Instead he opts for what he names “primitive priority” (Shields Order 123). This is the kind of priority which Aristotle thinks a truth-making fact (pragma) has over the true proposition (logos) that corresponds to it (Cat. 14b20ff). A true proposition, e.g., “Socrates is a man” reciprocates in existence with the corresponding fact that Socrates is a man, such that neither could neither could exist if the other did not. Even still, they do not have equal explanatory priority: the fact explains the proposition’s truth and not the other way around. For Shields, this provides a kind of non-causal explanatory priority which a primary instance of a pros hen homonym might have over its secondary instances.

Ward points out that the trouble with this suggestion is that Aristotle actually characterizes the “primitive” type of priority in causal terms (Homonymy 84). Aristotle says that the pragma is “in some way the cause” (to aition hopōsin) of the proposition’s truth (14b13), while the proposition’s truth is “in no way the cause” (oudamōs aitios) of the pragma (14b20). This means that if we actually specify what “primitive priority” amounts to we end up reverting to some type of causal priority of the core over the periphery after all.
In light of these criticisms, Ward suggests two revisions to FCCP which reinstate two features of Cajetan’s original causal analysis of *pros hen* predication (Ward Homonymy 85). First, she suggests we omit formal causation and replace it with what Cajetan calls “exemplary causation” (*ibid*). In this kind of causation, one thing’s *F*-ness serves as a model or paradigm for another thing’s *F*-ness, although the two things do not share an identical characteristic corresponding to the name, *F*. Ward argues that there is precedent for this sort of causation in Aristotle’s thought in the *Physics* (*Phys.* 194b26, Ward Homonymy 85).

Second, Ward proposes that we acknowledge that the priority of the primary over the secondary instances is a causal one (Homonymy 86). Unlike Shields, she does not think this thesis is inconsistent with allowing the causal direction to either be from or toward the core. While she does not explain why she thinks causal priority is consistent with causal bi-directionality, I take it that she thinks Cajetan’s distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic denomination dissolves the apparent conflict. In Cajetan’s account, as Ward interprets it, the primary instance of a core homonym is intrinsically denominated, which is to say, it possesses the characteristic corresponding to the predicate *F* in virtue of itself. Secondary instances, on the other hand, are extrinsically denominated, that is, they are given the name *F* only in virtue of their (causal) relation to some characteristic they do not themselves possess (Ward Homonymy 86). Perhaps, then, the causal priority of the primary over the secondary cases consists in this: primary cases are *F* in virtue of themselves and not in virtue of their causal relations to anything else, while secondary instances are only *F* in virtue of their causal relations (in either direction) to *F*-ness in the primary case.
In my view, Ward is successful in showing that Shields does not provide a workable alternative to causal priority and her use of the intrinsic/extrinsic denomination distinction provides a better way of explaining the priority of the core. However, I think she is too hasty in removing formal causation from the set of possible relations that may obtain between some instance of $F$-ness and the core. As Ward admits, formal causation is fundamental to Aristotle’s thought about causes in a way that exemplary causation is not (Homonymy 85). This fact suggests to me that we ought to retain formal causation in FCCP unless it can be shown that it is unintelligible to hold that two homonyms are related to one another by formal causation. Shields proposal that two homonyms could be related by non-standard formal causation seems to show that, although it may be rare, it is not unintelligible. Ward’s objection to Shields’ proposal (that non-standard formal causation is *sui generis* and is only applicable to mental states) only shows that formal causation would have a narrow range of application in connecting homonyms to a core. It does not show that formal causation should or must be ruled out from FCCP *a priori*.

More fundamentally, however, if I am correct in my contention that the core around which core dependent homonyms are ordered is a *nature* and not necessarily a use of a term, then it is possible for an instance of $F$-ness to be connected to a core by *standard* formal causation. I have in mind cases like “medical” in “medical art”—since an art’s being medical *just is* it’s being medicine, this instance of the medical is formally caused by the core nature, medicine. The worry that if $a$’s $F$-ness (standedly) formally causes $b$’s $F$-ness then $a$ and $b$ will be univocally $F$ is not applicable here. The objection presupposes that we are dealing with two applications of one predicate. In this case we are only considering *one* use of a predicate (“medical” in “medical art”) and observing that the formal cause of the medical art’s medical-ness is medicine. This is
not a case in which some \( a \)’s \( F \)-ness is the formal cause of some \( b \)’s \( F \)-ness; it is a case in which \( a \)’s \( F \)-ness consists in its having a certain nature, \( N \), and so \( N \) is the formal cause of \( a \)’s \( F \)-ness.

Indeed, in my view, if an instance of \( F \)-ness is formally caused by a core nature, \( N \), then that instance is the primary case of \( F \)-ness. The cases in which \( F \)-ness is formally caused by \( N \) are logically equivalent to those cases in which \( F \) is simply used is to name the core nature, \( N \).

As we noted above, on my reading, some core dependent multivocals do not have a core sense. This is equivalent to saying that, for a given \( F \), there is no instance of \( F \)-ness that is formally caused by the core nature, \( N \). “Healthy” is like this—there is no instance of healthiness that is formally caused by health, because \textit{being healthy} is never identical to \textit{being health}. Thus, I agree with Ward when she claims that “the core instance alone is that which is the formal realization of the characteristic” (Homonymy 86). I would add, however, that for some core dependent multivocals there is no primary instance of \( F \)-ness. Rather, all the instances of \( F \)-ness revolve around a core that is not itself an instance of \( F \)-ness. For example, all the instances of healthiness revolve around health, which is not an instance of healthiness.

If the foregoing is correct, then formal causation has a prominent role to play in FCCP. This does not mean, however, that I wish to drop exemplary causation from the account of \textit{pros hen} homonymy. Cajetan claims that exemplary causation is the key to understanding the way the senses of “good” are ordered to a core (\textit{De Nominum Analogia} 2.9). For my purposes, this is reason enough to accept, at least provisionally, that homonymous things may be connected to a core by exemplary causation. I will take up Cajetan’s suggestion in chapter five—whether it proves fruitful in analyzing Aristotle’s views on the nature of goodness will serve as a test for whether it ought to be included in FCCP. Further, if we understand exemplary causation to be a
kind of final causation, as Ward suggests, we can admit it into the account of *pros hen* predication without having to make FCCP stand for “five-causal core primacy” (Ward Homonymy 85).

With these considerations in mind, we can reformulate a definition of *pros hen* homonymy that reflects the causal account of the core’s primacy. I will go about this by stating Shields’ final formulation of core dependence and then revising it in accordance with my criticisms as well as Ward’s critique of “primitive priority.” Shields final analysis of core dependent homonymy is as follows: “CDH: *a* and *b* are homonymously *F* in a core dependent way iff: (i) they have their name in common, (ii) their definitions do not completely overlap, (iii) necessarily, if *a* is a core instance of *F*-ness, then *b*’s being *F* stands in one of the four causal relations to *a*’s being *F*, and (iv) *a*’s being *F* is asymmetrically responsible for the existence of *b*’s being *F*” (Shields Order 124-125).

As I see it, there are two major problems with this definition. First, it supposes (erroneously, I have argued) that core dependence is chiefly about the dependence of the secondary uses of a term on a primary use, and thus, that all core dependent multivocals must have a primary use. My definition, by contrast, must emphasize the fact that the core on which core dependent homonyms depend is a nature, and that the existence of primary and secondary senses is a derivative, non-universal feature of core dependence. Second, Shields clarifies that the asymmetry in condition (iv) is to be cashed out in terms of primitive priority. Following Ward, I think the asymmetry is better understood in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic denomination.
I analyze core dependent homonymy as follows: (CDH*) $a$ and $b$ are homonymously $F$ in a core dependent way iff: (i) they have their name in common, (ii) their definitions do not completely overlap, (iii) there is some nature, $N$, such that $a$’s $F$-ness and $b$’s $F$-ness stand in one of the four causal relations to $N$, and (iv) for any instance of $F$-ness, if $F$-ness is identical to $N$, then $F$ is intrinsically denominated in that instance. If $F$-ness is not identical to $N$, then $F$ is extrinsically denominated in that instance.

Conditions (i) and (ii) remain unchanged from Shields’ formulation. They simply ensure that the two uses of $F$ are non-synonymous. Condition (iii) is revised to indicate the centrality of a core nature rather than a core sense. Note, however, that since I have retained formal causation among the kinds of causes that can relate a homonymous thing to a core, condition (iii) covers both cases in which there is a core sense and cases in which there is not. If $a$’s $F$-ness is related to $N$ by (standard) formal causation, then $a$’s being $F$ is nothing other than being $N$. Condition (iv) is revised in order to adopt Ward’s account of the priority of the core over the periphery. Note, however, that (iv) is not really an additional condition that homonyms must meet if they are to qualify as core dependent; I take it that if conditions (i)-(iii) are met, then (iv) follows. Condition (iv) is still a helpful corollary to include, however, because it clarifies the way in which the periphery is dependent on the core, but the core is not dependent on the periphery. Note also that in cases of core dependent multivocals which lack a core sense, all instances of $F$ will be extrinsically denominated, since all the different natures signified by $F$ will be called $F$ only in virtue of their causal relations to $N$, while nothing will be called $F$ because it $is$ $N$ (e.g. all healthy things are called “healthy” because of their causal relations to health, but nothing is called “healthy” because it is health).
In order to illustrate how my analysis works, let us consider three things that are homonymously medical: the medical art, medical operations, and medical minds. Since there is no single account that will adequately capture what it is for each thing to be medical, they are homonymously medical and meet conditions (i) and (ii). The medical art is medical because it is medicine. It thus meets condition (iii), since it is related to medicine by standard formal causation. It is also an instance of something that is medical by intrinsic denomination, since it formally realizes medicine. Medical operations are a function of the medical art. The performance of medical operations is thus a (proximate) end at which the art of medicine aims. So, a medical operation meets condition (iii) since it is a final cause of medicine. A mind can be called “medical” in the sense that it possesses the art of medicine. I take it this is similar to the way a body is healthy in that it is receptive of health. Perhaps, then, a mind is a material cause of medicine insofar as it is the substratum in which the form of the medical art is realized. Both medical minds and medical operations are called “medical” by extrinsic denomination, since they are medical in virtue of their relations a characteristic they do not themselves possess, i.e., the characteristic of being medicine.

My analysis of core dependence, drawing as it does on Cajetan, Shields and Ward, goes well beyond anything Aristotle explicitly says about pros hen predication. However, I would argue that my analysis is more faithful to Aristotle’s text than Shields’ (and Ward’s to the extent that she follows Shields) at least insofar as it recognizes that the principal feature of core

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12 This is a difficult case since, at least on most interpretations, at least some part or aspect of the intellect is immaterial for Aristotle. Perhaps, then, the medical mind is actually a case of non-standard formal causation: the mind is medical in that has taken on the form of medicine by encoding it in the intellect. This would be one way of understanding the idea that the intellect can “becom[e] all things” insofar as it takes on the forms of the things it thinks (DA 430a15). However, discerning whether this is a defensible reading would take us into thorny, millennia-old interpretive debates about De Anima III, 4-5 which I wish to avoid.
dependence is that the various uses of a term are oriented toward “some one nature” (\textit{Met.} 1003a34). Furthermore, I think the causal analysis is a plausible way of drawing out key implicit features of core dependence so that the framework can be applied more precisely and easily to other multivocal predicates, such as “good.” This framework will, therefore, be helpful in investigating Aristotle’s undeveloped suggestion that “good” is said \textit{pros hen} (\textit{EN} 1096b27).

\textbf{Forms of Connected Homonymy: Seriality}

One final kind of homonymy Aristotle discusses is the kind associated with things in an ordered series (\textit{tō ephexēs}). Following Kyle Fraser, I will refer to this kind of homonymy as “seriality” or “serial homonymy.” Serial homonymy occurs when a given term, \( F \), is predicated of a group of items and those items stand in successive relations of priority and posteriority to one another with respect to their being \( F \).\textsuperscript{13} That is to say that the second term of the series depends for its \( F \)-ness on the \( F \)-ness of first term, the third term depends for its \( F \)-ness on the \( F \)-ness of the second term, and so on

Aristotle thinks that when this kind of serial ordering obtains there can be no generic definition of \( F \), such that \( F \) would apply univocally to all the serially-\( F \) things. There can be no such definition because the primary thing in an ordered series is the first term in the series. But to posit a generic universal, subsuming the \( F \)-ness of both the first term and the subsequent terms, would be to posit something prior to the first member. That is, the universal would be prior to the thing which, by hypothesis, has absolute primacy in the series. In Aristotle’s view, this would be impossible. (For different versions of this argument see \textit{EE} I, 8 1218a1-19; \textit{Met.} III, 3 999a6-11; and \textit{Pol.} III, 1 1275a33-b1).

\textsuperscript{13}The issues of precisely what kinds of priority and posteriority will be discussed below.
Perhaps Aristotle’s clearest exposition of seriality occurs in *De Anima* II, 3 when he suggests that souls, like geometrical figures, need to be understood in terms of an ordered series (*DA* 414b20-21). Triangles, quadrilaterals, pentagons, etc. are not “equal and coordinate species of a common genus,” as Fraser puts it (136). Rather, the triangle is the first figure and all the other rectilinear figures can be arranged in an ordered series. Each subsequent figure in the series depends for its figure-ness on the figure immediately preceding it. Ultimately, therefore, all figures somehow owe their figure-ness to that of the triangle. Souls are similarly arranged in an ordered series with the nutritive soul as the first member. Aristotle later clarifies that the way to understand the dependence of the posterior on the prior in these two series is that “the prior is always potentially present” (*aei...huarchei dunamei to proteron*) in the posterior item (*DA* 414b29-30). The triangle, for example, is potentially present in the quadrilateral, which is potentially present in the pentagon, and so on. Likewise, the nutritive soul is potentially present in the sensitive, which is potentially present in the intellectual soul.

Since every serially homonymous item is ultimately named with reference to the first term in its series, we might reasonably ask whether seriality and core dependence ultimately amount to the same thing. After all, according to Aristotle’s serial analysis, is not “figure” an excellent candidate for a term that is “said in many ways but in relation to one thing”? Some commentators have thought so. Fraser, for example, has argued that seriality is best understood as a species of core dependence. On his account, not all core dependent homonyms are serially ordered (the various natures signified by “healthy” are not, for example), but all serially ordered homonyms are core dependent (Fraser 139n8). He marshals three pieces of evidence for this view. First, he argues that the dependence of posterior members in a series on the first is the right
kind of dependence to constitute a *pros hen* relation. Specifically, he claims that a posterior member in a series is logically and ontologically dependent on its antecedent such that the posterior can be defined without reference to the prior and cannot exist without it (Fraser 136). Ultimately, therefore, every member in an ordered series is logically and ontologically dependent on the first member. The first member in the series is thus a suitable candidate for the single nature and principle with reference to which all the items in the series share a common predicate.

Secondly, Fraser argues that core dependence does not require that there be a single primary sense and many *equally* secondary senses of a term. Aristotle’s descriptions of *pros hen* predication leave open the possibility that the peripheral senses have relations of priority and posteriority among themselves. In such cases, the relation of a peripheral sense to the core sense would be mediated by its relations to other peripheral senses. *Pros hen* predication certainly does not require this kind of mediation, but Fraser argues that Aristotle never excludes it either (138). Finally, Fraser argues at some length that “being,” Aristotle’s most famous example of a *pros hen* multivocal, is also serially ordered (139). That is, the non-substance categories are arranged in a series of priority and posteriority, such that the relations of non-substance categories to substance will be mediated by their relations to other non-substance categories.¹⁴ The fact that Aristotle’s most prominent example of core dependence is also serially homonymous, tells against interpreting core dependence and seriality as mutually exclusive alternatives. Fraser thus concludes that one of the ways a group of homonyms can be core dependent is by being serially ordered.

¹⁴Except, of course, in the case of the second category, which is directly subsequent to substance in the series. On Fraser’s account, Aristotle is indecisive as to whether the second category is quantity or quality (140-144).
However, Fraser’s identification of seriality as a species of core dependence may be too hasty. Ward argues that Aristotle’s examples of seriality in *De Anima* II, 3, at any rate, do not quite display the kind of logical and ontological dependence that is characteristic of *pros hen* predication (Souls 123). On the one hand, she argues that the nutritive soul does not have the right kind of primacy in *logos*, since “we do not grasp the notion of what it is to be a sensitive or intellective soul by means of what it is to be nutritive soul” (Ward Souls 126). We can contrast this, for example, with the way we *do* grasp what it is for an instrument to be medical by means of what it is for an art or science to be medical. Similarly, it seems reasonable to suggest that we do not actually grasp the notion of what it is to be a quadrilateral through that of a triangle either.

Ward also argues that the ontological priority exhibited in the series of souls and figures is also not the right kind. Triangles are prior in being to quadrilaterals insofar as triangles exist potentially within them. Ward points out that it is helpful to read this claim in light of a passage from *Metaphysics* V in which Aristotle talks explains that a half line is prior in potentiality to a whole line, insofar as the half line is potentially contained within the whole (Souls 124). The corollary of this thesis, however, is that the half line is *posterior* in actuality to the whole line, because the half lines only exist actually once the whole line has been actually bisected (*Met.* 1019a8-11). By the same reasoning, we could argue that although the triangle is prior in potentiality to the quadrilateral, the quadrilateral is prior in actuality to the triangles potentially contained within it. Likewise, the sensitive soul is prior in actuality to the nutritive soul that exists potentially within it.

Potential priority (and the corresponding actual posteriority) is not the kind of priority health has over healthy things and substance has over non-substantial beings. Health does not
exist potentially in a healthy diet and substances to not exist potentially in qualities, for example. Ward does not explicitly claim that core dependence exclusively involves actual rather than potential priority. However, she does argue convincingly that the fact that the seriality of souls and figures involves only potential priority “complicat[es] the issue of mapping this kind of priority onto the senses typically found in cases of focal reference [i.e. core dependence]” (Souls 126).

In light of Ward’s analysis, it seems that it would be a mistake to classify seriality as a species of core dependence. De Anima II, 3 seems to imply that the potential existence of the prior term in the posterior terms is sufficient for seriality. If seriality were a species of core dependence, this sort of potential priority would also be sufficient for core dependence. But Ward has provided strong reasons for thinking that potential priority is not sufficient for core dependence.

However, this argument does not rule out the possibility of salvaging the thesis that at least some cases of seriality are also cases of core dependence (e.g. “being”). Even if seriality is not a species of core dependence, they could still be two overlapping kinds of predication. More specifically, if the terms of in a series are ordered in relations of priority and posteriority that meet the conditions of the four causal core primacy set out in the previous section, it seems reasonable to regard the items in that series as both serially and core dependently homonymous.15 Thus, Fraser’s intriguing suggestion that the categories form an ordered series with substance as the first member is logically independent of his view that seriality is a species

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15I am assuming that the potential priority of the antecedent over the subsequent terms in a series is not both necessary and sufficient for seriality. That is, I am assuming that other kinds of serially ordered primacy relations, such as those of causal relations and intrinsic and extrinsic denomination, could also count as serially homonymous.
of core dependence. If “being” is serially core dependent as Fraser argues, that would have
important implications for the connections among different senses of “good”. Aristotle does not
suggest seriality as a way the different senses of “good” might be unified. However, he does
argue that items in every category are spoken of as “good” and that the term has a different sense
in each category. Thus, an ordered series of the categorial senses of “being” would suggest a
corresponding ordered series of the senses of “good.” I will examine this possibility in detail in
Chapter Five.
CHAPTER TWO

THE HOMONYMY OF GOODNESS

Introduction

In this chapter, we turn our attention from homonymy in general to the homonymy of goodness in particular. In order to clarify the different ways in which Aristotle thinks things can be homonymous with respect to their goodness, it will be instructive to think about the issue in terms of the Porphyrian tree of genera and species. I argue that Aristotle recognizes at least three distinct levels on the tree at which “good” can have multiple senses. Namely, he claims a) that good things are necessarily homonymous if they fall under different *summa genera* (i.e. under different categories), b) that good things are typically (though perhaps not always) homonymous if they fall under different *infimae species*, and c) even within a single species, certain things can be homonymously good, or at least, certain things can be homonymously *good for* beings of a single species. We might call the first level (a) the “transcendental” or “transcategorial” homonymy of goodness, since it has to do with the homonymy that results when “good” is predicated across the categories. I will call the second level (b) the “trans-specific” homonymy of goodness, since it is the kind of homonymy that can result when “good” is predicated across different specific kinds. I will refer to the third level (c) as the “intraspecific” homonymy of goodness since it has to do with things which are homonymously good within a single species.

Before moving on, I should point out that when I discuss the trans- and intraspecific homonymy of goodness, I will be using the term “species” in a somewhat broader way than it is
often used in Aristotle scholarship. Frequently commentators use “species” to refer exclusively to the lowest kinds of natural substances; paradigmatically, kinds like *dog*, *horse*, and *human*. Sometimes the term is also used to refer to the lowest kinds in non-substance categories as well.

In addition to substantial and non-substantial natural kinds, I also want to include certain conventional and artefactual kinds as well, such as *bed*, *cloak*, *shoemaker*, and *harpist* (see *Phys. II, 1* 192b16ff; *EN I, 7* 1097b29-1098a10). As I am using the term, a harpist is a different species of craftsman from a shoemaker and a bed is a different species of artifact from a cloak.

I will be using “species” in this inclusive way in order to capture more accurately the range of kinds that Aristotle thinks are relevant to goodness. Some terminology from contemporary philosophy may help to clarify what I mean: Judith Jarvis Thomson introduces the concept of a “goodness-fixing kind.” She stipulates that a goodness-fixing kind is a kind “such that what being a *K* is itself sets standards that a *K* has to meet if it is to be good *qua K*” (Thomson 21). Her paradigm example is the kind, *toaster*: given that a toaster is (roughly) and artifact designed to toast bread, a particular toaster counts as a good toaster (i.e. good *qua toaster*) to the extent that it toasts well (*ibid.*).

The notion of a goodness-fixing kind should sound familiar to students of Aristotle. Although Aristotle obviously never uses Thomson’s terminology, a significant part of his thinking about goodness is based on the idea of goodness-fixing kinds. As we will see below, Aristotle does regard species, in the narrow sense of lowest kinds of natural substances, as goodness-fixing kinds. However, like Thomson, he would deny that a kind must be natural in order to be goodness-fixing. The kind, *shoemaker*, sets the standards a particular shoemaker must meet if he is to be good *qua* shoemaker, just as the kind *horse* sets the standards a horse must
meet if it is to be good *qua* horse. As I read Aristotle, “good” will not be said univocally of good shoemakers and horses; rather, each thing will call for a distinct account of its being-good. In my view, this phenomenon is aptly called the “trans-specific homonymy of goodness,” even though *shoemaker* may not be a species in the strictest sense. Similarly, if there are things which are things which are homonymously good for shoemakers, these things will be intraspecifically homonymous in my inclusive sense of “species”. With those qualifications in place, let us examine the three levels of the good’s homonymy.

**Transcendental Homonymy of Goodness**

Aristotle argues for the transcendental homonymy of goodness in *Eudemian Ethics* I, 8 (1217b25-34) and *Nicomachean Ethics* I, 6 (1096a23-29). Though the arguments have important differences from one another, they are similar enough that it is more appropriate to think of them as two versions of the same argument rather than two distinct arguments. Accordingly, I will refer to them both as “the categorial argument” for the homonymy of goodness.

The *Eudemian Ethics* version of the categorial argument opens with the claim that “good” is multivocal and, in fact, that it is said in as many ways as “being” (*EE* 1217b25). Aristotle then gives a one sentence summary of the doctrine of the categories (referring readers to other works for a more comprehensive explanation)—“being,” he says, signifies essence (*ti esti*), quality (*poion*), quantity (*poson*), and time (*pote*), as well as being moved (*kinesthai*) and moving (*kinein*) (1217b26-29). He claims that the good exists in each of these categories (*ptōseōn*) (1217b26-29). In substance (*ousia*, here used interchangeably with *ti esti*), there is the

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1Readers may notice that this list of categories omits four of the categories from the familiar set of ten (place, position, possession, and relation). Intriguingly, unlike in the *Nicomachean Ethics* version of the argument, Aristotle gives no indication here that he thinks the list is incomplete. I will not speculate as to whether this constitutes evidence for developmentalism about Aristotle’s theory of categories.
intellect (*nous*) and god; in quality, the just; in quantity, the moderate; in time, opportunity (*kairos*); and in motion, teaching and being taught (1217b31-33). Aristotle concludes that just as being is not a single nature (a single *ti esti*) possessed by items in each of the categories, neither is goodness (1217b34). That is to say, just as what it is for a substance to be differs from what it is for a quality to be, so too what it is for a substance to be good differs from what it is for a quality to be good.

The claims Aristotle is trying to establish in this passage seem clear enough: “good” is predicated of things that fall under different categories and, like “being,” it does not signify a single attribute when it is applied to those things. What is less clear, however, is what exactly the argument is supposed to be. In the *Eudemian Ethics* version of the argument, Aristotle puts forth a series of claims about being and goodness which do not stand in any obvious, valid inferential relations to one another. It would seem, therefore, that there are some suppressed premises at work in the *EE* version of the categorial argument, and that the argument cannot succeed if those premises are not made explicit.

Fortunately, the *Nicomachean Ethics* version of the argument, although it is similar in many respects, is more explicit about the inference Aristotle wants to make. As in the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle opens by claiming that “good” is said in as many ways as “being” (*EN* 1096a24). Then he gives a similar list of examples from the categories: in the category of substance (literally, “in the ‘what’” [*en tō ti]*) it is said of god and the intellect; in quality, the virtues; in quantity, the moderate; in relation, the useful; in time, opportunity; in place, a habitat (*diaita*) (*EN* 1096a25-27). Aristotle then indicates that the list of categories is incomplete (“*kai hetera toiauta*”) and we may infer that he thinks there are examples of goodness in the four
omitted categories (position, possession, action, and being acted upon) as well (EN 1096a27). Aristotle concludes by claiming that the good cannot be “something common, universal, and single” (koinon ti katholou kai hen), because if it were, it would not be said in all the categories, but only in one (1096a27-28). It take it that Aristotle’s final claim means that the predicate “good” does not correspond to a single universal, goodness, which is instantiated by all the things of which “good” is predicated. “Good” could only be this sort of predicate if it were applied exclusively to items in a single category. But since the application of “good” is not confined to one category in this way, “good” must name different attributes when it is predicated of items in different categories.

We can reformulate the Nicomachean Ethics version of the categorial argument as a simple modus tollens:

1) If “good” names a single universal, goodness, which is common to all good things, then it is only predicated of items in one category.

2) “Good” is not only predicated of items in one category.

3) So, it is not the case that “good” names a single universal, goodness, which is common to all good things.

Construed in this way, premise one of the argument is clearly the most contentious one. Since Aristotle makes no effort to justify the first premise here, it seems likely to me that it is supposed to be a particular instantiation of a general principle which he takes to follow from the doctrine of the categories, which I will call the Principle of Transcendental Homonymy (TH): for any term, F, if F names a single universal, F-ness, which is common to all F-things, then F is only predicated of items in a single category.
TH implies that a necessary condition for any term’s univocal predication of two subjects is that those two subjects belong to the same category. Conversely, if the two subjects of which a term is predicated fall under different categories, then the term must only apply to them homonymously. Thus, on my reading, the transcendental homonymy of goodness is just a special case of the multivocity that always results from predicating any term across the categories.

The interpretation I have just set out is briefly considered and summarily dismissed by J.L. Ackrill in “Aristotle on ‘Good’ and the Categories.” In that paper, Ackrill sets out three possible readings of the Nicomachean Ethics version of the argument based on three ways of interpreting the examples of goodness in different categories that Aristotle gives. He labels these “interpretation A,” “B,” and “C.” Ackrill criticizes and rejects various versions of A and B and argues for his favored alternative, C. Interpretation A construes Aristotle’s examples of goodness in different categories as subjects to which “good” is applied. Interpretation B, which I will not discuss, interprets the examples as subjects of which “good” is essentially predicated. Ackrill’s favored alternative, interpretation C, takes the examples to be the grounds on the basis of which “good” is correctly applied to a subject.

The reading I sketched above is a version of interpretation A, according to which the examples Aristotle gives are to be understood as categorially diverse subjects to which the predicate “good” may be applied. As we have already seen, according to interpretation A, Aristotle infers the multivocity of “good” from the categorial diversity of the subjects of which it is predicated. In Ackrill’s view, this reading is unacceptable because the principle needed to make the argument work (what I have called the TH principle) is too strong a generator of multivocity. For Ackrill, TH is prima facie implausible, there is no obvious reason why anyone
should accept it, and there is no reason that Aristotle should think it is a corollary of the theory of the categories (Good 17). Terence Irwin, adding to Ackrill’s critique of interpretation A, argues that “the mere fact that [“good”] is predicated of things in all the categories would hardly prove multivocity; we might as well say that ‘amusing’ or ‘strange’ is multivocal because both substances and qualities can be amusing or strange” (Homonymy 539).

On the alternative reading that Ackrill and Irwin favor (interpretation C) Aristotle’s examples are not to be understood as subjects of which “good” is predicated, rather, they are to be understood as grounds for predicating goodness, or, as Irwin puts it, the “properties that support claims about goodness” (Irwin Homonymy 539). On interpretation A, when Aristotle says that god and the intellect are examples of goodness in substance and the virtues are examples in quality, he has in mind propositions like “god is good” and “the virtues are good.” On interpretation C, by contrast, Aristotle has in mind propositions like “the prime mover is good in that he is god” and “Socrates is good in that he is virtuous” (Ackrill Good 21).

According to this reading, Aristotle infers that good is multivocal because different attributes (indeed, attributes in different categories) justify applying the term to a subject.

In Ackrill’s view, interpretation C has two major advantages. First, it frees Aristotle’s argument from its dependence “on any arbitrary and esoteric doctrine” (which is what Ackrill takes the TH principle to be) (Good 22). Secondly, interpretation C allows us to see the categorial argument in the Nicomachean Ethics as an extension of Aristotle’s argument for the multivocity of “good” in Topics I, 15. In both passages, Ackrill contends that Aristotle is drawing our attention to “examples which all use the predicate in question but where the account (logos) of the predicate… varies from example to example” (Good 22). Thus, Ackrill takes his
interpretation to provide Aristotle with a stronger argument for the homonymy of goodness than alternative readings do (since it does not saddle him with any dubious metaphysical and semantic principles like TH) and one that is more tightly connected to what Aristotle says about goodness elsewhere in the corpus.

However, I contend that there is a powerful, indeed decisive, reason to reject interpretation C, namely that according to Ackrill’s reading, Aristotle’s categorial argument that there is no single universal of goodness does not really hinge on an appeal to the categories at all. While Ackrill himself raises this objection, in my view he fails to address it adequately. He formulates it as follows: “if the fact that the criteria for calling different things good differ shows… that [‘good’] does not stand for a single simple characteristic… it shows this whether or not the various criteria are features in different categories” (Ackrill Good 23). To put the point in yet another way, if all Aristotle is doing is showing how the *logoi* corresponding to the predicate “good” differ depending on what is being called “good,” then he need not appeal to the categories at all. I will refer to this as “the superfluity objection,” since it alleges that, as Ackrill reads the categorial argument, Aristotle’s appeal to the categories is superfluous for establishing the conclusion that goodness is homonymous. To see why it is superfluous, consider the example of Socrates, a good man, and Bucephalus, a good horse. If Socrates’ goodness consists in his virtue and Bucephalus’ goodness consists in his swiftness, this fact alone is already sufficient to establish that Socrates and Bucephalus are homonymously good; the categorial status of their respective good-making properties is completely irrelevant. A corollary of the superfluity objection is that Aristotle’s argument will not generate ten senses of “good” corresponding to the ten categories, rather, it will generate “an indefinitely large number of senses of ‘good’”
corresponding to the wide variety of good-making properties different good things possess (Ackrill Good 23).

Ackrill responds to this objection by pointing out that Aristotle actually claims that there are more senses of “being” that the ten corresponding to the categories (Good 23). This is ultimately unproblematic, Ackrill argues, because the doctrine of the categories does not preclude Aristotle “from recognizing finer distinctions when this suits his purpose” (ibid.). Similarly, there is no inconsistency in Aristotle recognizing additional, intracategorial instances of homonymously good things in other contexts.

In my view, Ackrill’s reply is correct, so far as it goes, but is not sufficient to neutralize the force of the superfluity objection to interpretation C. Ackrill seems to assume in his reply that the main problem he must address is that his interpretation entails that there are more than ten senses of “good.” If that really were the crux of the superfluity objection, then Ackrill’s response would, for the most part, be adequate. However, the more serious aspect of the problem is that the appeal to the categories does absolutely no work in the argument as Ackrill construes it. In his view, Aristotle’s examples of goodness in each category are intended to be different properties that make the ascription of goodness to something apt. If this is correct, then the mere fact that they are different properties is enough to establish homonymy; the fact that the properties are in different categories is an additional, superfluous fact.

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2In my own view, Aristotle’s claim that there are “as many” (isachōs) senses of “good” as of “being” must be taken with a grain of salt; given the existence of homonymously good things within each category, perhaps he should have said “at least as many” instead. However, on my interpretation, Aristotle’s argument only actually establishes that there are ten senses of good; further argumentation would be required to establish that there are more than ten. By contrast, on Ackrill’s reading, the argument directly establishes that “good” has indefinitely many senses. It is not easy to see why Aristotle would insist that “good” has as many senses as “being” and then give an argument proving that “good” has many more senses than “being.” I take it that this consideration speaks in favor of my reading.
Furthermore, if all Aristotle had wanted to do in the categorial arguments from *EE* I, 8 and *EN* I, 6 was to draw attention to the fact that the definitions of being corresponding to "good" differ for different good things, then he could have said as much more explicitly. In fact, he *does* say this more explicitly in the argument for the homonymy of goodness in *Topics* I, 15 (which will be considered below). Indeed, another way of putting the superfluity objection is that it makes the substance of the categorial arguments from the ethical works identical to that from the *Topics*. If we accept Ackrill’s reading, the only difference between the two arguments is that the categorial argument is framed in terms of an unnecessary and obfuscating appeal to the categories that the *Topics* argument lacks. My version of interpretation A, on the other hand, reads the argument in such a way that the appeal to the categories does the bulk of the work in the argument; it takes it to be an argument specifically about the multivocity generated by the ontological difference among the categories, rather than an argument about the difference among criteria for calling different things “good” (which sometimes happen to fall into different categories).

However, even if Ackrill were to concede that interpretation C has major unresolved difficulties, he might still insist that interpretation A remains unacceptable insofar as it makes Aristotle’s argument depend on the “arbitrary and esoteric” TH principle. It must be conceded that Ackrill’s objection is a powerful one if the TH principle remains a suppressed premise in the categorial argument; a premise which Aristotle never states, let alone defends, and has no obvious connection to any of his more foundational philosophical commitments. However, if it could be shown why Aristotle might plausibly think that TH is entailed by the theory of the categories, then Ackrill’s objection to interpretation A would lose much of its force.
In my view, Aristotle’s basic rationale for affirming TH is clear enough and is at least initially plausible. Recall that, in order for a predicate, \( F \), to apply univocally to two subjects, it must designate the same account of what it is to be \( F \) in both applications (\textit{Cat.} 1a6-7). Furthermore, according to the homonymy of being, if the subjects are themselves in different categories, then the account of what it is for each of them \textit{to be} differs. If we assume that the account of what it is for \( S \) \textit{to be} is implicit in the account of what it is for \( S \) \textit{to be} \( F \), then there cannot be a single account of what it is for \( S_1 \) to be \( F \) and of \( S_2 \) to be \( F \) if \( S_1 \) and \( S_2 \) belong to different categories. Thus, for any \( F \), it is impossible two items from different categories to be univocally \( F \). To make this more concrete, consider the examples of the propositions “Socrates is a good man” and “courage is a good quality.” Socrates and courage belong to different categories (substance and quality respectively), and so the account of what it is for Socrates to be is different from the account of what it is for courage to be. Consequently, if we assume that the account of what it is for courage to be is implicit in the account of what it is for courage to be good, and likewise for the account of Socrates’ being and being-good, then it would be impossible for Socrates and courage to share an account of what it is for them to be good. Therefore, “good” cannot be predicated univocally of Socrates and courage and, more generally, no common predicate applied to items in distinct categories can be applied to each of them in the same sense.

What, then, of the counterexamples, “strange” and “amusing” that Irwin raises in support of interpretation C? Do these arguments not show that the TH principle is false and that any argument given in support of it must be unsound in some way? Perhaps they do, but in my view, Aristotle would be within his rights to reject the notion that “strange,” “amusing,” and similar
alleged counterexamples to the TH principle are genuine ones. He could do so in one of two ways: first, he could claim that “strangeness is in the eye of the beholder”—whether something counts as strange (or amusing) depends on the reactions of observers to the thing. So, contrary to appearances, calling some $x$ strange does not actually name an attribute of $x$, but rather names the typical reaction of observers to $x$.

Alternatively, Aristotle could argue that strangeness and amusingness are causal notions: to say “$x$ is strange” ascribes to $x$ a tendency to bring about reactions of surprise or confusion in observers. Then Aristotle could argue, plausibly, that the sense in which qualities are causes is different from the sense in which substances are. Thus, he could bite the bullet and say that substances and qualities are homonymously strange or amusing.

I contend, therefore, that my version of interpretation A has decisive advantages over the interpretation supported by Ackrill and Irwin. In my reading, Aristotle’s appeal to the categories does real work; Aristotle could not make the same argument if he removed the appeal to the categories. Furthermore, while I do not go so far as to claim that the principle of transcendental homonymy is a correct metaphysical-cum-semantic thesis, I do claim, contra Ackrill and Irwin, that it is a reasonably defensible thesis that can plausibly be seen to follow from Aristotle’s categorialism and that it resists refutation by simple counterexamples.

If Aristotle is appealing to a principle of transcendental homonymy in the categorial arguments of EE and EN (as I claim he is) then these arguments establish a specific type of homonymy of the good. Namely, they attempt to establish the homonymy of goodness at the level of the *summa genera*. That is to say that if we call, for example, both Socrates and his wisdom good, these two things must be homonymously good. The thesis that goodness is
transcendently homonymous is compatible with the thesis that all intracategorial predication of “good” is univocal. For instance, it is compatible with saying that all good substances are good in the same sense. The transcendental homonymy of goodness does not rule out the possibility, for example, that Socrates’ goodness is the same attribute as Bucephalus’ goodness. Aristotle does not, in fact, believe that all intracategorial predication of “good” is univocal, but if I have interpreted him correctly, he does not attempt to establish intracategorial homonymy in the categorial argument.

Trans-Specific Homonymy of Goodness

However, in my view, Aristotle does have another argument which, at least implicitly, attempts to demonstrate that goodness is homonymous within the categories as well, namely, what I will call the “signification argument” from Topics I, 15. I say “implicitly” because Aristotle does not actually draw the conclusion that the good is homonymous within each category or even make any explicit comment about the relation between goodness and the categories at all. In fact, since the Topics is a treatise about dialectical reasoning in general, Aristotle’s primary purpose in presenting the signification argument is to provide an illustration of a particular dialectical technique. He evidently thinks that an argument about the nature of goodness provides an especially helpful illustration of that technique. However, since Aristotle is primarily interested in making a point about the argument form that the signification argument instantiates (rather than the content of the argument itself), he does not develop his conclusions about the natures signified by the term “good” as much as we might like. Nevertheless, I contend that the argument is revealing: since Aristotle appears to regard the argument as sound, it sheds
considerable light on the way he is thinking about the multivocity of “good.” Ultimately, I argue that it shows why he must think that “good” is intracategorially multivocal.

The broad subject with which *Topics* I, 15 is concerned is “*to posachōs,*” literally, “the how many ways” something is said. *To posachōs* is, in turn, one of four tools, or instruments (*organa*) that Aristotle recommends for becoming “well-supplied with syllogisms” (*euporēsomen tōn sullogismōn*), the other three being “the provision of propositions,” “the discovery of differences,” and “the investigation of likeness” (*Top.* 105a22). All four instruments appear to be techniques for crafting premises for use in dialectical arguments. For “the how many ways,” Aristotle gives the example that the choiceworthy (*haireton*) is one of three things: the fine (*kalon*), the pleasant, or the expedient (*Top.* 105a29). Presumably, this premise can be derived by detecting that “choiceworthy” has three (and only three) distinct senses. Thus, disambiguating “choiceworthy” provides us with a proposition that can serve as a major premise of a syllogism, for instance, an argument by elimination proving that something is not choiceworthy (in any sense).

With the aim of constructing premises to use in dialectical syllogisms in mind, *Topics* I, 15 proposes a series of methods, or tests by which we may discern whether or not a term is used in many ways. Some of these tests are somewhat indirect. For instance, Aristotle argues that, in some cases, it may be easier to see whether a term is being used equivocally by examining the contrary of the attribute signified by the term in one context and observing whether it is different from the contrary of the attribute signified by the same term in another context. For instance, the contrary of a sharp musical note is a flat note, while the contrary of a sharp knife is a dull knife.
Since dullness is not identical to flatness, we can tell that sharp knives and sharp notes are homonymously sharp (Top. 106a6-21).[^3]

The homonymy test which Aristotle illustrates with the signification argument, however, is much more direct. So direct, indeed, that one might wonder whether it really provides any kind of helpful tool for discovering multivocity or not.[^4] For this test, Aristotle says that the dialectician must “examine the classes of predicates corresponding to the name (ta genē tôn kata tounoma katēgoriōn)” in different contexts and see whether they are the same in all cases (Top. 107a3-4). If they are not the same, then the word is being used homonymously (Top. 107a5). The term Aristotle uses to demonstrate this test in action is “good.”

Aristotle gives a list of things which may be called “good” along with the “classes of predicates” which he thinks are signified by the term “good” in each case (Top. 107a5-12). He says that the good in food is productiveness of pleasure (to poiētikon hēdonēs), while the good in medicine is productiveness of health. When good is predicated of a soul or a human being, it signifies a certain quality, such as being brave, temperate, or just. Sometimes the good is a time-when (to pote), since that which is in the opportune moment (to en tō kairō) is called good. And often the good is a quantity since the moderate (to metrion) is called good. Surveying the diversity of the things signified by “good,” Aristotle concludes that the good is homonymous (Top. 107a12).

[^3]: This is the standard way translators adapt Aristotle’s example to make sense in English. More literally, Aristotle speaks of sharp and “heavy” (baru) sounds.

[^4]: As we will see, the test ultimately appears to be nothing more than “check whether the definitions of being signified by the term are the same or not.” This would not be a very helpful test for someone who was genuinely unsure whether a term signified one attribute or multiple attributes.
One question we might raise about Aristotle’s list of goods is whether he is talking about the good of each thing or about what it is to be a good instance or specimen of each sort of thing. If, for example, he is talking about the good of food vs. the good of medicine, then the point of the argument is that the characteristic end at which food aims is different from the characteristic end at which medicine aims. More generally, different kinds of thing have different goods because they aim at different ends. Let us call this the “telos interpretation.” If, alternatively, Aristotle is talking about what it is to be a good instance of each sort of thing, then the point of the argument is that what it is for medicine to be good medicine is different from what it is for food to be good food. To generalize the point, different things of different kinds must meet different criteria in order to qualify as good specimens of their respective kinds. Let us call this the “excellence” interpretation.\(^5\)

In my view, there are two strong reasons for favoring the excellence interpretation over the telos interpretation. First, it is hard to make sense of the telos interpretation when applied to the last two items on Aristotle’s list, a kairos as an example of “good” applied to a time, and the moderate as an example of the good in quantity. Prima facie, there does not appear to be anything unintelligible about the notions of a good time or a good amount; on the excellence interpretation, Aristotle is analyzing these two notions in terms of opportunity and moderation respectively. But on the telos interpretation, Aristotle would not be talking about good times and good amounts, but rather the goods of times or amounts, which is arguably absurd. The telos interpretation would imply that particular times, say, today at 3:45PM, aim at being opportune

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\(^5\) A hybrid interpretation is also possible, according to which Aristotle switches back and forth between good-as-telos and good-as-excellence. In my view, however, the excellence interpretation makes better sense of all the examples than the telos interpretation. Thus, if my critique of the telos interpretation works, it would also work against a hybrid interpretation.
and that particular quantities, say 7lbs, and are teleologically directed toward being moderate. Admittedly teleology plays a major role in Aristotle’s thinking about goodness and it is likely that the goodness of times and quantities ultimately needs to be analyzed in terms of the ends that good times and quantities serve. Nevertheless, it seems highly dubious that Aristotle would want to be committed to the apparent absurdity that times and quantities themselves have ends.

Even if we could come up with a satisfying way to accommodate time and quantity within the telos interpretation, Aristotle’s other examples fit better with the excellence interpretation. This is easiest to see with the example of the soul/human. Readers of Aristotle’s ethics know that Aristotle emphasizes that the good at which humans aim is virtuous activity, not merely the possession of virtue. It would be very odd, therefore, for Aristotle to say here that the good to which humans are teleologically directed is being qualified in a certain way (to poian einai), namely virtuously (Top. 107a8). To put it another way, Aristotle names the disposition (hexis), in the signification argument rather than the corresponding activity; we would expect him to name the latter if the telos interpretation were correct. It seems likely, therefore, that Aristotle is talking about the goodness of a good human rather than the good of a human.

Similarly, “productiveness” (to poiētikon) of pleasure and health, identified as the good in food and medicine respectively, are dispositional attributes as well. I take it that “productiveness” indicates that capacity to engage in productive activity. If Aristotle had wanted to name the good of medicine and food, then he probably would have indicated the activity of producing (to poiein) health or pleasure, or even named the products themselves, i.e. health and pleasure (cf. EE 1219a10ff on both processes of production and products as ends).
Thus, I take it that Aristotle’s strategy in the signification argument is 1) to examine the expressions “good food,” “good medicine,” “good soul/man,” “good time,” and “good amount,” 2) Note that the “classes of predicates” that correspond to the term “good” differ in each case, and 3) to conclude, on the basis of these differences, that the various good things are homonymously good. Whether this argument can work depends heavily on what exactly Aristotle means by the somewhat vague phrase “classes of predicates corresponding to the name” (ta genē tōn kata tounoma katēgoriōn) (Top. 107a3). By itself, the phrase might call to mind mere nominal definitions or otherwise non-essence-specifying descriptions of the goodness of each thing. That is, one might think that the “classes of predicates” could be words and phrases we could to characterize the goodness of each thing, but which may not reveal what it is for each thing to be good. But if the argument is to work, then Aristotle needs the classes of predicates to be something much more metaphysically robust than a nominal definition or a description that might focus on accidental features. In fact, the classes of predicates must be identical to what he elsewhere calls “definitions of being.” If two things described by a common name have different definitions of being corresponding to that name, they are homonymous. But differences in any other two descriptions that fall short of definitions of being do not necessarily establish homonymy.6 So, the descriptions Aristotle gives of the goodness of the various good things must be intended as accounts of what it is for them to be good.

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6An example: Joe and Jane both have eyes which are called “green,” and we want to know whether or not they are univocally green. Jane’s eyes are described as “the color of a pine tree,” while Joe’s are described as “the color of a frog.” Obviously the difference in these loose, non-essence specifying descriptions do nothing to establish that the two sets of eyes are homonymously green. We would need a difference in a precise account of what it is for them to be green to do that.
Much like the categorial argument, then, the signification argument attempts to show that “good” does not name a single characteristic common to all good things, rather, it signifies different characteristics in different contexts. However, whereas the categorial argument offers a principle to explain what causes at least some of the multivocity of “good” (i.e. its predication across categories), the signification argument does not offer any principle to explain why “good” names a different attribute when it is applied to the different good things on Aristotle’s list. This lacuna is understandable, given Aristotle’s purposes in the *Topics*: as was discussed above, the primary aim of the signification argument is to provide an example of a multivocity test that can be used on any predicate. So, once he has established the bare fact that “good” is being used homonymously in his examples, he can move on without asking what accounts for the multivocity, or examining the broader implications about the nature of goodness.

Nevertheless, I think we can discern an implicit principle operating in Aristotle’s list of homonymously good things in the signification argument. In section 1, I introduced the notion of a goodness-fixing kind—a kind which itself sets standards that an individual kind member must meet if it is to count as a good specimen of the kind. If we think about the signification argument with goodness-fixing kinds in mind we can develop an account that plausibly explains why the goods in the signification argument require different accounts of their goodness: specimens of different goodness-fixing kinds must meet different standards in order to qualify as good specimens of their kinds. As such, the attribute(s) that appear in their respective definitions of being-good will differ. *Food* and *human being* are different goodness-fixing kinds, for example. Accordingly, a particular person and a particular meal must meet different criteria if they are to
be correctly described as good (*qua* food or human). This is why Aristotle thinks that the goodness of a human being consists in her virtue and that of a meal in its pleasant taste.

One might object: is it not grossly anachronistic to read a concept from 20th and 21st century metaethics into Aristotle’s *Topics*? Admittedly, Aristotle does not explicitly articulate the idea of a goodness-fixing kind. However, I think it is more defensible to attribute the idea to him than it may at first seem. As Terence Irwin points out, Aristotle assumes that his theories of substance, essence, and causality will be relevant to ethical inquiry. Irwin argues that it is reasonable for Aristotle to make this assumption because he also assumes that the questions “‘What is the good for F?’ and ‘What is a good F?’ both depend on the answer to the question ‘what is an F?’” (First Principles 351). That is to say, the specific character of a thing as an *F* determines what it would mean for it to be a good *F*. If Irwin is right to claim that Aristotle holds this thesis then there is no harmful anachronism in interpreting Aristotle as having a theory that incorporates goodness-fixing kinds.

In my view, therefore, the signification argument draws our attention to a particular generator of multivocity for the term “good.” It invites us to notice the way “good” names different attributes when applied to good specimens of different goodness-fixing kinds. Understood in this way, the argument implies that goodness is not only homonymous across categories, but also within them. To see why this is, consider the example Irwin uses to illustrate his principle, “the good for a dog and the goodness of a dog seem to depend on the sort of thing a dog is” (First Principles 351). The good of a dog⁷ will be a distinctively canine sort of flourishing

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⁷I take it that Irwin’s expression “the good for a dog” is just a different way of saying the good of a dog, that is, the end toward which dogs are directed.
life, while the goodness of a dog will consist in the qualities that enable a dog to live that life, that is, the canine virtues. Since humans are different kinds of beings from dogs, human virtues are different from canine virtues, and thus the account of a good human’s goodness will differ from that of a good dog’s goodness. Two beings within the category of substance, a dog and a human, will therefore be homonymously good.

We can generalize from the example of dog and human to formulate a “principle of trans-specific homonymy” (TSH). Unlike the principle of transcendental homonymy, which states that any predicate that is applied to items more than one category must be said homonymously of those items, TSH only concerns the predicate “good.” Let the following serve as an initial formulation of TSH: for any two distinct goodness-fixing kinds, \( k_1 \) and \( k_2 \), “good” will be said homonymously of a good \( k_1 \) and good \( k_2 \). We can call this the principle of trans-specific homonymy because, as I will try to show below, all the infimae species of substances are goodness fixing kinds for Aristotle. Furthermore, at least some non-substantial species are goodness fixing as well. Non-natural goodness-fixing kinds, kinds of artifacts for example, may be called “species” in an extended sense. Since there can be many different goodness fixing kinds in the same category, TSH would commit Aristotle to an indefinitely large number of senses for the term “good”; far more than the ten senses established by the categorial argument.

In order to develop and clarify my interpretation of the signification argument and the TSH principle, it will be instructive to consider two potential objections. The first is that the signification argument cannot be intended to establish intracategorial homonymy, because all the items on Aristotle’s list of goods in the argument belong to different categories from one another. The second is that the signification argument actually seems to present a counterexample to the
TSH principle. Specifically, *human being* and *(human) soul* are plausibly construed as two distinct goodness-fixing kinds, but “good” is said univocally of a good human and a good soul. In my view, the first of these objections is not as powerful as it may appear to be, but is helpful to consider nonetheless because it clarifies the rationale for thinking about the signification argument in terms of goodness fixing kinds. The second objection, however, reveals a genuine inadequacy in my initial formulation of the TSH. Accordingly, my response will involve modifying TSH to correct for the deficiencies of the initial formulation.

For the first objection, a critic might argue that it is a mistake to interpret the signification argument as establishing that goodness is homonymous within the categories; it would be completely useless for that purpose, since no two examples on Aristotle’s list of homonymously good things are in the same category. The list consists of a relative (food), a quality (medicine), a substance (human/soul), as well as the categories of time and quantity themselves.\(^8\) If Aristotle had wanted to show that things which fall under a single category can be homonymous with respect to their goodness, he had the opportunity to do just that; he could have provided an example of two things in the same category which have differing accounts of what it is for them to be good. Since Aristotle does not do this, it is more plausible to take the signification argument to be making the same point as the categorial argument, namely, that no two good things that fall under different categories can be good in the same sense.

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\(^8\)A particular plant or animal, considered in itself, is a substance, but that plant or animal only counts as food in virtue of its relation to an animate body that can be nourished by it (*DA* 416b10ff). Thus food and “eater” are relatives much like father and son or master and slave. Medicine is a quality insofar as it is a *technē*, *technai* are *hexeis*, and *hexeis* are qualities (*Cat.* 8b27ff). This is only a valid analysis of medicine understood as the knowledge and skills existing in a particular soul. Other ways of understanding medicine (e.g. as a social practice) would need to be given a different categorial analysis.
Admittedly, it is somewhat awkward for my interpretation that none of Aristotle’s examples fall under the same category. However, I do not think that the objection is as damaging as it may at first seem. We can see why this is so by attending to the accounts of goodness Aristotle gives or food, medicine, and humans. These are the three examples that are species within categories (species of relatives, qualities, and substances, respectively), rather than being categories themselves (as are time and quantity). The accounts of the goodness of Aristotle’s three species examples are “productiveness of pleasure,” “productiveness of health,” and (to paraphrase) “human virtuousness.” What is salient about these accounts is that they are dependent on features proper to each specific kind, rather than depending merely on features of each species qua members of their respective categories. For example, the goodness of good medicine consists in its productiveness of health because it is medicine specifically, not because of its categorial status as a quality. If the goodness of medicine were dependent for its nature only on its categorial status, then Aristotle would need to give a much more generic account of its goodness; one which could apply to all qualities.

In short, the signification argument implicitly establishes intracategorial homonymy because, given the level of description at which Aristotle articulates what it is for specimens of the three species he mentions to be good, we can infer that he thinks that species differences within categories must be a source of multivocity in the predicate “good.” Aristotle does not provide any examples of any two intracategorially homonymously good things, but if we supply some examples we can see why the argument commits him to it nonetheless. Suppose, in addition to food, Aristotle also mentioned (the relative) father, in addition to medicine he mentioned architecture, and in addition to humans he mentioned dogs. In order to avoid positing
intra-categorical homonymy, Aristotle would have to say that the goodness of a good father consists in his productiveness of pleasure, the goodness of good architecture consists in its productiveness of health, and the goodness of a good dog consists in its wisdom, justice, etc. In light of the absurdity of these examples, it is clear that Aristotle would want to produce accounts of the goodness of each thing tailored to the specific kind of thing that it is. And since this is the case, if the signification argument succeeds and proving that goodness is homonymous at all, it must also prove that it is intra-categorically homonymous. Thus, the fact that Aristotle’s examples of homonymous goods in all fall into different categories ultimately proves to be unproblematic for my reading.

However, there is another objection that may be more troublesome. Recall that the TSH principle states that for any two distinct goodness-fixing kinds, $k_1$ and $k_2$, “good” will be said homonymously of a good $k_1$ and good $k_2$. If we plug human being in for $k_1$ and human soul in for $k_2$ we can derive the conclusion that a good human and a good soul are non-univocally good. But this is the opposite of what Aristotle claims: both a human and a soul have the same account of being-good, namely, that they possess virtuous qualities. The critic might concede that human and soul cannot be cited as a straightforward and unproblematic example “good” being used in a trans-specifically univocal way; after all, in Aristotle’s view there is at least some sense in which an individual human is identical with his or her soul (see e.g. Met. VII, 11 1037a5-10).

Nevertheless, Aristotle does seem to be claiming that the goodness of a human being qua hylomorphic composite is identical to the goodness of a human being qua form. Insofar as forms are different kinds of things from hylomorphic composites, this seems to be an example of two
different kinds of things which are identical with respect to the characteristics that constitute their goodness.

What this counterexample shows is that it is possible for two distinct kinds to set the same goodness criteria for their members. Thus, my initial formulation of TSH is inadequate since it ignores the fact that kinds may be distinguished from one another by features that are not relevant to their goodness-fixing character. We may modify the principle to correct for this deficiency: (TSH*) For any two goodness fixing kinds which set distinct goodness standards, \( k_1 \) and \( k_2 \), “good” will be said homonymously of a good \( k_1 \) and a good \( k_2 \).

The TSH* formulation escapes the soul/human counterexample. Although human being and human soul are distinct kinds which are both goodness-fixing, they are not distinct with respect to the standards of goodness they set for their kind members. Thus good humans and souls can share a single definition of being good. For reasons I will set out below, I take it that the phenomenon of two goodness-fixing kinds that set the same goodness standards will be a relatively rare one for Aristotle. Nevertheless, TSH* represents an advancement over TSH inasmuch as it can accommodate special cases like soul/human.

But even if TSH* is correct, a critic might argue that it is too abstract to be very illuminating or useful. Presumably, not all kinds set standards of goodness to be met by their kind members. To borrow an example from Thomson, pebble is not plausibly construed as a goodness-fixing kind (22-24). Although pebbles may, of course, be good for various purposes, there is arguably no such thing as excellent specimen of the kind, pebble; a pebble which is good qua pebble. Aristotle thus needs some account of what distinguishes kinds that are goodness fixing from those that are not. Furthermore, since TSH* allows that two goodness-fixing kinds
may set identical goodness standards, he also needs an account that specifies the conditions under which goodness-fixing kinds will set different standards. Otherwise, we could not reliably infer that two goods are homonymous from the fact that they are good *qua* specimens of two distinct kinds.

Unfortunately, Aristotle never sets out the necessary and sufficient conditions for a kind’s being goodness-fixing. He does not leave us completely without guidance on the matter, however. I argue that he at least provides us with an account of a sufficient condition—a kind is a goodness-fixing kind if it is a function kind. And since members of function kinds are assessed as good or bad with reference to their functions, a difference in function will also be sufficient for different goodness standards. That is, if a $k_1$ and $k_2$ belong to kinds with different functions, we can infer that a “good” is not said synonymously of a good $k_1$ and a good $k_2$. To set out a clearer picture of Aristotle’s views of function kinds as goodness-fixing, we should turn our attention to the function arguments from *Nicomachean Ethics* I, 7 and *Eudemian Ethics* II, 1.

The function argument, especially the *EN* version, will no doubt be familiar territory for most students of Aristotle. Nevertheless, it may be helpful to review briefly the basic structure of each argument. The two versions of the function argument differ significantly in their structure and in their details, but they both ultimately seek to establish the same conclusion and employ the same basic strategy to establish it. The conclusion to be proved is, of course, that happiness consists in a life of virtuous activity (*EE* 1219a39, *EN* 1098a17-20). The basic strategy of both arguments is to draw out conceptual connections between the function of a thing and various types of goodness proper to it. Both arguments then try to show that, if we think about the human
soul in terms of the conceptual links that have just been laid out, we can deduce that happiness is a life of virtuous activity.

To begin with the more familiar *EN* version: Aristotle opens the argument by claiming that, for any kind of thing which has a function, the good of a thing of that kind is to be found in the function (*EN* 1097b27-28). Then he argues that human beings as such have functions, thus the human good is to be found in the human function (*EN* 1097b 30-34). Aristotle takes for granted that the human function will be some kind of life or vital activity. He rules out the possibility that it would be mere life, or a life guided by sensory appetites, as these are shared by plants and non-rational animals respectively, and would not, therefore, be proper to human beings (*EN* 1097b35-1098a1). He argues that the human function must therefore be rational life activity (*EN* 1098a4).

Aristotle then draws out the connection between virtue and human functioning. He argues that the function of a *k* and the function of a good (*spoudaios*) *k* are the same, except that in the case of the good *k*, “superiority in virtue” is added to the function (*EN* 1098a10). This means that if the human function is rational activity, the function of a good human is rational activity in accordance with virtue (*EN* 1098a13-16). Since the human good resides in the human function, Aristotle concludes that rational activity in accordance with virtue is also the correct definition of happiness (*EN* 1098a 17-20).

The function argument in the *Eudemian Ethics* is less extensively studied and arguably more complex than the one in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Like the more familiar *EN* version, the function argument in *EE* also aims to prove that happiness is to be identified with virtuous activity. Aristotle proceeds by, first, laying out an extensive array of assumptions (*EE* 1218b-
1219a26), and then inferring conclusions from them in quick succession (EE 1219a26-39). In my presentation of the argument, I will make the inferences along the way to facilitate clarity.

Although it is not explicitly stated until the argument is well underway, the EE function argument begins with the assumption that happiness is the best human good (EE 1219a27). Aristotle takes this assumption to have been established by the arguments of book I. The first explicitly stated assumption is that all goods may be divided into those that are internal to the soul and those that are external to it (EE 1218b31-32). Since internal goods are assumed to be superior to external goods, we can infer that happiness must be internal rather than external (EE 1218b33).

Aristotle then analyzes what types of things constitute internal goods by applying the theory of potentiality and actuality to the soul. Things in the soul (and thus internal goods) are either states (hexeis), powers (dunameis), on the one hand, or motions (kinēseis) or activities (energeiai) on the other (EE 1218b36-37). Aristotle is drawing our attention to the contrast between various types of potentiality in the soul and the active exercise of those potentialities. Thus, at this point we are meant to infer that happiness must either be some kind of potentiality in the soul or the actualization of a psychic potentiality.

Two further assumptions about the goodness of powers and activities in the soul allow Aristotle to refine this conclusion. The first is that the better a state (hexis) is, the better its corresponding work (ergon) is (EE 1219a6). To put the point more generally, the better a psychic potentiality is, the better its corresponding actualization. This means that if some power, $P_1$ is better than some other, $P_2$, then the corresponding actualization, $A_1$, will be better than $A_2$. The second assumption is that an actualization of a potentiality is always better than the potentiality
itself (*EE* 1219a9). In our earlier example, $A_1$ will be better than $P_1$ and $A_2$ better than $P_2$. The upshot of these two assumptions is that happiness must be the actualization of the best potentiality in the soul. Happiness cannot be a psychic potentiality at all because, if it were, there would be at least one thing better than it, namely, its actualization. Neither can happiness be an actualization of any potentiality other than the best, because it would then be worse than the actualizations of better potentials. Hence, happiness must be the actualization of the best psychic potentiality, whatever that turns out to be.

Aristotle argues that the best potentiality of anything which has a work or function (*ergon*) is virtue (*EE* 1218b39-1219a1). Just like cloaks, boats, or houses, Aristotle argues that the soul has a function (*EE* 1219a3-5). It follows that the best psychic potentiality is virtue. The actualization of virtue will be the best internal good, and therefore, the best human good of all. This means that happiness must be identified with the activity of virtue (*EE* 1219a39).

Our present purpose in examining the two versions of the function is to shed light on the trans-specific homonymy of goodness in Aristotle. For this reason, we can safely set aside Aristotle’s conclusion about the nature of the human good and, instead, focus on the more general framework relating goodness to functioning. I take it that the key connections are between the function of a (kind-member) $K$ and:

a) The good of a $k$ (i.e. the end at which it characteristically aims).

b) The virtues of a $k$.

c) Being a good $k$. 
d) “The well” of a $k$ (that is, I take it, what it is for a $k$ to do well, or what good activity for a $k$ is).\(^9\)

The two versions of the argument take different approaches to connecting the function of a thing to the different kinds of goodness, but the basic conceptual structure they set out is very similar (though perhaps not completely identical).

First, both arguments maintain that for anything which has a function, the good of that thing is dependent on the function. In the $EE$ version, Aristotle straightforwardly claims that the good of a thing (in the sense of its end), $just$ is its function: “And the function of each thing is its end” ($EE$ 1219a9). The $EN$ version qualifies the identity of $telos$ and $ergon$; there Aristotle claims that “for all things that have a function or activity [$praxis$], the good and the well is thought to be in the function” ($EE$ 1097b26-27). Saying that the good of a thing is $in$ its function is slightly different than saying that the good $is$ the function. Unfortunately, Aristotle does not clarify this being-in relation in general terms. However, we can infer what the relation is supposed to be based on Aristotle’s conclusions about the human function and the human good: the good of a thing is its function performed well, which is to say, with excellence or virtue.\(^10\)

Concordantly, both arguments also posit a connection between being a good $k$ and carrying out the function of a $k$ well or virtuously. The $EE$ version argues for this connection in a somewhat roundabout way. It begins by comparing the function of a $k$ with the function of a virtue of a $k$ ($EE$ 1219a20). The function of shoemaking (both the art and the activity,\(^9\)

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\(^9\)“The well” is only explicitly mentioned in the $EN$ version of the argument. However since in both arguments, Aristotle ends up claiming that the good of a thing is an activity (which can be performed well or badly), the $EE$ version also implicitly contains an account of “the well.”

\(^10\)Since the human function is rational activity and the human good is excellent rational activity. It also follows that the good of a $k$ is the function of a good $k$. 
skutotomikos and skuteusis) is a shoe. So, if there is a virtue of shoemaking and of a good (spoudaios) shoemaker, the function of these will be a good (spoudaios) shoe (EE 1219a23-24).\textsuperscript{11} Aristotle does not articulate the abstract principle at work in this example, but we can supply it: if the function of $k$ is $f$, then the function of the virtue of $k$ is good $f$ (or, if the function is an activity, φ-ing well).

When Aristotle talks about the “virtue of a good shoemaker” this might be taken to imply that good shoemakers have virtues that are distinct from the virtues of shoemakers as such. I doubt Aristotle intended to imply this conclusion. It is more likely that the virtues of shoemakers are just those characteristics that make a shoemaker a good shoemaker. And thus, the function of a good shoemaker is a good shoe and, more generally, if the function of a $k$ is $f$, then the function of a good $k$ is a good $f$ (or φ-ing well). This reading is corroborated by Aristotle’s statement that happiness is the activity of a good soul (EE 1219a35), a conclusion he takes to follow from the premise that the good (spoudaios) life is the function of the soul’s virtue (EE 1219a27). So Aristotle appears to be committed to the thesis that the function of a virtue of a $k$ is the same as the function of a good $k$. It is plausible to suppose that this is because a good $k$ just is a virtuous $k$. We could cash this out further by noting that a good $k$ aims at its function in the way that it does because of its virtues, and so, the fact that the virtues of a $k$ aim at carrying out $k$’s function well explains the fact that the virtue-possessor also aims at functioning well.

\textsuperscript{11}The word Aristotle uses in this passage and in the corresponding one in EN is not agathos, but spoudaios, “serious.” Given the conceptual structure the argument is laying out between different kinds of goodness, this terminology is unexpected and somewhat perplexing. Traditionally, many translators have simply rendered “spoudaios” as “good,” sidestepping the problem. Some recent commentators and translators have criticized this practice, arguing that it distorts Aristotle’s meaning (see Sachs 11n16 and Lu). In my view, for Aristotle “a spoudaios $k$” means at least “a good $k$.” “Spoudaios” may be more colorful than “agathos” and have suggestive connotations that “agathos” lacks, but I take it that Aristotle would endorse the principle that a $k$ is spoudaios only if it is agathos. If I am right about this we may, for present purposes, treat seriousness and goodness as equivalent.
The *EN* version of the argument draws the connection between a good *k* and functioning well more directly: the function of a *k* and the function of a good (*spoudaitos*) *k*, he says, are the same, except that in the case of the good *k* “superiority in virtue” is added to the function (*EN* 1098a10). That is, if the function of a *k* is φ-ing, then the function of a good *k* is φ-ing well, that is, φ-ing with virtue. Since the only difference between the function of a *k* and the function of a good *k* is that the latter is carried out virtuously, it is reasonable to suppose that the goodness of a good *k* consists in its possession of its proper virtues. This would suggest that, for function-kinds, being good *just is* being virtuous, where virtues are understood as those characteristics that enable their possessors to carry out their functions well. Aristotle does not make this implication explicit in the function argument itself, but he does when he is working toward a definition of moral virtue in book II chapter six: “So it must be said that every virtue both brings into good condition that thing of which it is the virtue and makes the function of that thing be done well” (*EN* 1106a15-16).

These considerations provide a clue as to how Aristotle may be thinking about the homonymy of goodness in *Topics* I, 15. Most obviously, the function of the human being is rational activity. Thus, the human virtues are the excellences proper to rational activity. And since a good (function-kind member) *k* is a virtuous *k*, the moral and intellectual virtues constitute the goodness of a good human being. Consequently, the account of a good human’s being-good is “being courageous, just, temperate, wise, etc.” A different substance with a different function will have different virtues proper to it, and thus, the goodness of a good specimen of that kind of substance will have its goodness constituted by different characteristics; a good horse, or good dog, for instance, will not be good in the same sense as a good human.
Similarly, the function of medicine is health, so the virtues that constitute the goodness of good medicine are those that enable it to bring health into being. Hence, “productiveness of health” is the definition of good medicine’s goodness. Other items in the category of quality which have different functions (like the other arts) will accordingly have different accounts of goodness.

Admittedly, “productiveness of pleasure” as the account of food’s goodness does not fit smoothly into a functional analysis. In light of the account of food from De Anima II, 4, we would expect Aristotle to analyze food’s goodness in terms of its capacity to nourish an animate body. There are several possible explanations for his anomalous account of the goodness of food: perhaps Aristotle had not yet worked out his mature account of the nature of food when he wrote the Topics. Alternatively, he may have simply been deferring to ordinary linguistic usage; to the fact that when people call a meal “good” they are more likely to be saying that they find the taste pleasant than they are to be assessing its nutritional value. Neither of these explanations would undermine the idea that the signification argument can be read in light of the function argument.

Another possibility, which would be more damaging to my interpretation, is that Aristotle had not yet worked out the functional account of goodness when he was writing the Topics. If the signification argument predates the function argument, one might argue, then reading the former in light of the latter would be anachronistic. I concede that it is possible that the Topics predates the Eudemian and Nicomachean Ethics (and the Magna Moralia if it is authentically Aristotelian). However, even if the Topics is the earlier text, I argue that it is justifiable to read the function argument and the signification argument together. Since Aristotle’s function argument is a descendent of a similar argument from Plato’s Republic book I (352d-354b), we can be reasonably confident that Aristotle had already been exposed to the notion that there is a
conceptual connection between virtue and function when he was writing the *Topics*. So, even if we assume that the ethical works came later, it seems likely that the function arguments from those works represent refinements of ideas that Aristotle had been entertaining throughout his career.

The function arguments allow us to see some of the key implications of the TSH* principle. First, all the *infimae species* of substances will be function kinds, and therefore goodness-fixing kinds. Sublunar, material substance will have the complete actualizations of their respective forms as their functions. Particular sub-lunar substances will count as better or worse as members of their kinds to the extent that they are well-disposed toward carrying out that function. Celestial substances, on the other hand, will always be eternally carrying out their functions and attaining their proper goods. Therefore, the goodness of any good substance, as the particular kind of substance it is, will be distinct from the goodness of a good specimen of any other species of substance.

Similarly, non-substantial species will also be goodness-fixing kinds if they are directed toward a function. Arts and virtues are presumably non-substantial function-kinds, as are certain relatives (like *father* and *food*). Certain conventional and artefactual kinds, like *harpist*, *shoemaker*, and *cloak*, will also be goodness-fixing in virtue of their directedness toward a function. But Aristotle need not claim that all conventional kinds are goodness-fixing. To use our earlier example, Aristotle might not want to say that there are standards of excellence proper to a pebble. A pebble, no doubt, *will* have a function for Aristotle insofar as it is a piece of earth or of an earthy compound. But Aristotle might well agree with Thomson that a pebble does not have a function, an end, or proper standards of goodness *qua* pebble.
Viewing the TSH* principle in light of the function arguments also helps us see why human beings and their souls are synonymously good: the human soul and the human being have the same function. Indeed, since anything has the function it has in virtue of its form rather than its matter, the human being has the function it has in virtue of its soul. For this reason, a human being is good if and only if his soul is. In short, the fact that human and soul are two distinct goodness fixing kinds that set the same goodness standards for their members is a special case that only arises because of the constitutive metaphysical relation between a hylomorphic composite and its form. Absent this constitutive relation, distinct goodness-fixing kinds will set distinct goodness standards.

I have so far argued that being a function kind is a sufficient condition for being a goodness-fixing kind. Is it also a necessary condition? That is, are function kinds the only goodness-fixing kinds Aristotle recognizes. I resist this conclusion for two reasons: first, according to the signification argument, it is possible for items in certain categories to be good qua members of those categories. More specifically, it is possible for a time to be good qua time (by being opportune) in the same way it is possible for a human to be good qua human (by being virtuous). But unless Aristotle thinks the categories themselves are function-kinds (which seems unlikely) then it follows that there are at least some goodness-fixing kinds which are not function-kinds. These goodness-fixing kinds which are not function kinds will presumably not be infima species (Aristotle’s own examples are summa genera, after all), but it seems that Aristotle is at least open to the possibility of some intermediate species that are goodness-fixing in a way that is not dependent on the function of the kind. Secondly, the function argument (at least the EN version) takes special care to leave open the possibility of non-function kinds that
have their good/goodness fixed in some other way. “For all things that have a function or activity [praxis], the good and the well is thought to reside in the function,” but perhaps there are other things which do not have functions and whose good lies in something else (EN 1097b26-27). Times and quantities may be examples of non-functional goodness-fixing kinds.12

Although Aristotle does not provide us with a complete theory of goodness-fixing kinds, what he does tell us is sufficient to conclude that the trans-specific homonymy of goodness will be more ubiquitous than its transcendental homonymy. The categorial argument only establishes that there is a sense of “good” corresponding to each category. Taken together, the signification argument and the function argument establish that, in addition to the ten transcendental senses, there will be as many senses of “good” as there are goodness standards set by goodness-fixing kinds

**Intra-Specific Homonymy of Goodness: The Homonymy of Intrinsic Goods**

If my readings are correct, the categorial argument and the signification argument together establish that, for Aristotle, there is an indefinitely large number of attributes signified by the term “good.” Since “good” is extensively multivocal, Aristotle would face a formidable task if he wanted to show that goodness is not merely homonymous by chance. Clarifying the relations that tie homonomously good things together would be a tall order even if Aristotle only had to worry about the transcendental and trans-specific homonymy of goodness. However, as I will argue in this section, Aristotle also introduces a third level, the *intraspecific* level, at which good things can be homonymous.

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12It seems *prima facie* plausible to me that times and quantities are judged to be good or bad to the extent that they promote the functioning of substances in some way.
At the intraspecific level, some things which are good for beings of a particular species (e.g. human goods or equine goods) are good in different senses. Ultimately, following Thomas Tuozzo, I will argue that Aristotle posits four distinct types of human good, each type being good in a different sense. I further argue that we could extend the four-fold division of goods to other species of substances. Intraspecific homonymy serves to add yet another layer of complexity to any analysis we might give of goodness as a connected homonym. Aristotle was likely aware of this additional layer of complexity, since he introduces intraspecific homonymy in the passage immediately preceding his proposal for analyzing goodness in terms of connected homonymy (EN 1096b8-26).

The passage which introduces intraspecific homonymy, like the one which introduces transcendental homonymy, occurs in the context of the critique of Platonism about the good in EN I, 6. After presenting a series of arguments against the view that all good things are good in virtue of their participation in the form of the good (including the categorial argument we examined above), Aristotle pauses to consider a possible Platonic rejoinder. He imagines that a Platonist might object that Aristotle’s criticisms misconstrue the theoretical role of the form of the good. According to the objection, Platonists do not intend to claim that all goods share in a single form (EN 1096b10). Rather, we must make a distinction between those things which are sought and welcomed \textit{per se}, on the one hand, and the things which produce, protect, or prevent the opposites of the things which are sought \textit{per se} on the other (EN 1096b11-13). Thus, on this version of Platonism, “good” is said in two senses, good \textit{per se} and good \textit{per aliud} (EN 1096b14-15). The goodness of \textit{per se} goods consists in their sharing in the form of the good, while \textit{per aliud} goods are good because of their causal relations to \textit{per se} goods.
Aristotle grants the distinction and suggests that the auxiliary things (hoi ὦμελοι, i.e. the per aliud goods) be set aside in order to focus the enquiry on the per se goods alone (EN 1096b15). But even with the focus restricted to the per se goods, Aristotle doubts whether it is plausible to claim that they are all called “good” in accordance with a single form (EN 1096b15-16). His argument, which I will call “the argument from the homonymy of intrinsic goods” (HIG), can be interpreted as taking the form of a dilemma.13 A Platonist could either claim that the only per se good is the form of the good itself or could claim that some things are good per se other than the form. If the Platonist takes the first horn, he will run into the serious difficulty that the form will be “empty” or “without purpose” (mataion) (EN 1096b20-21). Presumably, the idea here is that participation in the form is meant to explain the goodness of the things in the class of per se goods. But if that class is empty (aside from the form itself), then the form of the good cannot play the explanatory role for the sake of which it was posited in the first place. On the other hand, if the Platonist takes the second horn and allows that there are other per se goods aside from the form, then he will have to acknowledge what Aristotle takes to be a set of paradigmatic per se goods. Furthermore, Aristotle thinks that, on reflection, the Platonist will see that the different items on the list of per se goods are not all univocally good. Thus, their (per se) goodness will not be explicable in terms of their sharing in a single form.

Aristotle begins the chain of reasoning for the second horn by asking what sorts of things we ought to classify as good per se (EN 1096b16). He answers that per se goods are whichever

13Aristotle does not neatly lay out the dilemmatic form of the argument: he begins with what I am characterizing as the second horn of the dilemma, interrupts with a consideration of the first horn, and then returns to the second horn. I treat each horn in the sequence I do for the sake of clarity. Additionally, I will argue below that the per se/per aliud distinction does not perfectly map on to the modern distinction between instrumental and intrinsic goods. I call the argument “HIG” primarily to avoid the more cumbersome (albeit more accurate) title “argument from the homonymy of per se goods.”
things are sought even when isolated or taken by themselves (monoumena diōketai) (EN 1096b17). Particularly clear examples include prudent thinking (to phronein, that is, the activity of phronēsis), seeing (to horan), and some pleasures and honors. Even if we pursue those things on account of something else, Aristotle also thinks that we also pursue them for their own sakes and that they should be included on any plausible list of per se goods (EN 1096b18-19). But if this is true, then, on the Platonic theory, all four things should share a single account of what it is for them to be good (EN 1096b21-22). Just as the account of the whiteness of snow is the same as the account of the whiteness of white paint, so too the account of goodness should be the same for Aristotle’s paradigmatic per se goods (EN 1096b22-23). But in fact, the accounts of pleasure, honor, and prudence, as goods (hē agatha), are different and distinct (EN 1096b23-25). That is to say, pleasure, honor, and prudence are homonymously good. Thus, Aristotle concludes, the good is not something common and in accordance with a single form (EN 1096b25-26).

Whether HIG works as a critique of Platonism is debatable. In particular, there is no obvious reason that a Platonist should accept without argument that the items on Aristotle list of per se goods are homonymous. However, for my purposes, HIG is more valuable for what it reveals about Aristotle’s own views of the good than it is as a critique of Platonic theory. The premise that pleasure, honor, and prudence are homonymously good, which I will henceforth call “the homonymy premise,” appears to be one that Aristotle endorses. It is, of course, true that some of the arguments in EN I, 6 appeal to premises that Aristotle does not necessarily endorse, for example, that there are no forms corresponding to groups of things in which there is priority and posteriority (EN 1096a17), and that whenever things fall under a single form they constitute
the subject matter for a single science (EN 1096a29).\textsuperscript{14} However, in these cases, Aristotle is temporarily taking up Platonic premises in order to construct a dialectical refutation; to show that certain central Platonic doctrines (in conjunction with other premises), entail that there can be no single form of the good. By contrast, the homonymy premise of HIG is not a well-known Platonic tenet. On the contrary, it is a premise that a Platonist would undoubtedly want to reject. It seems likely, therefore, that Aristotle is not merely taking up the homonymy premise temporarily for the sake of the refutation. Rather, he introduces the premise because he actually thinks it is true.

Unfortunately, Aristotle provides no argument to justify the homonymy premise and does not tell us what the “different and distinct” accounts of pleasure, honor, and prudence as goods are supposed to be. Thus, the challenge for the interpreter of HIG is to discern how we ought to understand these items as both good \textit{per se} and homonymous with respect to goodness within Aristotle’s philosophical framework. To state my own view at the outset: I think that the items on Aristotle’s list of \textit{per se} goods are human goods, which derive their goodness from their relations to the highest human good, happiness. I will argue that the fact that their goodness is derivative does not conflict with their being good \textit{per se}. Furthermore, we can understand the goods as homonymous because they stand in different sorts of relations to the highest good. If this interpretation is right, then Aristotle is advocating the thesis that goodness is intraspecifically homonymous—that at least some of the things that are (\textit{per se}) good for a being of a particular species are not good in the same sense.

\textsuperscript{14}Perhaps Aristotle trivially agrees with the first of these premises, since he does not think that there are separated forms of anything. But insofar as the premise assumes that there \textit{are} separated forms corresponding to groups of things in which there is no priority and posteriority, Aristotle would reject it.
To begin the case for the intraspecific interpretation of HIG, we should take note of the following: in claiming that the accounts of the goodness of pleasure, honor, and prudence differ, Aristotle is implicitly denying that “being sought even when taken by themselves” (monoumena diōketai) is an adequate account of their goodness (EN 1096b17). If it were, then we would already have an account of goodness that would apply univocally to every per se good. I take it that the similar definition of the good from the Rhetoric as “that which is choiceworthy [haireton] for its own sake” would not be sufficient either (Rh. 1362a23). Aristotle appears to want a more informative definition; one which would specify what it is about each thing that makes it a fit object of choice or pursuit per se. The claim of the homonymy premise must be, therefore, that the characteristic (or set of characteristics) that constitute pleasure’s choiceworthiness is distinct from the characteristic (or set thereof) that constitute honor’s choiceworthiness, and so on.

One interpretive strategy we might employ to elucidate why the goods on Aristotle’s list have different good-making (and choiceworthy-making) features is to think of them along the same lines as the goods discussed in the signification argument from the Topics. That is to say, we could think of pleasure, honor, and the rest as goodness-fixing kinds. On this reading, we could argue that just as the goodness of good food is different from the goodness of a good human being, so too the goodness of good pleasure is different from the goodness of good honor, etc. Interpreted in this way, Aristotle appeals to trans-specific homonymy to refute the objection he has devised on behalf of the Platonist.

15Haireton is ambiguous between “chosen,” “able to be chosen,” and “choiceworthy” and Aristotle is not always as clear as we might like about which sense is intended. Diōkta, is similarly ambiguous between that which is actually pursued, can be pursued, and is worthy of pursuit. Gabrielle Richardson Lear argues persuasively that Aristotle typically has the normative senses of these terms in mind (31-37).
However, in my view, the trans-specific reading of the homonymy premise is untenable for at least two reasons. The first is that it cannot adequately make sense of the goodness of prudence and its activity (*phronēsis* and *to phronein*). The trans-specific reading must assume that prudence is itself a goodness-fixing kind, and thus, that it is possible for a particular instance of prudence to be good or bad *qua prudence*. But there is a plausible *prima facie* case for denying that prudence is a goodness fixing kind. While Aristotle certainly thinks that there are good and bad pleasures (*EN* 1175a25ff), and he might plausibly be interpreted as thinking that there are good and bad honors as well, prudence is arguably not the sort of thing that could have good and bad instances. Since “prudence” names a virtue, it only refers to the excellent specimens of the broader goodness-fixing kind which we might call “practical thought.” As such, there is no such thing as *bad* prudence. If practical thought is exercised poorly (either because it aims at an unworthy end or selects inappropriate means to that end) it simply does not count as prudence (*EN* 1142b34-35, 1144a24-28).

Now, it must be conceded that Aristotle at least sometimes maintains the thesis that virtue comes in degrees (*EN* 1173a17-23). If prudence comes in degrees, then perhaps we *can* make sense of prudence as a kind with good or bad instances after all. Namely, we could argue that a maximally prudent disposition (and its corresponding activity) is better *qua* prudence than a minimally prudent one. According to this way of thinking, practical thought must pass some minimal threshold of excellence in order to qualify as prudence, but there is room to improve the disposition beyond that threshold. Notice, however, that on this analysis of prudence, even a minimally prudent disposition will count as a virtue. As such, even the worst possible instance of prudence will be an important human good and will be choiceworthy for its own sake. So, when
Aristotle says that the account of prudence as a good is different from that of honor as a good, the account in question must articulate the goodness of bad, i.e. minimal prudence (if there is such a thing) just as much as it articulates the goodness of good prudence. The trans-specific reading of the homonymy premise would only explain why the goodness of the good instances of prudence differs from the goodness of the other two goods.

The upshot is that the trans-specific reading of the homonymy premise faces a dilemma concerning prudence: either prudence is a goodness-fixing kind or it is not. If it is not, then the trans-specific strategy fails, since it is predicated on viewing each of Aristotle’s examples as goodness-fixing kinds. On the other hand, if prudence is a goodness-fixing kind, then the trans-specific reading is not much better off. This is because we must acknowledge that even the worst possible instance of prudence would still qualify as a virtue, and thus, as a good which is choiceworthy in itself. The trans-specific reading would only be able to give an account of the goodness of those dispositions and activities which are good qua instances of prudence. It would not be able to account for the goodness of those minimally prudent activities and dispositions which, although bad qua prudence, would still count as per se goods.

The second reason to reject the trans-specific reading is more general. Indeed, it generalizes the lesson learned from our examination of prudence: in the homonymy premise, Aristotle is not saying that only the good instances of the things on his list are choiceworthy per se. Rather, he is saying that all cases of seeing, prudence, (some) pleasures, and (some?) honors are choiceworthy per se. The fact that he adds the qualification that only some pleasures (and
possibly only some honors) are *per se* goods underscores this point.\(^{16}\) Aristotle wants to ensure that everything he lists is good *per se* and thus, he excludes from consideration anything which might not be, such as vicious pleasure. Therefore, the accounts of goodness we are looking for would be those that specify the characteristics in virtue of which prudence and seeing are always *per se* choiceworthy, on the one hand, and the characteristics in virtue of which honor and pleasure are choiceworthy whenever they are choiceworthy. These accounts will not be coextensive with those that specify the good-making features of good instances of seeing, prudence, pleasure, and honor.

The alternative interpretation that I favor begins with the observation that Aristotle would understand the items on his list of *per se* goods to be human goods. They are things that are *per se* choiceworthy for human beings specifically, rather than for some other sort of being. Admittedly, each particular good on the list might also be a good for some other sort of being: non-human animals share in pleasure and sight, some non-human animals are said to have some form of prudence (*EN* 1123b17-18), and divine beings are also recipients of honor (*EN* 1123b17-18). Nevertheless, humans are the only kind of being in Aristotle’s cosmos for which *all four* things (pleasure, sight, prudence, and honor) would be *per se* goods—non-human animals presumably do not pursue honor, and divine beings would lack sight or any other form of sense-perception.\(^{17}\)

\(^{16}\)The Greek reads “*hēdonai tines kai timai*” (*EN* 1096b18), and translators are divided over whether or not “*tines*” is distributed over both nouns. If Aristotle thinks that only some honors are *per se* goods, then presumably he is excluding honors that are undeserved or those that come from the wrong sources (cf. *EN* 1125b7-10).

\(^{17}\)Here, I am bracketing a curious passage in the *Generation of Animals* in which Aristotle appears to argue for the existence of a species of animal that lives on the moon (*GA* 761b16-24). Given Aristotle’s general tendency to view celestial things as superior to terrestrial things, it seems highly likely that Aristotle would think that, if there were animals on the moon, they would be rational animals. In that case, the items on Aristotle’s list of *per se* goods might also be good for these moon animals as well. I will not explore this possibility. See Patrick Macfarlane’s
If we take Aristotle’s list of *per se* goods to name human goods, then another strategy for interpreting how they can be both good in themselves and homonymous suggests itself. Aristotle holds that happiness is the first principle of ethics which is to say that it is the cause of the goodness of all other human goods (*EN* 1102a3-5). In light of this, perhaps Aristotle holds that pleasure, honor, and prudence are all choiceworthy in their own right because they stand in certain causal relations to happiness. At the same time, he might hold that these *per se* goods are homonymous with respect to their goodness because they do not stand in *the same* relation to happiness. To put the point in another way, happiness is the cause of each thing’s goodness, but it may be a different kind of cause in each case.

Before we explore how what the different relations between the *per se* goods and happiness might be, let us pause to consider some possible objections. Firstly, one might worry that if we think of pleasure, honor, and prudence as human goods (whose goodness is to be explained with reference to happiness) then Aristotle’s argument appears to be question-begging. The Platonist contends that the goodness of the goods attainable in human life is the very same attribute as the goodness of every other (*per se*) good thing in the cosmos. If HIG presupposes that the goodness of human goods is distinct from, say, the goodness of equine goods, then it starts from an assumption that the Platonist cannot be expected to take on board. More specifically, it starts from the assumption that goodness is trans-specifically homonymous in order to argue that it is also intraspecifically homonymous. The Platonist need not grant the assumption, let alone the conclusion inferred from it, because he holds that *per se* goods are not

“*Aristotle on Fire Animals*” for a helpful overview of different interpretations of the passage in question. According to Macfarlane, Aristotle is only arguing that the celestial spheres are themselves alive, not that there are animals living on the surface of the moon.
homonymous at all. A critic of my reading might go on to say that it is uncharitable to saddle Aristotle with an argument that is so blatantly question-begging.

By way of response, I would first point out that Aristotle does not give a question-begging defense of the homonymy premise of HIG, because he in fact gives no defense of that premise whatsoever. I must concede, however, that on my interpretation, if Aristotle were to give an account of why he thinks pleasure, honor, and prudence are homonymously good that account probably would beg important questions against the Platonist; at least inasmuch as it would presuppose distinctively Aristotelian theoretical commitments that a Platonist would not necessarily share. However, I do not think that my reading us uncharitable to Aristotle for that reason. On my interpretation, Aristotle has good reasons, well-grounded in his own ethical theory, for thinking that pleasure, honor, and prudence are not univocally good. For that reason, he at least has justification for thinking that he has produced a sound argument against the position that the form of the good explains the goodness of all per se goods. In this respect, I contend that my interpretation is more charitable than one which would see the homonymy premise as ad hoc and ungrounded in any more fundamental Aristotelian principles. Perhaps an ideally charitable reason would attempt to find reasons why a Platonist ought to be committed, even on his own terms, to the homonymy premise. But it seems to me exceedingly unlikely that any such reasons will be forthcoming.

To drive the point home, it may be useful to compare HIG with the argument from priority and posteriority that appears earlier in EN I, 6 (EN 1096a17-23). The basic structure of the argument from priority and posteriority is:
1) There are no forms corresponding to classes of things in which there is priority and posteriority.

2) There is priority and posteriority among good things.

3) So, there is no form corresponding to the class of good things.

Premise one is a Platonic premise, taken up for the sake of argument, but premise two is not. Premise two justified by an appeal to the theory of categories, specifically, the priority of substance to the non-substantial categories (EN 1096a 20-22). The argument from priority and posteriority is thus constructed from one premise that a Platonist would readily grant and another premise that relies on distinctively Aristotelian theoretical commitments. We can represent the second horn of HIG as having the same hybrid structure:

1) If the form of the good explains the goodness of all per se goods, then all per se goods share a single account of their goodness.

2) It is not the case that all per se goods share a single account of their goodness.

3) So, the form of the good does not explain the goodness of all per se goods.

Unlike the argument from priority and posteriority, Aristotle leaves premise two of the HIG argument entirely undefended. Nevertheless, I contend that if he were to defend premise two, he would do so on Aristotelian, rather than Platonic grounds, just as he does for premise two of the argument from priority and posteriority. So, in my view, the cogency of HIG does depend on presupposing controversial Aristotelian doctrines that a Platonist would be unlikely to accept.

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18 More precisely, he leaves the premise that pleasure, honor, and prudence have different accounts as goods undefended. I have formulated the premise in its negative, generalized form in order to present a formally valid, two premise version of the argument.
However, in this respect it is no different from the earlier arguments in *EN* I, 6 which presuppose the theory of the categories.

Another, perhaps more obvious objection is that it is unclear how the goods on Aristotle’s list can count as *per se* goods at all if their goodness is dependent on their relations to happiness. In the explanatory notes to his translation, Joe Sachs suggests we construe the premise that honor and pleasure are good in themselves as an endoxic one that Aristotle may not ultimately endorse. His argument is that Aristotle has already called into question whether certain kinds of pleasure are good at all and has “questioned whether honor is dependent on a higher good” (Sachs 8n11). Sachs’ assumption concerning honor seems to be that Aristotle could not regard it as good *per se* if he believed its goodness to be dependent on a higher good. To extend the argument a bit, we might contend that insofar as honor’s goodness is dependent on its relation to a higher good, it is only good in virtue of another thing (i.e. good *per alium*), rather than good in itself. So, according to this line of thought, it would be incoherent to think of the goodness of *per se* goods in terms of their relations to happiness because if their goodness were constituted by those relations they would not be good in themselves at all.

In answering this objection, it is important to remember that Aristotle explicitly and unambiguously rejects the position that happiness is the only thing that is choiceworthy for its own sake and that everything else is choiceworthy only to the extent that it is a means to happiness. He recognizes a class of goods, which commentators often refer to as “middle-level ends,” which are both choiceworthy in their own right and for the sake of happiness. In *EN* I, 7

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19Sachs’ comment about pleasure seems to ignore the fact that Aristotle specifies that he is only talking about *some* pleasures. I take it that this qualification is intended precisely to exclude any pleasures which are not good and to focus on the goodness of those that are good.
he reaffirms that honor, pleasure, and every virtue fall into this class of things that are choiceworthy on account of themselves (di’ auta) and that we would chose them even if nothing else resulted from them (EN 1097b2-4). Even if Aristotle initially accepts the status of honor and pleasure as per se goods on endoxic grounds, as Sachs contends, their reappearance in EN I, 7 suggests that Aristotle endorses the endoxon. Further, the fact that honor and pleasure are for the sake of happiness clearly does not compromise their status as choiceworthy per se in Aristotle’s eyes.

In reaffirming that pleasure, honor, and the virtues are good per se, Aristotle is implicitly denying that they are to be classed among the auxiliary goods (hoi ὁψελιμοί). That is, their goodness does not consist in, or at least is not exhausted by, their capacities to produce, protect, or prevent the opposite of happiness. However, I take it that Aristotle is not denying that their choiceworthiness must ultimately be explained in terms of some kind of relation to happiness. Happiness’ status as the first principle of ethics and the “cause of goods” means that the goodness of every other human good must be explained with reference to it. What we need to find, then, is some kind of relation between happiness and the subordinate per se goods that would explain the goodness of the latter without reducing them to auxiliaries. Furthermore, in order to explain why some per se goods are homonymous, we need to find more than one of these relations so that honor, pleasure, and prudence can be understood as having “different and distinct” accounts as goods.

Perhaps the most well-known strategy in the literature for explaining the goodness of middle-level ends like pleasure, honor, and prudence is J.L. Ackrill’s “inclusivist” interpretation. Ackrill attributes to Aristotle a distinction between two different ways some x can be for the sake
of some $y$. $X$ is for the sake of $y$ as an *instrumental means* if $x$ “terminates in a product or outcome which [$y$] can then use or exploit” (Ackrill Eudaimonia 18). This corresponds, at least roughly, to the relationship between the auxiliary goods and the *per se* goods they produce or protect. But $x$ can also be for the sake of $y$ as a *constitutive means*, which is to say the relation between $x$ and $y$ is “like that of part to whole, the relation an activity or end may have to an activity or end that includes or embraces it” (Ackrill Eudaimonia 19). For Ackrill, the relation between middle-level ends and happiness is a relation between constitutive means and the end they jointly constitute. On this account, pleasure, honor, and virtue are good *per se* because they each partially constitute the highest good, happiness.

Unfortunately, Ackrill’s account will not work for my purposes. One reason is, as Gabrielle Richardson Lear argues, it is doubtful that inclusivism can actually do justice to happiness’ status as the first principle of ethics. Rather than showing how middle-level ends derive their goodness from happiness, inclusivism seems to assume that middle-level ends possess their intrinsically good character independently of their relations to happiness. This is because inclusivism understands happiness as an aggregate of intrinsic goods. The most straightforward way of understanding the goodness of this aggregate would be as a function of the goodness of its constituents. But this gets the explanatory relation between the goodness of middle-level end and happiness backwards (Lear 42). More to the point, however, on an inclusivist interpretation, all middle-level ends will be univocally good. The account that specifies the goodness of each middle-level end will be that it is a constitutive means to happiness. For this reason, inclusivism is of no help in making sense of Aristotle’s claim that pleasure, honor, and prudence each have different accounts of their being-good.
Intraspecific Homonymy: The Four-Fold Division of Goods

However, an alternative interpretation, proposed by Thomas Tuozzo, promises to illuminate what inclusivism leaves obscure. Tuozzo attributes to Aristotle the view that there are four distinct kinds of human goods, three of which are choiceworthy per se (298-299). He concedes that this four-fold theory of the good is never explicitly spelled out by Aristotle in any extant and uncontroversially authentic work (Tuozzo 298). However, it is presented in the Magna Moralia (MM 1183b20-38) and is attributed to Aristotle by several ancient commentators. Alexander of Aphrodisias even claims that Aristotle discusses the four-fold division of goods in his now-lost work, Diaereses (Comm. In Topica 242.1-9). Tuozzo spends the bulk of his article showing that this classification of goods provides an illuminating context for interpreting several important passages in the Nicomachean and Eudemian Ethics. Here, I argue that the homonymy premise of HIG (which Tuozzo does not discuss in his article) is another such passage. In order to see why this is so, let us examine Tuozzo’s argument in more detail.

One of Tuozzo’s opening claims is that it is illegitimate to read the modern dichotomy between intrinsic and instrumental goodness back into Aristotle (298). That dichotomy, he argues, is based on a broadly Humean conception of causality (Tuozzo 293). Since Hume, many philosophers have taken the position that there is no essential connection to be found between a cause and an effect. That is, causes and effects are thought to be “loose and separate” (in Hume’s words), such that the nature of an effect tells us nothing about the nature of its cause and vice versa (EHU 7:26; SBN 74). If we assume a theory of causation along these lines, then “an instrumental good’s standing in… a causal relation to an intrinsic good goes no way to showing
that it is good in itself” (Tuozzo 293). If an alternative theory of causation is assumed, one in which there are essential connections between causes and effects, then it may make more sense to suggest that a good may derive per se goodness from its causal relation to some other good. Aristotle, of course, does have a non-Humean theory of causation; a theory in which there are four distinct kinds of causal relation and all four arguably involve some kind of essential connection between cause and effect. Tuozzo argues that we ought to expect Aristotle’s theory of causation to be reflected in his theory of the good, particularly in his views of the way(s) in which one good can derive goodness from another. And this is just what we find in the four-fold division of goods attributed to Aristotle by the ancient commentators (Tuozzo 298).

The four kinds of good that the commentators and Tuozzo find in Aristotle are “the honored things” (ta timia), the noble or praiseworthy things (ta kala or ta epaineta), the powers (hai dunameis), and the auxiliaries (ta ōphelima) (Tuozzo 299). Aristotle uses the first three of these terms, without offering much of a clue as to what precisely they are supposed to signify, at the beginning of EN I, 12: “let us examine, concerning happiness, whether it is one of the praiseworthy things or one of the honored things, for it is clearly not one of the powers” (EN 1101b10-12). Tuozzo turns to the ancient commentators Aspasius, Arius Didymus, and Alexander of Aphrodisias, as well as the Magna Moralia for aid in interpreting this passage.

The picture that emerges from Tuozzo’s survey of the commentators is that honored things, praiseworthy things, and powers are three distinct classes of per se goods (299-301). The

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20 The essential connections are roughly as follows: form and matter are ontological constituents of the hylomorphic composites of which they are causes. Efficient causation always involves the actualization of some potentiality, and potentialities are pointed by their nature toward the actualities for which they are potentialities (see Met. IX, 8). Final causation is also ultimately grounded in the priority of actuality to potentiality, as Christopher Mirus has persuasively argued (see “The Metaphysical Roots of Aristotle’s Teleology”).
fourth class, the auxiliaries, is not included in the discussion in EN I, 12 because auxiliaries are not *per se* goods and it is taken for granted that happiness is choiceworthy *per se*. The four-fold division of goods clarifies both the structure and significance of the argument in EN I, 12. Without that division in mind, the question of whether happiness is honored or praiseworthy (and the assumption that it must be one or the other) appears arbitrary and unmotivated and the reference to powers seems mysterious. But if we suppose that Aristotle is working with the four-fold classification in mind, it is clear that the structure is an argument by elimination: beginning with the assumption that there are three types of *per se* human good, Aristotle immediately rules out the possibility that happiness is good *per se* as a power and then spends the rest of the chapter arguing that it is honored rather than praiseworthy. That happiness is an honored thing is a significant conclusion, according to this way of interpreting the chapter, because it represents an important refinement in Aristotle’s account of what it is for happiness to be good and how it relates to other human goods.

But what exactly is it to be an honored good and how does the goodness of honored things relate to that of praiseworthy things, powers, and auxiliaries? Aspasius tells us that honored things are “all those that pertain to the first principle (*hōsa archēs echetai*), such as rulers and gods” (*Comm. In Eth.* 32, 10-11). Meanwhile, the praiseworthy goods consist of “the virtues and the activities in accordance with virtue” (*Comm. In Eth.* 32, 12). The powers are the goods which are possible to use well or poorly (*Comm. In Eth.* 32, 13-14), and which are called “good” because they are “instruments (*organa*) for the virtuous for noble activities” (*Comm. In Eth.* 32, 15). Aspasius names health and wealth as examples of powers (*Comm. In Eth.* 32, 14). All three sorts of good are contrasted with auxiliaries, which are “never choiceworthy in
themselves (di’ auta haira), but always on account of something else (di’hetera)” (Comm. In Eth. 32, 17). As examples, he names several varieties of medical treatment which are choiceworthy only for the sake of the health they produce or protect (Comm. In Eth. 32, 17-18).

As Tuozzo acknowledges, Aspasius is frustrating vague about the nature of honored things and about what gives them their ultimate value-conferring role (306). Neither are the other commentators much more illuminating about the nature of honored things (Tuozzo 307).

Nevertheless, Tuozzo thinks that this lacuna can be remedied: the four-fold classification of goods provides an instructive framework for thinking about the relations the lesser goods bear to one another and, ultimately, to honored things. With this framework in place, we can give a more informative account of the nature of honored goods by returning to Aristotle himself, especially his comments on the value of contemplation and of the divine (Tuozzo 307-309).

As I have already indicated, Tuozzo thinks that the relations among the four types of good should be thought of as causal relations, as those relations are understood in Aristotle’s theory of causation. He further argues that, because Aristotle’s theory of the good presupposes his theory of causation, attempts to understand the theory of the good in terms of the instrumental/intrinsic dichotomy are bound to fail. One particularly salient case in is the attempt to account for the goodness of wealth. Modern theories often take wealth to be a paradigmatic instrumental good; something whose goodness consists entirely in its ability to facilitate the acquisition of other good things. At first glance, it might seem as though Aristotle is in agreement with modern moral theory on this point: in EN I, 5, for example, he argues that wealth cannot be the human good because it is “a useful thing (chrēsimon) and is for the sake of
something else” (EN 1096a6-7). However, if we take a closer look we find passages in which Aristotle claims that wealth is (also) choiceworthy *per se* (EN 1147b23-31).

The four-fold theory of goodness attributed to Aristotle by the ancient commentators has an explanation for this anomaly: wealth is a power, not an auxiliary. Powers are *per se* goods insofar as they are things a virtuous person would use well, as “instruments…for the performance of noble activities” in Aspasius’ words (*Comm. In Eth.* 32, 15). It might be objected that wealth’s status as an *instrument* for a good person can hardly explain its *non-instrumental* goodness. But Tuozzo argues that such an objection would misconstrue the relationship between powers and the virtuous activities they serve. Taking a cue from Arius Didymus, Tuozzo argues that powers “serve as the matter, the material cause, of virtuous action” (303). Wealth, for example, is the matter for a generous action. Wealth is not an extrinsic and therefore dispensable cause of generous action. In an act of giving a generous gift, for example, the wealth that is donated is an ontological constituent of the action itself. As a result, wealth has *derivative* *per se* goodness: its nature is such that it can (partially) constitute a praiseworthy good and this makes it choiceworthy in itself.

Powers are usefully contrasted with the auxiliaries, the goods which are not choiceworthy *per se*. Auxiliaries derive their goodness from producing or protecting some other good thing, but, unlike powers, they are not constituents of the good things they cause. A surgical procedure, for example, is neither the matter nor the form of the health it brings about. Auxiliaries, then, are efficient causes of powers, which are themselves material causes of praiseworthy goods (Tuozzo 304). So, auxiliaries and powers derive their goodness from two different kinds of causal relation.
to moral virtue and morally virtuous activity. Morally virtuous activity, in turn, is the joint actualization of the power and the virtuous disposition (Tuozzo 305).  

However, morally virtuous activity is not the ultimate source of goodness—it’s goodness must in some way derive from its relation to honored things. Tuozzo argues that Aristotle’s comments in EN I, 12 suggest that the relevant relation is one of final causation (307). Aristotle claims that happiness is an honored thing because it is a first principle, is that for the sake of which everything else is done, and is thus the “cause of goods” (EN 1102a 3-4). Since morally virtuous activities are praiseworthy goods rather than honored goods, classifying happiness as an honored good would imply that it is a good which is distinct from morally virtuous activity and explains the value of that activity. If we make these assumptions, there is only one plausible candidate for what that good could be in the context of Aristotle’s ethical theory: contemplation (theōria). And indeed, in light of the four-fold classification of goods, Tuozzo thinks we should not be surprised when Aristotle argues that happiness extends just as far as contemplation does, that contemplation is “honored in itself” (kath’ autēn timia), and that happiness is a kind of contemplation (theōria tis) (EN 1178b28-32) (Tuozzo 304).

The last major challenge for Tuozzo’s interpretation is to explain how the praiseworthy goods derive their (per se) goodness from contemplation by being teleologically directed toward it. Ultimately, Tuozzo argues that moral virtue is the state that gives an agent the “psychic

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21 Tuozzo does not address what the formal cause of a virtuous action is, but it must be the virtuousness of the action. For example, if wealth is the matter of a generous act, then the form must be the generous way in which it is used. This is subtly but importantly different from saying that the virtue of generosity itself is the form. As a hexis, generosity is less actual than generous activity that corresponds to it. For this reason, the character trait of generosity itself cannot be the form that actualizes the power, wealth, in a generous act. Tuozzo does convincingly argue that the fact that a virtuous act is a simultaneous actualization of two potentialities (e.g. wealth and the hexis of generosity) is not philosophically problematic by Aristotle’s lights; Aristotle already recognizes that a similar joint actualization of two potentialities occurs in sense perception (Tuozzo 305; DA 425b26-426a11).
freedom” she needs to acquire wisdom and to actualize it in contemplation (309). To stave off the objection that this would reduce moral virtue to an instrumental means for achieving contemplation, Tuozzo argues that the relation between the state of psychic freedom and contemplation is not merely extrinsic. That is, the relation is not analogous to the relation between an auxiliary and a power, a surgical procedure and health, for example. A more appropriate model is the relation between health (a power), and moral virtue. Health is not the matter of any particular moral virtue in the way that wealth is, but it is a “standing condition” for the exercise of many of the moral virtues, a “general material condition of moral action” (Tuozzo 311). Similarly, Tuozzo argues that moral virtue is a kind of general material condition for contemplation (311-312).

I have my doubts as to whether psychic freedom as a material condition for contemplation is the best way to characterize the teleological relation between moral virtue and contemplation. To briefly mention one worry, if the analogy, health: moral virtue :: moral virtue: contemplation, holds then it would seem that the relation between the two is just another case of material causation rather than one of final causation. Perhaps this is ultimately unproblematic: Christopher Mirus has argued that Aristotle holds, in general, that matter is proximately for the sake of form, and ultimately for the sake of the activity that corresponds to form (Roots 707). If this is correct, then psychic freedom’s being a material cause of contemplation is one way contemplation can be moral virtue’s final cause.

However, even if it is unproblematic at an abstract, conceptual level to claim that contemplation is the final cause of moral virtue insofar as moral virtue is a material condition contemplation, this still seems like troublingly tenuous basis for grounding the value of the moral
life. It would seem to make the value of moral virtue contingent on the truth of a dubious psychological hypothesis. Namely, the hypothesis that the particular psychic state induced by the acquisition of a very specific set of character traits (including, say, the disposition to tell jokes in the appropriate ways) is the only psychic state that makes contemplation possible. While justice, for example, is not merely instrumentally valuable on Tuozzo’s interpretation, it is good per se only because unjust people cannot contemplate, or at least cannot contemplate as well as just people. It would be preferable if we could find another plausible way of understanding how moral virtue’s value is grounded in its teleological relation to contemplation that would free Aristotle from his reliance on farfetched empirical theses like these. In chapter five I will argue that Gabrielle Richardson Lear’s proposal that moral virtue is for the sake of contemplation by approximating it can be used to fill out the four-fold classification of goods in a more satisfying way. However, for present purposes, it will be sufficient to review the basic conceptual structure of the classification and to show how it can illuminate the HIG argument.

So, to provide a synoptic account of the theory Tuozzo attributes to Aristotle, following the ancient commentators: there are four distinct kinds of human good, three of which are good in themselves, one of which is not. The goods which are not choiceworthy per se, the auxiliaries, are good insofar as they efficiently cause powers. Powers are per se goods because they serve as the material causes of virtuous action. Virtues and virtuous activity, the praiseworthy goods, are higher goods than powers since virtuous acts are actualizations of powers. Praiseworthy goods, in turn, derive their goodness from being finally caused by the honored things, more specifically, by contemplation.
We are now well-situated to apply the four-fold division of goods to HIG. Recall that Aristotle claims that Platonism about the good must be mistaken because, if it were correct, all *per se* goods would have the same account of what it is for them to be good. But pleasure, honor, and prudence have “different and distinct” accounts specifying what it is for them to be good (*EN* 1096b23-25). In light of the four-fold division of goods, we can understand exactly why these *per se* goods would have different account of goodness. Most obviously, prudence, as the intellectual virtue that entails all the moral virtues, would be a praiseworthy good. Its *per se* choiceworthiness would derive from its teleological relation to contemplation. Honor, on the other hand, would be a power, and would count as choiceworthy *per se* on account of serving as the material cause of magnanimous action (*EN* 1123b19-22) or of the nameless virtue concerned with small honors discussed in *EN* IV, 4.

Assessing the status of pleasure is a more complicated matter, since there is significant scholarly controversy over how Aristotle’s theory of pleasure is to be interpreted. One major issue is that in *EN* VII, 12 Aristotle gives an account of pleasure that seems to identify it with “unimpeded… activity (*energeian*…*anempodision*) (*EN* 1153a14-15), while in X, 4 he argues that it is a “kind of supervenient telos” (*epigignomenon ti telos*) that perfects the activities with which it is associated (*EN* 1174b33). There is no clear scholarly consensus about how either passage is to be interpreted or about whether they are consistent with one another. In particular, it is controversial whether Aristotle ultimately holds that pleasure is just the same thing as
pleasurable activity or if it is something over and above that activity (though closely related to it).  

Fortunately, we need not take a definitive stance on these thorny issues in order to clarify pleasure’s status as a good. Whatever the precise relation between pleasure and pleasant activity is, Aristotle clearly thinks that the relationship is close enough that pleasures differ in kind in accordance with the differences among their corresponding activities (EN 1175a23). In light of this, it seems reasonable to suggest that different kinds of non-vicious pleasure will count as different kinds of human good, depending on what the corresponding activity’s status as a good is. For instance, the pleasure a just person takes in doing justice would count as a praiseworthy good since that pleasure supervenes upon and is inseparable from the just activity. The pleasure a wise person takes in contemplation would be an honored good for the same reason. On the other hand, if it is fruitful to think of bodily pleasures as the matter for temperate activity, then these kinds of pleasures would be powers. Finally, pleasure taken in physical exercise might count as an auxiliary, since exercise is an efficient cause of health. Thus, different kinds of pleasure will themselves be homonymously good, in addition to being good in a different sense from prudence and/or honor.

22Matthew Stohl’s article, “Pleasure as Perfection” gives a helpful overview of some the prominent approaches in the recent literature and argues for the view that pleasure is “a certain aspect of perfect activity of awareness,” namely, the very aspect of its being perfect (259). I find Stohl’s position attractive, and it fits together well with the way I think about where pleasure falls on the four-fold division of goods, but my position does not presuppose or require his.

23I am not sure whether it is fruitful to think of bodily pleasures in this way. It may be more accurate to say that the external things that cause bodily pleasures (such as food, drink, and sex) constitute the matter for temperance.

24I say “and/or” because one pleasure might be good in the same sense as prudence but not in the same sense as honor (e.g. the pleasure taken in just action), and another might be good in a different sense from both (e.g. the pleasure of contemplation).
It should be noted that clarifying pleasure’s status as a good also helps us see how the four-fold scheme would map onto Aristotle’s more well-known three-fold classification of goods as useful (sumpheros), pleasant (hēdus), and noble (kalos) (EN 1104b31-32). I take it that the useful goods will encompass both the auxiliaries and the powers. Both of these types of good derive their value from the way they facilitate morally virtuous action, albeit in two different ways. As we have already seen, Aristotle regards wealth, a power, as a useful thing (chēsimon), and to chrēsimon seems at least roughly equivalent with to sumpheron (EN 1096b6-7)\textsuperscript{25}. In another context, he defines to chrēsimon as “that by which some good or pleasure is produced… so that it is the good and the pleasant that are loveable as ends” (EN 1155b20-22). I take it that this shows that the auxiliaries are also to be included in the class of useful things. Indeed, one might worry that this passage appears to imply that useful things are never lovable as ends, and thus, are never good per se. This might be thought to exclude powers from the class of useful things. However, I do not think the problematic inference follows. Powers are good per se because they are useful for the performance of virtuous actions and can enter into those actions as constituents. Aristotle’s position seems to be that, wealth, for example, is loveable on account of the good thing it helps bring into being (a generous act), and qualifies as good per se because of the particular way it brings that good thing into being (viz. as a material cause).

Likewise, I contend the noble will encompass both the praiseworthy goods and the honored goods. Although Aspasius appears to identify the noble and the praiseworthy (32, 12),

\textsuperscript{25}Richard Kraut, by contrast, has argued that to sumpheron should be understood as encompassing the whole class of that which beneficial or good for someone, including those things which are intrinsically good for someone, such as eudaimonia itself (Well-being 21-23). If this reading is correct, then I take it that the useful and the noble are not mutually exclusive categories. Likewise, praiseworthy and honored goods would also count as useful.
there is strong evidence that Aristotle also thinks that the honored goods are aptly described as noble. For example, in *Metaphysics* XII, Aristotle argues that those who believe that the best (ariston) and noblest thing (kalliston) did not exist in the beginning (or perhaps “does not exist in the first principle” \(mē\ en\ archē\ einai\)) are mistaken (Met. 1072b32-33). This is because god, the ultimate first principle, is the best and the noblest thing there is. In light of this, it would seem to follow that contemplation, the most divine activity of which humans are capable and the first principle of human goodness, would also be the noblest of human goods. So, the things which are choiceworthy because they are noble would include both the praiseworthy and the honored goods.

Finally, the pleasant will run the gamut though all four kinds of good. As we have already noted, pleasures differ in kind depending on the different kinds of activities they perfect. Further, since Aristotle holds that we take pleasure in useful things (sumpheron) just as we do in noble things, there will be pleasures corresponding to powers and auxiliary goods whenever these are activities (EN 1104b35-1105a1). These pleasures will themselves count as powers and auxiliaries insofar as they supervene on powers and auxiliaries. As we have already mentioned, the pleasure taken in physical exercise might be a good example of an auxiliary pleasure. As for power pleasures, perhaps the pleasure taken in the activity of sight would serve as a good example. The activity of sight is plausibly characterized as a power. Like health, it can be thought of as a general material condition for the exercise of virtue. In that case, the pleasure that supervenes on the activity of seeing would also be a power.

If my arguments in this section are on target, they show that the four-fold division of goods is a helpful framework for understanding why many human goods are homonymous with
respect to their goodness. But we might still ask whether intraspecific homonymy is a more
general phenomenon that extends beyond the human species. For example, are different equine
goods also homonymously good? And, if they are, would the four-fold division of goods help us
understand the homonymy of equine goods? Any answer we give to this question must be
somewhat speculative, but I think there are sufficient grounds to conclude that at least some
other substances have intraspecifically homonymous goods and that something roughly
analogous to the four-fold division can help us analyze the different senses in which they are
good. Consider the following: all human goods are to be understood with reference to the human
good, which is the activity of human virtue. So too, all equine goods are to be understood with
reference to the equine good, which is the activity of equine virtue. As examples of virtuous
equine activity, Aristotle mentions galloping and carrying its rider well, and facing the enemy in
battle (EN 1106a20-22). These sorts of activities, and the excellent dispositions to perform them,
will be the equine analogues of praiseworthy human goods. In light of this, it seems plausible to
suggest that there would be some equine goods which are good in that they are material
constituents of virtuous equine activities and others which are good because they produce these
material constituents. These would be equine analogues of powers and auxiliaries, respectively.
Perhaps strength of the legs and the sort of training that produces that strength would be good
examples of equine powers and auxiliaries. One crucial disanalogy between human goods and
the goods of other species is that non-human, sublunary substances will have no direct share in
the honored goods. This follows from Aristotle’s claim that non-human animals have no share of
contemplation, and thus, no share in happiness (EN 1178b24-25).
Nevertheless, non-human animals may have an analogue of the honored goods in their contributions to the human good. Notice that Aristotle’s examples of virtuous equine activity are strikingly anthropocentric. Some commentators have argued, more generally, that Aristotle’s teleology is anthropocentric in important respects. If the value of virtuous equine activity is ultimately to be understand in light of its being for the sake of humans, then its teleological relation toward the human good will mirror the way human praiseworthy goods are for the sake of honored goods. Furthermore, non-human sublunar substances will be indirectly linked to the honored goods themselves by way of the contributions they make to human lives. I will consider this way of interpreting Aristotle’s teleology in Chapter Six. For now, we may bracket the issue of whether the goodness of non-human virtuous action derives from its relation to humans. Even if it is not, it seems plausible to argue that intraspecific homonymy of goodness exists among species of non-human substances. Namely, non-human substances can also have auxiliaries which are good on account of efficiently causing powers, which are good on account of materially causing the virtuous activities proper to the species.

Conclusion

If the interpretations in this chapter are correct, then the incomparability problem is arguably even more difficult to unravel than it initially seemed to be. This is because, on the account I have given, the whole Porphyrian tree is shot through with axiological homonymy. Furthermore, since the homonymy of goodness originates from three distinct sources, there is no guarantee that an account which adequately explained the comparability of transcendentally homonymous goods would also adequately explain the comparability of trans-specifically homonymous goods, and so on. Thus, I argue that any attempt to solve the incomparability
problem must keep the three-tiered structure of the problem in mind; my own attempts to resolve it in Chapters Five and Six will reflect that structure.
CHAPTER THREE
CHRIS SHIELDS’ CRITIQUE OF ARISTOTLE’S HOMONYMOUS CONCEPTION OF GOODNESS

Introduction

As I have already noted, the incomparability problem has largely been overlooked in the literature. This chapter will focus on the work of Chris Shields, one commentator who serves as a notable exception to that trend. In his *Order in Multiplicity: Homonymy in the Philosophy of Aristotle*, Shields provides a detailed analysis and critique of Aristotle’s main arguments for the homonymy of good. Even more relevant to my concerns, his recent article “The Summum Bonum in Aristotle’s Ethics: Fractured Goodness” explicitly argues that Aristotle’s acceptance of a homonymous conception of goodness threatens to undermine his ethical theory as a whole, which assumes that it is intelligible to place goods into ordinal rankings of better and worse.

In general, Shields is pessimistic about the likelihood of finding a consistent, defensible Aristotelian theory of “commensurability in a homonymous value world” (Shields Summum 109). On the one hand, he argues in his book that Aristotle’s attempt to establish the multivocity of “good” is largely unsuccessful; Platonists and other defenders of a univocal conception of goodness have powerful rejoinders to Aristotle’s main arguments open to them. On the other hand, in the article he argues that, once Aristotle has accepted that “good” divides into so many different senses, he has no plausible way of coherently ranking homonymous goods as better or worse than one another. As he puts it in a rare rhetorical flourish “Aristotle’s sumnum bonum
threatens to fracture into so many scattered shards, each of which glistens under Plato’s sun, but none of which glistens any more or any less than any other” (ibid.).

Taken together, these two lines of thought strongly suggest that Aristotle would be well-advised to abandon the homonymy of goodness. In Shields’ view, Aristotle does not have any terribly compelling grounds for affirming the thesis that “good” is multivocal in the first place. And to make matters worse, accepting that thesis creates seemingly insuperable problems for his own axiology. Shields does not explicitly argue that Aristotle should have reverted to a univocal conception of the good, but that conclusion seems hard to avoid if we accept his contention that Aristotle’s theory of value is “fractured,” perhaps irreparably, by equivocity.

I am more optimistic than Shields about the prospect of finding in Aristotle a coherent picture of comparability in a “homonymous value world.” In this chapter, I will lay out my reasons for resisting Shields’ pessimistic conclusion. To that end, I will begin by examining Shields’ analysis and critique of Aristotle’s arguments against the univocity of goodness. Then I will turn my attention to his characterization of the incommensurability problem that results from rejecting that univocity. Finally, in my response to Shields I will raise three points. First, I will try to demonstrate that Shields underestimates the strength of Aristotle’s arguments for the homonymy of goodness. Thus, Aristotle has more justification than Shields gives him credit for in regarding “good” as a multivocal predicate. Second, I contend that Shields overstates the extent to which Aristotle’s arguments commit him to “unconstrained multivocity” (Summum 101n40). That is, I try to show that Aristotle’s conception of goodness is not so “fractured” as he fears it is. Third, I argue that reverting to a univocal conception of goodness would not automatically solve the incommensurability problem that Shields astutely identifies. I will show
that a similar problem would arise if we were to regard “good” as a higher-order univocal universal, which Shields suggests as an alternative to homonymy.

Whether my optimism can ultimately be vindicated against Shields’ pessimism will largely depend on whether it is possible to solve the commensurability problem within Aristotle’s framework of homonymous goodness. I will attempt to sketch out and defend some possible solutions in chapters five and six. However, by the end of this chapter I hope to have established that we have sufficient justification for seeking to solve the comparability problem within Aristotle’s framework of homonymous goodness, rather than the alternative framework of higher-order synonymous goodness.

**Shields on Aristotle’s Arguments for the Homonymy of Goodness**

Shields argues Aristotle’s attempt to establish that goodness is not univocal is largely a failure. More specifically, he claims that Aristotle’s two main arguments for the multivocity of “good,” namely the signification argument from *Topics* I, 15 and the categorial argument from *Nicomachean Ethics* I, 6, are both unsound. The former is unsound because, according to Shields, Aristotle implicitly recognizes a distinction among types of signification that would provide the resources for a Platonist to construct a powerful rejoinder to the argument. The latter is unsound because, *prima facie*, the argument appears to be a direct inference from the multivocity of being, a doctrine which Shields regards as false and indefensible. Some commentators have interpreted the categorial argument in ways that do not depend so directly on the multivocity of being, but Shields argues that these reconstructions of the argument also fail. While Shields concedes that Aristotle is successful in showing that “good” is not synonymously
applied to instrumental and intrinsic goods respectively, he thinks that Aristotle’s stronger claims about the homonymy among intrinsic goods themselves are ultimately unsubstantiated.

Shields’ criticism of Aristotle’s argument in the *Topics* is based on his interpretation of Aristotle’s concept of signification (*sēmainein*). He argues at length that Aristotelian signification is best understood as a meaning relation, that is to say, if \(x\) signifies \(y\), \(x\) means \(y\) (Shields Order 75). Some readers may find this thesis obvious, or even tautologous, but it is far from it. Some commentators, notably Terence Irwin, have argued that Aristotle’s conception of signification has nothing directly to do with the meanings of terms at all. This is because, according to Aristotle, words, e.g. “animal,” and their corresponding definitions, e.g. “living being with a sensitive soul,” signify **essences**, and essences are not meanings but are non-linguistic features of reality (Irwin Signification 246). Thus, the relation between “animal” and the essence it signifies is not a meaning relation according to Irwin; it is not a relation between a word and its meaning, but rather a relation between a word and the world.

Shields’ argument against Irwin’s position is extensive; here I will only touch on a few salient aspects of it. First, he points out that Aristotle cannot hold that all cases of signification involve the specification of an essence (Shields Order 81). This is because he recognizes that it is possible for a term to be significant while lacking a referent entirely, for example “goatstag” (*Int.* 16a16-18). There is no such thing as a goatstag, and thus there is no real essence for the term “goatstag” to specify. Yet Aristotle is clear that the term does not fail to signify for that reason—indeed in *Posterior Analytics* II, 7 he explicitly contrasts the knowledge of an essence with the knowledge of what a word or phrase signifies and uses “goatstag” as example of the latter (*An*
Post. 92b6-8). Therefore, Shields concludes, there are at least some cases in which signification is of something other than an essence.

However, Shields concedes that although signification is not coextensive with essence specification, in the most philosophically important cases Aristotle does think that signification is the specification of an essence. When doing natural science, for example, “animal” and its definition “living being with a sensitive soul,” are supposed to signify what it is to be an animal. But this is only a problem for Shields’ semantic interpretation of Aristotelian signification if we assume (as Irwin does) that the meaning of a term cannot be identical with an essence. While some contemporary philosophers of language insist on a sharp distinction between concepts and properties that would preclude such an identification, Shields argues that there is no textual basis for thinking that Aristotle holds that we must make a distinction of this kind (Order 98). Aristotle is thus free to say, for example, that the word “animal” signifies the essence of the kind, *animal*, and that the meaning of the word, “animal” just is the essence of the kind, *animal*. On this interpretation, Aristotle would hold that the meaning of the term is identical with the extra-linguistic essence it signifies.

Some implausible consequences might seem to follow from this view: signification is meaning and, in many philosophically important cases, words signify essences of non-linguistic things. If we add to this the premise that competent speakers of a language know the meanings of the terms they use, it would seem to follow that competent speakers would automatically know the essences of the referents of those terms. Similarly, it would seem that we could discover apparently synthetic property identifications (such as “water=H2O”), simply by engaging in a priori linguistic analysis (Shields Order 98).
Shields argues that we can avoid these unacceptable consequences by making a distinction between “shallow” and “deep” signification/meaning (Shields Order 100). The shallow meaning of a term is what a speaker of a language needs to know in order to qualify as a competent user of the term. The deep meaning, on the other hand, is only revealed after investigation (whether empirical or \textit{a priori}), and actually does specify the essence of the word’s referent. Thus, we do not automatically acquire knowledge of mind-independent essences merely by learning to speak a language, because becoming proficient in a language only requires that we know the shallow signification of the terms we use. Along similar lines, someone who grasps the deep meaning of “water” knows that water is equivalent to H2O, but someone who only knows the shallow meaning does not necessarily.

Aristotle never explicitly makes a distinction between shallow and deep signification, but Shields argues that it is implicit in his views of definition. In the strict, scientific sense, Aristotle thinks of a definition as an account which states the essence of the \textit{definiendum} (\textit{Top.} 141a24-141b2). However, Shields points out that he also recognizes other, inferior, but nevertheless genuine forms of definition which fail to specify the essence of the thing defined (Order 92). Essence-specifying definitions are generally preferable since they are more productive of scientific knowledge, but Aristotle thinks that for those who are not (yet) capable to grasping the essence in question, it may be necessary to frame a definition in terms that are more familiar to them. For example, in geometry we might define a point as the terminus of a line. This definition does not actually pick out the essence of a point, since (in Aristotle’s view) a point is prior to a line. Nevertheless, the non-scientific definition is likely to help a beginning student of geometry
grasp what a point is more adequately than a definition that actually specified the essence would

(\textit{Top.} 141b 15-25).

Shields’ suggestion, then, is that the deep meaning of a word corresponds to its scientific definition, while the shallow meaning(s) of a word correspond to its non-scientific definition(s). Ordinary competent speakers of a language typically will not be able to produce a scientific definition of the terms they use, which is to say, they do not know the deep meanings of those terms. So, to use Shields’ example, Euthyphro knows the meaning of “piety” well enough to use the word competently, but he does not actually know what piety is and so, in the deep sense, does not know what “piety” means (Order 100). Aristotle needs the distinction between shallow and deep signification in order to avoid attributing extravagant epistemic power to ordinary language use, and his theory of scientific and non-scientific definitions give him the resources to make the distinction.

We are now in a position to understand why Shields thinks Aristotle’s argument for the multivocity of “good” in Topics I, 15 is a failure. Recall that there Aristotle argues that one test to determine whether a term is being used homonymously is to “examine the classes of predicates corresponding to the name” to verify that they are the same in each case (\textit{Top.} 107a3-4). If they are not, then we have established that the term is being used homonymously. He uses “good” as an example to illustrate this test. When food is called “good,” it means that the food is pleasant tasting, when medicine is called “good” it means that the medicine produces health in the person treated by it, and when a person is called “good” it means that the person is virtuous (\textit{Top.} 107a5-10). Aristotle concludes that “good” is being used homonymously in these cases (\textit{Top.} 107a13).
Shields thinks that Aristotle draws this conclusion too hastily, and that a Platonist (or other proponent of the univocity of goodness) has a strong rejoinder available. The Platonist may object that the argument from the *Topics* only establishes that various predications of “good” differ in their shallow meanings. It does not rule out that these meanings are ultimately unified in a single, deep meaning. More specifically, Shields suggests that there may be a multiply-realizable second-order universal that subsumes the different first-order significations of “good” (Order 200).

To explain what he means by this, Shields uses the example of “swimming.” Someone applying Aristotle’s test might conclude that “swim” is being used homonymously when it is predicated of people who are doing the backstroke on the one hand and freestyle on the other. This would be a mistake however, because although “swimming” is multiply realizable in many different strokes, it is nevertheless univocally applied to all of them (Shields Order 66).

Similarly, according to functionalist philosophies of mind, mental states like pain or belief are functional states which are realizable in many different kinds of material states (*ibid*). The pain felt by a lizard, a human, and an artificial intelligence would all be “pain” univocally, despite being instantiated by two different neurological states, and one state that is not neurological at all. Aristotle’s argument does not rule out the possibility that “good” is a predicate like “swimming” or “pain” which, despite differences in first order signification, applies univocally to food, medicine, and people at the second-order.

If the argument from the *Topics* fails to establish the equivocity of the good, Shields also thinks that Aristotle’s other major attempt to establish it, the categorial argument from *Nicomachean Ethics* I, 6, fares no better. There Aristotle is in the process of arguing against the
Platonists that the good cannot be something “universal, common, and single” on account of its multivocity (EN 1096a27). In order to establish that “good” in said in many ways, Aristotle appeals his theory of categories. Shields construes the argument as follows (Order 197-198):¹

1) If the good is spoken of in many ways, then it cannot be something universal, common [to all good things], and single.

2) If the good is predicated in more than one category, then it is spoken of in many ways.

3) The good is predicated in more than one category.

4) Hence, the good is spoken of in many ways (2, 3 MP).

5) Hence, the good cannot be something universal, common [to all good things], and single (1, 4 MP).

Assuming that it is impossible for any term to predicated univocally across the categories (which Aristotle does assume in the context of this argument), premise three would be sufficient to demonstrate the multivocity of “good.” In fact, Aristotle argues for the stronger thesis that good is said “in as many ways as being is” (EN 1096a24). That is to say, it is predicated in all ten of the categories, and must have at least ten corresponding senses.² If the argument is sound, it shows that it is not possible to subsume the goodness of, say, virtues (qualities), people

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¹I have slightly adapted Shield’s presentation. He includes steps inferring the homonymy of the good from its multivocity, and its non-univocity from its homonymy. These steps seem largely superfluous and have thus been omitted. I have added the premise inferring the multivocity of goodness from the theory of categories, which Shields presents as a separate argument.

²Even though Aristotle says in this passage that “good” has as many senses as “being” has (isachōs legetai tō onti), the argument from the Topics discussed above would show that it must also have many senses within each category. Shields notes that “isachōs” is an Aristotelian neologism whose literal meaning should be “equally as many as,” in this context it should probably be understood to mean “at least as many as” (Summum 98n37).
(substances), and opportune moments (times) under a single universal. Aristotle thinks this shows that Platonists are misguided in positing a single Form of the Good.

Shields raises two critical points in response to the categorial argument, both of which call into question the conditional expressed by premise two. First, he asks why we should think that goodness is said in as many ways as being is, indeed, why we should “suppose…that being and goodness march in step at all” (Shields Order 198). As it stands, Aristotle only provides us with a bare assertion that goodness cannot be univocal if it is spoken of in more than one category. In order to support his claim, Aristotle needs to provide a convincing argument that the multivocity of being entails the multivocity of any other transcategorial predicate.

Shields’ more fundamental objection, however, is that Aristotle never adequately establishes that “being” is said in many ways (Order 198). If “being” is said univocally of quantities, qualities, substances, etc. then Aristotle’s rationale for thinking that “good” must apply to items in these categories in different senses is entirely undercut. And since Shields devotes a substantial portion of his book refuting Aristotle’s arguments for the homonymy of being, he feels justified in rejecting Aristotle’s categorial argument for the homonymy of goodness, at least insofar as it turns on a direct inference from the homonymy of being. However, Shields notes that several commentators have put forth alternative interpretations of the categorial argument which take it to be less dependent on the multivocity of “being.” He devotes his attention to two of these interpretations which he regards as particularly promising: J.L. Ackrill’s “criteriological” interpretation and Scott MacDonald’s “functional” interpretation.

As we saw in chapter two, Ackrill criteriological reading argues that Aristotle is *not* emphasizing that the subjects of which “good” is predicated fall into different categories. Rather,
he is claiming that the criteria by which we assess various things as good fall into different
categories, and that this is sufficient to show that “good” is not being predicated univocally of
those things (Ackrill Good 22). For example, the prime mover might be called good in virtue of
its being god (a substance), Socrates in virtue of his being morally virtuous (a quality), and a
farm animal in virtue of its being useful (a relation). All three of these subjects of the predicate
“good” fall into the category of substance, but the criteria for predicating goodness of them fall
into three distinct categories. In Ackrill’s interpretation, Aristotle thinks that this is what shows
that the term “good” is not naming a single quality that the three things share.

Shields points out that there are two ways we could construe the notion of “criteria” in
Ackrill’s reading: evidential or constitutive (Order 202). On an evidential construal, a criterion is
a ground for believing that something is $F$. On a constitutive construal, on the other hand, a
criterion is what it is for something to be $F$. In this case, the prime mover’s divinity, Socrates’
virtue, and the farm animal’s utility would either be understood as evidence that they are good or
as constituting their goodness. Shields argues that Ackrill’s reconstruction of Aristotle’s
argument fails to establish the non-univocity of the good on either construal.

The failure of the evidential reading is obvious: evidence that $S$ is $F$ can come from
categorically diverse sources without raising the slightest worry of equivocation. Shields gives the
example that we might try to infer what country a person is from by observing his behavior (in
the category of action), his appearance (in the category of quality), or even his posture (being-in-
a-position) (Shields Order 202). These different sources of evidence could all contribute to the
conclusion that the person is, say, an American, in a single sense of the term. So, categorial
diversity of evidential criteria is not sufficient for homonymy.
The constitutive reading is more plausible on the surface, but ultimately fares no better according to Shields. The first step in his response is to reiterate his critique of Aristotle’s argument from *Topics* I, 15: a univocal, second-order universal may be multiply realizable (Shields Order 203). The fact that Socrates’ goodness is constituted by his virtue and a farm animal’s goodness is constituted by its usefulness need not show that “good” is being used equivocally. It may instead show that one and the same univocal concept of goodness is being realized in two distinct ways, just as freestyle and backstroke realize are two realizations of the univocal concept of swimming. Shields concedes that a layer of complexity is added by the fact that the various things constituting goodness are themselves in different categories. Ultimately, however, he thinks that this makes no difference, because he contends that a second-order universal may even be realized by items in different categories while remaining univocal (Order 203-204). He gives the example of *being dangerous*: it is dangerous to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, and it is also dangerous to be exposed to carcinogenic chemicals (*ibid.*). But even though the states of affairs constituting dangerousness are in different categories[^3], Shields holds that they are both dangerous in the same sense. If this is correct, then it is possible for the unmoved mover, Socrates, and farm animals to be good in the same sense, even though their goodness is constituted by items in different categories.

An alternative approach to the categorial argument, defended by Scott MacDonald, interprets it in the context of the function argument from *EN* I, 7. That argument puts forth the view that, for functional kinds, the good of a thing consists in carrying out its function. From this

[^3]: Shields does not name the categories in question, but presumably he has in mind place, time, and being-affected.
premise, we may infer that what goodness consists in will differ for different functional-kinds. In MacDonald’s view, this already establishes that goodness will be predicated non-univocally of different function-kinds (167). Therefore, we can explain the transcategorial multivocity of goodness in terms of its function-based multivocity if the categories are themselves function-kinds. That is to say, if the categories as such have functions, then their diverse functions would explain why “good” takes on different senses when applied to items in different categories. And MacDonald argues that it is reasonable to interpret Aristotle as thinking that the categories are function kinds. Specifically, he argues that for the category of substance, “existing independently can be construed as performing a function, analogous to the way in which building and playing the harp are functions” (MacDonald 169). This would explain why Aristotle references “god or nous” as his examples of goodness in the category of substance: these things carry out the function of existing independently to a much higher degree than any other being does.

Shields contends that there are at least three severe problems with this interpretation of the categorial argument. First, concerning MacDonald’s example of the category of substance, the evidence is slim that Aristotle thinks of it as a function-kind or that he ought to given his fundamental ontological commitments. It is true, Shields concedes, that a necessary condition for being an Aristotelian substance is to be “separable” (choriston) and this is plausibly understood as being capable of independent existence (Order 206). However, there is a considerable logical leap between this claim and the thesis that independent existence is the ergon of a substance qua substance. For instance, (my example, not Shields’) if the capacity to laugh is a proprium (or “proper accident”) of human beings, then having this capacity would be a necessary condition of
being human. It would hardly follow, however, that exercising the capacity for laughter would constitute the function, or even part of the function, of human beings as such.

Secondly, the proposal that the categories are function-kinds is even less plausible when we attend to non-substance categories (Shields Order 206). What exactly is the function of a quality \textit{qua} quality? And why are the virtues particularly successful in attaining that function rather than, say, being red or smelling of cinnamon? Any account we might attempt to produce here would be artificial, and in any case not grounded in anything Aristotle says.

Finally, Shields argues that even if the categories were function-kinds with different functions this would still not be of any help in grounding the multivocity of transcategorical predications of “good” because differences in function do not establish multivocity in the first place (Order 207). His argument for this conclusion should be familiar by now: distinct functions may show that goodness is multiply-realizable, but do not therefore establish its non-univocity. Shields remarks that it is ironic that MacDonald appeals to functions to establish multivocity, since, as was discussed above, functionalist philosophy of mind provides us with a particularly clear paradigm case of multiply-realizable univocals. If goodness is to be understood in terms of functions in all cases, then we actually have the resources to construct a univocal account of goodness: something along the lines of “to be a good \textit{X} is to be an \textit{X} that consistently performs the function of an \textit{X} well.” We could apply this account to sharp knives, flavorful meals, virtuous people, and (if MacDonald is right that substance is a functional kind) substances like the prime mover that exist with a particularly high degree of ontological independence. The functional reading of the categorial argument thus “carries the seeds of its own undoing” (Shields Order 207).
Shields’ Formulation of the Incommensurability Problem

If Shields’ criticisms of the categorial and signification arguments hold water, then Aristotle’s justification for endorsing the homonymy of goodness is severely undermined. In a recent paper, Shields develops a distinct, but equally challenging critique of Aristotle’s conception of the good as homonymous. Namely, he argues that it cannot be reconciled with Aristotle’s tendency to place good things in ordinal rankings of better and worse. After laying out the basic structure of the problem, Shields examines certain aspects of Aristotle’s arguments in EN I,6 that intensify it. He also analyzes and rejects two potential solutions which he regards as inadequate, one of which he calls the “deflationary rejoinder” and another based on analogous predication. Shields concludes that the incompatibility of homonymy and comparability is a serious, unresolved problem in Aristotle’s theory of the good.

Shields opens the article by drawing our attention to the 19th century classicist, J.A. Stewart’s comments on Nicomachean Ethics I, 6. Stewart worries that, in critiquing the Platonic view of the good, Aristotle also risks undermining his own theory of the good. Specifically, he is concerned that Aristotle shares the commitment to a single highest good from which all other good things derive their goodness (Shields Summum 83-84). So, if Aristotle’s arguments go through, some of his own core commitments may also be threatened. Stewart’s objection is somewhat vaguely formulated, but Shields argues that a sufficiently refined version of it could pose a serious challenge to Aristotle’s theory of the highest good. The rest of the paper is devoted to articulating and exploring that more precise version of Stewart’s worry.

Shields argues that the most powerful way of refining Stewart’s objection is to draw out the way in which the critique of Plato subverts Aristotle’s own theory of the good in that it
makes it impossible for him to claim, consistently, that goods are commensurable.4 The root of the problem is that Aristotle endorses a “commensurability thesis” according to which “x can be more or less \( \varphi \) than y, or as \( \varphi \) as y is—only if x and y are univocally \( \varphi \)” (Shields Summum 89). That is, more briefly, univocity is a necessary condition for comparability. It is worth noting in passing that Aristotle does not actually endorse this commensurability thesis in Topics 107b13-17, the passage Shields cites to justify imputing it to him. That passage only argues that synonymy is a sufficient condition for comparability (and that incomparability is sufficient for homonymy). It is not possible to derive the thesis that synonymy is a necessary condition for comparability from the claim that “synonyms are always comparable” (Top, 107b16).

However, Shields slightly careless reading of Topics 107b13-17 matters less than it otherwise would because Aristotle does appear to commit himself to the commensurability thesis elsewhere in the corpus. Most explicitly, in the Physics, Aristotle apparently endorses the principle that “things not synonymous are all incommensurable” (Phys. 248b7). By transposition, we can derive the conclusion that synonymy is necessary for commensurability. The passages from the Physics and the Topics, taken together, suggest that Aristotle is ultimately committed to the view that univocity and commensurability are biconditional. This fact is reflected in Shields

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4Shields rightly notes that contemporary philosophers often make a distinction between commensurability and comparability of values (Summum 89n21). Things of commensurable value, in this precise sense, are those whose values are comparable in terms of some common measure of units. Things of comparable value, on the other hand, are those whose value may be ranked in terms of better and worse, but not necessarily in terms of some common quantitative measure. That is, comparability entails ordinal rankability but not necessarily cardinal rankability, whereas commensurability entails both. See Chang 1997 for a discussion of these issues. Aristotle does not make a fine-grained distinction between comparability and commensurability; his word sumblētios could arguably be translated by either word. Shields thus uses the terms interchangeably and I will follow his practice in this. However, I should note that insofar as the distinction between commensurability and comparability is applicable to Aristotle at all, I suspect that he is more interested in comparability than commensurability. He is more interested, that is, in the proposition that humans are better than horses than he is in measuring the number of goodness-units by which humans exceed horses.
refined formulation of the commensurability thesis: “COM: the predicate \( \varphi \) as it occurs in ‘\( a \) is \( \varphi \)’ and ‘\( b \) is \( \varphi \)’ is commensurable in terms of \( \varphi \)-ness if, and only if, \( \varphi \) is synonymous in these applications” (Summum 103).

To illustrate the upshot of (COM), Shields adapts one of Aristotle’s examples of incommensurability that results from multivocity using the predicate “sharp.” We might call both a knife and the key of a piece of music sharp. Beethoven’s *Moonlight Sonata*, for example, is sharp in that it is in the key of C-sharp minor. But since knives and sonatas are not *univocally* sharp, “it makes no ready sense to compare a paring knife and a sonata in respect of sharpness (Top. 1976b19-26), at least not in any literal, non-analogical manner” (Shields Summum 91). By the same reasoning, Aristotle would not be entitled to compare any two non-univocally good things in respect of goodness. For example, Aristotle would not be entitled to claim that prudence or intelligence (\( \textit{phronēsis} \)) is better than pleasure since, as we saw in chapter two, he regards these as equivocal with respect to their goodness. Shields points out that a likely consequence is that we will also be unjustified in claiming that the life of intelligence is superior to the life of pleasure; they will simply be two different sorts of good lives which are incommensurable with respect to their goodness (Summum 91). This is obviously not a consequence Aristotle would welcome, so the incomparability of homonymous goods poses a serious challenge to his ethical theory.

At this point, Shields pauses to consider a “deflationary rejoinder;” a way of reading Aristotle’s critique of Plato which would attempt to avoid the troubling incommensurability problem. The deflationary rejoinder relies on the distinction between “indexed” and “non-indexed” goods. An indexed good is one which counts as good only with reference to some
“qualifying domain or predicate” (Shields Summum 93n27). For example, excellent specimens of goodness-fixing kinds would count as indexed goods in Shields’ idiom, since their goodness is indexed to the kinds of which they are specimens. Non-indexed goods, on the other hand, are good in a way that has no reference to any qualifying domain. They are “simply good, full stop” (Shields Summum 92).

On the deflationary reading, Aristotle is primarily taking issue with the non-indexed nature of Plato’s Form of the Good—what Aristotle “decries is a non-indexed sumnum bonum; what he affirms, for each good-bearing kind φ, is a highest-good-for-φ” (Shields Summum 93). The deflationary rejoinder can provide a satisfying answer to Stewart’s original worry: Aristotle’s rejection of a non-indexed highest good does not preclude him from endorsing a highest good for human beings and building an ethical theory around that good.

Unfortunately, however, the deflationary rejoinder does nothing to solve the incommensurability problem. If anything, appealing to indexed goods makes the problem even worse. If every good-bearing kind has its own proprietary good such that different accounts are required to define each type of indexed goodness, then any two differently-indexed goods will be homonymous, and thus, incommensurable. Aristotle will be unable to say, for example, that “the good-for-human-beings has anything to do with the good-for-peacocks” in a way that would allow us to count the human good superior to the peacock good (Shields sumnum 94). This is hard to reconcile with Aristotle’s vision of the cosmos as a hierarchy in which some forms of life and being are superior to others.

Strangely, Shields does not point out that the deflationary rejoinder is also powerless to diffuse his original formulation of the incommensurability problem in terms of the
incomparability of pleasure and *phronēsis*. If pleasure and prudence are to be understood as indexed goods, then presumably that would involve understanding them as *human*-indexed goods. Indeed, I argued in chapter two that this is precisely how we should understand them. But indexing pleasure and prudence to the human species does nothing to cancel their equivocity as goods. As I read him, Aristotle’s point is precisely that pleasure and prudence are homonymous, even as human goods; this is why I characterize them as intraspecifically homonymous goods. Consequently, incomensurability threatens even if we accept an indexed goods interpretation of the argument from the homonymy of intrinsic goods (HIG).

In fact, as Shields interprets it, the HIG generates even more problematic cases of incomparability than that between pleasure and prudence. Shields rightly notes that, as the key move in the argument, Aristotle produces a list of things which are assumed to be good in themselves and then argues that they are nevertheless different with respect to their goodness. Shields takes this step in the argument to be an instantiation of a general principle: “for any intrinsic good *i*, the account of goodness attaching to *i*, differs from the account of goodness attaching to *i*_2…*_i*_n” (101). The implication of this principle is that every intrinsic good is good in a different sense from every other. Shields probably intends this principle to apply to *types* of intrinsic goods rather than *tokens*—particular instances of pleasure⁵ or prudence, for example, are presumably good in the same sense as other instances of the same. Even with this qualification, however, Shields is certainly right that the “kinds of goodness seem to be multiplying unconstrainedly” (Summum 102). And given the (COM) principle, unconstrained

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⁵Given Aristotle’s view that pleasures themselves differ in kind, perhaps we ought to restrict this claim further. Perhaps we only be able to say that a particular instance of pleasure is good in the same sense another instance of pleasure *of the same kind*. 
multivocity will entail equally unconstrained incommensurability. Aristotle will be committed to the extreme view that we cannot compare the value of any two intrinsic goods (of different types). At this point, it should be clear that the incommensurability problem is a very severe one. Accepting the incommensurability of every intrinsic good type with every other would arguably doom any ethical or axiological theory to incoherence, let alone a theory as ambitious as Aristotle’s.

With the full significance of the incommensurability problem laid out, Shields evaluates one more potential solution to it: perhaps Aristotle could reject (COM) and allow that homonymous goods are comparable, provided that they are analogically good. Members of different goodness-fixing kinds have different goodness-standards by which they are evaluated, different “frameworks of appraisal,” as Shields puts it (Summum 104). Nevertheless, we can still compare the degree of excellence two analogous goods have achieved relative to their own frameworks. For example, a woman of superlative wisdom and justice is better than a somewhat dull knife insofar as the knife is “not as far along the scale of knife-ish goodness as that woman is along the scale of human goodness” (ibid.). Perhaps this is what Aristotle has in mind in EN I, 6 when he suggests that homonymous goods may be analogous rather than homonymous by chance (EN 1096b26-30) and in Politics III, 12 when he argues that analogy enables the comparison of disparate goods (Pol. 1283a3-4).

However, Shields argues that there are two serious difficulties with the analogical solution to the commensurability problem. The first is reminiscent of Shields’ critique of MacDonald’s functional interpretation of the categorial argument: if we analyze and compare different goods in terms of analogy, the equivocity of goodness threatens to collapse into second-
order univocity. The analogy between the goodness of a knife and the goodness of a human depends upon the fact that both frameworks of appraisal are based on the directedness of knives and humans toward their respective ends or functions. In light of that fact, it seems that we do not, after all, require two distinct definitions of being-good for the good human and the good knife. Rather, we can produce a second-order definition that applies to both: “x is good =df (i) x is a member of a functional kind, k; and (ii) x realizes the function of k to a high degree” (Shields Summum 104). Claiming that two goods are comparable by analogy, therefore, subverts the claim that they are homonymous in the first place.

Another, equally serious difficulty is that the analogical solution appears to be of no help in reestablishing comparability among goods in non-functional/non-teleological contexts. This means that the incomparability among goods in different categories and much of the incomparability among intrinsic goods entailed by the HIG will remain in place. Concerning the former, no relative can be good in the same sense that a substance is. Yet Shields argues, plausibly, that relatives as such have no function (Summum 106). This means that we cannot set up an analogy comparing the extent to which a relative realizes its function with the extent to which some other good realizes its function; there is no proper function for the relative as such to realize. Analogy, therefore, cannot resolve the incommensurability of transcendentally homonymous goods. Likewise, Shields argues that it is difficult to understand how pleasure as such could be construed as a functional kind. And if it is not a functional kind, analogy will be useless in attempting to compare its value with that of some other intrinsic good like prudence (ibid.)
A third objection to the analogical solution, which Shields does not mention, but which seems to me decisive, is that analogy does not provide the right *kind* of comparability among goods. Or at any rate, it cannot deliver the correct results about which goods are better than others. To see what I mean, let us modify Shields’ example of the analogy between the knife and the human. Instead of comparing a wise and just woman with a dull knife, instead consider a maximally excellent knife and a woman of merely mediocre moral and intellectual virtue. In this case, the woman is not so far along the scale of human goodness as the knife is on the scale of knife-ish goodness. Analogical comparison of these two goods will therefore yield the result that the knife is better than the woman. To put it mildly, this is not a conclusion Aristotle would want to embrace; no knife, no matter how finely crafted, could be higher up on the *scala naturae* than an animate being with a rational soul. With this fact in mind, it is easy to see that in Shields original example we did not actually compare the woman and the knife as *goods*; rather, we compared the goodness of the woman *qua human* with the goodness of the knife *qua knife*. The latter is a rather limited, circumscribed form of evaluative comparison. Aristotle’s axiology requires that goods be comparable in a more robust sense than analogy alone can deliver. The fact that Shields neglects this glaring inadequacy of the analogical solution is curious. Perhaps he is reluctant to draw attention to the issue because the limited scope of analogical comparability would arguably be just as troublesome for a conception of the good as univocal at the second order, which appears to be Shields’ preferred alternative to Aristotle’s homonymous conception. I will come back to this point in my reply to Shields below.

Since neither the deflationary rejoinder nor the analogical solution is adequate, Shields concludes that the incommensurability of goods poses a crippling problem for Aristotle’s theory
of value. Just as J.A. Stewart suspected, Aristotle’s anti-Platonism about the good is not nearly as “cost-free” as he thinks it is because “a serious commitment to the homonymy of the good threatens genuine incommensurability among those very values Aristotle seems otherwise disposed to bring into ordinal rankings” (Shields Summum 109). Given his acceptance of (COM) and the homonymy of the good, the burden of proof is on Aristotle to show that those ordinal value rankings are intelligible in a way that ordinal sharpness rankings of knives and sonatas are not. In Shields’ view, Aristotle has not discharged that burden.

A Reply to Shields

To my knowledge, Shields never explicitly argues that Aristotle should have retracted his view that the good is homonymous. However, it is possible to build a powerful case for that position by combining the arguments from *Order in Multiplicity* and “Fractured Goodness.” The first point to make in that case is that Aristotle’s acceptance of the homonymy of the good is not well-motivated since the central arguments that purport to establish the thesis fail. Additionally, Shields might strengthen the point by arguing that Aristotle does not actually *need* to posit the homonymy of the good to reject Plato’s Form of the Good. Rather than taking aim at Plato’s univocity assumption, Aristotle could simply deploy the battery of familiar arguments against separated forms, such as those from *Metaphysics* I, 9. Those arguments, unlike the categorial and signification arguments, are supposed to undercut the belief in ontologically independent forms while leaving room for universals that apply univocally to all the particulars subsumed under them. In short, Aristotle could give arguments against the Platonic Form of Goodness that do not rule out the possibility of an Aristotelian universal of goodness. Aristotle’s commitment to the
homonymy of goodness is thus *doubly* unmotivated—it is both unnecessary to reject Platonism and not well justified by his arguments.

Meanwhile, in accepting the homonymy of goodness, Aristotle is saddled with a devastating incommensurability problem. If Shields is correct that Aristotle is committed to the position that every intrinsic good requires a distinct definition of goodness from every other, then Aristotle will be compelled to conclude that most good things are incomparable with one another. The only goods that will turn out to be comparable on that position are tokens of the same type of good; evaluative comparisons can extend no further without running afoul of (COM). Aristotle will not, therefore, be entitled to rank lives and beings in terms of their goodness. Even specifically human-indexed good lives will turn out to be incomparably good if they are lives which derive their goodness from the pursuit of homonymous intrinsic goods (e.g. the lives of pleasure, honor, and intelligence).

If we take Shields’ two lines of thought on board, then the homonymy of goodness appears to be a poorly justified thesis which is also the source of a potentially fatal flaw in Aristotle’s ethical theory. Furthermore, in the course of Shields’ critique of Aristotle an alternative way of conceptualizing goodness has emerged in higher-order synonymy. Thus, Shields’ arguments suggest a new approach to the problem of cosmic hierarchy goodness I am exploring in this dissertation. Specifically, Shields might submit that, since Aristotle fails to establish the homonymy of the good in the first place, it is unsurprising that he appears to fall back to a conception of goodness as a univocal universal when he depicts the cosmos as an axiological hierarchy. While no doubt Aristotle would be reluctant to make such a deep concession to Platonism, admitting that goodness is univocal would resolve some major tensions
in his metaphysics and semantics of value. Perhaps, then, the correct way to approach the question of how the great chain of being fits into Aristotle’s theory of the good is to examine closely the revisions he would have to make to accommodate the univocity of goodness and to show how these revisions would make for a more coherent, formidable theory than the one Aristotle in fact offers.

I will not be taking this Shields-inspired approach to the problem, however, for three reasons. First, I argue that both the categorial and signification arguments are more powerful than Shields recognizes. Second, Shields worry about “unconstrained multivocity” is overblown. While Aristotle is certainly committed to the view that the word “good” has a very large number of senses, he need not accept the extreme view that every intrinsic good is homonymous with every other. Third and finally, I argue that even if we were to revise Aristotle’s theory along the lines that Shields’ criticisms suggest, Aristotle’s cosmic hierarchy would not simply fall into place. The comparability problems that arise on a theory of goodness as homonymous reemerge if we instead take it to be a multiply-realizable, univocal universal. Let us treat each of these points in turn.

In a compressed form, we might present Aristotle’s categorial argument for the transcendental homonymy of the good as follows:

1) If “being” is said in many ways, corresponding to the categories, then “good” is also said in many ways, corresponding to the categories.

2) “Being” is said in many ways, corresponding to the categories.

3) So, “good” is said in many ways, corresponding to the categories.
Presented in this way, Shield’s primary criticism of the argument is that premise two is false or at least insufficiently defended by Aristotle. Shields develops this critique at length, and it may well be correct. However, assessing his argument against the homonymy of being would take us too far afield, and for the sake of this project I am simply granting Aristotle’s thesis that “being” is predicated homonymously across the categories. So, for my purposes, any attempt to undermine the categorial argument for the homonymy of goodness must take aim at the conditional expressed by premise one. As I noted above, Shields does question why we should think that the multivocity of being entails the multivocity of goodness, pointing out that Aristotle merely asserts the premise without defending it, but he does not develop a positive argument that premise one is false.

In my view, however, we can reasonably infer the kind of defense Aristotle would give of the premise that being and goodness “march in step,” as Shields puts it (Order 198). As we saw while considering a similar objection from Ackrill in chapter two, the Aristotle’s basic intuition seems to be that two things cannot have identical “accounts of being” corresponding to a common predicate when they cannot even be said “to be” in the same sense. If the account of what it is for something to be is implicit in the account of what it is for that thing to be \( F \), then no two subjects from different categories could share a single account of being-\( F \). I do not claim that this argument is unassailable—perhaps Shields could attempt to block the chain of inferences by denying that an account of what it is for \( S \) to be is implicit in the account of what it is for \( S \) to be \( F \). (Perhaps “\( S \) is \( F \)” only implies “\( S \) is” in a way that is indeterminate, does not specify which category \( S \) belongs to, and thus does not imply any particular account of what it is for \( S \) to be).

\(^6\text{For a detailed reply to Shields’ critique of Aristotle on this point, see Ward 2008, 121-128.}\)
However, I do think the argument is sufficient to show that the premise that the homonymy of being implies the homonymy of goodness is more than a bare, unsupported assertion; it can plausibly be seen to follow from basic features of Aristotle’s ontology and his views about the nature of univocal predication. And if that is true, then the categorial argument for the equivocity of the good is defensible, provided we accept the equivocity of being.

In my view, Shields also underestimates the signification argument from *Topics* I, 15. Recall that he thinks that a Platonist may dismiss this argument by claiming that Aristotle’s homonymy test only reveals differences in shallow signification and does not rule out the possibility of a univocal, second-order universal that subsumes all the various shallow senses of “good” (Shields Order 200). But this response will not do because, given Aristotle’s definitions of synonymy and homonymy, if the account of what it is for $S_1$ to be good is different from the account of what it is for $S_2$ to be good, then *ipso facto* we have a case of homonymy. The test actually does rule out the possibility of a superordinate universal, so long as we grant that the provided accounts of what it is for the various items to be good are correct. If the Platonist is willing to admit that Aristotle has identified the correct account of what it is for $S_1$ to be good and the correct account of what it is for $S_2$ to be good and if those two accounts differ from one another, then the Platonist has already conceded that Aristotle has successfully established homonymy.

To see why this is so, let us return to Shield’s example from functionalist philosophy of mind. If a mental state like pain is a functional state that is realizable in many different kinds of material states, then it would simply be incorrect to give an account of pain in terms of a particular neurological state (say, the firing of nerve fibers in the parietal lobe). Such an account
would, at best, correctly identify one particular way in which pain is instantiated. It would completely fail to identify what it is for that state to be pain. Similarly, if the Platonist thinks that there is a second-order, univocal universal that subsumes the various kinds of goodness that Aristotle mentions, then he is committed to saying that Aristotle has misidentified what it is for his various examples to be good. For example, if there is a universal, goodness, that is equally instantiated by the pleasure-producing quality of food and the virtuousness of a soul, then “productive of pleasure” is not the correct account of what it is for food to be good and “virtuousness” is not the correct account of goodness in a soul. Rather, what it is for both of these things to be good would be specified by whatever the correct account of the universal, goodness, turns out to be. And if this is true, then Aristotle’s accounts of the goodness of food and souls only pick out some specific way goodness can be realized; they fail to capture what it is for food and souls to be good, in the same way an account of pain as the firing of certain nerve fibers fails to capture what it is for that neural state to be pain.

Therefore, in order to refute Aristotle’s signification argument, the Platonist objector would have the considerable burden of showing that Aristotle’s differing accounts of goodness in the various cases are incorrect. More precisely, he would have to show that they are incorrect because they are too specific; that they merely pick out first-order ways of being good rather than revealing the nature of the second-order universal that is decisive for grasping what it is for each thing to be good. It would be very difficult to make this case without actually proposing an account of the universal which both the pleasant taste of food and the courage and justice in a soul instantiate. Given the Platonic view that the nature of the Good Itself largely exceeds our cognitive grasp, it seems unlikely that such an account would be forthcoming. So, Shields’
Platonic rejoinder is committed to claiming that Aristotle’s accounts of the goodness of food, souls, etc. are incorrect, but does not provide any justification for that claim (absent a univocal definition of the nature of goodness). Thus, it seems that Aristotle’s argument in Topics I, 15 cannot be so easily dismissed. More generally, then, Aristotle’s rejection of a univocal conception of goodness is better-motivated than Shields would have it.

Of course, if Aristotle’s arguments for the equivocity of the good are more powerful than Shields acknowledges, that only serves to make the incommensurability problem even more troubling. In order to respond properly to Shields, therefore, we must not only show that Aristotle has good reason to accept the homonymy of goodness, but also that he has some hope of overcoming the incommensurability problem that arises from it. As I already noted, developing some possible solutions will be the task of chapters five and six. To lay the groundwork for those solutions, however, it is necessary to diffuse the most extreme version of the incommensurability problem as posed by Shields, i.e., the problem posed by the “unconstrained multivocity” of intrinsic goods.

Recall that Shields takes HIG to rely implicitly on a general principle about the homonymy of intrinsic goods. On his reading, Aristotle is not merely claiming that pleasure, honor, and prudence are distinct insofar as they are good; he is inferring that claim from the principle that every intrinsic good is distinct in its goodness from every other. Shields admits that neither the principle nor the inference are anywhere present in the text. However, he defends his interpretation by arguing that if we do not assume that Aristotle is appealing to a general principle about the homonymy of intrinsic goods then we need to supply “some principle which requires the intrinsic goods mentions to have ‘different and divergent’ (EN 1096b24) accounts of
goodness pursuant to them while precluding this in other cases. It is, however, difficult to see what this principle might be” (Shields Summum 101).

In Chapter Two, I argued at length for just such a principle, namely, the four-fold division of goods between auxiliaries, powers, praiseworthy goods, and honored goods. This division posits that there are three and only three kinds of per se human good (and one type of per aliud human good), based on the theory of the four causes. To be sure, even if we accept the four-fold division, there will still be incommensurability problems that need to be solved. Specifically, we need to show why it is coherent to rank the four kinds of goods if they are all goods in different senses from one another. And if other species have analogues of the four kinds of good, as seems plausible, these also need to be incorporated into our overall picture of a commensurable, homonymous value world. Nevertheless, the four-fold scheme allows us to prevent the senses of “good” from “multiplying unconstrainedly” so that the task of mapping out how they relate to one another becomes completely unmanageable.

Even still, Shields might argue that the incommensurability problem remains a formidable one—sidestepping it would be a significant advantage of dropping the homonymy of goodness and conceptualizing goodness as a second-order, multiply-realizable, univocal universal instead. However, I argue that major questions about the comparability of different kinds of goodness would remain and problems with Aristotle’s conception of the cosmic hierarchy would not be solved even if we revised Aristotle’s theory along the lines suggested by Shields’ critique. To see why this is, let us imagine that Aristotle revises his views and holds that “good” in “good food” and “good person” is predicated univocally and that goodness in food is merely realized by its tastiness and in a person by her virtue. Further suppose that some meal is
an extremely tasty one, ranking ten on scale of one to ten, while some person is only imperfectly virtuous, ranking seven on a scale of one to ten—would it follow that the perfect meal is simply better than the imperfect person? As I noted in discussing the problems with analogical comparability above, it seems unlikely that either Aristotle or his Platonist opponents would be willing to admit this conclusion.

Problems of this sort would be pervasive on second-order univocal conception of the good; even if Aristotle’s arguments failed to show that goodness is homonymous, they would surely show that goodness is realized in an indefinitely large number of ways. It is clear, therefore, that even if Aristotle were to concede that goodness is ultimately univocal, there would still be unanswered questions about how the multiple realizations of goodness can be compared with one another and how they relate to one things’ being simply and unqualifiedly better than another thing. Admittedly, a second-order univocal conception of goodness would be able to sidestep Aristotle’s prohibition on commensurable homonyms. Nevertheless, the question about how the many different forms of goodness fit into an ordinal ranking seems largely unchanged whether we frame them it terms of the equivocity of goodness or in terms of its multiply-realizable univocity. Since Aristotle thinks that “good” is said in many ways and, so I argue, does so with more justification than Shields gives him credit for, I will continue to frame the issues in terms of the equivocity of goodness. However, even if Shields’ arguments win the day, my project is not thereby obviated, because the same questions about how two things of different natures can be evaluatively compared would crop up even if Aristotle held goodness to be a multiply-realizable universal that applies univocally to all good things.
CHAPTER FOUR
HOMONYMY, SYNONYMY, AND COMPARABILITY

Introduction

In the last chapter, we saw that the homonymy of goodness creates a major problem for Aristotle’s theory of value. Specifically, it appears to entail that he will not be entitled to make many of the comparative judgments among goods that he often does, in fact, make. Or, at any rate, he will be obliged to admit that these judgments are unintelligible, provided that he also accepts the thesis that two things are comparable with respect to their goodness if, and only if, they are synonymous with respect to it. In this chapter, therefore, we will take a closer look at the evidence for the claim that Aristotle accepts the thesis that comparability and synonymy are biconditional; a thesis which, following Shields, I will continue to refer to as “COM.”

The primary passages that support attributing COM to Aristotle come from Topics I, 15 and Physics VII, 4. I argue that neither passage is as clear-cut as it may seem at first appearance. Topics I, 15 only argues that synonymy is sufficient for comparability; a thesis that is compatible with the comparability of at least some homonyms. Physics VII, 4, on the other hand, does argue that synonymy is necessary for comparability, but it does so in an aporetic context, while apparently rejecting the sufficiency premise endorsed in the Topics. A close reading of both passages, therefore, yields no evidence at all that Aristotle ever endorsed the bi-conditionality of synonymy and comparability. It also suggests that taking COM to be Aristotle’s definitive, or
“official” position is misleading insofar as it portrays him as having a stable view on the relations between synonymy, homonymy, and comparability which he adheres to throughout the corpus.

The opening sections of this chapter may seem to focus excessively on textual minutiae, but the underlying issue they seek to address is of great importance to my project. If Aristotle is definitively committed to the thesis that synonymy is a logical prerequisite for comparability, then I claim that one of the most promising strategies for addressing the incommensurability problem is not open to him. My contention is that a close analysis of the relevant passages in the *Topics* and the *Physics* reveal that Aristotle is not as wedded to the incomparability of homonyms as he may seem to be at first blush.

If my analysis of *Topics* I, 15 and *Physics* VII, 4 is correct, a passage from the *Protrepticus* takes on special relevance. Provided we accept the authenticity of the *Protrepticus* fragments, a passage found in chapter eleven of Iamblichus’ *Protrepticus* (Düring fragment B82) provides decisive evidence that Aristotle rejected the necessity of synonymy for comparability, at least at one point in his career. I argue that B82 gives Aristotle the conceptual resources to make a distinction between two kinds of comparability. I will call these “s-comparability” (for “synonymy-comparability”) and “p-comparability” (for “priority-comparability” or, if you like, “Protrepticus-comparability”). S-comparability is the familiar kind in which two things both possess a single attribute, designated by common predicate, and in which one thing possesses the attribute to a greater degree than the other, or else they both possess it to an equal degree. P-comparability, on the other hand, is when two different attributes correspond to a common predicate, but one of the attributes is, in some sense, prior to the other.
I say, “in some sense,” because the *Protrepticus* leaves the type of priority Aristotle has in mind unspecified. I will attempt to remedy this lacuna by drawing on Aristotle’s discussion of the different types of priority from *Metaphysics* IX. I argue that once we have filled in the details about how p-comparability would work, we can see that it would be a powerful tool Aristotle could use to explain the sense in which some homonymous goods are better than others. This paves the way for Chapters Five and Xix, in which I will apply p-comparability to the challenges posed by the intraspecific, trans-specific, and transcendental homonymy of goodness.

Interpreting the canonical works of the Aristotelian corpus in light of a doctrine found only in the *Protrepticus* is bound to be quite controversial. Accordingly, I will not rest the entire argument of this dissertation on doing so. In addition to applying p-comparability to the incommensurability problem, Chapters Five and Six will also explore the extent to which it is possible to solve, or at least mitigate that problem using only s-comparability. However, I would ultimately argue that the prospects of finding a coherent account of goodness in Aristotle are significantly improved by availing ourselves of p-comparability. Thus, in this chapter, I will provide some initial justification for reading a theory from the *Protrepticus* back into Aristotle’s “mature” works.¹ I hope, at least, to establish that the *Protrepticus*-inspired position on comparability I will be advancing in the remainder of the dissertation deserves a fair hearing.

¹The *Protrepticus* is one of Aristotle’s “exoteric” works. That is to say, it was composed for a broader audience than nearly all the works that have come down to us in the corpus, which are “esoteric” (see e.g. EE 1217b22 for the distinction). The exoteric works are often believed to have been written at an early point in Aristotle’s career, and to express positions that are fundamentally inconsistent with Aristotle’s mature perspective. The classic defense of this “deep developmentalist” view is, of course, Werner Jaeger. The Jaegerian position is far from unchallenged, however—Gerson, for example, argues that the exoteric works should be understood as “popular expressions of [Aristotle’s] established philosophical positions and not immature, soon-to-be-discarded positions” (75). I am, so far as is possible, attempting to bracket the vexed questions about Aristotle’s development throughout this dissertation. However, I recognize that, since I am assuming that the *Protrepticus* can be used to solve problems in the works universally acknowledged to be mature, I may be implicitly siding with more unitarian interpreters like Gerson and against developmentalists like Jaeger.
Comparability and Synonymy in the *Topics* and the *Physics*

The first key passage in which Aristotle discusses the relationship between homonymy and comparability is *Topics* I, 15 107b13-19. Recall that Aristotle’s goal throughout *Topics* I, 15 is to provide a series of tests for detecting whether a common predicate is being used homonymously. In this particular passage, Aristotle argues that incomparability can serve as such a test. He claims that if two things are *F*, but they are incomparable with respect to being-*F*, that is sufficient to show that they are not univocally *F*. The argument is worth quoting in full:

Moreover, see if the terms\(^2\) cannot be compared as more or less or in like degree, as is the case (e.g.) with a clear sound and a clear argument\(^3\), and a sharp flavour and a sharp sound. For neither are these things said to be clear or sharp in like degree, nor yet is the one said to be clearer or sharper than the other. Clear, then, and sharp are homonymous. For synonyms are always comparable; for they will always hold either in like manner, or else in a greater degree in one case. (*Top.* 107b13-19).

The upshot, then, is that the incomparability of attributes signified by the same term entails that the term is said homonymously of the two subjects. More succinctly, incomparability is sufficient for homonymy. Aristotle then supports this claim by arguing that its transposition is true: synonymy entails comparability. If two things are synonymously *F*, then one of them must be more *F* than the other, or they must be equally *F*. If neither *F*-thing is more *F* than the other, and if the two things are not *F* to an equal degree, we can rule out the possibility that they are synonymously *F*. We should note in passing that, in accordance with the “moderate” interpretation discussed in chapter one, the argument depends on the assumption that homonymy

\(^2\)“Terms” is inserted by the translator here. I take it Aristotle is instructing us to see whether the *attributes signified by the terms*, rather than the terms themselves, can be compared.

\(^3\)Literally, “a white sound and a white cloak.” The translator has modified the example to fit English idioms.
is equivalent to non-synonymy. If there were some *tertium quid* between homonymy and synonymy, none of Aristotle’s inferences would follow.

As we saw in Chapter Three, Shields appeals to *Topics* I, 15 to argue that Aristotle holds that synonymy is *necessary* for comparability. It should now be clear, however, that the text actually argues that *comparability is necessary for synonymy*. If Aristotle also endorses the stronger COM thesis, that synonymy and comparability are biconditional, there is no hint of that endorsement in the text. Unlike the view synonymy is necessary for comparability, the view that synonyms are always comparable is *compatible* with claiming that there are also some comparable homonyms. So, at least as far as *Topics* I, 15 is concerned, Aristotle could consistently hold that some homonymous goods are comparable just insofar as they are good.

Perhaps one might object that Aristotle at least *should have* said that synonymy is necessary, rather than sufficient, for comparability. It might be thought that it is ill-advised for Aristotle to endorse the sufficiency premise because it is at odds with one of the central contentions of his substance-based ontology. The problem is that in *Categories* Aristotle makes clear that there is no question of comparing the substantiality of primary substances—something simply is a primary substance or it is not; there are no *degrees* of primary substantiality (*Cat.* 2b22-26). And yet substantial predication provides a paradigm case of univocity; humans and oxen are univocally substances, Socrates and Alexander are univocally human. It would, however, be a category mistake to compare their respective degrees of humanity or substantiality. According to this line of argument, the most fundamental entities in

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4 Robert Wardy gestures toward this objection although he does not develop it or address it at any length (274).
Aristotle’s ontology are synonymous incomparables and, thus, pose a glaring counter-example to the thesis that synonymy is sufficient for comparability. Perhaps, then, we ought to regard the argument in *Topics* I, 15 as a slip on Aristotle’s part; a slip that could be rectified by claiming that synonymy is necessary for comparability, rather than sufficient for it.

The objection will not go through for two reasons. The first is that the philosophical task Aristotle is trying to accomplish in the passage depends on establishing that synonymy is sufficient for comparability. The thesis that synonymy is necessary for it will not do just as well. Aristotle is proposing tests to detect homonymy. If synonymy entails comparability, then it follows that incomparability entails homonymy. If we have managed to detect incomparability, therefore, we have necessarily also detected homonymy. The same chain of inferences will not follow, however, if we begin instead with the claim that comparability entails synonymy. We could not claim that the incomparability we have detected entails homonymy without committing the fallacy of denying the antecedent. In short, *Top*. 107b13-19 only works as a homonymy test provided that synonymy is sufficient for comparability.

The second reason is that substantial predication is arguably *not* a counterexample to the *Topics* I, 15 position on synonymy and comparability at all. We can see why by noting that Aristotle accepts a thesis about comparability which some contemporary philosophers call “the trichotomy thesis.” The trichotomy thesis holds that if \( x \) and \( y \) are comparable with respect to \( F \), then \( x \) must be more \( F \) than \( y \), less \( F \) than \( y \), or equally \( F \) as \( y \) (Chang 4).\(^5\) In Aristotle’s idiom, comparable things will either be \( F \) “in like degree” (homoiōs) or one more than the other (mallon

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\(^5\)Chang introduces the trichotomy thesis as one about evaluative comparisons specifically, but it is easily generalized. Lest one suspect that the trichotomy thesis is trivially true, it should be noted that Chang herself, along with a number of other prominent contemporary philosophers such as Derek Parfit and Thomas Hurka, reject it (Chang 4-5).
In *Categories* 5 Aristotle certainly does deny that any primary substance is more substantial than any other, however, he does not rule out the third possibility of the trichotomy thesis, i.e. that all primary substances are substantial in like degree (*Cat.* 2b21-26).

Admittedly, if we have already denied that there is any such thing as degrees of primary substantiality, it might seem unnatural or forced to claim that an ox and a human, say, are substances in an equal degree. Saying so, however, would be in keeping with the way Aristotle thinks about other, non-substantial entities that do not admit of degrees. In *Categories* 8, for example, he argues that there are no degrees of triangularity or circularity and argues that all triangles and circles are, thus, equally (*homoiōs*) triangular or circular (*Cat.* 11a5-14). Thus, triangles meet the conditions for comparability, even though it is impossible for any triangle to be more triangular than any other. There seems to be no reason Aristotle could not say the same thing about primary substances. If so, the ontology of the *Categories* does not conflict with the thesis that synonymy is sufficient for comparability. Indeed, it is possible that Aristotle’s provision that things count as comparable if they are *F homoiōs* was specifically designed to accommodate cases like synonymous substances and triangles.

To review, then, in *Topics* I, 15, Aristotle argues for a logical relation between synonymy and comparability that is consistent with the comparability of homonymous goods. Furthermore, the view that synonymy is sufficient, rather than necessary, for comparability seems to be a carefully considered position, rather than a momentary slip or confusion. Admittedly, Aristotle may also think that synonymy is necessary for comparability. He does not rule that position out in the *Topics*, but neither does he argue for it.
Physics VII, 4, on the other hand, is a more challenging text for the interpreter who hopes to leave room for comparable homonymous goods. In it, Aristotle appears to argue, unambiguously, that synonymy is necessary for homonymy. Indeed, he even seems to say that homonymy explains the incomparability of homonyms. Once again, here is the relevant passage in full:

Things not synonymous are all incommensurable (mē sumblēton). E.g. a pen, a wine, and the highest note in a scale are not commensurable: we cannot say whether any one of them is sharper than any other; and why is this? They are incommensurable because they are homonymous. But the highest note in a scale is commensurable with the leading note, because the term “sharp” has the same meaning applying to both (Phys. 248b6-10).

The opening line of our passage claims that non-synonymy entails incomparability. This premise allows Aristotle to deduce, plausibly, that sharp pens, wines, and notes are not comparable with respect to their sharpness. But the same premise could just as easily be used to prove that homonymous goods like pleasure, honor, and prudence are incomparable with respect to their goodness (EN 1096b24-25). Further, just as Aristotle argues that we can compare sharp things only if “sharp” has the same meaning applied to each thing being compared, by parity of reasoning, we could only compare good things if the same meaning of “good” applied to each. Since goods are homonymous at the transcendental, trans-specific, and intraspecific levels, Physics VII, 4 suggests a picture of goodness in which small islands of comparability are separated from one another by gulfs of incomparability. Is Aristotle saddled with such a picture?

If Physics VII, 4 represents Aristotle’s definitive statement on comparability, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that he is saddled with that picture. In the next two chapters, I will consider ways in which Aristotle could soften this “insular” perspective on goodness even if Physics VII, 4 represents his official position on comparability. Ultimately, however, I think a much more
coherent, philosophically attractive theory of goodness is open to Aristotle if he is freed from the strictures on comparability imposed by *Physics* VII, 4. For that reason, I will now consider some reasons for thinking that it is *not* his settled view.

The first point to note is that the status and purpose of book VII as whole within the *Physics* is a controversial issue. While it is clear enough that VII, 1 aims to provide an argument for the existence of a prime mover, it is less obvious how (or whether) the four subsequent chapters support that argument, and how VII, 1 relates to Aristotle’s more elaborate proof of the unmoved mover in book VIII. As a result, commentators from Simplicius to Ross have suggested that book VII is an early work, not originally part of the *Physics* at all, which is largely superseded by book VIII (see Wardy 85-89 for a helpful overview of the debate and his own dissenting view). I do not wish to hang my argument on any controversial developmental speculations, but if the traditional assessment of *Physics* VII as immature is correct, it would tell against regarding chapter four as the definitive Aristotelian statement on synonymy and comparability.

The second issue is that VII, 4 is a notoriously difficult chapter to interpret. Aristotle is working through an *aporia* concerning whether circular motion and rectilinear motion are commensurable with respect to their speeds; that is, whether it is intelligible to claim that a circular motion is faster than, slower than, or just as fast as a rectilinear motion. Working through *aporiai* is a familiar part of Aristotle’s philosophical method. However, VII, 4 never clearly articulates a *lusis*, a position that resolves the tensions and contradictions presented by the *aporia*. Instead, as Ross puts it, “suggestions and objections follow each other with great rapidity, and the turns of thought are unusually difficult to follow” (Physics 677). Because of the
unresolved aporetic character of the chapter, Wardy cautions us to remember that some of the positions Aristotle takes up in VII, 4 may not be ones he “would actually admit in propria persona, but rather [may be] only... temporary challenge[s] at that particular juncture in the dialectic” (263). Diving in to the thorny issues involved in providing a correct overall interpretation of VII, 4 would take us too far afield. For our purposes it is enough to observe that Aristotle may not actually be endorsing the thesis that synonymy is necessary for comparability; he may only be taking the position up as part of a dialectical exercise. Had Aristotle provided a definitive lusis to the aporia investigated in the chapter, it might have left room for comparable homonyms.

However, even if we suppose Aristotle is speaking in his own voice when he claims that synonymy is necessary for comparability, there is one final consideration against regarding COM as the settled Aristotelian position. Namely, a later passage in VII, 4 also denies the thesis of Topics I, 15, that synonymy is sufficient for comparability. Immediately after the passage we have been discussing, Aristotle argues that terms like “much” (polu) and “double” (diplasion) can apply univocally to substances which are nevertheless not commensurable (Phys. 248b12-20). The idea seems to be that “much” signifies the same thing in “much water” and “much air,” but that air and water are quantitatively incommensurable—this is supposed to serve as a counter-example to the claim that synonymy guarantees comparability. Accordingly, Aristotle

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6See Wardy, chapter 7 and Platanakis for two recent attempts. One major issue concerns the extent to which Aristotle is relying on theories from the geometry of his day which (erroneously) held that it is impossible for the circumference of a circle to be equal to a straight line.

7Aristotle makes no attempt to defend the thesis that air and water are incommensurable in the text and it is, in any case, highly dubious. Even if we presuppose that Aristotle’s theory of the five elements is correct, surely it is both intelligible and true to claim that there is more air in the cosmos than there is water in the cup on my table? But the incommensurability of water and air would commit Aristotle to rejecting comparative statements like these.
tests out other conditions which, along with synonymy, would be jointly sufficient for comparability (Phys. 248b21-249a7).

We can draw some important conclusions without investigating these additional conditions in detail. First, in Physics VII, 4, Aristotle implicitly rejects COM since he rejects the sufficiency of synonymy for comparability. Thus, neither the Physics nor the Topics provide any evidence that he ever accepted COM. At best, in the Physics he holds that synonymy, plus some additional conditions concerning the specific similarity of attributes to be compared and their substrata, are jointly biconditional with comparability. However, the more basic and important point to note is that at some juncture between the Topics and Physics VII, Aristotle changed his mind about the relationship between synonymy and comparability. Aristotle clearly thinks that there is some logical relation between the two features, but he does not appear to have a single account of what the precise relation is that he adheres to throughout the corpus. Even if, at one point in his career, Aristotle affirmed the necessity of synonymy for comparability, it seems unlikely that he would be more wedded to that thesis than to the comparability of goods. I suspect that if Aristotle ever noticed the inconsistent triad composed by the homonymy of goodness, the comparability of goods, and the incomparability of homonyms, he would be most willing to give up the incomparability of homonyms.

Comparability in the Protrepticus

With that triad of theses about goodness and comparability in mind, a passage from the Protrepticus discusses synonymy, homonymy, and comparability takes on special relevance.8 In

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8I am assuming, without argument, both that the Protrepticus fragments are authentic and that we can distinguish the quotations of Aristotle from the editorial comments of Iamblichus with a reasonably high degree of confidence. In defense, I will only note that many scholars are more optimistic about both assumptions since the publication of D.S. Hutchinson and Monte Ransome Johnson’s “Authenticating Aristotle’s Protrepticus.”
it, Aristotle expressly denies that synonymy is necessary for comparability and argues that homonyms that fall into orders of priority and posteriority may also be compared. Even more intriguingly, he uses the example of goods *per se* and *per aliud* to illustrate his meaning:

> For we use ‘more’ not only in respect of excess in things which fall under a single definition [*kath’ huperochēn ōn an heis ē logos*], but also in respect of what is prior and posterior; for example, we say that health is more a good than the things conducive to health and what is valuable [*haireton*] in itself and by its own nature than what produces it. And yet we see, surely, that it is not by the definition of ‘good’ being predicable of both that it applies to each of them, beneficial things [*ōphelimōn*] and virtue. (Iamblichus *Protr*. Ch. 11, 57.12-18 = B82)

A skeptical reader might notice that Aristotle does not use the words “synonymy,” “homonymy,” or “comparability,” at all in this passage. This is true, but the relations among synonymy, homonymy, and comparability are clearly the subject of the argument nevertheless. Perhaps given the exoteric nature of the *Protrepticus*, Aristotle does not want to assume that his readers will be familiar with his technical terminology. Alternatively, the *Protrepticus* may predate the *Categories* and so Aristotle may not have formulated his technical meanings of homonymy and synonymy when it was written. Whatever the reason, the things which he says “fall under a single definition” corresponding to their common term are clearly what he elsewhere calls synonyms. Those which have multiple definitions signified by their common term are what he elsewhere calls homonyms. Likewise, given Aristotle’s acceptance of the trichotomy thesis, if one *F*-thing is more *F* than another, they are comparable with respect to *F*-ness.

Throughout, my quotations from the *Protrepticus* will make use of Hutchinson and Johnson’s translation, rather than the Revised Oxford Translation.
Thus, we can restate Aristotle’s opening claim that “more” is not only used of things that fall under a single definition. It is equivalent to the claim that not only synonyms are comparable; a certain class of homonyms are comparable as well. More specifically, if $x$ and $y$ are homonymously $F$, but the $F$-ness of $x$ is prior to the $F$-ness of $y$, then $x$ is more $F$ than $y$.

What kind of priority Aristotle has in mind is obviously a crucial issue for the interpretation of this passage? I will postpone investigating this important question until sections IV and V of this chapter. Our immediate purpose is to clarify the *Protrepticus* position on the logical relations between synonymy, homonymy and comparability. A rough and ready conception of priority as some kind of logical and/or explanatory dependence of the posterior item on the prior will suffice for that purpose.

In contrast to the *Topics* which offers synonymy as a sufficient condition for comparability, and the *Physics* which argues that it is a necessary but not sufficient condition, I argue that the *Protrepticus* puts forward a disjunctive necessary condition for comparability. I do not see any indication in the text that Aristotle also regards it as a disjunctive sufficient condition. In light of his view in the *Physics*, it is probably prudent not to assume that Aristotle is arguing for a disjunctive biconditional. Thus, I suggest we interpret the position as follows: (COM$^1$) Any two things, $x$ and $y$, that are $F$ are comparable with respect to their $F$-ness, only if a) they are synonymously $F$ or, b) the $F$-ness of $x$ is prior to the $F$-ness of $y$ or vice versa.

Note that COM$^1$ is compatible with the position of *Topics* I, 15, although it obviously does not entail it. Synonymy could still be a sufficient condition for comparability even if it is not singly necessary for it. Thus, it is possible that incomparability would still be an effective test for homonymy, even if some homonyms are comparable. On a related note, COM$^1$ appears to
salvage much of what is intuitively plausible about positing a logical connection between homonymy and incomparability in the first place. According to COM\(^1\), sharp knives, sharp wine, and sharp notes, for example, will still be incommensurably sharp. They are neither sharp in the same sense, nor do the different definitions stand in any ordered series of priority. It must be conceded, however, that the *Protrepticus* at least appears to be in flat contradiction with the thesis of *Physics* VII, 4 on the issue. The latter text argues that synonymy is necessary for comparability, the former argues that it is not.

Thus, although COM\(^1\) provides an initially promising framework for thinking about the comparability of homonymous goods, some readers may be understandably hesitant about an interpretation of Aristotle that would allow the *Protrepticus* to trump the *Physics*. A reading, that is, that would permit a lost work, usually regarded as immature, and whose authenticity is far from unquestioned, to supersede the position defended in one of the central works in the Aristotelian canon. Perhaps these reasonable concerns can be partially allayed if *Protrepticus* ch.11, 57 can be plausibly interpreted as a qualification of the position from the *Physics* rather than an outright rejection of it.

The first step in crafting such an interpretation is to note that the two disjuncts of COM\(^1\) do not seem to yield the same *kind* of comparability. When two synonyms are compared, one has more of the very same feature that the other has (or else they both possess the feature to an equal degree). But homonyms obviously cannot be compared in *this* sense; the very fact that they are homonyms means that they do *not* share a single attribute corresponding to their common predicate, which they might possess in varying degrees. On the contrary, different attributes
correspond to the shared predicate, but one attribute is somehow more fundamental than the other.

It seems, then, that COM allows that some homonyms are comparable, but that they are comparable in a different way, or perhaps a different sense, from the comparability of synonyms. A steak knife is sharper than a butter knife, and health itself is better than a healthy diet. However, the sense in which the steak knife is more sharp is different from the sense in which health is more good. Accordingly, I suggest we distinguish between two kinds of comparability. On the one hand, there is “s-comparability” (for “synonymy-comparability). Two things, x and y, are s-comparable with respect to F-ness if, and only if, they possess a single attribute corresponding to the predicate, “F,” and x possesses the attribute to a greater degree than y (or vice versa), or else x and y possess the attribute in like degree. On the other hand, there is “p-comparability” (for “priority-comparability”). Two things, x and y, are p-comparable if, and only if, they possess distinct attributes, corresponding to the predicate, “F,” and the F-ness of x is prior to the F-ness of y or vice versa.

As a brief digression, we can develop some helpful terminology to articulate comparisons among homonymous goods by applying the distinction between s-comparability and p-comparability. When one good is better than another in terms of p-comparability, we may call it “p-better,” as distinct from “s-better.” For example, optimal health is s-better than merely adequate health, because they are good in the same sense, but one has more goodness than the other. Health in general, however, is p-better than a healthy diet, because they are not good in the

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9Perhaps there are two species of the genus comparability, or perhaps “comparable” is said homonymously of comparable homonyms and comparable synonyms. I remain agnostic about which of these two alternatives better reflects Aristotle’s position.
same sense, but one sense of “good” is prior to the other. Similarly, a group of homonymous goods which have differing levels of priority may be called a “p-scale,” with the posterior, and thus, p-worse, goods at the bottom of the scale and the prior, p-better, goods at the top. A p-scale of goodness would contrast with an s-scale, in which all the goods are good in the same sense, though some are s-better than others. We can call the different levels on p-scales and s-scales “p-degrees” and “s-degrees” of goodness.\(^{10}\)

The idea of a p-scale of value raises an additional issue about the nature of p-comparability: is it possible for two homonymous goods to occupy the same level on a p-scale, that is, to have equal p-degrees of goodness? S-comparability is trichotomous, encompassing comparisons among things which are more \(F\), less \(F\), or \(F\) in equal degree. Is p-comparability also trichotomous, or is it dichotomous instead, allowing for comparisons of more and less, but not of equal degree? COM\(^1\) assumes that p-comparability is dichotomous rather than trichotomous. I formulated it in this way to reflect that fact that Aristotle’s introduction of p-comparability focuses on the conditions under which one \(F\)-thing may be p-more \(F\) than another. He does not so much as mention a case in two things are p-equally \(F\). Nevertheless, it seems to me that there is logical space in Aristotle’s thought for trichotomous p-comparability. Consider four homonymous \(F\)s: \(w\), \(x\), \(y\), and \(z\). Further, let these four stand in an order of priority and posteriority: \(z\) is the primary \(F\)-thing, \(x\) and \(y\) are secondary \(F\)-things, and \(w\) is a tertiary \(F\)-thing (dependent for its \(F\)-ness on its relation to either \(x\) or \(y\)’s \(F\)-ness). In this case, although \(x\) and \(y\) have distinct definitions as \(F\)s, they have an equal degree of proximity to the primary \(F\)-thing (cf.

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\(^{10}\)Hopefully the “degree” terminology will not be too misleading: one might argue that when one good is p-better than another, its goodness is different in kind rather than degree. I do not deny this; I take it that p-degrees are nothing other than hierarchically ordered differences in kind. I do not intend to obscure this fact by describing them as degrees.
Met. 1018b 10-14 on priority as proximity to a principle). Thus, I contend that we would be entitled to think of \( x \) and \( y \) as \( p \)-equally \( F \). \(^{11}\) We should, therefore, revise \( \text{COM}^1 \) to allow for trichotomous \( p \)-Comparisons: (\( \text{COM}^2 \)); any two things which are \( F \), \( x \) and \( y \), are comparable with respect to their \( F \)-ness, only if a) they are synonymously \( F \) or, b) they are members of an ordered series of priority and posteriority with respect to their \( F \)-ness.

With the distinction between \( p \)-Comparability and \( s \)-Comparability in place, it becomes easier to see \( \text{COM}^2 \) as a qualified version on the \( \text{Physics} \) position on synonymy and comparability. It is, of course, characteristic of Aristotle to qualify a thesis by claiming that it is true in one sense but false in another (e.g. \( \text{Met.} \) 1072a3-4, \( \text{EE} \) 235b16-17, \( \text{DA} \) 426a21-22).

Aristotle is especially inclined to make this move when he is attempting to reconcile plausible, but conflicting \textit{endoxa}. As we noted above, Aristotle is engaging in just such a dialectical process throughout \( \text{Physics} \) VII, 4, although he never offers a final \textit{lucus} to the \textit{aporia} as he ordinarily does. With that in mind, I submit that it is not implausible to speculate that, even in \( \text{Physics} \) VII, Aristotle’s considered position is that in one sense synonymy is necessary for comparability, though in another sense it is not. The standard form of comparability in which two entities share a feature and we are able to assess which of them has the feature to a higher degree, really \textit{does} require synonymy. However, there is another, non-standard form of comparability based on orders of priority and posteriority among distinct features, which is compatible with homonymy.

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\(^{11}\)I should concede that I have not proved that Aristotle thinks of things which have equal proximity to the primary member of a series are \( F \) in a \( p \)-equal degree. Aristotle may think that \( p \)-Comparability is dichotomous and that \( x \) and \( y \) are incommensurable with respect to \( F \)-ness since they are neither \( s \)-Comparable, nor is one prior to the other with respect to \( F \)-ness. I recommend the trichotomous interpretation only because a) it is compatible with what Aristotle says and b) it would allow him more flexibility in comparing homonymous goods.
Some readers may remain unconvinced; they may think that p-comparability was, at best, a youthful experiment which Aristotle had evidently discarded by the time he wrote *Physics* VII. I concede that these skeptics may ultimately be correct. With them in mind, chapters five and six will advance two alternative lines of thought: one which makes use of both p- and s-comparability and another which assumes that s-comparability is the only kind that Aristotle recognizes. However, I hope that the arguments I have given thus far are at least sufficient to justify giving the former line of thought a hearing. Perhaps the strongest argument in favor of reading p-comparability into Aristotle outside the *Protrepticus* is that Aristotle’s views of goodness appear to be significantly more coherent with it than without it.

**P-comparability, Potentiality, and Actuality**

However, if we wish to apply p-comparability to Aristotle’s axiology, we cannot put off addressing the question of what kind of priority is at issue any longer. The reason this question is so important is that Aristotle thinks that priority and posteriority are homonymous. There are many senses in which one thing can be prior to another, and these different senses of priority do not coalesce into a single order of priority and posteriority. That is to say, the fact that \( x \) is prior to \( y \) in one sense does not rule out the possibility that \( y \) will be prior to \( x \) in another. Therefore, if we do not identify which sense or senses of priority entitle us to claim that a prior \( F \) is *more* \( F \) than a posterior \( F \), we may arrive at rankings of goods which are exactly backwards, or else we may arrive at multiple, contradictory rankings.

The *Protrepticus* itself, read alongside *De Anima*, offers a good illustration of the problem. Aristotle introduces p-comparability as part of his argument that a philosopher is *more alive* than a non-philosopher, because the exercise of wisdom is living to the highest possible
degree (Iamblichus *Protrep*. Ch.11 56.15-58.10). Part of the argument is that one is more properly called “living” in virtue of exercising the soul’s capacities, as opposed to merely possessing those capacities but not exercising them. The other part is that exercising rational capacities is more properly called “living” than exercising non-rational capacities. Although Aristotle does not explicitly argue for it, it would not be much of a leap for him to claim that human beings are, in general, more alive than non-human animals and that animals are more alive than plants. The comparison would be based on the idea that, with respect to living, rational activity is prior to sensitive activity which is prior to nutritive activity.

However, if we recall the serial ordering of souls from *De Anima* II, 3 which was discussed in chapter one, we would arrive at the exact opposite conclusion. The nutritive soul is the primary kind of soul inasmuch as it is potentially contained in all the subsequent souls, just as the triangle is potentially contained in all subsequent rectilinear figures. If this sort of priority entitled us to p-comparability, we could derive the conclusion that plants are more alive than non-rational animals and non-rational animals are more alive than humans. Aristotle would undoubtedly regard such a conclusion as absurd.

It is crucial, therefore, that we clarify what kind(s) of prior goods count as better goods. Unfortunately, in the passage that introduces p-comparability (B82), Aristotle does not draw attention to the multiple senses of “prior” and specify which are relevant. We are not left completely in the dark however: two of Aristotle’s examples of p-comparability provide clues about the types of priority he has in mind. They suggest that the relevant kinds of priority are the same as those that actuality has over potentiality, on the one hand, and that a core sense has over
the peripheral senses of a *pros hen* multivocal on the other. Let us examine these two clues more closely.

The first clue, which associates priority and posteriority with actuality and potentiality, immediately precedes the passage in which p-comparability is introduced:

When some one word means each of two things, and one of the two is so called either by acting or by being acted on, we shall attribute the term as applying more to this one [*toutō mallon apodosōmen huparchein to lechthen*]: for example, we attribute ‘knowing’ to the one who makes use of knowledge more than the one who has it, and seeing to the one who is applying his vision more than the one who has the capacity (Iamblichus *Protrep*. Ch.11 57.6-11).

The examples Aristotle gives in this passage to illustrate his point are relatively lucid and have clear connections to familiar doctrines in the canonical works. In particular, the contrasts between the capacity to see and the possession of knowledge, on the one hand, and the exercise of sight and knowledge, on the other, call to mind Aristotle’s introduction of his famous distinction between first and second actuality in *De Anima* II,1. Accordingly, the examples suggest that his thesis in the passage is as follows: (PR$^1$) when $x$ and $y$ are both called $F$, but $y$ is called $F$ in virtue of a potentiality and $x$ is called $F$ in virtue of the actualization of that potentiality, then $x$ is p-more $F$ than $y$.

In my view, interpreting the passage in terms of actuality and potentiality is ultimately correct. However, the first sentence of the passage poses a challenge, or at least a complication, for that interpretation. Aristotle does not mention the distinction between actuality and potentiality at all in the first sentence. Rather, he references the related but non-identical distinction between acting and being acted upon (*poiein* and *paschein*). Perhaps, then Aristotle is arguing for a subtly different thesis: (PR$^2$) when $x$ and $y$ are both called $F$, but $y$ is called $F$ in virtue of being acted upon and $x$ is called $F$ in virtue of acting, $x$ is p-more $F$ than $y$. Jonathan
Barnes and Gavin Lawrence, at any rate, seem to assume that Aristotle has PR\textsuperscript{2} in mind; they translate “toutō mallon apodosōmen huparchein to lechthen” as “we shall say that the former [i.e. acting] possesses the property to a greater degree.” (B81).\textsuperscript{12}

The problem with Barnes and Lawrence’s agent/patient interpretation is that Aristotle’s examples do not conform with it. The relationship between the power of sight and actually seeing is not the same as the relation between being-acted upon and acting. We might say that the power of sight is acted upon by a visible object and is thus brought into a state of actuality, i.e., the activity of seeing. But this is not the same as saying that the power of sight is acted upon by the activity of seeing itself, which would clearly be a metaphysical absurdity. If the agent/patient reading is correct, then Aristotle appears to be sloppily conflating the acting/being acted on distinction with the actuality/potentiality distinction. These two sets of distinctions obviously have important connections to one another, but they cannot be reduced coherently to a single distinction.

Hutchinson and Johnson appear to recognize the difficulty, and they translate the problematic phrase in a way that is more consistent with the actuality/potentiality reading: when a term is applied to one of two things \textit{either} in virtue of acting or being acted upon “we shall attribute the term as applying more to this one.” (Iamblichus \textit{Protrep}. Ch.11 57.9 qtd. In Hutchinson and Johnson 267.)\textsuperscript{13} I take the thought to be as follows: there are both active and passive potentialities, i.e. potentialities to act in a certain way and to be acted on in a certain way

\textsuperscript{12}An extremely literal interpretation would be “we will submit this to belong more to the thing said.”

\textsuperscript{13}In their analysis of the passage, Hutchinson and Johnson also assume that the actuality/potentiality reading is correct. It seems likely that Barnes and Lawrence would concede that the broader argument hinges on powers and their exercise rather than agents and patients, but their translation nevertheless gives the impression that Aristotle is conflating the two.
When something is called $F$ in virtue of an *actual* action or passion, an actualized active or passive potentiality, it counts as more $F$ than a mere potential for acting or being affected. In contrast to what Barnes and Lawrence’s translation implies, it is possible for a thing to be more $F$ than another $F$-thing in virtue of being acted on, insofar as it is *actually*, rather than potentially, being affected. To reuse an earlier example, the power of sight is a passive potentiality, since it is the capacity to be affected in a certain way by visible objects. Aristotle tells us that an animal may be called “seeing” both because it has the power of sight or because that power is being exercised (B79, cf. *DA* 417b17-21). An animal with its eyes open is seeing to a higher degree than an animal with its eyes shut, because the passive potentiality is being actualized by visible objects in the former case but not in the latter.

The upshot, then, is that despite a somewhat ambiguous, potentially misleading reference to agents and patients, Aristotle’s main line of thought is that at least some homonyms are p-comparable because their common name refers to both a power and the actualization of that power, and the term applies to the actuality to a higher p-degree. Thus, PR\textsuperscript{1} better reflects Aristotle’s view than PR\textsuperscript{2} does.

However, while PR\textsuperscript{1} certainly helps us home in on the kind of priority involved in p-comparability, it seems clear that it is not quite general enough to explain fully that kind of priority. For example, it would be a stretch, at best, to think that a sensitive soul is a potentiality which becomes a rational soul when actualized.\textsuperscript{14} Likewise, things that produce health are not potentially health, although they actualize potentialities for health in a body. Nevertheless,

\textsuperscript{14}While there are certainly some important relations of potentiality and actuality between the sensitive soul and the rational soul, I take it that they are significantly more complex than that between, say, the power of sight and the activity of sight.
perhaps we can arrive at the correct account of the priority involved in p-comparability by starting with PR\textsuperscript{1} and taking it to a higher level of generality: (PR\textsuperscript{3}) when \(x\) and \(y\) are both called \(F\) homonymously, \(x\) is more \(F\) than \(y\) if, and only if, the \(F\)-ness of \(x\) is prior to the \(F\)-ness of \(y\) in the same way(s) that actuality is prior to potentiality. If PR\textsuperscript{3} is on the right track, then in order to understand how one homonymous good can be p-better than another we need to understand the ways in which actuality is prior to potentiality. Aristotle gives his most detailed account of the priority of actuality in *Metaphysics* IX, 8. There he argues that actuality is prior to potentiality in definition or account (*logos*), in time (in one sense, though it is temporally posterior in another sense), and in substance.

Actuality’s definitional, or logical priority consists in the fact that the definition of a potentiality must include a reference to the corresponding actuality. The account of being-potentially-\(F\) must include or at least refer to the account of being-actually-\(F\). The relation is asymmetric in that the definition of being-actually-\(F\) does *not* need to include or refer to the account of the potentially-\(F\). Aristotle’s examples are that the powers of building and seeing are defined with reference to the activities of building and seeing, while visibility is defined with reference to actually being seen (*Met.* 1049b14-16). Accordingly, we have knowledge of potentialities by means of their corresponding actualities (*Met.* 1049b16-17; cf. *Met.* V, 11 which classifies priority in *logos* as a kind of epistemic priority).

The discussion in *Met.* IX, 8 might give the impression that Aristotle requires that the definition of the prior item be directly and explicitly contained in the definition of the posterior item if logical priority is to obtain. The requirements are probably not quite so strict. Aristotle holds that the category of substance is logically prior to the non-substantial categories (*Met.*...
1028a33-36). We might plausibly argue, however, that the definitions of many non-substantial entities do not contain within them the definition of substance, at least not explicitly. For example, it seems that we could give a definition of a particular color, say, white, without referring to any particular substance in which the color inheres, or even to substance in general. In light of this difficulty, John Cleary suggests that Aristotle allows for implicit or indirect definitional containment to constitute logical priority. The definition of white, like the definition of any color, would refer to a surface and all surfaces here in and depend on substances (Cleary 67, cf. Ward, Homonymy 117-118). The definition of a color implicitly contains a reference to substance, therefore. Going forward, I will assume that this kind of indirect definitional containment is enough to constitute a relation of logical priority.

Aristotle also argues that actuality is temporally prior to potentiality in one sense, though it is temporally posterior in another. Actuality is temporally posterior in that, with the exception of eternal beings, individuals are potentially-\(F\) before they come to be actually-\(F\). Aristotle’s paradigm here is biological generation, in which seeds, eggs, and infants precede fully grown organisms (Met. 1049b19-21). Actuality is temporally prior in a different way, however: all potentially-\(F\)-things are themselves produced by pre-existing actually-\(F\)-things (Met. 1049b22-25). Organisms again provide the model in that immature organisms are generated by adults. More broadly, however, Aristotle’s view of temporal priority seems to be grounded in what Istvan Bodnar calls the “principle of causational synonymy.” That is, the view that if \(x\) causes \(y\) to be \(F\), \(x\) must itself be actually \(F\) (e.g. GC 323b33-34).\(^{15}\) Causational synonymy would ensure

\(^{15}\)See Bodnar for a helpful account of the principle and Aristotle’s attempts to qualify it in order to neutralize obvious counterexamples.
that any potentially-F-thing must have been preceded in time by some actually-F-thing which imparted the potentiality to it.

Finally, Aristotle argues that actuality is prior in substance (protera tē ousia) to potentiality. He opens his case for this claim by arguing that things which are “posterior in becoming” (ta tē genesei hustera) are prior in form and substance (Met.1050a4). “Priority in becoming” seems to be nearly equivalent with the first sense of priority in time that Aristotle has just discussed. I take it that x is prior to y in becoming just in case x comes to be earlier in time than y. So, a boy is prior in becoming to a man, but posterior in substance. This is because the boy is developing toward and only potentially exhibits the form which the man fully exhibits (Met. 1050a9-10). Priority in substance, thus, appears to be something like the ontological correlate, or even the ontological grounding, of actuality’s logical priority. The account of a potentiality must make reference to its corresponding actuality. I take it this fact is grounded in the ontology of potentialities—an unrealized potentiality just is a kind of directedness toward the actuality for which it is a potential. The very being of the potentiality consists in a tendency toward its end, which is its actualization. This would explain why, when giving an account of what a potentiality is, we need to refer to the actuality at which it is aimed.

Of the three kinds of priority, logical and substantial priority seem to be the more promising types for explaining p-comparability. It is doubtful, for example, that Aristotle would want to endorse the premise that if the goodness of x existed before the goodness of y, then x is p-better than y. Admittedly, it is true that Aristotle holds that eternal things are more valuable than things which come to be and pass away (e.g. PA I, 5). We may even concede the further point that the goodness of eternal things is somehow intrinsically connected to their eternity
It seems likely that even in this case, the fact that the moon, say, has existed (infinitely) longer than any generated substance, Socrates for example, is not the real reason the moon is better than Socrates. It is more likely that something about the moon’s substantial nature, which it possesses at every moment that it exists, explains why its value outranks that of any sublunary substance. This intuition is confirmed by Aristotle’s claim, later in *Met. IX*, 8, that “eternal things are prior in substance to perishable things” (*Met.* 1050b6). Their substantial priority seems to be more fundamental than their temporal priority—the everlasting duration of celestial beings is explained by their natures as substances which have no potencies for corruption and not the other way around.

If temporal priority is derivative in the way I have suggested, we can safely focus on logical and substantial priority in attempting to discern whether homonymous goods are p-comparable. That is, if giving an account of y’s goodness requires us to refer to x’s goodness and if y’s status as a good consists in its directedness toward x as a good, then we have grounds to say that x’s goodness is logically and substantially prior to y’s. In that case, we would be entitled to claim that x is p-better than y. We may, therefore, refine PR\(^3\) to reflect the lessons from *Metaphysics* IX: (PR\(^4\)) when \(x\) and \(y\) are both called \(F\) homonymously, \(x\) is more \(F\) than \(y\) if, and only if, the \(F\)-ness of \(x\) is logically and substantially prior to the \(F\)-ness of \(y\).

**P-comparability and Core Dependence**

The second clue about the kind of priority involved in p-comparability comes from Aristotle’s use of healthy things as examples of p-comparable goodness. The claim in question is

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\(^{16}\) Whether Aristotle has adequately shown that eternal substances are prior in substance to perishable ones in the same way that a man is substantially prior to a boy is an important, but separate question. We will examine the priority relations among the different kinds of substances in Chapter Six.
that “health is more a good than the things that conduce to health” even though these things do not share a single definition of being-good (Iamblichus Protrep. Ch.11 57.15). As we saw in chapter one, “the healthy” is one of Aristotle’s paradigmatic examples of a core dependent multivocal. Aristotle’s suggestion here seems to be that, say, a healthy diet’s status as a good mirrors its status as a healthy thing; just as it is called “healthy” in virtue of its relation to a core nature, so too is it called “good” in virtue of its relation to a core sense of “good.” Thus, parallel to the analysis of “the healthy” as a core dependent multivocal, we could presumably construct a parallel analysis the same items, taken as goods.

Some readers may object to importing the analysis of core dependence into an exegesis of the Protrepticus. One prominent source of skepticism might be the developmental hypothesis G.E.L. Owen advances in his “Logic and Metaphysics in some Early Works of Aristotle.” Owen argues that “focal meaning” (his term for core-dependence) is a conceptual innovation from the later part of Aristotle’s career and is absent from early works like the Organon (179-181). If we combine Owen’s thesis about focal meaning with the early date traditionally ascribed to the Protrepticus, we can infer the conclusion that Aristotle cannot have a core dependent analysis in mind when discussing p-comparability. It would be illegitimate, then, to conceptualize p-comparability in terms of core dependence or to think that homonymous goods may be compared insofar as they are core dependently good.

I resist this Owen-inspired objection for three reasons. First, the example and the language Aristotle uses in our passage are so strikingly reminiscent of his analysis of pros hen homonymy that we may be more inclined to take the Protrepticus as evidence against Owen’s developmental thesis than we are to take his thesis as evidence against core dependence in the
Protrepticus. Just like Metaphysics IV, 2, the current passage draws our attention to the way that things which are healthy (hugieinos) have a derivative status, based on causal relations to health itself (hugieia). At the very least, we seem to have the seeds of a theory of core dependence in the Protrepticus.\textsuperscript{17} I would argue that a stronger reading is quite defensible; a reading according to which Aristotle has already developed the theory of pros hen predication, but leaves out its technical details with a view to his intended audience. Such an interpretation seems to me at least as plausible and consistent with the text as an Owen-inspired reading.

A second reason not to give in to the Owenian objection is that more recent scholars have contested Owen’s developmentalist reading of pros hen predication. Julie Ward, for example, argues that Owen’s interpretation has at least two serious defects. The first is that Aristotle clearly and explicitly employs pros hen homonymy in his theory of friendship in Eudemian Ethics VII, 2, which is not typically regarded as a later work (Ward, Homonymy 63).\textsuperscript{18} The second is that the absence of explicit mention of core dependence in the Organon is better explained by the different aims of the works in question than by a developmental hypothesis. The Topics, for example, has a different aim than the central books of the Metaphysics. In the context of developing a theory about the nature of being, Aristotle needs his theory of core-dependence, so he employs it. In the context of honing students’ argumentative techniques for use in eristic,

\textsuperscript{17}Noting that B82 contradicts Aristotle’s “more rigorous doctrine” that comparability requires synonymy, Owen argues that we should understand the passage as an attempt to construct “a logic for theories that were part of his inheritance” from the Academy, rather than a formulation that reflects his mature theory of focal meaning (184). While Aristotle may well be wrestling with ideas he encountered in the Academy, it seems implausible to me to dismiss out of hand the obvious similarities between the language of B82 and canonical sources of Aristotle’s theory of core dependence like Metaphysics IV.

\textsuperscript{18}Owen acknowledges that pros hen predication is employed in the Eudemian Ethics, but claims that Aristotle has not yet realized that it could also be applied to “wholly general expressions such as ‘being’ and ‘good’” (169). However, Ward’s analysis of the core dependence of friendship in the Eudemian Ethics calls this claim into question (Homonymy 149-167).
he does not need it and thus does not employ it (*ibid.*). Ward’s second objection fits well with the idea that Aristotle does not explicitly mention core dependence in the *Protrepticus*, not because of his philosophical immaturity, but with a view to his intended, non-academic audience.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I will be assuming, at least provisionally, that it is permissible to interpret “mature” works like the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Metaphysics* using p-comparability. This involves assuming that, even if the *Protrepticus* is immature, Aristotle never definitively or permanently repudiated its position on synonymy, homonymy, and comparability. Consequently, the question of whether Aristotle had already worked out his theory of core dependence by the time he wrote the *Protrepticus* is not as relevant as it otherwise might be. In light of his use of healthiness as an example of a p-comparable good, it seems clear that if the mature Aristotle accepted p-comparability at all, he would think about it in terms of core dependence. I am undoubtedly arguing for a contentious premise when I claim that it is permissible to interpret Aristotle’s canonical works on the basis of a position that appears only in the *Protrepticus*. If that premise is granted, however, it seems logical to allow that p-comparability itself may be analyzed in terms of core dependence.

So, if we accept the premise that core dependent homonyms are p-comparable, how should that shape our understanding of p-comparability? In order to answer this question, recall that in chapter one, I followed Cajetan, Shields, and Ward in arguing for an interpretation of core dependence in which the peripheral senses of a term are connected to the core by causal relations. My final formulation was as follows: (CDH*) $x$ and $y$ are homonymously $F$ in a core dependent way iff: (i) they have their name in common, (ii) their definitions do not completely overlap, (iii) there is some nature, $N$, such that $x$’s $F$-ness and $y$’s $F$-ness stand in one of the four
causal relations to \( N \), and (iv) for any instance of \( F \)-ness, if \( F \)-ness is identical to \( N \), then \( F \) is intrinsically denominated in that instance. (v) If \( F \)-ness is not identical to \( N \), then \( F \) is extrinsically denominated in that instance.

The most obvious way of connecting core dependence and p-comparability is to say that the core sense, i.e. the intrinsically denominated sense of \( F \) is more \( F \) than the peripheral, extrinsically denominated senses. \( F \)-things that are called \( F \) in virtue of their causal relations to the core nature are not as \( F \) as the thing that is \( F \) in virtue of formally realizing that nature. These are obviously not s-comparisons—the core \( F \)-thing does not have a higher degree of the very same attribute peripheral \( F \)-things have. Rather, they are p-comparisons: the \( F \)-ness of peripheral \( F \)-things is asymmetrically dependent on the \( F \)-ness of the core in the way specified by CDH*.

Consider Aristotle’s example of the goodness of healthy things in light of core dependence. Aristotle argues that health is a better good than healthy things and that this is an instantiation of the general truth that things which are choiceworthy \textit{per se} are better than things which are good because they are productive of what is choiceworthy \textit{per se} (Iamblichus \textit{Protrep.}, Ch. 11 57.15-16). In this context, at least, health is taken as a core good. Insofar as it is good \textit{per se}, it formally realizes a feature of goodness; it does not merely stand in an extrinsic relationship to something else which realizes that feature.\(^{19}\) Healthy things, on the other hand, are good in virtue of the fact that they produce health; that is, I take it, because they bear an efficient and

\(^{19}\text{To that extent, therefore, health is intrinsically denominated as good. But we must be careful here. Ultimately, on my interpretation, only one good is intrinsically denominated as good \textit{strictly speaking}, namely, god. Every other good thing is ultimately called \textquoteleft good,\textquoteright in virtue of some kind of relation to divine substance. This claim may seem mysterious at this point in the argument, but I hope it will become clearer as I develop the p-comparable solution in chapters five and six.}\)
final causal relation to health. A healthy diet, for example, is good insofar as it creates health, sustains it, and is pursued for the sake of it.

The *Protrepticus*, thus, suggests two models of the way in which a p-better good is prior to a p-worse good: the priority of actuality over potentiality, on the one hand, and the priority of a core sense to the peripheral senses in *pros hen* homonymy on the other. What is the relationship between the two models? One possibility is that they supposed to be two alternative kinds of priority. If they are alternatives, then we may wonder if either kind suffices to constitute p-comparability, or if both need to obtain. If either suffices, then it seems we may run into the same problem of multiple, incompatible p-rankings that we first worried about when noting that there are multiple senses of “priority.” Alternatively, we could avoid this thorny issue if the two models were somehow equivalent; if the priority of actuality over potentiality ultimately came to the same thing as the priority of a core sense over peripheral senses. We could also avoid it if we could show that one of the models superseded the other.

Aristotle does not provide us with much help in the *Protrepticus* in deciding which of these possibilities best captures his position. However, I think the most plausible response is that the relation between core and periphery in *pros hen* homonymy is more general than the priority of actuality to potentiality. One prominent way $x$ can be $p$-more $F$ than $y$ is by being related as actuality is to potentiality. When $x$ this condition, it also meets the core dependence condition for being p-comparable, but it is possible to meet the core dependence condition without being related as actuality is to potentiality. To see why this is, recall that the two most important types of priority actuality possesses are logical and substantial; the account of a potency must refer to the corresponding act and the *being* of the potency consists in its directedness toward its
actualization, which is its end. Core dependent homonymy is also supposed to involve these kinds of priority. The definition of the core is, at least implicitly, included in the definitions of every peripheral $F$-thing. The logical dependence is grounded in the fact that a peripheral thing’s being-$F$ consists in standing in a causal relation to the core nature, $N$. This is very similar to the way a potentiality’s being, full stop, is constituted by the relation to its actuality. Furthermore, since the actualization of a potentiality is its end, something called $F$ in virtue of being potentially $N$ meets the conditions for core dependence because $N$ is the final cause of the potentially $N$ thing. To reuse an earlier example, an animal with its eyes shut is seeing in a peripheral sense, while an animal with its eyes open in seeing in the core sense.

However, CDH* does not stipulate that a peripheral $F$ must be the core nature in potentiality; other relations to the core nature are included as well. A medical instrument like a scalpel is core-dependently medical because it is ordered to its end by the medical art. But a scalpel is not potentially the art of medicine itself. Similarly, healthy diets and exercise are healthy because they produce health in a body, not because they have the power to transform into health. It seems, then, that core dependence is the more fundamental model of priority involved in $p$-comparability; it both subsumes and extends beyond the priority of actuality over potentiality. The basic criterion homonymous things must meet in order to be $p$-comparable, then, is core dependence. In attempting to detect $p$-comparability among homonymous goods, therefore, we ought to see whether they meet the criteria set by the four-causal core primacy specified by CDH*.

Now one might object that Aristotle typically uses core dependence to distinguish between the primary and secondary senses of a term. If “good” mirrors “healthy” and “medical,”
then presumably we would distinguish between a primary sense of “good” and multiple secondary senses. P-comparability would then allow us to say that primary goods are p-better than secondary goods, and that secondary goods are all p-equally good. But this would be woefully inadequate for capturing all the dimensions of Aristotle’s cosmic hierarchy. As we saw in chapter two, goodness is homonymous in an indefinitely large number of ways, but Aristotle seems to think that we are nevertheless able to make fine-grained distinctions of better and worse among different types of being which are not good in the same sense. Many more than two levels of primacy will be required, therefore, if p-comparability is to allow for the comparison of homonymous goods.

The answer to this difficulty is that the peripheral senses of a core dependent multivocal need not be p-equally F. There can be p-comparisons of more and less among the peripheral senses themselves. Specifically, the senses of a core dependent multivocal will have more than two p-degrees if they instantiate the serially core dependent structure I discussed in chapter one. In a serially core dependent multivocal, some x will be F in virtue of its causal relation to the F-ness of y, which will be F in virtue of its causal relation to the F-ness z, which will be intrinsically denominated as F. There can, in principle, be many levels of increasing proximity to the primary F-thing or (more fundamentally) the core nature of the multivocal. If “good” is serially core dependent, therefore, Aristotle could have his fine-grained distinctions of better and worse among homonymous goods.

We can, therefore, refine the PR and the COM principles one final time: (PR*) when x and y are both called F homonymously, x is more F than y if, and only if, they are core-dependently F and either a) x is F in the core sense and y is F in a peripheral sense, or b) x and y
are both $F$ in peripheral senses, but the $F$-ness of $x$ has more proximity to the core nature, $N$, than $y$ has. PR* represents an advance over PR$^4$ in that it unpacks the implications of PR$^4$ more explicitly. Furthermore, since core dependence is arguably Aristotle’s most sophisticated, well-developed conceptual tool for thinking about the relations among homonyms, linking p-comparability to core dependence is an advantage in itself. Similarly, COM principle should be revised as follows. (COM*) Any two things which are $F$, $x$ and $y$, are comparable with respect to their $F$-ness, only if a) they are synonymously $F$ or, b) they are core-dependently $F$. Whereas COM$^2$ left the type of priority and posteriority required for p-comparability unspecified, COM* ties p-comparability to core dependence. All core-dependently $F$-things will be p-comparable, either in one of the two ways specified by PR*, or by being $F$ to an equal p-degree.

If p-comparability is based on the kind of priority at work in core dependence, then Aristotle’s tentative comments about the unity of the good in EN I, 6 take on new significance. Recall that he asks “in what way are things called good? They do not seem like the things that only chance to have the same name. Are goods one, then, by being derived from one good [aph’ henos] or by all contributing to one good [pros hen], or are they rather one by analogy?” (EN 1096b27-28). It is sometimes assumed that Aristotle’s preferred alternative is analogy (e.g. Stewart 77, Jacquette 315-316, Shields, Fractured 104). While I agree that analogies play an important role for Aristotle in giving the value in the world an intelligible structure, in my view it is ultimately pros hen predication that does the real philosophical work in restoring comparability to homonymous goods.

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20Shields explicitly rejects Stewart’s claim that Aristotle ultimately commits to analogy as the unifying principle of goodness. Oddly, he proceeds to argue as if Stewart were correct, examining the shortcomings of analogy as a unifying principle and not considering pros hen as an alternative.
If the many senses of “good” can be unified around proximate core goods (like good healthy things are unified around the core good of health), and if those core goods themselves are called “good” in virtue of their relations to a single, ultimate principle of goodness, then we can think of “good” as an extremely complex, serially core dependent multivocal. Because of its core-dependence, it would be a multivocal word whose many senses are p-comparable with one another. Correspondingly, the whole cosmos could be thought of as a vast p-scale of goodness. Goodness throughout the universe would be constituted by many different natures, but those natures would be intelligibly and hierarchically arranged, enabling us to compare them precisely insofar as they are good. I think this is the correct account of Aristotle’s response to the commensurability problem in a nutshell. But the devil is in the details: there is still much work that needs to be done to show that the many senses of “good” actually stand in the right kinds of relations to one another to qualify as p-comparable. Otherwise, the proposed solution could not even get off the ground. In the next two chapters I will make the case that the various senses of “good” do display the requisite kind of order and, thus, that p-comparability can mend the alleged “fractures” in Aristotle’s account of goodness.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE COMPARABILITY OF TRANSCENDENTALLY AND INTRASPECIFICALLY HOMONYMOUS GOODS

Introduction

Equipped with the distinction between s-comparability and p-comparability, the task is now to apply the two types of comparability to each of the three levels of axiological homonymy and discern whether and how they can provide a resolution to the incomparability problem at each level. In this chapter, I will focus on homonymy at the transcendental and intraspecific level, leaving trans-specific homonymy for Chapter Six. It may seem unnatural to set aside the level of homonymy in the middle of the Porphyrian tree and focus on the levels at the two extremes in a single chapter. I do so for two reasons: first, providing an account of both s- and p-comparable solution to transpacific axiological homonymy is arguably a more complex task than providing such an account for transcendental and intraspecific homonymy, meriting a chapter of its own. More importantly however, transcendental and intraspecific homonymy have surprising and important connections with one another. Although transcendental homonymy occurs at the level of summa genera and intra-specific homonymy occurs below the level of infimae species, both levels involve assessing the value of accidents inhering in substances. This fact makes it important to consider them together.

I aim to show that the transcendental and intraspecific incomparability problems are intractable on an interpretation which holds that s-comparability is the only kind Aristotle
recognizes, but are readily handled by an interpretation which permits us to make use of p-comparability as well. (For the sake of brevity, we may call these “s-interpretations” and “p-interpretations,” respectively). In the case of transcendental homonymy, being provides a model we can use to understand transcendental goodness: being is not a genus that can be predicated univocally of the ten categories, but is core dependent homonym ordered around substance. I argue that we can understand transcendental goodness to be organized in a similar structure. Likewise, if I am correct in my contention that intraspecifically homonymous goods are ordered by causal relations, then they are also prime candidates for core-dependence, especially given the causal analysis of core dependence developed by Cajetan, Shields, and Ward.

**Transcendental Homonymy and the S-interpretation**

Recall that Aristotle endorses a principle of transcendental homonymy according to which it is impossible for any predicate to apply univocally to items that fall into different categories. Since “good” is applied to items in every category, we can infer that there are at least as many senses of “good” as there are categories. Good things from different categories will be good equivocally. For example, Socrates (a good substance), temperance (a good quality), and a suitable habitat (a good place), will not share a single definition specifying what it is for each thing to be good.

If we opt for an s-interpretation, then transcendental axiological homonymy will inevitably entail transcendental axiological incomparability. That is, Aristotle will be committed to the view that all items falling under different categories will be incomparable to one another with respect to their goodness. On such a view, it would be unintelligible to claim that a given entity is better than, worse than, or just as good as another entity in a different category. I
contend that Aristotle has no hope of escaping this consequence if he holds both that synonymy is necessary for comparability and accepts the principle of transcendental homonymy; at the transcendental level, at least, the incomparability problem is completely intractable if we are only allowed to employ $s$-comparability.

S-interpreters may be tempted to reply that, if the other two levels of homonymy can be resolved, the transcendental homonymy of the good is not as problematic as it may seem. Provided that we can rank substances in a hierarchy of better and worse, and we can also compare the value of the different things that are good for those substances, then perhaps it does not matter if categorially distinct entities are incommensurably good. The objector might maintain that Aristotle does not need to hold that every good is comparable with every other; he only needs to show that enough goods are comparable that we can make sense of the hierarchy of the cosmos and the important values in ethical life. Perhaps, then, transcendental incomparability can be incorporated into Aristotle’s theory of goodness without damaging its overall coherence.

While I agree with the general notion that Aristotle does not need to eliminate incomparability completely in order to have a coherent theory of value, I argue that transcendental homonymy is too fundamental to be innocuous. As an illustration, consider the plausible view that a surgical operation is not as good as the health it aims to restore. Since surgical operations are in the category of action (or passion if being received), and health is in the category of quality, Aristotle will not be able to compare these two goods if he is committed to transcendental incomparability. If he wants to claim, more generally, that the product at which an action aims is better than that action itself (EN 1094a6-7), this too will be inconsistent with
the homonymy of the good according to an s-interpretation.\footnote{A possible exception would be when the product of an action is another, distinct action. E.g. I cut a rope, so that the catapult fires, so that the projectile destroys the enemy’s wall. Since all three in the category of action, they will not be transcendentally homonymous as goods. Nevertheless, I take it that actions which produce other actions are not primarily what Aristotle has in mind when he claims that the product of an action is better than the action itself.} Worse still, some commentators take Aristotle’s claim about the value of actions and their products to be an instantiation of a more general principle that “if \( x \) is for the sake of \( y \), \( y \) is better or more worthy of rational choice than \( x \)” (Lawrence 42; Cf. \( \text{Pol.} \) 1333a22, \( \text{MM} \) 1208a13-14).\footnote{This principle might seem to have bizarre or counterintuitive consequences: if I walk to the grocery store for the sake of buying some carrots, presumably it would imply that the carrots are better than my walk. However, I think Aristotle would likely endorse claims like these, provided we restrict the respect or domain in which the two things are being evaluatively compared. My walking activity may have a different axiological status \( quae \) producer of health or pleasure, or \( quae \) exercise of my animal powers. But insofar as the walk is subordinated to the goal of acquiring carrots, the carrots are more choiceworthy than the walk that is necessary to acquire them.} But if any of the items in a teleological chain fall into different categories from one another, evaluative comparability would be disrupted. Aristotle would be committed to the view that it is possible for \( x \) to be for the sake of \( y \), even though \( y \) is not better than \( x \); a view he would likely regard as absurd.

It should be clear that the s-interpretation needs some way to at least mitigate the problem of transcendentally incomparable goods. Perhaps an s-interpreter could argue that, even if Aristotle is obliged to hold that categorically distinct goods cannot be compared, strictly speaking, he could place those goods in an order of priority and posteriority; an s-interpretation is just as entitled to make that move as a p-interpreter is. The s-interpreter could claim that although Aristotle’s theoretical commitments do not permit him to say that health is \textit{better} than a surgical operation, they \textit{do} permit him to say that the goodness of health is prior to the goodness of a surgical operation. Whenever Aristotle compares categorically distinct goods, he may not be
speaking precisely as he ought to, since comparability requires synonymy, but we can readily
give content to those statements by translating them into claims about priority and posteriority.

In my view, taking “better” as a loose (and potentially misleading) way of referring to
priority among categorically distinct goods is the best solution to transcendental incomparability
open to s-interpreters. However, even this solution faces a significant problem. Commenting on
the Protrepticus passage that introduces p-comparability, Donald Morrison points out that the
“superior goodness of health” involves both “its causal and definitional superiority” and its
“greater choiceworthiness” (400n61). Aristotle’s view in the Protrepticus appears to be that the
great choiceworthiness of a prior good is not ultimately distinct from its causal and definitional
priority—its betterness and greater choiceworthiness are constituted by its priority. In light of
this observation, we can pose a dilemma for the s-interpretation of transcendental homonymy:
either the priority of a good confers greater choiceworthiness upon it or it does not. If it does,
then there seems little to prevent the s-interpretation from collapsing into a p-interpretation. For,
onece we have already admitted that some categorically diverse goods are prior to others and that
they are more choiceworthy on account of that priority, then there does not seem to be much
reason to resist describing the more choiceworthy goods as “better” than the less choiceworthy
ones. However, if we do decide that the prior, more choiceworthy goods qualify as better, then
we have thereby abandoned the s-interpretation. On the other hand, if priority does not confer
greater choiceworthiness, then there would not be much point in appealing to it in practical
philosophy. From the standpoint of ethical theory and ethical life, why should it matter that
health is prior to surgery as a good, if health is not more desirable on account of its priority? It
seems, then, that the strongest response to transcendental incomparability available to the s-

interpretation either slides into a p-interpretation, or else rests on an appeal to priority that cannot do much normative work. We have ample reason, therefore, to examine an alternative p-interpretation.

The Core Dependence of Transcendental Goodness

Transcendental homonymy may pose an intractable problem for the s-interpretation, but there is reason to hope that the p-interpretation will be better equipped to deal with it. In the last chapter, I argued that p-comparability is best understood on the model of core dependent homonymy. It would follow that, if goodness across the categories has a core dependent structure, goods in different categories will be p-comparable. And there is at least some hint that Aristotle does think that goods in different categories are core dependent. Aristotle famously holds that “being” is a core dependent multivocal. In *Metaphysics* VII, 1 he argues that substance is the primary mode of being and that entities in the non-substantial categories count as beings in virtue of their relations to substance. Aristotle’s claim that “good” is also predicated across the categories is striking when read alongside *Met.* VII, 1. It suggests that, just as “being” is said homonymously of items in different categories, but always with reference to substance, perhaps goodness in the ten categories is also ultimately unified by reference to substantial goodness. Perhaps, that is, transcendental goodness has a *pros hen* structure which mirrors that of transcendental being.

Conspicuously, however, Aristotle does not actually provide the *pros hen* analysis of goodness across the categories. In my own view, he refrains from doing so for methodological reasons; he thinks it would be more appropriate in theoretical philosophy than practical philosophy (*EN* 1096b26-30). Yet, one might plausibly object that Aristotle does not have
anything to say about the core dependence of transcendental goodness anywhere else in the corpus either. Perhaps, then, he never argues that goodness across the categories has a core-dependent structure simply because he does not believe that it has that structure. Although both predicates are applied in every category and take on a different sense in each, it does not necessarily follow that the different senses are related to each other according to the same pattern. For example, goods in different categories might merely be analogous to one another, rather than meeting the requirements for pros hen predication. Thus, if I want to attribute to Aristotle the view that transcendentally homonymous goods are p-comparable because they are core dependent, I need to provide some additional justification for the view that being and goodness share a pros hen structure.

One traditional reading, developed in great detail by medieval commentators, would provide the needed rationale. According to this reading, all the transcendentals are convertible. That is, although the transcendentals are conceptually distinct from one another, they are not really distinct from one another; every transcendental predicate signifies the same reality in each category, even though each presents a different aspect of that reality. To take a representative proponent of the view, Aquinas argues that all the transcendental predicates aside from “being” are distinct from it only insofar as they “express a mode of being not expressed by the term ‘being’” (DV Q1, A1). Thus, everything that is, insofar as it is, is also a thing (res), something (aliiquid), one ( unus), true ( verum), and good ( bonus). Of special interest for our purposes, Aquinas argues that “good does not really differ from existing [ ens], though the word ‘good’

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3 Aquinas’ list of transcendentals is longer than Aristotle’s. Aristotle only explicitly affirms that being, one, and good are transcendentals. Metaphysics II discusses the true in a way that would be consonant with reading it as a transcendental, but it is never explicitly affirmed as such (Met. 993b20-30).
expresses a notion of desirability \textit{[rationem appetibilitatis]} not expressed by the word ‘existent’ \([\textit{ens}]\)” (\textit{ST} Ia. 5, 1). Aquinas’ argument for the convertibility of being and goodness in the \textit{Summa Theologiae} depends heavily on an Aristotelian conceptual framework, and his commentary on \textit{EN} I, 6 makes clear that he takes himself to be following Aristotle’s own view in affirming the convertibility of goodness and being (\textit{In Eth. Nic.} I, Lec. 6).

If Aquinas and other medieval commentators are right that being and goodness are convertible for Aristotle, then we have every reason to suppose that transcendental goodness is core dependent, with good in the category of substance serving as the core. If goodness is exactly coextensive with being, simply representing being under the aspect of its desirability, then we should expect the relations of logical and ontological dependence between non-substantial goods and substantial goods to be perfectly homologous with the relations between non-substantial beings and substances. A quality, for example, will be dependent on a substance for its goodness in the same way it is dependent on a substance for its being, because its being and its goodness are not really distinct features. The core dependence of the good quality on the substance would, in turn, allow us to claim that the substance is p-better than the quality.

At this point we should forestall a potential misunderstanding: the convertibility of being and goodness might seem to have the implausible implication that being a \(k\) is identical with being a good \(k\); that being a human and being a \textit{good} human are the same, for example. This, in turn, would seem to entail that there can be no such thing as a bad human being; indeed, it would seem to imply that bad things do not exist at all. No defender of the convertibility of the transcendentals would endorse these bizarre theses. Rather, the idea is that simply existing confers a rudimentary degree of goodness upon every existing thing. But this is compatible with
the notion that different types of beings have their own distinctive standards of excellence, provided we somehow understand the excellence of a thing as a fulfillment of the being that thing. As we will see, Aristotle does understand excellence in this way. Likewise, proponents of convertibility typically think of defect and evil as privations of being and goodness. Although he does not develop it in much detail, Aristotle also seems to endorse a *privatio boni* theory of evil, as we would expect him to if he accepted the doctrine of convertibility (*DA* 430b21-23). Thus, if he accepted the convertibility of being and goodness Aristotle *would* have to say that an unjust human being and the quality of his injustice are good inasmuch as they exist. However, he would *not* have to say that unjust human beings are good *qua* human or that injustice is a good human quality, since injustice is understood as a kind of deficiency and incompleteness in the being of a human.

Although there is a long tradition of interpreting Aristotle as a proponent of the convertibility of the transcendentals, some modern commentators are skeptical about attributing the doctrine to him. Stephen Menn, for example, argues that the theory “derives from the Neo-Platonists (via Augustine and Boethius), and is incorrect as an interpretation of Aristotle” (551n12). His reasoning is that there is only one being in Aristotle’s cosmos that is good in its essence, namely, god (Menn 550-551). All other beings, if they are good at all, are contingently good—humans may fail to acquire moral and intellectual virtue, horses may not be strong and swift, knives may be dull and unwieldy, earth may be inhibited from descending to its natural place, and so on. This explains why “god and nous” (which Menn plausibly takes to be a hendiadys) appears as Aristotle’s only example of good in the category of substance in his lists of transcendental goods in *EN* I, 6 and *EE* I, 8. If Menn is right that the convertibility of being
and goodness is a Neo-Platonic interpolation with no grounding in Aristotle’s thought, then one major reason for thinking that transcendental goodness is core-dependent is undercut.

Christopher Mirus has defended the Aristotelian provenance of the doctrine, however. His argument ultimately rests on two considerations. The first is that there are two passages in the corpus in which Aristotle affirms, as a general truth, that being is better than non-being (GC 336b26, GA 731b28-31; Mirus, Order 500). Aristotle’s claim in these passages implies that everything that exists possesses some basic level of goodness, simply in virtue of existing. This is precisely what we would expect if being and goodness were convertible, but it is hard to reconcile with Menn’s view that no being, aside from god, is good in its essence. Admittedly, it does not by itself establish that Aristotle accepts convertibility. He might hold that goodness is some kind of necessary concomitant to being which is nevertheless distinct from it.

The second consideration, however, would rule out the possibility that being and goodness are distinct but necessarily co-occur. Mirus argues, at length, that Aquinas and other medieval commentators were correctly interpreting Aristotle when they took him to hold that goodness is identical with actuality (Mirus Agathon 516). Stripped to its essentials, Mirus’ argument is that Aristotle consistently identifies the good with “that for the sake of which” and, in turn, identifies that for the sake of which with actuality (ibid.). More specifically, Mirus takes Aristotle to hold that the basic good of a substance is its form while it obtains its full goodness by engaging in the activity that corresponds to that form (Agathon 522). The form, the actuality of a hylomorphic composite, is the end at which processes of generation are aimed, and the complete actualization of that form is the good proper to each kind of substance.
Aristotle never gives us an account of the metaphysical underpinning of the claim that being is better than non-being, but with Mirus’ argument in mind, it seems likely that if he were to give such an account it would invoke the theory of potentiality and actuality: everything that exists, insofar as it exists, is actual in some respect.\(^4\) If goodness is to be identified with actuality, and every existing being has some degree of actuality, then it follows that every existing being has some degree of goodness. I take this to be identical with the claim that everything that is, insofar as it is, is good. Aquinas uses just this sort of argument when defending the convertibility of goodness and being in the *Summa Theologiae*. He argues that the desirability of a thing is consequent on its perfection, and that a thing is perfect to the extent that it has achieved actuality. “So it is manifest that something is good just insofar as it is, for being is the actuality of everything *esse enim est actualitas omnis rei*” (my translation) (*ST* Ia. 5, 1).\(^5\) If Mirus is right about the identity of goodness and actuality in Aristotle, then Aquinas is developing a thoroughly Aristotelian argument for the convertibility of being and goodness in the *Summa*.\(^6\)

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\(^4\)Prime matter, traditionally understood as pure potentiality for form, might seem to be a counterexample undercutting the argument. There are two reasons for thinking that it is not. First, it is a matter of controversy whether Aristotle really believes in prime matter as traditionally construed. The classic argument that Aristotle has no concept of prime matter at all is H.R. King’s “Aristotle without *Materia Prima*.” More recently, Christopher Byrne has argues that Aristotle *does* have a concept of prime matter, but not as pure potency; even prime matter has some degree of actuality. I will not review or assess the extensive debate here, but if either Byrne or King are correct, prime matter would have no force as a counterexample. Second, even if Aristotle did hold the traditional doctrine of prime matter, he would still hold that it cannot exist by itself, but only as the potential aspect of a hylomorphic composite—it exists only insofar as it is actualized by some form or other. Hence, Aquinas argues that prime matter is a merely potential being and thus has merely potential goodness (*ST* Ia 5, 3). This claim would be consonant with Aristotle’s view that the goodness of matter and potentiality “depends on that of the corresponding actuality” (Mirus Agathon 531; cf. *Met.* IX 1051a4-21).

\(^5\)McDermott’s translation renders the bracketed phrase “it is by existing that everything achieves actuality.” I take this to mean that actuality entails being. However, the argument requires the converse claim that being entails actuality. The latter is also a plausible construal of the Latin, and I have translated accordingly.

\(^6\)Admittedly, Aquinas probably also has in mind his thesis that essence and existence are related to one another as potency is to act. This thesis is not explicitly present in Aristotle. Nevertheless, I would argue that the argument can go through even without the commitment to distinctively Thomistic positions on essence and existence.
We can add a third piece of evidence to support Mirus’ position on the convertibility of the transcendents: Aristotle explicitly endorses the convertibility of “being” and “one,” the other transcendental predicate he recognizes. In *Met.* IV, 2, he argues that being and unity are one in nature (*phusis*), but not one in account (*logos*) (*Met.* 1003b30-31). I take this to entail that everything that is, insofar as it is, is one. Even if we need to give a different account of what it is for something to be one than of what it is to exist, a thing’s unity and its being are not ultimately different natures. This fact explains why “there must be exactly as many species of being as there are of unity” (*Met.* 1003b34). Being and unity march in step because being is not a distinct property from unity. It seems a reasonable to infer that Aristotle would think of goodness as following the same pattern.

**Transcendental Homonymy and the P-interpretation**

In my view, therefore, we have sufficient grounds to attribute to Aristotle the position that being and goodness are convertible. The convertibility of being and goodness would entail that the transcendental senses of “good” share a core dependent structure with those of “being,” such that substantial goodness takes priority over non-substantial goodness. Since core dependence is sufficient for p-comparability, the p-interpretation has a promising way of thinking about the comparability of transcendentally homonymous goods.

However, sorting out the precise axiological implications of the convertibility of being and the good requires us to answer a further question about the core dependence of goodness: is the goodness of good accidents merely dependent on the goodness of substance *in general*, or is the goodness of a good accident specifically dependent on the goodness of the substance *of which it is an accident*? According to the former, generalist option, the goodness of non-
substantial goods like virtue, health, opportune times, moderate amounts, etc., will depend on
goodness in the category of substance. On the latter, particularist reading, the goodness of
Socrates’ virtue, of the opportune time for him to act, etc. will be posterior to the good of
Socrates, specifically. The generalist reading would imply that all substantial goods are p-better
than all non-substantial goods; no quality or quantity could be better than any substance, because
the goodness of qualities and quantities is posterior to the goodness of substances. The
particularist reading, on the other hand, would not have this implication. Provided we can make
sense of the idea that substances form a hierarchy of better and worse, Aristotle could hold that
an accident of a superior substance is p-better than another, inferior substance. For example, he
might hold that Socrates’ wisdom is better than Bucephalus, the horse; even though Bucephalus
is a substance and Socrates’ wisdom is not, humans are better substances than horses, so non-
substantial human goods can outrank the substantial goodness of a horse.

I argue that the particularist reading is preferable for two reasons: it better reflects the
structure of Aristotle’s substance ontology, and provides a more satisfying account of the
derivative status of non-substantial goods. Concerning the first, Aristotle of course holds that
individual substances are ontologically fundamental, rather than substance as a universal. The
black of Bucephalus’ coat (a quality) and his 2,000lb weight (a quantity) inhere in and depend
for their existence on Bucephalus, a particular substance. Having a black coat and weighing
2,000 pounds are not equine virtues and thus might seem to be perfectly value-neutral accidents.
But if the transcendentals are in fact convertible, it would follow even these accidents are non-
substantial goods which derive their goodness from their substance (since they are non-
substantial beings which derive their being from their substance). It seems likely to me,
therefore, that Aristotle would think that good accidents are dependent for their goodness on the substances of which they are accidents, rather than on substance in general.

Not incidentally, the particularist reading also has a clearer explanation of the way in which accidental goods are posterior and derivative. As Mirus points out, in each of Aristotle’s examples of goodness in the non-substantial categories in the categorial argument, the “attribution of goodness makes sense only relative to the goal directed activity of substances” (Agathon 534). Virtues are good qualities in that they complete the form of functioning proper to the substance of which they are the virtues. Likewise, “the moderate” is to be understood as a good quantity insofar as there is an end, the pursuit of which would be hindered by quantities that exceed or fall short of moderation. “The useful” in relative, “the opportune” in time, and “suitable habitat” in place all presuppose an end in a more transparent way. The picture that is emerging, therefore, is that each substance has an end proper to it, which is its good, and the accidents of that substance are good to the extent that they contribute, in different ways, to their substance’s end.

There are at least four objections to the particularist reading that are worth considering: first, particularism implies a certain asymmetry between the transcendental predicates “being” and “good,” which they ought not to have if they are convertible. While it is certainly true that the grey of Socrates’ beard inheres in Socrates while the black of Bucephalus’ coat inheres in Bucephalus, Aristotle would not hold that these qualities are beings in different senses. They share the qualitative sense of being, despite inhering in two different substances. However, the particularist reading entails that Bucephalus’ strength would be good in a different sense from
Socrates’ justice, since the being-good of each is constituted by relations to different ends, the equine good and the human good respectively.

The second objection recalls Menn’s argument against the convertibility of being and goodness in Aristotle: for any non-divine substance, there is a difficulty with construing substantial goodness as prior to non-substantial goodness. For example, it seems that Socrates is good in virtue of his wisdom and justice, while wisdom and justice do not derive their goodness from inhering in Socrates. Arguably, then, that the goodness of any particular, non-divine substance is posterior to the goodness of accidents possessed by it. For that reason, the particularist reading has no hope of explaining the priority of substantial goodness over the goodness of accidents.

Thirdly, one might think that the argument for the transcendental homonymy of goodness in the *Eudemian Ethics* provides a counterexample to the thesis that every accident derives its goodness from the substance in which it inheres. Specifically, Aristotle suggests teaching and being-taught (*to didaskon* and *to didaskomenon*) as examples of goods in the categories of action and passion (*to kinein* and *to kineisthai*), respectively (*EE* 1217b33).\(^7\) If we assume that actions are accidents that inhere in the agents that perform the actions, teaching would seem to provide a clear case of an accident that derives its goodness from a substance other than the one in which it inheres. Intuitively, the act of teaching is good primarily because of its effect on the student, not because of its inherence in a teacher. We could apparently generalize the point: accidents in the category of action will typically be good in virtue of their effects on patients, not their inherence.

\(^7\)Here I assume that *kinein* and *kineisthai* are equivalent to the to the categories of *poiein* and *paschein* in the *Categories*. I take that assumption to be vindicated by Aristotle’s analysis of motion in *Physics* III, discussed below.
in agents. Thus, we might think that it is not universally true that accidents derive their goodness from the substance in which they inhere. Perhaps, they must derive their goodness from some particular substance or other, but not necessarily the substance of which they are accidents.

And finally, it is at least intuitively plausible that there are good accidents whose goodness floats free of any relation to their substances, or indeed, of any substance at all. For example, it might be argued that the luster of a horses’ coat is a good quality, even if it plays no necessary or even ancillary role in perfecting the performance of the equine function, and thus, contributing to the achievement of the equine good. If there are “free floating” good accidents of this kind, they would contradict any analysis according to which goodness in accidental categories stands in a core dependent relationship to the goodness of substances, not just the particularist reading of the convertibility thesis. However, the particularist reading might seem especially vulnerable to this kind of objection; in requiring that the goodness of accidents be posterior to the goodness of the substance to which those accidents belong, it might seem to have an excessively narrow account of what can constitute the goodness of an accident.

With respect to the first objection, it much be conceded that particularism will imply an asymmetry between being and goodness. However, there is an intelligible explanation for the asymmetry in question: Aristotle does not think that being is trans-specifically homonymous, whereas he does think that goodness is. Horses and humans are beings and substances univocally, but the human good and the equine good are different. Thus, being good qua horse is different from being good qua human. How this asymmetry fits together with the convertibility of being and goodness is a tricky issue, but I do not think they are necessarily in contradiction with one another.
Regarding the second objection, it is certainly true that wisdom and justice do not derive their value from inhering in Socrates. However, they do derive their value from contributing to the human good. Socrates’ wisdom, specifically, is good insofar as it enables Socrates to actualize the human form completely in intellectual activity. The apparent posteriority of substantial goodness is illusory: good accidents derive their goodness from contributing to the perfect actualizations of the substantial forms on which they depend. The particularist reading does not, therefore, subvert the core dependent structure of transcendental goodness.

The problem of accounting for the goodness of teaching (and accidents in the category of action more generally) is equally illusory. We can begin to see why when we recall Aristotle’s thesis on the relations among action, passion, and motion (kinēsis) in *Physics* III, 3: motion takes place in the thing moved, not the mover (*Phys.* 202a14). Furthermore, action and passion are just motion considered from two different points of view: they are identical in the same way that the road from Thebes to Athens is identical to the road from Athens to Thebes (*Phys.* 202b13-14). As counter-intuitive as it might seem, this doctrine implies that the action of teaching is an accident that inheres in the student, not the teacher. The idea is that there is a certain process of change whereby as student moves from a state of ignorance to a state of knowledge. Teaching is nothing but that process, viewed from the side of the teacher as its efficient cause. Since the process takes place in the student, and since the act of teaching is nothing but the process under its active, rather than passive description, teaching inheres in the person being taught. More generally, actions (*poiēseis*) inhere in the patient of change, rather than the agent. Consequently, the fact that actions derive their goodness from the patient substance rather than the agent substance does not contradict the particularist interpretation I am advocating.
Admittedly, locating the action in the patient substance does raise some other perplexing questions about Aristotle’s ontology that would have implications for how we should understand the transcendental homonymy of goodness. As Paul Studtmann has pointed out, Aristotle’s position in *Physics* III, 3 seems to undermine the basis for claiming that there are “two distinct categories, namely action and passion, rather than just one, namely motion.” That is to say, it is difficult to justify thinking action and passion as distinct categories if the difference between them is not a robust, ontological difference, but merely a difference in the aspect from which a single entity is considered. Whether or not Aristotle’s categorial theory needs to be revised in this way would make a difference to the comparability of various non-substantial goods. In particular, if action and passion ultimately collapse into one category, then at least some actions and passions would presumably be s-comparable with respect to their goodness, rather than p-comparable.

Another problem is that, even if we concede that the act of teaching in the strict sense inheres in the student, we might still want to insist that *something* happens in the teacher, and thus some non-substantial entity is left unaccounted for. After all, teachers sometimes fail to move their students from ignorance to knowledge. Clearly, *some* type of potency is exercised by the teacher even when she tries and fails to initiate a learning process in a student. To generalize the point, even if we accept that *poiēseis* inhere in patients rather than agents, we might be understandably hesitant about claiming that there is *no* accident that inheres in an agent which is related to the process of change in the patient. Along these lines, Mary Louise Gill has suggested that every *poiēsis* that inheres in a patient is accompanied by a corresponding *praxis* that takes place in the agent (136). Her example is that an act of building involves both the creation of the
structure (the *poiēsis*) and the builder’s actualization of his acquired capacity (the *praxis*). If we were to take this suggestion on board, the categorial status of that *praxis* is a new, vexing question we would have to deal with in sorting out how all the accidental goods inhering in a substance relate to one another.\(^8\)

Nevertheless, these are quite *general* problems in Aristotle’s physics and ontology, not problems for my interpretation, specifically. Although they affect the details of how we should interpret the transcendental homonymy of goodness, they are *not* problems that are created by my particularist reading, nor would they be obviated by taking up an alternative, generalist reading. They do not, therefore, give us any reason to reject the thesis that the goodness of an accident derives from the goodness of the substance in which it inheres.

Finally, it might be tempting to handle the potential problem of the “free-floating” good accidents by qualifying the thesis that accidents depend on the substance of which they are accidents for their goodness. We might instead argue that good accidents can derive their goodness from a *part* of a substance without ultimately referring back to the substance taken as a whole. Thus, the luster of Bucephalus’ coat could be thought of as a good which resides in the coat, even if it has nothing to do with Bucephalus’ excellence *qua* horse. I would resist this line of response, however. Aristotle tends to think that the parts of substances have functions, but that these functions are subordinated to the function of the substance as a whole (e.g. *PA* 640a34-641b5). Assuming that the goodness inhering in parts of substances depends on the functions of those parts, this functional subordination would imply that the goodness inhering in a part of a

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\(^8\)My tentative answer is that these *praxeis* would have to be in the category of quality—since they are the actualizations of *hexeis* (which are qualities according to *Categories* 8), and I assume that it is not possible for an entity to change from one category to another when it transitions from potency to act.
substance ultimately depends on the whole substance after all. If the luster of Bucephalus’ coat is a good quality for horse coats to have, it would have some role to play in the achievement of the equine good. It seems to me that if the goodness of a part of a substance were really independent from the goodness of the substance as a whole, then parts of substances would have their own functions which would not be subordinated to their substance’s function. I doubt Aristotle would be willing to attribute this level of independence to parts of substances.

As an alternative account, I suggest the following: the main focal points of value for Aristotle are substances and the activities that actualize the forms of those substances. However, it is also possible for a substance to be good in a capacity or under a description other than the one specifying its substantial form—a human can be a good doctor or even a good thief, for example (Met. 1021b14-20). Thus, there can be accidents which derive their goodness, not immediately from their relation to the good of the substance itself, but from that of the substance under some other description. Skill with a scalpel is presumably not a quality that is central to perfecting a human qua human, but it might be central to perfecting her qua doctor. Similarly, if there is no plausible way to understand a lustrous coat as contributing to a horse’s flourishing qua horse, it might nevertheless perfect the horse under some other description (perhaps “show horse”).

Ultimately, however, I take it that understanding the value of substances in their non-essential capacities will involve analyzing the ends they serve in those capacities, and thus forging a link to the goods of substances as such. This is presumably why Aristotle thinks there is something odd about the expressions “good thief” and “good swindler” (sukophantēn agathon) (Met. 1021b19-20)—thieving and swindling are typically inimical to the human good, such that
perfecting oneself in these capacities will tend to go together with being bad *qua* human. An analysis of the value of thieving excellence that left this fact out would be insufficiently informative, to say the least. By contrast, skill with a scalpel is a good in that it perfects a person *qua* practitioner of the art of medicine, but the value of medicine itself should be understood in terms of its contribution to the good of human beings and human communities. From this perspective, we can see how the goal directed activity of substances serves as an axiological point of reference, even for accidents which might seem at first to have value independent from their substances.

To sum up, on what I take to be the most promising p-interpretation of transcendental homonymy, every non-substantial good stands in a *pros hen* relationship to some particular substance on which it depends for its goodness. Because core dependence enables p-comparability, that relationships licenses us to say that that good accidents are not as good as the substances on which they depend. Furthermore, since not all substances are equally good, accidents will also vary in goodness depending on the value of their substance. A rock’s unimpeded, downward movement will be less good than, say, the health of a tree’s leaves, which will be less good than a human’s temperance, which will not be as good as the eternal circular motion of a heavenly body.

There are limitations to the comparability that transcendental core dependence allows, however. Intuitively, we may allow for evaluative comparisons among accidents of the same substance. We may want to claim that that Socrates’ wisdom, for example, is better than the opportune moment for him to eat a meal. It is hard to see what the basis for such a comparison would be, however: Aristotle clearly thinks that substance has priority over non-substances, but
he is not typically interpreted as holding that there is an order of priority and posteriority among non-substantial beings. We would apparently need to posit such an order if we wanted to make room for a scale of value among accidental goods that derive their goodness from the same substance.

At least one recent commentator argues that Aristotle *does* think of the categories as falling into a serial ordering, such that “non-substances themselves fall into internal relations of priority and posteriority, exhibiting degrees of proximity to the underlying substrate” (Fraser 133). If Fraser is correct about the serial structure of the categories, then there is an additional level at which transcendentally homonymous goods are p-comparable. Namely, non-substantial goods would be p-better or p-worse, commensurate with their proximity to substance. Goods in the second category would be better than those in the third, which would be better than those in the fourth, and so on.

Fraser points to three passages from the *Metaphysics* as direct textual evidence for his position: VII, 3; XII, 1; and XIV, 1. In the first passage, Aristotle is laying out an argument against identifying substance with matter. Aristotle invites us to conceive of an entity and strip off its attributes until we arrive at an ultimate, indeterminate substrate (*Met.* 1029a11-19). Fraser notes that Aristotle’s procedure seems to assume that some accidents have a greater level of primacy than others. We first remove affections (*pathē*), actions (*poiēmata*), and powers (*dunameis*). Then the spatial dimensions, which Aristotle takes to be quantities, are removed. Aristotle argues that these quantities are the things which “belong primarily” (*prōtō huparcheī*) to the substrate (*Met.* 1029a16). Fraser takes the argument to imply that quantity is the second category for Aristotle; the inheritance of a quality (or any other non-substantial being) in a
substance is mediated by its inherence in the quantitative dimensions of the substance (Fraser 143).

In the second passage Fraser cites, however, Aristotle seems to have changed his mind about which non-substantial category is primary. In the opening lines of *Metaphysics* XII, Aristotle is discussing the primacy of substance and the role it plays in the unity of reality as a whole. He argues that if the totality (*to pan*) is a serial ordering (*ephexēs*), then substance would be the first member, “succeeded by quality, then by quantity” (*Met.* 1069a21). Aristotle give no argument in defense of the ordering. However, Fraser argues that the passage is useful in that it provides more evidence that Aristotle is interested in thinking about the categories as a serial order, even if he is ambivalent about which category comes second (144).

Finally, Fraser draws attention to a passage in *Met.* XIII, 1, in which Aristotle argues that the relative is “least of all things a real thing or a substance and is posterior to quality and quantity” (*Met.* 1081a24). Fraser argues that Aristotle is “understating his case” by claiming that relative is merely posterior to quality and quantity; he likely regards it as the tenth and last category, as the phrase “least of all a substance” would imply (145). Fraser contends that there some serious problems with the ontological status of relatives which Aristotle did not adequately resolve. He argues that, had Aristotle attended to those problems, he likely would have seen that it is not ultimately defensible to place the relative at the bottom of the list of categories (Fraser 145-146). Defensible or not, however, the passage provides clear evidence of Aristotle ranking the categories in terms of their proximity to substance.

Fraser supplements these three passages with more indirect evidence to fill out the serial system of the categories. In the *Physics*, Aristotle famously claims that time is the measure of
motion. Fraser argues that this would imply that the category of time is posterior to the
categories of action and passion, the active and passive forms of motion (149). Further,
locomotion is the first motion so that any motion will imply a change in place. Thus, action and
passion will be posterior to the category of place (ibid.) We can, therefore, piece together a
nearly complete serial ordering of all ten categories: Substance, quantity (or quality), place,
action, passion, time, position and possession, ⁹ relative.

While I find Fraser’s position on the categories intriguing, I do not ultimately accept it. In
my view, the arguments he puts forward in its favor are far from decisive and are ultimately not
strong enough to counterbalance the problems his position faces. Fraser himself concedes that “a
final and complete system of the categories” as serially ordered is not to be found in Aristotle;
only a “tendency toward the articulation of a serial structure” is (140). While Fraser’s provides
some fairly strong evidence that Aristotle at least tinkered with the idea that the categories form a
serial order, there are significant lacunae in any account we would be able to extract from
Aristotle’s texts about the nature of the order. More to the point, those lacunae are especially
problematic for the purposes of establishing a value ranking among transcendentally
homonymous goods.

Consider what such a ranking would look like if we take Fraser’s position on board:
seriality implies that the accidents in different categories form a chain of dependencies,
terminating in the substance to which all the accidents belong. Assuming the convertibility of
“being” and “good,” we could also think of that chain as a p-scale of value, with the accidents

⁹Fraser makes no mention of these two categories. I place them as eighth and ninth only because I have
assumed that relative is last category, and I doubt either would be prior to time. Admittedly, I have no argument that
would demonstrate the logical or substantial posteriority of position and possession to time, nor one which would
shed any light on which is prior to the other.
closer to substance having more goodness than those which are further away. Goods in the category of relative, for example, would be p-worse than those in the category of time, which would be p-worse than those in action, and so on. This strategy might seem promising initially, but several problems crop up on closer inspection.

One obvious issue concerns Aristotle’s ambivalence about the ordering of quantity and quality. Since he has no consistent account of which category comes second, the relative values of quantities and qualities would remain in doubt. This would be a particularly troubling problem from the standpoint of ethics, since the virtues are among the goods in the category of quality. If quality is the second category, as Metaphysics XII suggests, then the virtues would derive their value directly from the substance, and would be more valuable than any other non-substantial good that derived its value from that substance. But if quantity is prior to quality, which appears to be Fraser’s preferred position, then virtues will depend for their goodness on some quantitative feature of substances, and would consequently have a lower level of goodness than those quantities. Absent a more definitive position on which category immediately succeeds substance in the serial ordering, the axiological status of the virtues would remain in doubt.

A second, and arguably more serious problem concerns the inapplicability of the whole serial scheme to immaterial substances. This is problematic both because it subverts Fraser’s motivation for defending the seriality of the categories in the first place, and because it limits the utility of seriality for comparing goods across categories. The primary reason Fraser is interested in establishing the seriality of the categories is that he hopes to show that Aristotelian metaphysics can be an apodeictic science. He contends that the chain of dependency of one category on another would allow Aristotle to construct demonstrative syllogisms in the science
of being qua being. For example, “one can demonstrate that every substance must be in place, on
the grounds that every substance is defined by quantitative dimension; and in turn, one can
demonstrate that every substance must have quantitative dimension on the grounds that every
substance has a material body, which is essentially quantified” (Fraser 152).

The trouble with Fraser’s proposed demonstrations is that Aristotle would regard every
premise in them as false. Aristotle thinks it is possible to prove that there are immaterial
substances, so he would obviously not want to begin a chain of demonstrations with the major
premise that all substances are material. Closely related, Aristotle’s “stripping off” argument
from Met. VII, 3, which Fraser interprets as the justification for the primacy of quantity among
accidents, would not apply to substances which lack spatial magnitude. Frasier acknowledges
this, but then brackets “the question of how the categorial framework would apply to indivisible
and immaterial substances” (143n13). The fact that he sets that question aside suggests that he
thinks of it as a secondary detail that can be worked through after the main principles of
Aristotle’s categorial ontology have been established. But, of course, Aristotle himself thinks
that the status of immaterial beings is of first importance in ontology; he thinks of them as the
ultimate principles on which the whole science depends, and even argues that the science of
being qua being may be identified with theology (Met. VI, 1). Consequently, the syllogisms
Fraser proposes to give first philosophy a demonstrative structure would fail to apply to the
primary objects of first philosophy. If Fraser’s syllogisms have a place at all, it would seem to be
in the second science, physics, rather than the science of being qua being.

I take this problem posed by immaterial substances to be serious enough to undermine
Fraser’s whole interpretation, but even if it is not, the problem would limit considerably his
interpretation’s utility for my purposes. As we will see in detail in the next chapter, Aristotle thinks of the prime mover as the ultimate first principle of goodness. This entails that no picture of Aristotle’s theory of goodness could be complete without clarifying the value things have in virtue of their relations to god. The inapplicability of the serial scheme to immaterial substances leaves us completely in the dark on this important issue.

Finally, the seriality of the categories would create a tangle of problems relating to the interaction between the transcendental and intraspecific homonymy of goodness. To see what I mean, consider a good in the category of relative. Aristotle names “the useful” (to chrēsimon) as a paradigm example of a good relative (EN 1096a26) and earlier tells us that wealth is good because it is a useful thing (EN 1096a6). Since relative is the last category according to Fraser’s interpretation, it ought to have the lowest level of goodness. On the other hand, receiving a surgical operation would be an example of a good in the category of passion. As such, it should have a lower level of goodness than quantities and qualities, but a higher level than relatives like wealth.

However, as we saw in chapter two, Aristotle thinks of wealth as a per se human good (EN 1147b23-31), while a surgical operation is only good per aliud. Wealth belongs to the class of goods called “the powers” while an operation belongs in the lower class called “auxiliaries.” In short, the value ranking suggested by intraspecific considerations conflicts with the one that would be entailed by seriality of the categories. If Aristotle believes that non-substantial goods fall into a nine-fold hierarchy based on their proximity to substance, and that they also fall into a distinct, four-fold, intraspecific hierarchy then we need some account of how the two interact, or which takes precedence. There is no hint of such an account in Aristotle. Thus, rather than
solving the problem concerning the comparability of non-substantial, transcendentally homonymous goods, positing the seriality of the categories actually creates a new comparability problem pertaining to those same goods.

For all these reasons, I will not be following Fraser’s suggestion that we understand the categories to be serially core dependent. Instead, I will accept the more conventional reading according to which accidents are posterior to substance, but there is no definitive ranking of priority and posteriority among accidents themselves. What this implies for axiology is that non-substantial, transcendentally homonymous goods will be p-equally good, ceteris paribus. That is, a good quality and a good quantity, though not good in the same sense, will be equally valuable from the standpoint of p-comparability, unless some other non-transcendental consideration causes one to be ranked higher than the other. For example, some good quantity for a horse (e.g. an ideal weight) would be better than a good quality of a puddle of water, assuming that horses are better substances than water. Similarly, the four-fold intraspecific division of goods, which we will revisit in the next section, can impose an evaluative ranking among non-substantial goods which derive their goodness from the same substance.

In summation, the transcendental homonymy of goodness poses a troubling, arguably insurmountable difficulty for s-interpretations. P-interpretations, on the other hand, have the resources to render the problem tractable. If we are permitted to think of goodness as having a core dependent structure, mirroring that of being, then we can think of substances as both ontological and axiological focal points. Each substance is a core good, on which accidents depend for their goodness. Accordingly, p-interpretations allow us to think of substances as more valuable than the accidents that derive their goodness from those substances. Provided we reject
the seriality of the categories, p-comparability does not generate a more fine-grained ranking of goodness among accidents, but it does leave room for such a ranking to be generated by trans- and intraspecific considerations.

**S- and P-interpretations and Intraspecific Homonymy**

For the remainder of the chapter, we will turn our attention to the comparability of intraspecifically homonymous goods. Recall that Aristotle asserts that pleasure, honor, and prudence differ insofar as they are good, even though they are all choiceworthy in themselves (EN 1096b23-25). Unfortunately, Aristotle offers no rationale as to why we should think that these three goods are homonymous. I argued in chapter two that we ought to think of them as human goods which are good in virtue of different kinds of relations to the highest human good of *eudaimonia*. I developed this idea by drawing on an interpretation advocated by Thomas Tuozzo and several ancient commentators, according to which Aristotle divides human goods into four classes, corresponding to the four causes. Since I argue that the four-fold scheme may be plausibly extended to other kinds of substances, we may infer that there is not just homonymy among human goods, but among other kinds of intraspecific goods as well.

Intraspecific homonymy poses just as difficult a problem for the s-interpretation as transcendental homonymy does. In fact, the problems posed by the two levels of homonymy have conspicuous structural similarities. Aristotle says, in no uncertain terms, that pleasure, honor, and prudence are non-synonymous as goods (EN 1096b23-25). The s-interpretation holds that synonymy is required for comparability. So, we may directly infer that Aristotle is not entitled to rank those goods on a scale of better and worse. The s-interpretation could, once again, appeal to priority and posteriority to soften the problem, but just as with transcendental
homonymy, the s-interpretation would face a dilemma: if prudence is more choiceworthy than honor on account of its priority, then it seems fitting to call it “better” than honor, as the p-interpretation would. On the other hand, if it is no more choiceworthy on account of its priority, then the appeal to priority is of no real help in making the incommensurability problem less troublesome. Consequently, I see no satisfying way for s-interpreters to handle intraspecific axiological homonymy.

The p-interpretation is in a much more promising position to tackle intraspecific homonymy. The four-fold division of goods is based on the theory of the four causes: the four classes of good form a causal chain, such that each class has a differently mediated causal relation to 
\textit{eudaimonia}. As such, provided we accept that seriality can be a form of core dependence, intraspecifically homonymous goods are ideally suited to meet the four causal core primacy conditions. Since core dependence enables p-comparisons among homonyms, p-interpreters can quickly dispose of the worry that intraspecifically homonymous goods will be incomparable. Indeed, because the four-fold scheme is serially core dependent, it allows for more fine-grained evaluative comparisons than transcendental core dependence alone does. Auxiliaries efficiently cause powers, which materially cause praiseworthy goods, which are finally caused by honored goods. Thus, auxiliaries derive their goodness from powers, which derive their goodness from praiseworthy goods, which derive their goodness from honored goods: the four classes form a four-tiered p-scale of goodness.

Interestingly, the passage in the \textit{Protrepticus} where Aristotle introduces p-comparability appears to be a case in which he is making a p-comparison between two intraspecifically homonymous goods. “Things which conduce to health” (\textit{hugieinoi}) are auxiliaries, good insofar
as they efficiently cause the power, health. We could extend the example up the hierarchy by arguing that health is a material cause of morally virtuous action (as a “general material condition” in Tuozzo’s words), which itself is finally caused by the honored good of contemplation (311). Contemplation, therefore serves as the core nature among human goods. It stands at the terminus of multiple causal chains, and serves as the principle of goodness for all other human goods. This permits us to say that contemplation is better than moral virtue, which is better than health, which is better than a healthy diet, even though none of the four are univocally good. Pleasure, honor, and prudence could be ranked in accordance with the same principles. As we noted in chapter two, the fact that pleasures differ in kind for Aristotle complicates the picture. Nevertheless, we could definitively say that gustatory pleasure is not as good as honor, which is not as good as prudence, which is not as good as contemplative pleasure. The upshot of all this is that applying p-comparability to the four-fold division of goods makes possible an elegant solution to the problem posed by intraspecific homonymy.

Aside from general misgivings about reading p-comparability and the four-fold division of goods into Aristotle, which I have attempted to address in earlier chapters, I can think of two concerns one might have about the p-comparable solution to intraspecific incommensurability. The first is that it leads to an objectionably intellectualist reading of Aristotle’s ethics, insofar as it involves identifying happiness with the activity of contemplation. The second is that the teleological relationship between the praiseworthy and honored goods is obscure and tenuous.

Regarding the first objection, interpreters have long worried that readings which too strongly emphasize the preeminence of contemplation will be unable to do justice to the value of moral action and will saddle Aristotle’s ethical theory with absurd and immoral consequences.
David Charles, for example, argues that identifying happiness with the activity of theōria would ultimately commit Aristotle to an “intellectualist principle of choice.” According to this principle, whenever a human being is faced with a choice between engaging in contemplation and any other option, he or she should always choose to contemplate, unless the other option will conduce to more or better contemplation at a later time (Charles 206). Implications like the principle of choice have motivated some interpreters to endorse inclusivist interpretations, according to which contemplation is only one constituent of happiness among others, albeit the most privileged of those constituents. Since the four-fold scheme identifies happiness with contemplation and relegates moral virtue to a lower tier of value, one might reasonably worry that my p-comparable solution is in danger of inheriting all the problems associated with intellectualist interpretations.

This is not the appropriate place to survey the extensive debate among intellectualists, inclusivists, and proponents of various intermediate positions. For present purposes, it will suffice to show that, although the four-fold division of goods does identify (primary) eudaimonia with contemplation, it does so in a way that avoids, or at least softens, the most troubling aspects of intellectualism. One of the major concerns about intellectualism is that it is allegedly unable to explain why moral virtue has any value other than as an instrumental means to contemplation. The four-fold division has a ready response to this worry since one of its central contentions is that it is possible for a good to have value in itself, precisely in virtue of being subordinated to a higher good. Moral virtue and morally virtuous action are per se goods, even though they derive their value from their teleological relation to contemplation. Furthermore, the four-fold scheme is compatible with the position that moral virtue is a necessary part of any good life, even the
contemplative life; a position which would rule out the intellectualist principle of choice.\textsuperscript{10} While that may not be enough to satisfy committed inclusivists, it at least shows that the four-fold division of goods has a more nuanced account of the relation between contemplation and other goods than some more extreme intellectualist interpretations.

The second objection becomes all the more important, however, because I concede that Tuozzo’s account of the way that praiseworthy goods derive their \textit{per se} value from contemplation is not very satisfying. Recall that Tuozzo takes the virtues of character to derive their value by being a necessary condition for the acquisition and exercise of \textit{sophia} (310). By curbing unruly passions and appetites, moral virtue provides the “psychic freedom” required for the contemplative life (309). While this may be Aristotle’s view, there is very little direct textual support for attributing it to him. Additionally, I would argue that it is not a very appealing or defensible philosophical position. We can all too easily conceive of a person who is exceptionally gifted intellectually, but does not care at all about the requirements of justice. It is just as easy to imagine someone whose scientific understanding is unmatched, but who lacks the prudence to make reasoned decisions about the issues in her own life. If Aristotle does not think these are genuine possibilities, then he ought at least to provide some argument to that effect. More generally, if Tuozzo is correct, Aristotle believes that contemplation is impossible without the psychic state induced by the possession of moral virtue. Yet Aristotle not only leaves this substantive, controversial premise completely undefended, he also leaves it \textit{unarticulated}. If

\textsuperscript{10} Many contemporary interpreters make a helpful distinction between the good life itself, and the “central good,” the highest single end in a life, which serves as an organizing principle of that life (e.g. Broadie Ethics 26; cf. \textit{EE}, 1214b7-11). The p-comparable solution I advocate identifies contemplation as the central good of the best life, the contemplative life—this identification does not preclude holding that moral virtue is an essential constituent of the contemplative life.
there is an alternative way of construing the teleological relation between the praiseworthy and the honored, it would be well worth considering.

I argue that a more promising option is available to us with the notion of an exemplary cause, or, what I take to be essentially equivalent, teleology by approximation. Recall that in chapter one we noted that Cajetan claims that the exemplary cause is the key type of causal relation at work in the core dependence of goodness (*De Nom.* 16-17). We also took on board Ward’s suggestion that we may think of exemplary causation as a kind of final causation, insofar as an exemplary cause is a paradigm that a being aims at realizing or imitating. If my Cajetan and Ward-inspired line of thought is correct, then an exemplary causal relation between the praiseworthy and the honored would work just as well to establish core dependence between them as an instrumental relation would.

However, some commentators might be skeptical about reading teleology by approximation into Aristotle at all. W.J. Verdenius, for example, argues that one of the most decisive ways Aristotle breaks with Platonism is by rejecting “the idea of a hierarchical structure of reality, everything striving after some model of perfection of which it is an image, an approximative imitation” (63). On his interpretation, one of the distinguishing features of Aristotle’s teleology would be the fact that it is *not* based on the idea that teleologically superordinate things are paradigms to be emulated by teleologically subordinate things. Verdenius concedes that Aristotle occasionally uses language that would suggest that he does believe that there is some “hierarchical imitation” in nature, as when he argues in *Metaphysics* IX, 8 that sublunar elements imitate eternal bodies (*Met.* 1050b28; cf. *GC* 337a4). Nevertheless, he argues that Aristotle does not accept the Platonic thesis that a being’s “degree of reality”
depends on how closely it approximates eternal being (Verdenius 70n62). For this reason, he evidently thinks that approximation cannot play a very fundamental role in Aristotle’s thinking about teleology.

A related objection might be drawn from Sarah Broadie. In the process of critiquing the standard interpretation of the final causality of the prime mover, she argues as follows: to be an Aristotelian final cause, an exemplar would either have to be a beneficiary (*hou heneka tini*) or an objective (*hou heneka tinos*) (*Met*. 1072b1-3). Aristotle invokes this distinction in order to solve the problem of how there can be final causation among immutable entities, ultimately claiming that they cannot be ends in the sense of beneficiaries, but *can* be in the sense of objectives. However, Broadie argues that Aristotle does not sufficiently explain how it is that an unchanging being could be the objective of an action. In particular, she thinks that exemplary causation is not an adequate way of explaining how an eternal being could be an objective. In order for \(x\) to be the objective of \(y\), \(y\) must, in some way, enable \(x\) to exist or come into existence. But if \(y\) merely approximates the nature of \(x\), there is no reason to suppose that \(y\) will contribute to the existence of \(x\) at all. Indeed, in the case of the prime mover, it is obvious that the rotation of the highest celestial sphere in no way contributes to the existence of the prime mover’s contemplative activity. Thus, exemplary causation does not fit either of Aristotle’s two models of final causation (Broadie Prime Mover 3).

In my view, however, Gabrielle Richardson Lear provides us with the resources we need to respond to these challenges. She argues that approximation is a genuine mode of final causation for Aristotle and that it is explicitly at work in several important places in Aristotle’s thinking about the teleological order of nature. She also claims that the explicit examples of
approximative teleology give us reasonable grounds to infer that Aristotle thinks it is pervasive throughout nature. With these points established, she argues that it is plausible to think of phronetic activity as a teleological approximation of contemplation. This would give us a way to think of intraspecifically homonymous human goods as core dependently organized around contemplation without imputing dubious empirical hypotheses to Aristotle about the psychological prerequisites for contemplation.

Lear argues for the general thesis that approximation is a bona fide type of final causation by beginning with a thesis about what an Aristotelian telos is. She contends that the fundamental feature of an end (at least in the sense of a hou heneka tinos) is that it is a normative standard, following from the nature of an entity or activity, that sets the criteria of success for that entity or activity (14). Lear agrees with Broadie that Met XII, 7 does not sufficiently spell out how an immovable being could be an end in the sense of an objective to be attained. However, contra Broadie, she points out that Aristotle has at least one prominent model of action for the sake of an immobile end, namely biological generation. When a living thing develops toward maturity to the point that it realizes its form, that form is the end for the sake of which the developmental process takes place (Lear 77). However, the developing organism does not bring the form into existence, since forms themselves are not generated (Met. 1033b5ff, 1034b 7-19). Rather, the process of development causes the form to be instantiated or realized in a particular material substratum. Generation, therefore, provides a model for the way an entity or process can have a telos-as-objective which it does not bring into being.

With this model in mind, it does not seem so implausible to regard approximation as a genuine kind of final causality. Approximation is a “second best way of realizing a form” (Lear
If $x$ is for the sake of $y$ by approximating $y$, $x$ does not *become* $y$; it does not fully instantiate $y$’s form. Rather, it becomes as much like $y$ as it is possible to be while remaining $x$.

Furthermore, just as forms set the standards of success and failure for a process of generation, so do exemplars set the standards of success for the things that approximate them. Thus, it appears that Aristotle at least has the conceptual space to recognize approximation as a form of final causation.

Consequently, it should come as no surprise that there are several prominent places in which Aristotle appeals to teleology by approximation. Lear’s central example is from a passage in *De Anima* II, 4. She argues that this passage introduces a particularly clear case of teleology by approximation that provides an illuminating context for a number of other passages. In my view, Aristotle’s claims in *DA* II, 4 and the corroborating evidence from other passages scattered throughout the corpus make it implausible to dismiss approximation as a type of Aristotelian final causation. The central passage in question discusses the ends of the nutritive soul. Aristotle argues that one of the main acts that manifests the nutritive soul is that of reproduction and further claims that reproducing is the “most natural” (*phusikoton*) function of living beings (*DA* 415a26-27). The claim that reproduction is natural may strike readers as trivial, but Aristotle’s argument that reproduction has the status as the most natural function is striking: plant and animal reproduction are for the sake of participating in the eternal and divine, so far as is possible for them (*hina tou aei kai tou theiou metechôsin é dunantai*) (*DA* 415a35-415b1). All things desire the divine, and they do *whatever* they do in accordance with their natures for its sake (*DA* 415b1-2). Reproduction allows for this imitation by enabling an organism to be specifically, albeit not numerically, eternal (*DA* 415b5ff). Aristotle also invokes the distinction
here between telos-as-beneficiary and telos-as-objective (DA 415b3-4). This is evidentially supposed to clarify that the divine serves as an objective of reproduction rather than a beneficiary of it, even though it is an objective that cannot be fully attained by reproduction but can only approached by it.

Aristotle’s general claim that all things desire the divine and perform all their natural activities for its sake is highly significant. First, it implies that every natural substance stands in some kind of teleological relationship to god. However, since natural substances can neither benefit god, nor become gods themselves, this relationship would evidentially have to be one of approximation; each natural substance aims to become as much like god as it is possible for a thing of its species to be. If these implications are correct, we justified in thinking of teleology by approximation as an utterly pervasive feature of Aristotle’s cosmos. As Lear puts it, “the activity of the lower beings that approximates the Prime Mover or god is the very activity that expresses or actualizes their forms” (86). And since the good of a substance is the complete actualization of its form, every substance’s drive to attain its good, whether fire’s ascension to its natural place just below the lunar sphere, an oak tree’s growth of deep roots, or a human’s attempt to live in accordance with moral and intellectual excellence, is a kind of teleological imitation of god.11

Other passages from the natural scientific works confirm this reading. We have already noted in passing that Aristotle holds that the sublunary elements imitate the circular motion of ether by reciprocally transforming into one another. However, it is worth examining the context

11One might object that “imitation” and “approximation” are not equivalent concepts insofar as imitation implies some intentional activity on the part of the imitator. However, Aristotle uses the verb “mimeomai” to describe relation between the sublunary elements and the celestial spheres and he certainly does not mean to impute intentions to the elements (GC 337a4). In this context, therefore, Aristotle seems to regard mimesis as equivalent to approximation (to eggutata einai) (GC 336b35). (Cf. Lear 87-88).
in which this claim occurs in *Generation and Corruption* II, 10. Prior to his claim about the imitative activity of the sublunary elements, Aristotle is attempting to provide a teleological justification for the claim that the process of generation and corruption will never cease (GC 336b25). His argument begins with the axioms that “in all things… nature always strikes after *oregesthai* the better” and that “being is better than non-being” (GC 336b29ff). But he claims that it is not possible for all things to have being because they are “too far removed from the principle” (to porrō tēs archēs aphistasthai). In this context “being” (to *einai*) seems to refer exclusively to the being of eternal substances. If we are permitted to make this assumption, then we can infer that Aristotle is arguing that it is impossible for sublunar hylomorphic composites to be eternal in the way that celestial substances or immaterial substances are.

Aristotle continues by arguing (probably metaphorically) that god selected the next best available alternative to a universe in which all things have being by making a universe with uninterrupted and continuous coming-to-be which will never cease (GC 336b32-33). This is the next best alternative because “that coming-to-be should itself come-to-be perpetually is the closest approximation to eternal being” (*dia to eggutata einai tes ousias to ginesthai aei kai ten genesin*) (GC 336b35). Aristotle goes on to claim that reciprocal transformation of the four simple bodies into one another is one specific manifestation of the tendency of sublunar entities to imitate eternal ones (GC 337a1-7).

Lest one suspect that Aristotle’s Platonic-sounding language of “being” and “becoming” marks this passage as one of immature provenance, it is worth noting that there is an argument in *Generation of Animals* II, 1 that employs a conspicuously similar line of reasoning. In the context, Aristotle is attempting to provide a teleological argument for the eternal existence of
each biological species and, ultimately, a teleological explanation for the distinction between the
sexes. He argues that some existing things are eternal and divine while others admit of being or
not being (GA 731a24-25). He further claims that the divine is always the cause of the better in
things that admit of being better and worse (GA 731a25). It is clear from the context that the
class of things that admit of better and worse is identical with the class of things which admit of
being or not being. I take it that Aristotle does not intend to deny that eternal things may of admit
of better or worse insofar as one eternal substance might be better than another; the prime mover
is presumably better than the moon, for example. The point is, rather, that eternal substances are
always fully attaining their own proper goods and can never gain or lose any degree of perfection
proper to them. Aristotle continues the argument by adding the familiar premise that being is
better than non-being and (what he appears to think is a closely related premise) living is better
than non-living (GA 731a29-30). In a move that is reminiscent of DA II,4, he concludes that,
since it is impossible for an individual plant or animal to be eternal, organisms attain eternity as a
species instead, which is the only kind of eternity that is possible for them (GA 732a31-34).

Admittedly, Aristotle does not quite state in GC II, 10 or GA II, 1 that that lower entities
act for the sake of higher ones by approximating them, but it seems plausible enough to read
teleological implications into these passages. In GC II, 10, Aristotle moves freely from the claim
that nature as a whole “desires” what is better, to the claim that the particular natures of earth,
water, air, and fire imitate something better than they are by engaging in a process of cyclical
transformation. It seems to me that the most straightforward way of understanding this is that the
sublunary elements aim at the nature of ether by approximating it to the extent that their own
natures permit. Further, it is likely that he exclusively discusses the imitative activity of the
elements in this context only because they are most germane to his overall line of inquiry in the work. There is no reason to suppose that he thinks the elements are unique in imitating eternal beings. GA II, 1 confirms this reading by using a similar pattern of reasoning to establish that reproduction is a way that sublunary, animate substances imitate the divine. It is also likely that when Aristotle says that the divine is the cause of what is better among non-eternal substances he means that it is an exemplary teleological cause. It would arguably be absurd to suggest that god could serve as a material or formal cause of any terrestrial substance’s betterness. Neither does it seem particularly plausible that Aristotle would think that god efficiently causes plants and animals to become better. However, the idea that the divine serves as a telos to be approximated by terrestrial substances makes ready sense of the claim.

We can supplement Lear’s case for teleology by approximation by turning our attention to yet another passage that makes similar claims, De Caelo II, 12. Aristotle is attempting to solve a puzzle about why the intermediate planets are observed to have a greater number of movements than either the first heaven or the sun and the moon (DC 291b30-292a7). He answers with an elaborate analogy to explain the variety of way something can attain or approximate a goal: he explains that it is plausible to think that the best conditioned thing in the cosmos attains its good without any action, while the things nearest to it attain the good by a few actions, and things further by a multitude of actions (DC 292a22-24). He likens this to the way one person’s body may maintain health without effort, while another may require light exercise achieve health, and another may require strenuous training to attain it (292a25-26). He adds that some

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12Interpreters who think that the prime mover is the efficient cause of the first heaven’s rotation (like Broadie), might be able to argue that god is remote efficient cause of terrestrial substances’ processes of development toward their goods (Prime Mover 5). But this efficient causal connection seems too indirect to be a plausible reading of Aristotle’s claim that the divine is always the cause of the better.
bodies may be incapable of attaining a genuinely healthy condition no matter how much they are exercised, but can only achieve some lesser substitute for health (DC 292a27). This analogy enables Aristotle to give a teleological explanation of the movements of the intermediate planets: they come closer to attaining the divine good than the planets closer to the earth do, although they require a greater variety of movements to do so. It also enables Aristotle to account for the stationary state of the earth: the earth is like the body that cannot attain health no matter what exercise routine it adopts. Staying in its natural place in the center of the cosmos is what enables the earth to attain the nearest approximation of that good that is possible for it (DC 293b19). At the close of the argument Aristotle remarks that it is best for any being to attain the (divine) end, but if that is not possible they must “come as near to it as their share in the divine principle permits” (DC 292b21-22).

In all the passages we have discussed, Aristotle is giving us a picture of the cosmos in which every substance aims at the divine but does so in a way that is circumscribed by its own form. Admittedly, attributing teleology by approximation to Aristotle on the basis of these passages requires a far more expansive interpretation of the prime mover’s teleological role than some commentators are willing to countenance. However, it is far from an unprecedented interpretation. I take Lear’s reading to be consonant with Charles Kahn’s, which holds that god is the “goal of the universal tendency of nature to move from potency to act” (203). This goal is never actually reached by any substance other than god, but it is approximated in myriad ways by all the various beings performing the activities that actualize their forms.

If this reading is correct, then it follows that all excellent human activity is an approximation of the divine. And with this thesis in mind, it becomes easier to see why phronetic
activity would itself be an approximation of theoretical activity. We imitate the divine in \textit{theōria} by engaging in the very same of activity that constitutes god’s essence (though presumably ours is of inferior quality). In doing so, we realize our own nature, since Aristotle argues that we are intellects “most of all” (\textit{malista}) (\textit{EN} 1178a7). \textit{Phronēsis}, on the other hand, involves exercising reason over those parts of the human soul which are not themselves \textit{nous}, but do have the capacity to be guided by it (cf. \textit{EN} 1098a4-6). As such, \textit{phronēsis}/morally virtuous activity is a (secondary) way that human beings can actualize their forms and thereby approximate the divine nature. On Lear’s account, it follows that “morally virtuous activity is itself a way of extending contemplation of a sort (\textit{theōria tis}) into human life (\textit{EN} 1178b28-32)” (Lear 91). Both types of virtuous activity are ways of approximating the divine nature. And since the contemplation humans engage in is the same kind of activity god performs, morally virtuous action can be understood as teleologically subordinate to contemplation by approximating it.

If we take Lear’s thesis on board, we can free Aristotle’s account from relying on the claim that possessing moral virtue is a prerequisite for having the ability to contemplate. Instead, the \textit{per se} value of a praiseworthy good will be grounded more fundamentally in the fact that its nature approaches contemplation to the extent that is possible for an activity involving the non-rational part of the soul— “it has the intrinsically valuable nature that it does because it is approximating a more perfect nature” (Lear 87). Lear’s reading fits together well with Tuozzo’s

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13On the other hand, Kraut denies that phronetic activity is itself “a form of theoretical thinking” (Human Good 58). However, since he argues that there is enough similarity between the two to justify thinking of them both as forms of happiness, he agrees with the interpretation that both the political life and contemplative life approximate the nature of god (\textit{ibid.}) Indeed, he argues that it would be “incredible” if politicians were the only exception to the “general rule that the well-being of all forms of life can be assessed by determining the extent to which they resemble the unmoved mover” (Kraut Human Good 60). I am less concerned with the issue of whether the activity of \textit{phronēsis} is properly characterized as \textit{theōria tis} than I am with the more general idea that phronetic activity approximates \textit{theōria} and the divine.
aim to show how there are “essential connections” among the causally connected homonymous human goods; it arguably does so better than Tuozzo’s own “psychic freedom” account does (293).

Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen that transcendental and intraspecific axiological homonymy pose arguably irresolvable incomparability problems for Aristotle on an s-interpretation. If Aristotle is committed to the claim that synonymy is required for comparability, then we must admit that he is not permitted to compare goods that fall under different categories, or things that are homonymously good for substances of a single species. On the other hand, although the p-interpretation has its own challenges and obscurities, it has more promising ways of addressing transcendental and intraspecific incomparability problems. The core dependence of being provides a model by which p-interpreters can understand the comparability of goods across the categories. Likewise, if it is correct to conceptualize intraspecifically homonymous goods as standing in causal relations to one another then we are also entitled to think of them as core dependent and, thus, p-comparable.

However, even if these responses to the transcendental and intraspecific incomparability problems are successful, they would be of limited value if we could not also make sense of Aristotle’s hierarchy of substances. If the goodness of an accident depends on the goodness of the substance in which it inheres, we will only be able to compare the goodness of accidents belonging to different substances if we can compare the goodness of the substances themselves. We can only say that Socrates’ wisdom is more valuable than Bucephalus’ strength, for example, if we can say that Socrates is a better substance than Bucephalus. More generally, many of the
axiological claims that seem most central to Aristotle’s worldview and also most difficult to reconcile with homonymy of goodness are evaluative comparisons of substances. Making sense of these comparisons will be the focus of the next chapter.
CHAPTER SIX
THE COMPARABILITY OF TRANS-SPECIFICALLY HOMONYMOUS GOODS

Introduction

In order to complete our picture of comparability in Aristotle’s “homonymous value
world,” we must now turn our attention to the comparability of trans-specifically homonymous
goods. A recent paper by Samuel Baker provides a fruitful entry point for our discussion of
trans-specific comparability. Baker argues, against Richard Kraut, that there are several passages
in Aristotle that require us to attribute to him a belief in “absolute goodness.” In my view,
Aristotle’s commitment to the transcendental homonymy of goodness precludes him from
believing in the type of property that absolute goodness would have to be. However, I agree with
Baker’s contention that many commentators give implausibly deflationary accounts of the
metaphysics underlying Aristotle’s cross-kind evaluative comparisons. Thus, the task as I see it
is to give an account of that metaphysical framework that is sufficiently robust to make sense of
those evaluative comparisons, but which falls short of the absolute goodness that Aristotle’s
commitments would require him to reject.

I contend that both s-interpretations and p-interpretations have promising ways of
providing such an account. S-interpreters can argue that Aristotle’s trans-specific comparisons
should be understood in terms of maximally generic goodness-fixing kinds, especially goodness
qua substance. Although Aristotle never explicitly articulates the idea of substantial goodness, I
claim that he does advance some suggestive lines of thought which could be used to assemble a
conception of it. There are, however, some difficulties in working out the details of an s-comparable solution which make the p-comparable solution more attractive. P-interpreters can argue that good specimens of different goodness-fixing kinds can be comparable even without appealing to a more generic goodness-fixing kind. More specifically, they can argue that homonymous goods may be compared if there are core dependent relations among the homonymous goodness properties. I will argue that the teleological order among different substances would be sufficient to establish the required core dependence.

Ultimately, however, I claim that the s-comparable and p-comparable solutions to the trans-specific incomparability problem converge to a significant extent. On a p-interpretation, the p-best substances are the ones which are teleologically superordinate to all other substances in the cosmos. On an s-interpretation, the s-best substances will be those which possess the features that constitute goodness qua substance to the highest degree. Yet, in my view, Aristotle would think that these two classes of best beings are exactly coextensive: the beings at the top of the cosmic teleological order are the very same beings which would have the highest degree of substantial goodness. We can give an illuminating account of why this is by attending to the conceptual connections Aristotle draws between final causation on the one hand and the principles of natural rule, unity, and substantiality on the other hand.

**Kraut and Baker on Absolute Goodness in Aristotle**

Before we address the question of whether Aristotle needs to posit a property of absolute goodness, it may be helpful to home in on what that property would be. For Kraut, the paradigmatic proponent of absolute goodness is G.E. Moore. In the first chapter of the *Principia Ethica*, Moore famously argues that, in order to give an account of good conduct, we must first
give an account of the more primitive notion of goodness. Since goodness is a property that may belong to things other than conduct, we risk misunderstanding what good conduct itself is if we confine moral philosophy to the study of conduct without attending to what goodness is more generally (Moore 54-55). The conception of goodness at work in Moore’s line of thought, which Kraut refers to as “absolute goodness,” seems to be the property of goodness *simpliciter*; of simply being a good *thing*, full stop. That is, it is a highly generic property that (ostensibly) gives agents a reason to value the things that possess it.

For further clarification of the notion of absolute goodness, Kraut helpfully contrasts it with two other kinds of goodness: goodness-*for* and goodness of a kind (Absolute 3-4). To value friendship, say, because it is absolutely good, is different from valuing it because it is good *for* the people who are friends. Likewise, to value a poem because it is good (*simpliciter*) is different from valuing it because it is a good poem. To say that friendship is good for the people involved in the friendship is (roughly) to say that it is a benefit to them, or that it contributes to their well-being.¹ To be a good poem is to be good *qua* poem; to be a poem that meets the standards of excellence proper to poems. However, to say that poems or friendships are absolutely good things is to make the distinct claim that they “[make] the world a better place by adding to the amount of value it contains” (Kraut Absolute 4). Many poetry lovers may agree that, say, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” is a good poem, and that it is good for the people who read and appreciate it. However, a proponent of absolute goodness might go further and argue that the world would be worse off if “Prufrock” were not in it. What this illustrates is that absolutely

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¹Kraut ultimately gives an account of goodness-*for* that centers around the concept of “non-instrumental advantageousness,” but the general point that absolute goodness is to be distinguished from goodness *simpliciter* is not dependent on any particular theory about the nature of goodness-*for*.
good things may also be good for people or good qua members of goodness-fixing kinds, but their properties of being-good-for and being-good-qua would nevertheless be distinct from their property of being absolutely good. If friendships or poems are good simpliciter, then they are worth valuing simply because they are good things, in addition to being beneficial for someone or being excellent specimens of their respective kinds.

The central aim of Against Absolute Goodness is to make the case that contemporary moral philosophers should jettison the concept of absolute goodness. It is not primarily a work of historical scholarship, and thus it does not provide a complete defense of the thesis that Aristotle makes no use of the concept. Nevertheless, one supplementary part of Kraut’s argument that moral philosophy can do without goodness simpliciter is that plenty of important moral philosophers have done without it, notably including Aristotle (Absolute 209). To make that interpretation plausible, Kraut attempts to undermine two lines of thought that might lead us to attribute a conception of absolute goodness to him.

First, Kraut concedes that Aristotle uses an expression (agathos haplōs) which may be translated defensibly as “good simpliciter” or “absolutely good” (see e.g. EN 1129b3-6, 1152b26). However, he argues that the passages in which Aristotle uses that expression make clear that he is referring to something closer to what we would call goodness “in the abstract,” rather than absolute goodness in Moore’s sense (Kraut Absolute 211). Aristotle contrasts things that are good haplōs with things which are good for someone (tini) and argues that things which are good haplōs may not necessarily be good for a particular person in a particular circumstance (EN 1129b3). The idea seems to be that goods like wealth or honor should feature in our general account of a good human life, but that there are concrete contexts in which they are not
beneficial. A thematically similar passage in the *Eudemian Ethics* argues that “natural goods” (*agatha phusei*) like honor, wealth, and good fortune, can be harmful to some people on account of their (presumably vicious) dispositions (*EE* 1248b27-28). If this interpretation is on target, then when Aristotle characterizes something as good *haplōs* he is saying that it generally (but not universally) conduces to a good life for a human being—he is *not* to saying that it possesses the property of being an absolutely good thing.

However, one might suspect that even if “*agathos haplōs*” does not refer to the property of goodness *simpliciter*, Aristotle might nevertheless be committed to the existence of that property because of his famous endorsement of the dictum that “the good is that at which all things aim” (*EN* 1094a2-3). To undercut that interpretation, Kraut reminds us that the opening lines of the *Politics* recapitulate the theme that the good is the target of all human action, albeit with a new focus on the aims of human communities (*Pol.* 1252a1-2). Shortly after, Aristotle explicitly glosses the good at which communities aim as “the advantageous” (*to sumpheron*) (*Pol.* 1253a34). Accordingly, Kraut argues that it is highly unlikely that the good described in the opening lines of the *Politics* could be absolute goodness; Aristotle’s point is that communities are founded to benefit their members, not “to increase the amount of goodness *simpliciter* that exists in the world” (Kraut Absolute 210). And since Aristotle regards ethics as a part of the science of politics, it would be very surprising if the goodness he refers to in the opening lines of *EN* were a different feature from the one discussed at the beginning of *Pol.* Consequently, we are
justified in thinking that the good at which all human activity aims is always a good-for-someone (Kraut Absolute 211).²

Baker takes issue with Kraut’s absolute goodness-free interpretation of Aristotle. He advances several lines of critique: he argues that when Kraut construes the good of human action as a type of good-for, he does not sufficiently account for Aristotle’s thesis that to be good is to have the character of an end (Baker 1840-1841). He also argues that even if “agathos haplōs” does not refer to goodness simpliciter, there is a related expression in the Eudemian Ethics that arguably does (“spoudaios phusei,” “excellent by nature”) (EE 1237a12-18) (Baker 1842-1844). However, the primary thrust of Baker’s critique is that “Aristotle’s comparative evaluations of substances” cannot plausibly be understood in terms of goodness-for or goodness of a kind and thus require an appeal to absolute goodness to be intelligible (1840).

Baker’s central example of the kind of comparison he has in mind occurs in EN VI, 7 during an argument that sophia is superior to phronēsis (1847). Aristotle argues that phronēsis could only be the best form of knowledge if human beings were the best things in the cosmos. But although human beings are better than all other animals, there are other things, (notably the heavenly bodies) that are better and more divine than we are (EN 1141a20-1141b1). Baker points out that this passage is far from an isolated case: it is nothing but an application of Aristotle’s consistent doctrine that the value of a science is primarily determined by the value of its object (Baker 1848; Met. 1064b5-6). For example, theology is better than cosmology, which is better than zoology, because god is better than the stars, which are better than sublunar animals.

²In a more recent article, Kraut has revised this interpretation. He now denies that EN begins immediately with the thesis that all human action aims at something that is good for someone, but nevertheless argues that Aristotle hopes to have established that thesis by the end of EN I,1 (Kraut Well-being 22-23). Obviously, this amended interpretation is no more amenable to reading absolute goodness into Aristotle than the original.
Baker contends that Aristotle’s evaluative comparisons among substances poses a major problem for those of us who would try to avoid attributing absolute goodness to Aristotle. He argues that “most scholars understand the good of a substance to be good merely relative to that kind of substance, and thus they should suppose that the good of one kind of substance is strictly incommensurable with the good of a different kind of substance” (Baker 1849). To put the same point in my own idiom, goodness is trans-specifically homonymous when it is predicated of different kinds of substances. “Good” does not signify the same nature, for example, when it names the equine good on the one hand and the human good on the other. Consequently, Aristotle should be barred from making statements like “humans are better than horses.” For Baker, there is only one defensible way to make sense of the fact that Aristotle makes cross-kind evaluative comparisons so freely: he must be “assuming that substances are in some sense absolutely good and that they can be ranked with respect to that goodness” (1849).

There are some commentators who have tried to avoid this conclusion by offering a deflationary reading of Aristotle’s trans-specific evaluative comparisons. Baker points to Alan Gotthelf’s account of Aristotle’s hierarchy of animals as an exemplar of this interpretive strategy. On Gotthelf’s reading, all the evaluative concepts that Aristotle applies to animals, their capacities and their parts can ultimately be reduced to “the notion and aim of the self-maintenance of life” (131). Gotthelf’s treatment of “the honorable” or “the valuable” (to timion) is particularly instructive. In most cases, he argues that when Aristotle assesses some vital capacity to be more valuable than another, he is merely claiming that the capacity in question plays a more central role in the characteristic form of life proper to the organism of which it is a capacity (Gotthelf 127). Gotthelf concedes that there are a few passages for which this reading is
insufficient because Aristotle is unambiguously ranking different animal species themselves in terms of their honorability. For those passages, Gotthelf suggests that Aristotle is operating with a metaphysically non-committal notion that may be compared to the way we colloquially speak of “higher” and “lower” animals today: “one life-form is ‘higher’ than another if it has all the capacities the other has, and then some” (128). This naturalistic interpretation of to timion would make it unnecessary to posit a standard of value that is independent of the various life activities that are definitive of particular plant and animal species.

However, Baker argues that deflationary readings like Gotthelf’s are unacceptable because Aristotle’s trans-specific evaluative comparisons do significant normative work (1848-1849). The ranking of sciences in accordance with the value of their objects yields conclusions about which forms of knowledge we should prize most highly. More specifically, the conclusion that sophia is a better virtue than phronēsis is integral to Aristotle’s argument that the best possible human life is a contemplative one rather than a political one. As Baker interprets him, therefore, there is a tight conceptual connection between the idea that substances may be ranked on a scale of absolute goodness and the conclusion that we should “strain every nerve to live in accordance” with the intellect, the best and most godlike human capacity (EN 1178b35).

In my view, Baker makes a convincing case that Aristotle’s trans-specific evaluative comparisons cannot be explained away. I maintain that the idea of the universe as some kind of axiological hierarchy is central to Aristotle’s worldview and that any attempt to downplay that element of his thought is doomed to fail. However, I balk at Baker’s claim that the only way to make sense of Aristotle’s evaluative ranking of substances is to saddle him with a commitment
to absolute goodness. While we certainly need a reading that is less deflationary than Gotthelf’s, I am not convinced that we need one that is as inflationary as the one Baker proposes.

On the contrary, I argue that there is a straightforward and decisive reason why Aristotle cannot believe that there is such a thing as absolute goodness: if absolute goodness existed it would have to be transcendentally univocal. As we noted above, the property of being good absolutely is the property of simply being a good thing. Consequently “(absolutely) good” would need to be predicated univocally of beings that fall under different categories. For example, supposing there are some qualities that are absolutely good (e.g. wisdom and justice), as well as some substances that are (e.g. Socrates, the moon, the prime mover), then absolute goodness would have to be a single characteristic that is common to both good substances and good qualities. However, if my interpretation of the categorial argument from EN I, 6 is correct, Aristotle denies that “good” (or indeed, any predicate whatsoever) could apply univocally across the categories in this way.

As an alternative way of thinking about the issue, we might argue that (contrary to first appearances) absolute goodness is actually a special case of goodness of a kind after all; absolute goodness is simply goodness as a being, the most generic possible goodness-fixing kind. But since Aristotle denies that being is a genus (An. Post. 92b14, Met. 998b22), he cannot believe there is any such thing as goodness qua being. Rather, he holds that the categories are themselves the summa genera. There is no broader genus of being to which the categories belong, and which would be predicated synonymously of each of them. Consequently, it is not possible for something to be absolutely good for Aristotle, if by “absolute goodness” we mean goodness as a being.
Baker comes curiously close to recognizing this point. He acknowledges that the categorial arguments from *EE* I, 8 and *EN* I, 6 rule out understanding goodness as “a universal property like ‘blue’” (Baker 1843). It is perplexing that Baker does not elaborate on the implications of the categorial argument for absolute goodness in Aristotle. After all, in developing his conception of absolute goodness, Moore famously places a great deal of importance on the comparison between “good” and “yellow” (59-60). Admittedly, Moore’s concern in that context is to demonstrate the indefinability of “good,” not to argue for the existence of absolute goodness. Nevertheless, it still seems significant that Moore believes that it is appropriate to think of absolute goodness as a single, simple characteristic that is common to all good things; precisely the understanding of goodness that Aristotle goes to great lengths to refute in the categorial argument.

More to the point, however, Baker ultimately wants to argue that all (absolutely) good things are related by core dependence, with divine goodness serving as the focal instance of goodness (1851). He seems to think that this is a development of the thesis that Aristotle’s cross-kind comparisons need to be understood in terms of absolute goodness. In fact, it is incompatible with that thesis. The whole point of positing absolute goodness is to supply a *single sense* in which substances of different species may be compared. However, core dependence presupposes non-synonymy. Thus, if the goodness of a non-divine substance is related by core dependence to the goodness of god, then the two types of substances are, by definition, not good in a single sense. To put the point in another way: absolute goodness is supposed to be a *single property* which is possessed by all absolutely good things. But if we conceive of goodness as core dependent, converging on the divine nature, then we do not have a single property of goodness
Rather, we have a hierarchically organized system of distinct properties. In my view, the latter is, in fact, an accurate description of the way Aristotle thinks about the way goodness is distributed throughout the cosmic hierarchy, and I will attempt to develop an account of it below. However, conceptualizing goodness as a core dependent system of distinct, but connected properties rules out, rather than vindicates Baker’s move of attributing absolute goodness to Aristotle.

Perhaps Baker fails to notice this issue because he does not devote sustained attention to the relationships among synonymy, core dependence, and comparability. To illustrate how we are to understand the superiority of divine goodness over other goods, he constructs an analogy with different degrees of healthiness: “there may be a state of the body that cannot be called ‘health’ but that can nevertheless be called healthier than another state insofar as it approximates health” (Baker 1851). The idea here seems to be that perfect health is health in the primary sense, while mediocre or poor states of health are secondary (or otherwise posterior) senses of “health.” Consequently, we can compare the different states in terms of their healthiness. This seems to me like a confusion between s- and p-comparability. Although Aristotle repeatedly draws on “the healthy” to illustrate core dependent relations, he never argues that different degrees of health are examples of core dependence. On the contrary, comparing one person as healthier than another seems like a paradigmatic case of s-comparability; a single nature, signified by a common predicate, which one subject possesses to a greater degree than another (cf. Cat. 10b33ff).

Perhaps an analogy with a simpler quality than health will bring the point into sharper relief: Baker’s example of comparisons among different levels of health does not seem different, in principle, from comparing different degrees of heat. For example, lukewarm water is hotter
than cold water, and hot water is hotter than lukewarm water. Surely, we do not need to posit three different senses of “hot” (organized in a core dependent way) to explain this simple comparison. If core-dependence is required in this case, then obviously, many more than three senses of “hot” would be required to capture all the degrees of heat between water’s freezing and boiling points. But a much more plausible and parsimonious way of thinking about these comparisons is open to us: a single quality, heat, is signified by “hot,” and water can possess this quality to a greater or lesser degree. By the same token, different degrees of health are also better understood in terms of s-comparability than p-comparability.3

In my view, our brief digression into comparisons of health and heat shows that there is a serious inconsistency in Baker’s interpretation: although Baker acknowledges that Aristotle thinks of goodness as a core dependent homonym, he continues to think of the evaluative comparisons among different kinds of substances as if “good” were predicated synonymously of each substance. To put it in another way, he only sustains his reading of Aristotle as a proponent of absolute goodness by tacitly reverting to a conception of goodness as a single nature which all good things share to a greater or lesser degree. This provides more confirmation of that point that taking the homonymy of the good seriously rules out attributing absolute goodness to Aristotle.

Baker might object that it is possible to think of absolute goodness itself as a core dependent homonym. He could argue that the primary case of absolute goodness is uniquely exemplified by god, while it is exemplified in secondary (tertiary, quarternary, etc.) ways by

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3Admittedly, Baker does expose a prima facie problem with Aristotle’s account of comparability. If we adhere strictly to the doctrine that things are comparable with respect to their f-ness only if they are synonymously f, then we would apparently be prohibited from saying a hot glass of water is hotter than a cold glass; a cold glass of water is not hot at all, a fortiori, it is not hot in the same sense that a cold glass of water is. However, a charitable reading that avoids the problem seems easy enough to supply: s-comparisons may take place across the range of contraries constituted by the attribute signified by the term and the privation of that attribute.
other kinds of substances. If Baker intends to think about absolute goodness in this way, then his
synoptic picture of Aristotle’s theory of the good is not ultimately too distant from my own p-
comparable solution. However, I would nevertheless contend that it is mistaken to think about
the core-dependence of goodness as involving homonymous absolute goods, for two reasons

First, to talk about absolute goodness as a core dependent homonym is, to a significant
extent, to make a category mistake. Baker does not provide an explicit definition specifying what
he means by absolute goodness; he implies that he is following Moore and Kraut’s usage. But
Moore and Kraut explicitly think of absolute goodness as a single, maximally generic property of
being a good thing. But, again, if absolute goodness is a core dependent homonym, then it is not
one attribute, but many. And further, Aristotle’s metaphysical commitments preclude him from
recognizing any property that is as generic as Moorean absolute goodness. Consequently, even
the core case of absolute goodness, exemplified by the divine nature, would be less generic than
the property that Moore has in mind. It would seem, therefore, that if we think of absolute
goodness as a core dependent homonym, we risk stretching the meaning of the concept beyond
recognition.

Secondly, if we allow that the presence of a core dependency between two homonymous
goods permits us to compare those goods, then the motivation for positing absolute goodness as distinct from the goodness proper to a species is undermined. For example, in order to make
sense of the judgment that the heavenly bodies are better than human beings, we do not need to
posit absolute goodness over and above human goodness and astral goodness. We only need to
show that there is a priority relationship between the two different types of species-indexed
goods. To say that stars and humans are also absolutely good (presumably in two different senses of “absolutely good”) is superfluous.

**The S-comparable Solution: Substantial Goodness**

So, if it is misguided to interpret Aristotle’s trans-specific evaluative comparisons as expressing a commitment to absolute goodness, then how should we interpret them? A strategy that s-interpreters could accept begins from the insight that substances of different species might be compared in terms of a more generic kind of goodness. As we have already seen, the maximally generic notion of a good thing or good being is not available to Aristotle since he denies that being is a genus. However, he could consistently allow that it is possible for an entity to be good qua member of the highest genus to which it belongs. Thus, he could argue that stars are better than human beings, for example, because stars instantiate goodness qua substance to a higher degree than humans do. If Aristotle believes there is such a thing as goodness qua substance, this would allow for a single sense of goodness in terms of which all substances could be compared.

Is there any evidence that Aristotle actually does believe that there is such a thing as substantial goodness? Unfortunately, the answer seems to be ‘no,’ at least if we are seeking direct and explicit evidence. I know of no passage in which he contrasts the goodness something has as a member of its species with the goodness it has as a substance, nor even of a passage in which he uses a phrase that could be plausibly translated “good qua substance.” However, I contend that Aristotle makes some argumentative moves that leave conceptual space for a notion

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4The closest he comes to doing so that I am aware of is EN I, 6 1096a25, where uses “ho theos kai ho nous” as his example of good predicated in the category of substance. I take it that the interpretation I develop below, according to which goodness qua substance is divinity, is consonant with this passage.
of goodness *qua* substance. Furthermore, I would argue that there are textual resources for reconstructing a tentative account, at least, of what substantial goodness would consist in for Aristotle. Let us examine each of these points in turn.

First, consider Aristotle’s characterization of completion or perfection (*to teleion*) from the philosophical lexicon in *Metaphysics* V. Aristotle’s offers three meanings of the complete: 1) That which includes all its proper parts within itself (*Met.* 1021bff) 2) that which lacks none of the excellences proper to its kind (*Met.*1021b24ff), and 3) that which has attained its end (*Met.* 1021b24ff). The connections between meanings two and three are relatively obvious, since the excellences of a thing are determined with reference to its end. However, as Christopher Mirus has argued, Aristotle is also keen to highlight connections between the first definition and the latter two. When summing up the second definition, Aristotle says that “excellence is a completion [*teleiosis*]; for each thing is complete and every substance is complete when in respect of its proper kind of excellence it lacks no part of its natural magnitude” (*Met.* 1021b23-24). “Natural magnitude” here presumably does *not* refer to the literal size of the substance, at least not in the first instance. Rather, Mirus argues that the use of “magnitude” is intended to suggest a spatial metaphor by which we are to understand the relationship between a substance’s form and its excellences. Namely, the potentialities that make up a substance’s form define the substance by “projecting outward, as it were, an ideal version of themselves, an ideal that can be realized only through excellence. In this picture we have not only a metaphorical shape, but a

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5 Aristotle probably does think that an animate substance whose growth is stunted is imperfect relative to its species-form. However, stunted growth would only be one example of a much more general point Aristotle is trying to make about excellence and perfection in this passage.
size as well, a size that is either an unrealized ideal or the true stature of a being that stands head and shoulders above its peers” (Mirus Excellence 674).

If we adopt this spatial way of thinking about excellence and perfection, we would say that a perfectly virtuous human being fills all the “ontological space” projected for him by the human form, while a person of less than perfect virtue falls short of doing so. Similarly, a different kind of substance would have a different ontological “shape” projected for it and the contours of that shape would set its standards of excellence and perfection. At first glance, then, Aristotle’s account in Met. V seems to provide the metaphysical underpinnings for a species-relative conception of perfection and excellence: each substance is excellent to the degree that it fills out the ontological shape that is definitive of its kind. And since each kind of substance has a different ontological shape, they each have different standards of perfection.

However, as Mirus notes (though only to set the issue aside), Aristotle does not restrict himself to a species-bound understanding of perfection but holds that “certain kinds of animal… [and] of natural substance more generally are more complete than others” (Excellence 664). If we are to understand completion simply as filling out the metaphysical shape projected by a form, it is hard to make sense of this idea—why should a completely filled out triangle be any more or less complete than a completely filled out square? Analogously, why should a perfectly virtuous horse be any more or less perfect than a perfectly virtuous human being? However, I think the spatial imagery is also suggestive of the way we might understand trans-specific comparisons of perfection. Since Aristotle’s imagery includes both metaphysical shape and size, perhaps we could think of this raw ontological magnitude as the metaphorical way of understanding the more generalized completion or perfection.
To extend the metaphor a bit further, consider a square with an area of 50 square inches that is fully filled in and a triangle with an area of 150 square inches that is half filled in. Which shape is more completely filled in? In one obvious way, the square is, since no part of it is left unfilled. But Aristotle might think that, in another way, the triangle is more complete, since there is a greater total magnitude of space filled in. This may seem counter-intuitive as a sense of “complete,” but perhaps it will seem less so if we think in terms of some broader space which both the triangle and square occupy: the square is more completely filled in than the triangle, but the triangle more completely fills the broader spatial field. If this is a permissible way of thinking about the completion of geometrical figures, then we could extend the metaphor to substances. Consider, once again, the example of a perfectly virtuous horse and a vicious human being. The horse completely fills out the ontological shape set for it by its form while the vicious human being does not. However, if we have some reason to think that the ontological shape of the human form has greater magnitude than that of a horse in the first place then we might say that even the vicious human is more perfect than the horse which is absolutely perfect quâ horse.

Now one might object that talk of ontological shapes and magnitudes is vague and merely metaphorical. If it cannot be cashed out in more precise and literal terms, then perhaps all the spatial metaphor from Met. V shows is that Aristotle’s thinking about perfection is “held captive by a picture” as Wittgenstein might put it. But if we could find a way to give more precise significance to the idea of magnitude at work in Met. V, then I submit that we would have a plausible way of understanding Aristotle’s value rankings that cross different kinds of substances in the cosmos.
One passage that proves to be surprisingly relevant to the issue of cashing out the spatial metaphor occurs in the midst of Aristotle’s discussion of crustaceans in the *Parts of Animals IV*, 8. Aristotle has claimed that, in most species of crustaceans, the right claw is dominant over the left and has attempted to provide a teleological explanation of that fact. However, according to Aristotle, lobsters are not necessarily right-clawed: “in lobsters only, whether male or female, it is a matter of chance which claw is bigger. The cause of their having claws is that they are in the genus of claw-possessors (*hoti en tō genei eisi tō echonti chēlas*), but they have them irregularly because they are defective (*pepērōntai*) and do not employ them for their natural use but for walking” (*PA* 684a32-b1, my translation). For my purposes, the most interesting move Aristotle makes in this passage is his claim that lobsters are defective. Notice that he is not saying that some particular lobsters are defective relative to their species-form. Rather, he is saying that lobsters, as a species, are defective relative to the broader class of claw-possessing animals.\(^6\)

Thus, on the plausible assumption that defectiveness is a type of imperfection, Aristotle implicitly endorses the thesis that it is permissible to rank the perfection of multiple species relative to a higher genus to which they all belong.

A concrete illustration may help illustrate the importance of that thesis: imagine a particular lobster called “Robster.” Robster is endowed with every excellence proper to lobster nature and he actualizes those excellences in his thriving lobster life. Robster is thus perfect, *qua* lobster and his life is a complete actualization of the lobster form. This means that he is as perfect as it is possible for a substance to be *while remaining a lobster*. Relative to the broader

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\(^6\)One might suspect that “claw-possessor” is not a proper genus at all. If taken literally, it would presumably include land animals with claws as well, and I think it is safe to assume that Aristotle would not want to count lobsters as members of the same immediate genus as, say, lions. But I take it that Aristotle’s point is that lobsters belong to a genus which has claw possession as one of its *per se* characteristics.
genus of claw-possessors, however, Robster is imperfect. A crab, say, which uses its claws for their natural grasping function rather than for locomotion, would be a more perfect claw-possessor than Robster is. But even a perfect crab might be imperfect as a member of a higher genus, the genus *animal*, for example (though there are no doubt several intermediate genera between *claw-possessor* and *animal*). For Aristotle, viviparous mammals, with their higher degree of vital heat and cognitive capacity, would be more perfect *qua* animal than even the most perfect crustacean. But even the most perfect of the animals, the human being, might be imperfect relative to a higher genus. This process of ascending the Porphyrian tree must terminate once we reach the highest genus to which lobsters belong, i.e., the genus of *substance*. Therefore, Aristotle’s conceptual move of evaluating lobsters as imperfect relative to the genus of claw-possessing animals is the first step in a procedure whose conclusion would be positing perfection or goodness *qua* substance.

To put the example in the terms of the spatial metaphor from *Met. V*: Robster completely fills out the ontological shape projected by the lobster form. But the ontological magnitude of a perfected lobster is not sufficient to completely fill out the ontological shape projected by the genus *claw-possessor*, or the genera of *animal* and *substance*. On this picture, ontological magnitude ultimately turns out to be identical to goodness or perfection *qua* substance. A being which had maximal goodness *qua* substance would, therefore, take up whole spatial field; its ontological shape would be coterminous with whole the background against which we could compare the ontological magnitudes of different kinds of substances.

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7See Coles, especially pp. 310-311, for an ambitious attempt to reconstruct Aristotle’s hierarchy of animals in a way that integrates its physiological and axiological elements.
Admittedly, in order to arrive at the conclusions I have just stated, I have extrapolated well beyond what is expressly stated in Aristotle’s text. However, if my extrapolations are plausible, then there is a clear place for substantial goodness in Aristotle’s thought, even if he never develops the notion explicitly. However, the account of substantial goodness is bound to be unsatisfying unless we can say something significant about what exactly makes something better or worse *qua* substance, as distinct from characteristics that make it a good specimen of its kind. After all, it is relatively easy to get a purchase on the goodness proper to each species: Aristotle gives us several books detailing the nature of human goodness, and we can at least form a rough and intuitive idea of what it is for other species to fully actualize their forms and thereby flourish. But what features of a thing constitute its substantial goodness as distinct from the species-indexed kinds of goodness?

I think we can home in on an answer to this question if we consider the following: although Aristotle never thematizes a notion of substantial goodness, he is at least reasonably clear about which substance he thinks is best: god. What is more, he seems to think that divinity is a feature which substances can possess in different degrees. That is, he does not simply think that the unmoved movers are divine and other substances are non-divine. Rather, he appears to hold that the various substances in the universe constitute a scale of greater and lesser divinity (e.g. *EN* 1141a20-1141b1, *PA* 656a7-8, *GA* 732a3-9). My proposal is that divinity is identical to goodness *qua* substance. God has a set of features in virtue of which he is (maximally) divine and these are the same features in virtue of which he is maximally good *qua* substance. Other substances form a scale of divinity and substantial goodness to the extent that they have those same features, albeit to a lesser degree.
Dolores Miller has argued for an interpretation that is consonant with my proposal which is helpful for specifying the relevant features that would constitute divinity. She claims that “the characteristics of the [prime mover] comprise the formal nature of the Good for substantive being” (Miller 9). On her reading, there are five features which are definitive of substance generally. If we take all five features and push them to their maximum, we arrive at a conception of a being that matches Aristotle’s prime mover. The features in question are 1) separability, 2) unity, 3) Endurance/maintenance of identity over time, 4) intelligibility, and 5) efficaciousness (ibid.).

To take each feature one at a time: all substances are separate to the extent that they have a type of ontological independence that that accidents lack. The prime mover is maximally separable in that it requires no material substratum, indeed, no antecedent causal conditions at all, for its continued existence. Likewise, all substances have a principle of internal unity such that they are a single well-defined entity, rather than a heap of indeterminate material (see Met. 1040b10ff). God is a unity in a higher way in that he is metaphysically non-composite; as noēsis noēseōs noēsis, god is a being whose activity is identical to the subject of that activity and the object of that activity.\(^8\) Similarly, every substance maintains its identity over time in virtue of its form. For sensible substances, however, identity maintenance is inherently fragile and temporary, whereas for the prime mover it is eternal and necessary. Hence, living creatures procreate so that their species can be eternal, even though the individual living substances will inevitably be destroyed (DA 415a25-29). Miller argues that god’s nature as a reflexive, self-

\(^8\)See Gerson’s “Incomposite Being” for an argument that Aristotle is committed to an early version of the doctrine of divine simplicity.
thinking intelligence is what makes it the most intelligible being in the cosmos (9). We may add that Aristotle frequently describes reality as comprising a hierarchy of intelligibility or knowability and claims that first principles and causes, in virtue of which other things are known, are the most knowable entities (Met. 982a2-5). Consequently, the prime mover’s status as the most efficacious substance (i.e. the first cause), would directly correlate with its status as the most intelligible being (cf. Met. 1072a18-35).

The upshot, therefore, is that Miller’s reading suggests a long series of gradations of five abstract features which would underlie the axiological hierarchy of substances. To adapt her interpretation for present purposes, we could conceive of these five features as jointly constituting the nature of divinity and goodness qua substance. Miller’s interpretation has significant merits. Her five features do seem to capture much of what Aristotle thinks is distinctive about the divine nature and the idea that substances are good to the extent that they approach that nature has strong textual support. Consider, for example, Aristotle’s comments about the goodness of the first principle from Met. XIV, 4. The context is that Aristotle is raising a series of objections to the Academic doctrine that first principle is the One, understood both as an element out of which numbers are generated and the good itself. Aristotle argues that the features the One it would need to have to serve as the ultimate standard of goodness are inconsistent with its being a mathematical element. Most relevant for present purposes, he claims

Presumably, the relevant kind of intelligibility would be “intelligibility in itself” rather than “intelligibility to us,” since Aristotle typically associates the intelligible to us with sensibles (e.g. An. Post. 71b35-72a5, Phys. 184a16-25). As William Wians puts it, “in addition to the familiar distinction between what is better known to us and what is more knowable by nature, a less often remarked upon second scale ranks the objects of knowledge according to their timē, their dignity or worth… This hierarchy closely tracks the first. For those things most knowable in themselves are themselves the most exalted objects, and while they are the most difficult for us to know, knowledge of them is most precious and delightful” (55).
that “it would be strange if to that which is primary and eternal and most self-sufficient (to protō kai aidiō kai autarkestatō), this very quality—self-sufficiency and self-maintenance (sōtēria)—belongs in some other way than as a good. But indeed, it can be for no other reason indestructible and self-sufficient than because its nature is good” (Met. 1091b17-19). Aristotle is saying here that the first principle is to be understood as preserving its own self-sufficient nature through time (perpetually) precisely insofar as it is good. I take it he is claiming that there is a per se connection between these attributes and the goodness of the first principle. Assuming (plausibly in my view) that Aristotle affirms the existence of such a connection in his own voice, this passage would fit well with the hypothesis that the divine attributes constitute a standard of goodness for all substantial being.¹⁰

A thematically similar passage from Eudemian Ethics I, 8 bolsters the case. Unlike some of the other arguments in EE I, 8, the argument of present interest does not take aim at the Platonist’s ontology of goodness. Rather, it criticizes the Platonic methodology for proving that something is good. In effect, Aristotle argues that Platonists are going about their axiological arguments backwards: “from what is not agreed to possess the good they demonstrate the things admitted to be good, e.g. from numbers they demonstrate that justice and health are goods, for they are arrangements of numbers, and it is assumed that goodness is a property of numbers and units because unity is the good itself. But they ought, from what are admitted to be goods, e.g. health, strength, and temperance, to demonstrate that beauty is present even more in the

¹⁰One might object that since Aristotle is engaging in dialectic with the Academic position, he may merely be setting out a conceptual connection he would expect Platonists to accept, rather than one that he would endorse himself. But this is not the most plausible reading: Aristotle makes clear his disagreement with the academic view in this context has to do with its ontology of numbers and elements, not its view on the axiological status of the first principle.
changeless (akinētois); for all these things are order (taxis) and rest (ēremia); but if so, then the changeless is still more beautiful, for it has these attributes still more” (EE 1218a16-24).

For all their other disagreements about the metaphysics of goodness, Aristotle is here agreeing with his Platonic interlocutors that the best things in the cosmos exhibit a maximal degree of stability and permanence. He is primarily disputing the order of argumentation: it is mistaken to start from the assumption that oneness and number are good and then show that health is good. To do so is to begin from a highly controversial set of metaphysical premises and use them to prove a truism. Instead, we should begin by examining more mundane goods, isolating the features that make them good, and then showing that eternal beings have the same features to a higher degree. Once again, this approach coheres well with Miller’s idea that god is the paradigm of substantial goodness which other substances approximate to a greater or lesser degree.11

However, there are also some significant problems in spelling out the details of how Miller’s five features would work as an account of goodness qua substance. For one, unless all five features exactly co-vary as we ascend the chain of being, there is a vexing and unresolved question of the relative significance each feature has in making a being substantially better or worse. For example, if substance A has a higher degree of self-maintenance over time than substance B, but B has a higher degree of intelligibility than A, how do we discern which

11Admittedly, there is a difficulty here: health, strength, and temperance are not substances, so god cannot be s-better than any of them in virtue of having s-more stability, order, etc. While this would not pose any difficulty for the p-interpreter, an s-interpreter would need to resort to a somewhat circuitous account of the evaluative comparison between health, say, and god. An s-interpreter would need to be cash out “health is not as good as god” with something along the lines of “health is an accident that contributes to the goodness of a substance that is less good qua substance than god.”
substance has the higher degree of substantial goodness? I know of no resources in Aristotle to help us answer this question.

More fundamentally however, it is not obvious that Miller’s features will be able to generate an \textit{s-scale} of value at all. They can only do so if we assume that the varying degrees to which different substances possess each feature are \textit{s}-degrees rather than \textit{p}-degrees. There is reason to doubt this assumption. Consider unity and separation, for example—is it plausible to suppose that unity is a \textit{single attribute} which god has to a higher degree than material substances? A horse, say, is a unity in that its form organizes its many material constituents into a single whole and directs it toward its function. God is a unity in that he lacks composition entirely. Thus, it seems more plausible to me to say that god is a unity in a different and higher sense than a horse or a shrub is. But if this is the case, then goodness \textit{qua} substance will collapse into \textit{pros hen} homonymy and the \textit{s}-comparable solution will slide into a \textit{p}-comparable solution. Similarly, god’s maximal separability does not seem to be a matter of having more of the very same feature that other substances have. Rather, god is separable in the same sense that a horse is, but also in the additional sense of existing apart from matter.

These problems may not be intractable—perhaps there is a defensible way of thinking of all the features that constitute divinity as arranged on an \textit{s}-scale. Alternatively, I could be missing some feature, more fundamental than Miller’s five that varies across an \textit{s}-scale and could play the role of goodness \textit{qua} substance. However, the difficulties involved in providing a perspicuous account of a univocally predicated notion of substantial goodness seem to me formidable enough to warrant investigating an alternative that makes use of \textit{p}-comparability as well.
The P-comparable Solution: Core Dependence and Interactionist Teleology

If we give up the principle that synonymy is required for comparability, then we have more flexibility in explaining the axiological scale of homonymously good substances. On the one hand, we could take on board the idea that divinity is itself a *pros hen* homonym; that the various substances imitate the prime mover through serial core dependence rather than by increasing degrees of features predicated univocally of all substances. I will explore this idea in the next section. But on the other hand, p-interpreters do not actually need to posit a conception of goodness *qua* substance in order to make sense of the evaluative comparison among different kinds of substances. So long as we can discern core dependent relationships among the senses in which the various substances are good, then we have all we need in order to claim that Aristotle’s universe is a p-scale of value.

Arguably, the most plausible way of establishing a serial core dependent relationship among different substances and their goodness properties would be to discern teleological relations among them. The other causal relations do not seem particularly promising: it is true, of course, that substances contribute matter to one another, but they *do not* do so insofar as they remain the type of substance they are. When an owl eats a mouse, for example, the mouse contributes matter to the owl, but only insofar as it undergoes substantial change and ceases to be a mouse. Whatever murine excellence the mouse instantiated ceases to exist once its underlying substance is destroyed by the owl. Consequently, it does not seem correct to characterize the mouse’s goodness as a material cause of the owl’s goodness. Formal causation does not seem any more plausible: standard formal causation is a non-starter for obvious reasons. If a mouse’s goodness were the standard formal cause of the owl’s goodness, the features that constitute the
goodness of each would be identical to one another and would not be trans-specifically homonymous in the first place. Meanwhile, as we saw in Chapter One, non-standard formal causation is only applicable if one of the homonymous items is itself a mental state (like an act of perception or thought). This might be the case for some trans-specifically homonymous goods, but it cannot serve to unify the whole cosmic hierarchy into a p-scale.

Efficient causation might seem like a better candidate at first glance: if the goodness of one substance helps produce or sustain the goodness of another type of substance, then perhaps we would have a relationship analogous to the one between, say, a healthy diet and a healthy person. I do not doubt that Aristotle thinks that there are such efficient causal relations in nature. And perhaps they could be used to explain the hierarchy of (terrestrial) substantial goods by themselves.\footnote{This is only a possibility for the sublunary hierarchy. I take it that no terrestrial substance makes an efficient causal contribution to the good of any celestial substance. Consequently, an account of the core dependence of trans-specifically homonymous goods that only used efficient causation would inevitably falter in explaining the superiority of the heavens over the earth.} My suggestion, however, is that when one substance is an efficient cause of the goodness of another substance, this fact is less fundamental for the goodness of each substance than the correlative teleological relation between them. For example, it seems likely that Aristotle thinks that a horse which attains full equine excellence consistently and predictably serves as an efficient cause of the human good by facilitating transportation in peace and victory in war. But it seems equally likely that if Aristotle thinks that the equine good is teleologically subordinated to the human good, he would regard this final causal relation as the more axiologically relevant factor. The efficient causal relation would merely specify the particular way in which horses subserve the human good. Consequently, efficient causal relations will be less relevant to the core dependence of trans-specifically homonymous goods if final causes are
also in play. Thus, the crucial question becomes: does Aristotle think that the substances in the cosmos stand in relations of teleological sub- and superordination to one another?

Commentators are divided on this question. “Interactionists,” such as Cooper, Furley, and Sedley (among others), argue that there is a teleological ordering among substances, such that some kinds of substances and their ends are for the sake of others. If interactionism is the correct reading, then the materials are in place to interpret trans-specifically homonymous goods as serially core dependent. However, “immanentist” interpreters like Ross, Nussbaum, and M. Johnson deny that there is a teleological order among substances and argue that the only type of teleology Aristotle recognizes is immanent to each type of substance. According to immanentists, each substance comes to be and acts for the sake of an end that is internal to its own nature and not for the benefit of some other substance. Ross provides a particularly clear expression of this position, arguing that “Aristotle’s teleology is… an immanent teleology. The end of each species is internal to the species; its end is simply to be that kind of thing, or, more definitely, to grow and reproduce its kind, to have sensation, and to move as freely and efficiently as the conditions of its existence… allow” (129). If immanentism is correct, then it is a significant obstacle to getting a p-comparable solution off the ground: trans-specifically homonymous goods cannot be unified by teleological relations, because, on the immanentist view, there are no relations of final causation among substances of different species.

To begin to address this challenge, it is worth noting that there is at least one passage in which Aristotle states, fairly clearly and explicitly, that there is a teleological hierarchy among natural substances: “after the birth of animals, plants exist for their sake, and… the other animals exist for the sake of man, the tame for use and food, the wild, if not all at least the greater part of
them, for food, and for the provision of clothing and various instruments. Now if nature makes nothing incomplete, and nothing in vain, the inference must be that she has made all animals for the sake of man.” (Pol. 1256b15-20). Aside from his brief hesitation about whether all wild animals exist for the sake of humans, this passage seems like an unambiguous endorsement of the view that animate nature, at any rate, is an interactionist, anthropocentric teleological hierarchy. Furthermore, the teleological structure it sketches would, at least in broad outline, give us a recognizably Aristotelean picture of the scala naturae in which animals are p-better than plants and humans are the p-best of the animals.

However, immanentists argue that the passage’s anthropocentric character is more a reflection of its thoroughly goingly anthropocentric context in political theory than it is an expression of Aristotle’s considered view on the structure of nature. Furthermore, Johnson argues, with some plausibility, that Aristotle’s comments on the teleology of plants and animals in the biological works should trump what he says in the Politics. In his view, a detailed look at Aristotle’s employment of teleological explanations in his biology yields the conclusion that “as far as the science of nature is concerned, one kind of organism cannot exist for the sake of another kind of organism: each organism lives for the sake of itself” (Teleology 202). If Johnson is right about this, then we will have to give up on the idea that homonymously good substances are p-comparable in virtue of their teleological relations to one another.

This is not the proper place to survey the twists and turns of the debate between immanentists and interactionists. Instead, I wish to offer what I take to be a new consideration that favors some type of interactionist reading which may help make the p-comparable solution more acceptable to immanentist skeptics. The passage I want to focus on is Aristotle’s famous
A comparison between an army, a household, and the cosmos from *Met.* XII, 10. The basic point Aristotle wants to make in this passage will, no doubt, be familiar: the cosmos, like an army, contains goodness in two distinct ways; both in its orderly arrangement (*taxis*) and in the single, separate being that is the source of that order (god in the cosmos, the general in the army) (*Met.* 1075a 11-15). Aristotle elaborates that “all things are ordered together (*suntetaktaĩ*) somehow, but not all alike—both fishes and fowls and plants; and the world is not such that one thing has nothing to do with another, but they are connected. For all are ordered together to one end (*pros men gar hen apanta suntetaktaĩ*)” (*Met.* 1075a15-18). He also likens the cosmic order to that of a household: the lowest beings in each hierarchy have more freedom to act at random, but contribute least to the good of the whole, while the highest beings in each have more regimented activity but contribute the most to the good of the whole (1075b19-24).

I will assume that the cosmic order of natural and divine substances Aristotle describes in this passage is a teleological one. Admittedly, this assumption is not irresistible; the word “*telos*” does not appear in the line; it merely that asserts that all things are ordered together “to one.” Since the noun is left entirely unspecified, it is even possible that Aristotle does not mean to assert that there is a single *substance* toward which the cosmos is ordered; he might instead be claiming that the universe is ordered in accordance with one pattern or plan. This reading does not seem very plausible to me, however: the analogy of the general and army is supposed to show that it is possible for the good of an ordered whole to consist both in the order and in the

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13 The highest beings in the household are the freemen, while the lowest are beasts and slaves. Aristotle does not spell out exactly what their cosmic analogues are, but I take it that sublunary being as a whole corresponds to slaves and beasts, while celestial bodies and their movers correspond to the freemen. Since the general and army metaphor suggests that the prime mover is outside the *taxis* altogether (*kechōrismenon ti kai auto kath’ auto*), it is possible that Aristotle does not intend for it to map on to the freemen in the *oikos* analogy (*Met.* 1075a12).
single, separate thing on which the order depends. As such, the context strongly suggests that the prime mover is the “one” toward which the cosmos is ordered.

Even if this point is conceded however, immanentists might argue that god could be a non-teleological source of cosmic order. Indeed, some commentators argue that the present passage provides evidence against the received view that the prime mover is only a final cause and not an efficient cause, since a general is an efficient cause of an army’s order rather than the final cause (e.g. Miller Divine 279). However, if we grant that the prime mover is at least final cause (whether or not it is also an efficient cause), then it seems plausible that the order Aristotle is describing has a teleological dimension. Indeed, the translation quoted above (by Ross, the immanentist), even supplies teleological language to specify the relation between natural substances and their divine cause.

I claim that if we are permitted to assume that the cosmic order described in Met. XII, 10 is teleological then strong reasons emerge in favor of interactionism. In making this claim, I am disagreeing with David Sedley’s assessment of the passage. Sedley does defend a robustly interactionist view of Aristotle’s teleology, but argues that Met. XII, 10 does not provide significant support for his position. Rather, he argues that the passage is compatible with, but of “neutral evidential value” for the thesis that Aristotle thinks of the universe as “a complex chain of teleological causation, whereby all things contribute to the good of beings higher up than themselves in the natural hierarchy” (Sedley Lambda 332 n.9). I think he rules out the passage as a source of evidence too hastily. Sedley is correct, of course, that Aristotle does not explicitly affirm that the world is a teleological order of the kind he describes. However, I argue that he
neglects to consider the implausible assumptions that immanentists must affirm in order to make their position consistent with the passage.

Strictly speaking, the bare idea that the cosmos is a teleological \textit{suntaxis} (ordering-together) rules out the strictest versions of the immanentist interpretation straightaway. That is, it rules out readings according to which every substance has a teleological orientation toward its own end, but that the ends of different species are entirely independent from one another. I take it that one of Aristotle’s primary aims in the chapter is precisely to \textit{reject} that picture of the cosmos: “the world is \textit{not} such that one thing has nothing to do with another” because all things are ordered together in relation to a single end. At the very least, therefore, each substance is ordered toward its own end and is \textit{also} ordered toward the divine in some way.

Admittedly, however, immanentists could grant this relation, but still deny that any non-divine substance is teleologically subordinated to any other. They could argue that each substance is directed to its own end and that, in realizing that end, it acts for the sake of the divine as well. Agreeing with Charles Kahn, they could claim that the prime mover is “a kind of metaphysical magnet” that spurs substances toward their own respective ends (184). On this view, we need not say that a plant’s end is subservient to a fish’s or fowl’s. Rather, they \textit{all} act to attain their immanent ends and, in the very same acts, to approach the divine nature to the extent that their forms allow. This would amount to a kind of egalitarian teleological ordering-together; all beings are subordinated to god, but they are otherwise equal members of the cosmic household, at least so far as their final causes are concerned.

I contend that the egalitarian view only needs to be stated to seem suspicious as an interpretation of Aristotle. The household and the army are strictly hierarchical social structures
as Aristotle conceives of them. It would be highly misleading of him to use two institutions characterized by gradations of rank to illustrate a system of ends that is non-hierarchical (aside from the universal subordination of all things to god). Further, Aristotle indisputably thinks that the different substances form a hierarchy of value. It would be odd if he thought that the superiority of one substance over another had no implication for or correlation with a hierarchy of ends among different substances. It would be incongruous, for example, if he believed human beings to be superior to horses, but denied that the equine good were in any way subordinate to the human good. It would be especially surprising in light of the thesis that “in the world of nature and of art, the inferior (cheiron) always exists for the sake of the superior (beltionos) (Pol. 1333a22; cf. MM 1208a13). It seems more plausible to me that Aristotle would think that the hierarchy of substances is also a teleological chain. From this perspective, Aristotle’s explicit affirmation in the Politics that there is a teleological hierarchy throughout nature does not seem to be an aberration from his usual immanentist position, as Ross and others claim, but seems wholly in keeping with his principles.

On a slightly more speculative note, I would submit that one of the underlying motivations behind immanentist interpretations may be to save Aristotle from himself. It is widely (and plausibly) believed that a hierarchical and anthropocentric picture of the world serves as an ideological legitimation for many of the socially unjust and ecologically unsustainable practices in history and contemporary society. An immanentist interpretation of Aristotle would partially absolve him of the charge of promoting a worldview that is pernicious in these respects and, to a certain extent, enlist him in the fight against such worldviews. Hence, Johnson argues that “we have overcome the Aristotelian view that the earth is at the center or the
spatial universe, but we still need to come over to the Aristotelian view that humans are not at
the center of the axiological universe” since each natural substance is an independent locus of
intrinsic value (Teleology 5).

In many ways, I am in agreement with Johnson: humans are decidedly not the axiological
center of Aristotle’s universe (since god is). I would also argue that Johnson is right to attribute
to Aristotle the view that every substance has a kind of non-instrumental goodness. Indeed,
below I will argue that the instrumental type of teleology among substances (in which one
species benefits a higher species) is less fundamental for Aristotle than the exemplary or
approximative type (in which the lower species approaches the nature of the higher). I would
even go so far as to suggest that Aristotle’s perspective on the goodness of non-human
substances could potentially serve as the inspiration for a kind of neo-Aristotelian environmental
ethic. Nevertheless, I contend that such an ethic would have to diverge from Aristotle himself to
a significant degree: for Aristotle, the human species is the axiological focal point of the
sublunary world and the value of other sublunary beings is subordinate to ours. This may be
somewhat disappointing to those of us looking to Aristotle to illuminate contemporary
philosophical and moral problems. But I think it would be a mistake to let that disappointment
alter our exegesis too radically. Immanentism about teleology might make for a more intriguing
or defensible position in contemporary debates, but it does not appear to be Aristotle’s own view.

So, if we accept an interactionist interpretation of Aristotle’s teleology, what follows for
the comparability of trans-specifically homonymous goods? In short, it allows us to conceive of
the goodness of every substance as connected by a web of serial core dependence, and thus, to
conceive of the whole cosmos as a grand p-scale of value. To confine ourselves for now to
instrumental teleology, consider the following simplified illustration: water, falling from the sky as rainfall, attains its good by descending to its natural place. But the aquatic good might be subordinated to the good of, say, an oak tree, which uses the water to grow and obtain the perfection proper to oak trees. The oak tree’s goodness, in turn, might be subordinated to that of a squirrel, for whom it provides food and a habitat, allowing it to attain and actualize the excellence proper to its species. In this example, the water, the oak, and the squirrel are homonymous goods. But the sense in which water is good is posterior to the sense in which the oak is good, which is posterior to the sense in which the squirrel is good. Consequently, squirrel is p-better than the oak, which is p-better than the water. Ultimately, this chain extends upward toward the prime mover, who serves as the core nature and primary sense of the core dependent multivocal, “good,” in virtue of being the ultimate final cause of all goods.

Obviously, there are plenty of questions and obscurities about how we should think about this theocentric teleological hierarchy in detail. And since Aristotle’s discussions about the teleological relations among different kinds of substances are sketchy at best, some of the obscurities may not be ultimately clarifiable; we may lack the resources needed to construct a wholly satisfying picture of the teleological order of Aristotle’s universe. Nevertheless, I contend that we can at least develop a serviceable conception of the relations of final causation, and thus, p-comparability of goods in different species.

In order to do so it will be helpful to recall that, if the arguments from chapter five are on track, it is not the case that all teleology must involve the lower being benefitting the higher; approximation is a teleological relationship as well. Up to this point, I have been discussing teleological relations among different kind of substances as if the main or only type of those
relations were instrumental, rather than approximative. I have done so because the passage from *Politics* I, 8 is a focal point in the debates between immanentists and interactionists and it discusses the teleological relations among different substances in instrumental terms. Nevertheless, I argue that approximative final causation is a more promising candidate than instrumental teleology for establishing the p-scale of value across species of substances.

While I do not deny that there are relations of instrumental teleology across species, there are significant problems with using those relations to ground the core dependence of trans-specifically homonymous goods. To see why, consider the following issue: does each species of substance have exactly one direct teleological superior? Or can a lower substance be for the sake of more than one higher substance? The former option, according to which each type of substance is for the sake of exactly one substance above it, would provide a satisfyingly tidy vision of the cosmos and the value within it. Namely, it would allow us to arrange every substance on a single line and each species would represent a p-degree of goodness. But if instrumental teleology is at issue, it would also imply a completely untenable conception of the natural world. Assuming that mice, for example, exist for the sake of some higher species, there would surely be more than one such species; owls, hawks, snakes, and cats all seem to be *prima facie* plausible candidates. The problem becomes even worse if we consider the apparent impossibility of selecting the single species which is directly superordinate to, say, water. The consequence is that any conception of the instrumental teleological order that accords with even a remotely realistic understanding of the ecosystem would involve an array of multiple, crisscrossing for-the-sake-of-which chains from which it would be difficult to derive a single, unilinear order of value, to say the least.
We might attempt to get around this problem by recalling that the analysis of p-comparability in chapter four left open the possibility of p-equally good substances. Thus, multiple species can occupy the same tier on the teleological hierarchy. With this in mind, we could try to bring some order to the relations of instrumental teleology. We could begin with the idea that those classes of animals which Aristotle variously calls “more perfect” or “more honorable” serve as a telos for the less perfect. Aristotle never provides us with a comprehensive account of the scale of perfection among animals in one place, but Andrew Coles’ helpful reconstruction of it identifies eleven classes of animals in ascending order, with testacea at the lowest level and humans at the highest (311). Perhaps, then, these eleven genera comprise eleven links on the teleological chain and eleven degrees on a p-scale of value. We could, the, extend the scale upward to the heavenly bodies and the separate substances, and downward, to plants, inanimate compounds, and simple bodies, to arrive at a completed sketch of a p-comparable chain of being.

New problems crop up, however, when we look closely at what such a scale would imply. For example, the sixth class on Coles’ reconstructed scala naturae is that of oviparous quadrupeds like crocodiles and tortoises, while the fifth is that of birds. Consequently, on this reading, Aristotle would apparently be committed to the thesis that crocodiles exist for the benefit of birds. And although Aristotle was familiar with Herodotus’ account of the trochilus, the bird that eats leeches from the mouths of crocodiles (Histories 2:68,4-5), it seems unlikely that he would claim that this relationship (remarkable though it may be) would be sufficient to

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14Coles also, plausibly, places the class of plants below the lowest class of animals. Although this seem like a frustratingly blunt classification, leaving us in the dark about the degree to which there are degrees of value among plants, Aristotle himself is almost entirely silent on this question in the extant works. Coles does not place inanimate substances on the scale at all, but it seems obvious that they belong on the tier(s) below plants.
justify the wholesale teleological subordination of oviparous quadrupeds to birds (HA 612a20-25, EE 1236b8-9). Likewise, Coles argues that Aristotle would place viviparous cetaceans, like whales and dolphins, between birds and viviparous hoofed quadrupeds, like horses and goats. It is difficult to imagine how a dolphin’s nature could be such as to promote a goat’s flourishing.

These problems largely disappear if we think of the teleological relations among different species of substance as approximative rather than instrumental. If we do so, then there can be teleological relations between two species of substance even when the lower substance does not do anything to promote the good of the higher. Similarly, the worry that the teleological order will be too messy to generate a unilinear gradation of value seems more manageable if we assume that approximative rather than instrumental teleology is at issue. While it might be difficult to sketch it out in detail, it is much easier to imagine a unilinear ranking of substances that progressively approximate one another (and, ultimately, the divine), than it is to imagine a unilinear, instrumental teleological chain.

One might object that Aristotle’s only discussion of the final causal relations among different species of plants and animals is explicitly in instrumental terms and, thus, that there is no textual support for a sublunar order of exemplary final causes. While I concede that Aristotle does not discuss approximative teleological relations among species of plant and animal, in my view it seems reasonable to suppose that he would think they exist. After all, the human teleological subordination to the eternal substances cannot be a matter of benefitting those substances; at least all the links on the chain of being above humans involve the approximative type of final causation rather than the instrumental type. Why wouldn’t the approximative chain extend further into the sublunar realm? And, in fact, there is extensive evidence that Aristotle
thinks of the human form as a kind of paradigm which the forms of other animals imitate with greater or lesser degrees of success (see Lloyd 26-43 for a detailed survey of this evidence). Once we accept that exemplary causation is a genuine type of final causation, it seems natural to interpret this progressive imitation of the human form in teleological terms.

However, there is another problem with positing a chain of exemplary causation that cannot be dispensed with so easily. As I indicated earlier, I do not want to deny that there are instrumental teleological relations among different species of substances for Aristotle. In my view, *Politics* I, 8 is too unambiguous to deny that there are such relations. Rather, I agree with Margaret Scharle’s reading, according to which there is both an instrumental and an approximative teleological ordering in Aristotle’s scale of nature, but that these two orders are distinct from one another (180-181). The difficulty is that, in positing two distinct chains of final causation, I have opened up the possibility of discrepancies between them. For example, as polydactylous viviparous quadrupeds, mice would seem to be higher on the exemplary teleological chain than owls or snakes. Assuming that mice are lower than either on the chain of beneficiaries, we are faced with the prospect of two incompatible accounts of the serial core dependence of substantial goods and, consequently, two incompatible value rankings of substances. This is a serious problem and I am, admittedly, not certain that I have a wholly satisfactory resolution to it. However, I think that there are at least some resources available for mitigating it.

To begin to see how, we should note that Sedley argues that the relations of instrumental finality among substances is grounded, not primarily in the natures of the individual substances involved, but in the nature of the cosmos as a whole (*Anthropocentric* 192). So, when an owl
swoops down from a tree and eats a mouse, it is primarily the cosmic form that is being actualized more perfectly, rather than the forms of mouse or the owl. As an alternative to Sedley’s account, Scharle argues that the chain of instrumental teleology is grounded in the superordinate substance’s nature. For example, mice are for the sake of owls because it is in the nature of an owl to eat mice (Scharle 181). We need not definitively commit to either commentator’s proposal to notice that they agree that the instrumental relations are not grounded in the natures of the subordinate substances. That is to say, even if mice are for the sake of owls, it is not part of the murine good to be eaten by owls. On Scharle’s account, however, the approximative teleological chain does have roots in each individual substance’s nature. It is part of a mouse’s nature, for example, to imitate the nature of higher beings (and ultimately of the highest being) in its own distinctive way.

This consideration suggests to me that the chain of approximative teleology would be more fundamental for discerning the cosmos as a p-scale of goodness. The basic idea behind the p-comparable solution is that the links among the different substances’ (non-identical) natures as goods permit them to be compared. In the approximative kind of teleology, we need not “zoom out” to the level of a higher substance or the cosmos as a whole to see the relevant links. Rather, the goodness of the lower substance itself points toward the goodness of the higher substance. In a chain of instrumental finality, a mouse can benefit an owl, but only if it ceases embody its murine goodness and becomes food for the owl instead. But in the order of exemplary causes it is

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15Scharle’s proposal is appealing in that it seems less metaphysically extravagant than Sedley’s. On the other hand, De Caelo I, 9 provides strong evidence that Aristotle thinks of the whole cosmos as a hylomorphic composite substance, and it would seem to follow that the cosmos is the kind of thing that can actualize its form to a greater or lesser degree.
precisely insofar as a mouse embodies own distinctive form of goodness that it approaches a higher kind of goodness.

**The Convergence of the Two Solutions**

At this point, a certain convergence between the p- and s-comparable solutions should be discernable. Admittedly, a significant and ineliminable difference remains between them: the s-comparable solution must posit a single sense in which all substances are good to greater or lesser degrees, whereas the p-comparable solution allows that the teleological approximation of one substance by another homonymously good substance is sufficient to secure their comparability. Nevertheless, both solutions are strikingly similar in that they envisage the whole chain of being as an order of substances progressively approaching the nature of the prime mover. Moreover, I argue that there is reason to suppose that the rankings of beings from substantially worst to substantially best from the s-comparable solution will closely mirror the teleological hierarchy of substances from the p-comparable solution.

To begin to see why the evaluative rankings would be so similar, I suggest that we turn, once again, to the *Protrepticus*. In chapter VII, 41.27, Aristotle gives one of his clearest expressions in the corpus of a general criterion for betterness. I contend that this criterion can be read alongside other passages from the canonical works to illuminate the connection between the teleological order of the cosmos and the abstract, ontological features in virtue of which lower substances approach the divine nature. In the context of the passage in question, Aristotle is arguing that the virtue of the intellect is the most choiceworthy virtue humans can attain. To make that case, he begins with a general premise about what makes one thing “better by nature” than another and provides some familiar illustrations: “that which is by nature more authoritative
[archikōteron] and more commanding [mallon hēgemonikon] is better, as a human is over the other animals; thus soul is better than body (for it is more authoritative) as is the part of the soul which has reason and thought for this kind of thing prescribes and proscribes how we ought to act and not to act” (Iambl. Proptrep. Chap. VII 41. 27-30).16

At first glance, the criterion of betterness Aristotle offers in this passage might seem to have limited application. Even if we accept the theses that the rational part of the soul is the natural commander of the other capacities of human nature, and that humans naturally rule over other animals, it might seem difficult to extend the idea to the other parts of the chain of being. Aristotle cashes out the authoritativeness of the rational part of the soul in terms of its role as the part of the human being that issues the commands by which the whole human acts (or at least ought to act). But the analysis of authority as giving commands to lower beings would arguably not work for sorting out most of the other relations of relative authority that might exist in nature. At the summit of the chain of being, Aristotle’s god is not the type of being that gives commands at all, at least according to most interpretations of Aristotle’s theology. On the lower end, it is not intuitive why we should suppose that there is a “chain of command,” so to speak, among different species of non-rational animals. The problem only seems worse when applied to plants and inanimate substances: is there any sense in which a tree or a lump of bronze, can rule or be ruled?

16In addition to general worries about the authenticity of the Protrepticus, one might argue that the use of archikos rather than kurios raises suspicions that this passage could be un-Aristotelian. However, there are several passages in the recognized corpus in which Aristotle uses the same terminology: “the superior [archikōteran] science is more of the nature of wisdom than the ancillary” (Met. 982a16). “The science to which knows to what end each thing must be done is the most authoritative [archikōtē] of the sciences” (Met. 982b4). “By nature the higher faculty is always more authoritative [archikōtera] and gives rise to movement” (DA 434a15). “the courage and justice of a man and a woman are not, as Socrates maintained, the same; but the one is authoritative [archike] and the other is subordinate” (Pol. 1260a22-23)
However, the *Politics* makes clear that Aristotle thinks of ruling and being ruled as a universal, natural phenomenon, applicable far beyond the domain of beings that can literally issue or follow commands: “in all things which form a composite whole and which are made up of parts, whether continuous or discrete, a distinction between the ruling (*to archon*) and the subject element (*to archomenon*) comes to light. Such a duality exists in living creatures, originating from nature as a whole; even in things which have no life there is a ruling principle, as in a musical mode (*harmonias*)” (*Pol.* 1254a29-32). Aristotle’s line of thought here implies that, for every material substance which is not an element, there is some principle which gives the substance its order and unity. The thesis that the rational part of the soul is the ruling part of the human being is just one specific instantiation of this broad principle of natural rule.

Now, one might object that it is one thing to say that each composite substance has a ruling principle internal to it and quite another to say that *different* substances stand in relations of ruler and subject to one another. However, Aristotle moves quite freely in his analysis between ruling elements within substances and the natural rule of one substance over another. The context in which he invokes the principle of natural rule is his argument for the existence of natural slaves, and he clearly also thinks the natural rule of humans over other animals is another instantiation of the principle (*Pol.* 1254b10-25). Further, as Fred Miller Jr. has pointed out, the doctrine from *Met.* XII, 10 that god is the source of universal order and goodness is just the application of the principle of natural rule on a cosmic scale (39). Consequently, Aristotle’s point

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17Aristotle might think that the principle holds even of the simple bodies: inasmuch as fire, say, must be analyzed into the hot and the dry inhering in an indeterminate substratum, it too would count as a composite (cf. GC II, 1-3). It is also worth noting that the reference to harmony suggests that the principle of natural rule applies to non-substantial beings as well as substances, but the application to substances is most relevant for present purposes.
is that the whole of nature, living and non-living, celestial and terrestrial, is suffused with relations of ruling and being-ruled.

Aristotle’s statement that the ruling principle is what gives a composite its unity is reminiscent of his claims about form from *Metaphysics* VII. Famously, Aristotle’s conclusion in that book is that the substance of a thing is its form. Grasping the form of a thing gives us the answer to the question “why do these parts form this whole?” (*Met.* 1041b3), and the form is the cause in virtue of which a composite substance is a well-defined unity in a way that goes beyond the unity possessed by a mere heap of matter (*Met.* 1041b12). It does not seem like much of a leap, therefore, to suggest that the form is the ruling principle of any given hylomorphic composite.

If we read these passages from the *Protrepticus*, *Politics*, and *Metaphysics* together, an intriguing set of theses begins to take shape. The more authoritative a substance’s ruling principle is the better that substance is. Since ruling principles are those that confer unity upon substances, it seems natural to suppose that the more authoritative ruling principles would be those of substances which have a higher kind of unity. And since form is the source of a composite substance’s unity (as well as its very substantiality) authority turns out to have surprisingly deep roots in Aristotle’s metaphysics. To call one substance more authoritative than another is to say something about its form, essence, and ontological status.

I argue that we can discern at least five distinct levels of unity among substances in Aristotle’s cosmos (with room for more fine-grained distinctions within each level), which would correspond to levels of authority and goodness. At the lowest level we would have inanimate substances. Since Aristotle rejects atomism, he does not think there is any such thing
as a single unit of water, for example. Rather, he holds that any given quantity of water is potentially infinitely divisible and that each part that is divided will have the same aquatic character as the whole (GC 328a6-15). Consequently, in Metaphysics VII, 16 Aristotle argues that inanimate things are not substances at all (apparently reversing his position from Physics II, 1) because they lack the requisite unity and are like a heap (Met. 1040b1). Nevertheless, elements and inanimate compounds must have a basic degree of unity since they have a phusis, an inner principle of motion and rest which gives them determinate, essential characteristics and causal powers.

Living things, on the other hand, have a higher degree of unity: in virtue of their souls, plants and animals form ordered, homeostatic wholes (DA 416a15-17). The various parts of a plant or animal are organized into a single system, directed toward the end of flourishing that is proper to its species. A human’s soul would arguably confer yet a higher level of unity, since it organizes our faculties by reference to an eternal and immaterial entity, nous. And in some, notoriously obscure sense, Aristotle thinks that human beings most truly are their intellects (EN 1178a1; cf. Iambl. Proptrep. Chap. VII 42.13ff). The celestial spheres would occupy a fourth tier of unity: in addition to being animate substances with intellects, they are always composed of the same, uniform, eternal matter (DC 270a13-25; 292a19-20). And finally, the prime mover is

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18In my own view, the position from the Physics is more defensible, since if we deny that inanimate beings are substances at all we will be forced to conclude that there are accidents that exist without inhering in any substance. I would argue that the position that elements and inanimate compounds are substances in a lower sense than living things could serve as a plausible middle way between the two positions. This intermediate position is suggested by Aristotle’s remark a few chapters earlier in Metaphysics VII that living things are “especially substances” (malista ousiai) (Met. 1034a4).

19In a similar passage from book IX (1168b28-34), Aristotle glosses this doctrine with claim that any systematic whole (sustēma) is most of all (malista) its most authoritative (kuriōtaton) part. There are obviously multiple ways of interpreting this somewhat opaque claim. Some relevant secondary literature includes Reeve xxx-xxxii, Kraut Human Good 128-131, Lear 90, Charles 219-221, and Scott 231-233.
as unified as it is possible for a substance to be since it is immaterial, perfectly actual, self-thinking thought. We should note that since the prime mover is not a composite substance, he does not have ruling and ruled elements within himself. Rather, he is himself the ruling principle and the source of unity of the entire cosmos (cf. Met. 1076a3).

This gradient of increasingly authoritative forms and unified substances would broadly map onto a scale of goodness *qua* substance, assuming Aristotle believes in such a thing. But even if he does not think that there is a univocally predicable feature of substantial goodness, the increasing degrees of authority and unity would still correspond to the order of substances’ teleological approximations of one another and, ultimately, of god. On either approach, Aristotle has an elegant way of integrating the trans-specific homonymy of good substances with an axiological hierarchy of those same substances: every type of substance in the universe aims at its own distinctive good. This follows from the fact that every kind of substance has a distinct form and the good of each substance is the perfect actualization of its form. A particular substance is a good specimen of its kind to the extent that it possesses the virtues that enable it to achieve the end proper to substances of that kind. However, for every substance that is not the prime mover, the proprietary good of each species is also connected to a higher kind of goodness. On the s-interpretation, it is the highest degree of substantial goodness that is available to substances of that species, and the closest approximation of the perfect substantial goodness of god. On a p-interpretation, there need not be any such thing as substantial goodness, univocally predicated of all substances. Rather, there is an order of priority among the different types of species-indexed goodness. But p-interpreters can nevertheless argue that when a substance acts
in accordance with the excellences proper to its form it also engages in the teleological approximation of higher, homonymously good substances, ultimately, once again, of god.

Fire, for example, cannot achieve the pure actuality, eternity, unchanging unity, etc. of the prime mover, but it can completely actualize its own form by ascending to its natural place just below the lunar sphere. Plants and animals can accomplish superior approximations by growing to maturity, flourishing, and producing offspring. Some humans can more directly approximate god by engaging in contemplative activity; other humans fall short of the contemplative life but nevertheless imitate the divine by engaging in practical reasoning in the polis or the household. Likewise, the stars both achieve their own good and lovingly imitate the prime mover by revolving eternally in their perfect circular orbits. In every case, substances aim to achieve their species-indexed form of goodness and thereby ascend to the highest place in the cosmic hierarchy a substance with that form can inhabit.

20 Or, in the case of slaves, at least responding to the reasoning of their masters in the household.
CONCLUSION

I have now completed my argument about how we should frame and respond to the incomparability problem in Aristotle. However, it may be helpful to take a synoptic look at the most important conclusions of the argument. We began with an inconsistent triad of theses, all apparently endorsed by Aristotle: the comparability of goods, the homonymy of the good, and the incomparability of homonyms. Although the tension among these theses has not received much attention in the literature, I argued that it poses a serious challenge to Aristotle’s entire theory of goodness. To make matters worse, I argued that the incomparability problem quickly proliferates into three sub-problems, corresponding to the three levels of axiological homonymy: the transcendental, the trans-specific, and the intraspecific. My three-tiered framing of the problem is arguably more optimistic than Chris Shields’—according to which every type of intrinsic good is apparently incomparable with every other—but it nevertheless makes for a difficulty that is formidable enough in its own right.

How we should respond to the problem depends, in large part, on whether we take Aristotle’s denial of the incomparability of homonyms in the *Protrepticus* to be authentic and authoritative. If we are permitted to read the *Protrepticus*’ theory of comparability into Aristotle’s mature thought, then we can avail ourselves of core dependence to establish evaluative rankings among homonymous goods. On the other hand, if we do not accept the authenticity of the *Protrepticus* fragments, or if we regard positions they express as definitively superseded by those expressed in the canonical works, then we cannot make use of core
dependence in diffusing the incomparability problem; the only acceptable evaluative rankings will be those among synonymous goods.

Consequently, I argue that there are promising p-comparable solutions available to the transcendental and intraspecific incomparability problems. The transcendental incomparability problem can be resolved using p-comparability, provided we assume that the structure of transcendental axiological homonymy mirrors that of transcendental ontological homonymy; accidental goods, like accidental beings, are ordered toward substance as their core, and consequently have a lower degree of value than the substances on which they depend. Likewise, intraspecifically homonymous goods are ordered by serial causal relations toward the end of the species of being for which they are goods. Thus, they can be evaluatively ranked in accordance with their proximity to that end. These solutions to transcendental and intraspecific homonymy are not available to s-interpreters; nor, I argue, are any other obvious solutions forthcoming.

S-interpretations have a more promising way of approaching the trans-specific level of axiological homonymy than the other two levels: they can argue that goods of different species can be ranked in terms of goodness standards set by more generic goodness-fixing kinds. Ultimately, they can argue that substance is itself a goodness-fixing kind and that substances of different species can be ranked as better or worse qua substance. I further argued that goodness qua substance is best understood as divinity, and thus, that the cosmic scale of substantial goodness is best understood as a hierarchy in which different substances approximate the nature of the prime mover to a greater or lesser degree. The p-interpretation, on the other hand, need not construe substance as a goodness-fixing kind. Instead, it only needs to find causal relations among the proper goods of each species of substance. These causal relations would allow us to
think of the goods of the various substances throughout the cosmos as related to one another in a p-comparable chain of serial core dependence. Ultimately, I argued that the most promising candidate for the relevant causal relation is that approximative final causation. Thus, the p-comparable solution, like the s-comparable solution, envisions the cosmos as composed of many different substances progressively approximating the divine nature in their own unique ways.

The incomparability problem threatens Aristotle’s theory of the good, and arguably his entire worldview, at its foundation. So long as it remains unresolved, Aristotle would have a difficult time giving a satisfactory account of the great plurality, yet ultimate order and unity, of the goods attainable in human life and society. He would likewise lack the resources to give a satisfyingly integrated theory of the value and dignity of the substances that compose the sublunary natural world, of the divinity of the heavens, or of the value of the unmoved movers at the pinnacle of the cosmic hierarchy. At the very least, he would be unable to explain how all these vastly different forms of goodness relate to one another; he would be forced to admit that they are simply irreducibly distinct types of goodness, which can no more be compared with one another than can the sharpness of a knife with the sharpness of a musical piece. This would be a disappointingly fragmentary picture of goodness with which to saddle a thinker like Aristotle.

Yet, as I hope I have shown in this dissertation, Aristotle has ways to escape this predicament. If my arguments are correct, Aristotle’s vision of the cosmos is one in which goodness, like being itself, is irreducibly heterogeneous, but nevertheless not fragmentary or unintelligible. Rather, the whole reality is an organized system of distinct goodness-properties in which everything from the beauty of nature, to the values of the moral life, to the divine intelligence, has its place.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


VITA

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