

Ια4: The reconstruction of Platonism and wisdom as *περὶ τὰγαθοῦ*

In A1-2 Aristotle has sketched a general program of wisdom as a science *περὶ ἀρχῶν*, which is supposed to be equally acceptable to pre-Socratic-style physicists, to Platonic dialecticians, and to Pythagorizing mathematicians, each of whom will think that his own preferred discipline is the best way to carry out this program; Aristotle will then try to show them, beginning in A3, that their disciplines are insufficient, and that his new discipline is needed to achieve the ends they all share. Aristotle is officially a neutral arbiter between the different claimants to wisdom (as the Eleatic Stranger is between the Giants and the gods or the friends of the Forms), but it is clear that his sympathies are closer to the Platonic side; or, rather, what is clear is that he is primarily addressing an audience of Academic dialecticians and mathematicians (and their actual or potential students), and that he is trying to show that he can achieve their shared goals better than they can. Beyond the broad goals that are shared even with the physicists, these include, notably, the expectation that wisdom should be about incorporeal and unchangeable *ἀρχαί* (everything unchangeable is incorporeal, and everything incorporeal is unchangeable except perhaps a Platonic self-moving soul). Thus in *Metaphysics* A8 he complains about the physicists that "they seek the *στοιχεῖα* only of bodies, and not of incorporeals, although there are also incorporeals" (988b24-6--he gives no argument in A that incorporeals exist, apparently assuming that his audience will share this conviction, although of course he will argue for it later); by contrast with this limited approach, the Platonists and Pythagoreans "who consider all the things that are, and suppose that some beings are sensible and others are not sensible, are clearly investigating both kinds; and for this reason one would rather spend time on them, [asking] what they have said well or ill for the investigation that is now before us" (989b24-9). Obviously Aristotle is not saying that the dialecticians and mathematicians are right about the *ἀρχαί*: when Aristotle compares the modern speculations of the Academics with the archaic crudities of the physicists, he is often setting the Academics up for a fall.¹ Sometimes his point is that although their aim to find *ἀρχαί* beyond the physical realm is laudable, the disciplines they have chosen are inadequate, since dialectic and mathematics are not about any further substances, but are being fictitiously treated as if they were about some domain of substances in order to make them plausible rivals to physics;² sometimes the point is that the Academics have taken over questionable assumptions from the physicists about the *ἀρχαί* (e.g. that the *ἀρχαί* are *στοιχεῖα*, or contraries), and that they therefore fall into the same *aporai* as the physicists; sometimes the point is that the supposedly non-physical objects that they posit are all too similar to physical things, with the implication that the Academics have simply imagined these objects by extrapolation from the familiar physical things, and have no genuine knowledge of a realm beyond the physical.

Thus in the fifth *aporia* of *Metaphysics* B:

In what way we say that the Forms are causes and substances by themselves has been said in the first discussions of them [i.e. in *Metaphysics* A]; and although they involve difficulty in many places,³ what is most absurd is to say that there are

¹cp. Iβ3 on B#12 1002a8-11 and K2 1060a24-5, using a similar strategy; perhaps some of that discussion should be brought up here

²did I talk about the equivalence of *οὐσία* and *χωριστόν* in Ια3? if not, add some reference

³following EJ; or, with Ab, "many difficulties"

natures beyond those which are within the heaven, but to say that these are the same as the sensibles, except that the former are eternal and the latter are corruptible. For they say that there is a man-himself and horse-itself and health-itself, and nothing else, doing something close to those who said that there were gods, but in human form [ἀνθρωποειδεῖς]: for neither did those people [the poets] make [the gods] anything other than eternal men, nor do these people [the Platonists] make the forms anything other than eternal sensibles. (B2 997b3-12)

Here Aristotle is turning against Plato the arguments which philosophers from Xenophanes to Plato had used against the poets' anthropomorphic descriptions of the gods. When the poets tell us that there are gods, and claim to have knowledge from the gods themselves, this is exciting; but when they actually describe the gods, the results are disappointing, and show that they do not really have knowledge of divine things, and are merely projecting the familiar human things (amplified and made eternal) onto the divine realm. Plato too is claiming knowledge of divine (where this means, at least, eternal) things, but when he describes these divine things as a human being, a horse, and so on, this shows that he has no more knowledge of the divine realm than the poets do.⁴ Aristotle makes this implication more explicit in *Metaphysics Z*:

those who speak of Forms in one way speak rightly by separating them, if indeed these are substances; but in another way not rightly, because they say that the one-over-many is a Form. And the reason is that they cannot tell what the substances of this kind are, the incorruptible ones beyond the individuals and sensibles: so they make these the same in species [or form, εἶδος] with the corruptibles (for these we know), man-himself and horse-itself, adding to the sensibles the word "itself." But even if we had never seen the stars, nonetheless (I deem) there would still be eternal substances beyond those we knew; so also in the present case, even if we cannot tell what they are, it is still doubtless necessary that there should be some. (Z16 1040b27-1041a3)

⁴(i) note on translation: Ross construes "and nothing else" to mean that Plato only says that there is a man-himself (etc.), and says nothing further about these things; I think the point is rather that Plato says that this divine thing is man, himself, and no something other than man. (ii) texts in Plato on the Forms as θεῖα or παρὰ τοῖς θεοῖς (e.g. the *Philebus* on divine and human circles, the "greatest difficulty" of the first part of the *Parmenides*). Aristotle too speaks of the objects of wisdom as "divine": apart from *Metaphysics* A2 983a5-10 (wisdom as divine science in two senses), EE V = NE VI 1141b2-3 says that "wisdom is science and νοῦς of the things that are most noble by nature"; the previous sentence had used the word "divine," arguing that wisdom is not knowledge of human things, since "there are other things much more divine by nature than man, as most manifestly those out of which the cosmos is composed [sc. the heavenly bodies]" (a34-b2). that wisdom, or the highest human virtue, is knowledge of divine things, is also asserted at NE X 1177a11-21, EE VIII 1249b13-20, and *Magna Moralia* I 1197b7. the content of the word "divine" is often unclear: I suppose in general it means "possessing some relevant feature traditionally attributed to the gods," where this feature is often simply eternity, but also may be "being in the best possible state" or the like. to say that an object of wisdom is divine is not to say that it is a god, although Aristotle will in fact argue for this further claim about his first ἀρχή in Λ7, on the basis of an Academic definition of a god as "ζῶον ἰδίον ἄριστον", but this is a tour-de-force intended to redeem a promise from A2; in general he is in no hurry to claim the word "θεός" (too loaded down with contradictory assumptions, and too broadly applied to have much emotional charge) for any object he is seriously discussing.

Here "even if we had never seen the stars" means "even if we had spent all our lives in a cave":⁵ the Platonists, to their credit, have recognized that we are living in a cave here in the sensible world, but they have only fooled themselves into thinking they have found a passageway out. In fact they "have never seen the stars" and are still in the cave, although they have come to believe that some of the things they have seen down here are really the eternal objects up there. In these passages, and in a group of similar passages, Aristotle is not criticizing Plato for separating the objects of wisdom from the familiar things, but, on the contrary, for assimilating these divine things to the familiar things, for applying to them predicates which would really be appropriate only to sensible or to corruptible things; he is making an internal criticism of Plato by the same standards that Plato had used against the poets and the physicists, and he is doing so in the name not of a via media between Plato and the physicists, but as Aubenque rightly says of an "hyperplatonisme."⁶

Even in this last passage, which is highly uncharitable toward Plato, Aristotle ends by offering his readers the hope that, if they persevere with Aristotle in the continuing investigation, they will succeed in reaching the same goal that Plato was striving for, a knowledge of eternal substances beyond the familiar physical ones. And this is part of Aristotle's promise, to a Plato-influenced audience, in the Metaphysics: the project of seeking wisdom in knowledge of the Forms and their ἀρχαί, the highest genera or being and unity (or whatever the ἀρχαί of the Forms turn out to be), may have run into difficulties, and the alternative project of seeking wisdom in knowledge of mathematical things and their ἀρχαί may not work either, but the shared Academic project can nonetheless be saved. In the Metaphysics Z passage Aristotle says "even if we had never seen the stars," "even if we cannot tell what they are," not "even if οἱ περὶ Πλάτωνα cannot tell what they are," "even if you cannot tell what they are." Aristotle himself is in no doubt of his ability to say what these things are, but rhetorically it is better to present himself, as Socrates and the Eleatic Stranger had presented themselves, as engaged in a common enterprise with the audience and sharing the same frustrations and hopes. In the same spirit the B passage starts by recalling "in what way we say that the Forms are causes and substances by themselves," so that the difficulties or absurdities will appear as consequences that the speaker and audience are together trying to avoid, rather than as a refutation of the audience by the speaker. So too in the criticizing the theory of Forms in A9, Aristotle starts by recalling the

⁵compare Aristotle's version of the cave story in the fragment of the De Philosophia, which emphasizes the stars as the things the cave-dwellers (or the underground-mall-dwellers) have not seen. cross-reference to your other discussions of the Z16 passage (and of the B passage in Iβ3), and eliminate duplications so far as possible

⁶Aubenque p.334 ... cite also his footnote here ... go back and give some context, I'm not sure where his discussion begins, it's underway p.314 ... there's another text where he says that Aristotle thinks Plato has contradictory commitments to transcendence and immanence (or the like), and that Aristotle maintains transcendence and rejects immanence. cautions, however (i) this is one form of criticism Aristotle uses against Plato, but not the only one, (ii) Aubenque goes too far in saying that Aristotle's commitment to transcendence implies the denial of any causal connection between incorruptible and corruptible things: it implies that incorruptible things are not στοιχεῖα or immanent (material or formal) ἀρχαί of corruptible things, and Aubenque somehow misreads Δ1 as saying that all ἀρχαί are such, when (esp. when read in conjunction with Δ3) it says the direct opposite: there will be much discussion of this below. (Berti is here right against Aubenque--I think I've made this point before, d eliminate duplication). the neo-Platonic commentators on Aristotle, especially Simplicius, and then afterwards Fârâbî, are rightly sensitive to the fact that Aristotle's criticisms of Plato and other Academics are often criticisms of improperly assimilating divine things to lower things, i.e. attributing to divine things predicates which could in fact be applied appropriately only to lower things; but they are too hasty in assuming that Plato is not genuinely liable to these criticisms, and even that Aristotle knows that Plato is not genuinely liable to these criticisms, but intends only to target naïve readers who took Plato's metaphors literally--perhaps cite some texts, or just refer to my "Self-Motion and Reflection"

means by which "we" show that the Forms exist, in order to conclude with apparent regret that they either do not work or else entail consequences that "we" do not want (990b8-24), and concludes later that although wisdom seeks the causes of the manifest things, "we" have let this slip and have wound up positing new substances (the Forms) without "our" being able to explain more than verbally how they are substances of the manifest things (992b24-8).⁷ Jaeger took these passages as showing "that the first book was written at a time when Aristotle could still call himself a Platonist and a recent supporter of the theory" (Jaeger 1923, p.171 ET), but Aristotle is just following the standard rhetorical practice on frank criticism [*παρηγορία*], which will later be encapsulated by Plutarch: "the most reasonable method would be one that includes and embraces the critic too in the complaint ... those [critics] win good will and trust who appear to share the same faults and to be correcting their friends along with themselves" (How to tell a Flatterer from a Friend c33, 71f8-10 and 72a7-9: Plutarch gives examples using first person plural forms, and cites Socrates as well).⁸

This does not mean that Jaeger was entirely wrong: it is perfectly true that Aristotle is still representing himself as part of a, broadly interpreted, Platonist community. The inference that Aristotle had until recently supported the theory of Forms does not follow (there is no real evidence either way), but Jaeger was perceptive in finding in the Metaphysics traces of a "semi-Platonic" middle period when Aristotle could still represent himself as "the reconstructor of Plato's suprasensible philosophy."⁹ Jaeger is picking up on Natorp's detection of a tension between ontological and theological descriptions of metaphysics, and using it to find survivals of early stages of Aristotle's thought. So Jaeger defends the authenticity of (especially) EK, which Natorp had tried to expel as interpolations by "Platonizing" early Peripatetics, and he defends the theological interpretation of (especially) AB, which Natorp had subjected to violent "ontological" reinterpretations;¹⁰ Jaeger takes all of these texts as presenting a theological project

⁷similarly, in similar contexts and for similar reasons, A9 992a10-11 and B6 1002b12-14, and perhaps some other passages whose interpretation is disputable. as Jaeger noted, in the cases where the passages in A9 which use the first person plural in this way have parallels in M4-5, the M parallel turns the first person into a third person or avoids it by a passive construction. in a number of passages the manuscripts of A9 differ between a first and a third person, or between an active and a passive construction, but in some cases the transmission is unanimous, and Alexander of Aphrodisias had already noted this feature of A as well as of B2 997b3-12 (In Met. 196,20-24); and a corruption away from the first person, whether because it seemed wrong for Aristotle to be placing himself among the proponents of the Forms or because of the M parallels, would be much easier than a corruption in the opposite direction. {the probable cases of discrepancy between A9 and M4-5 are 990b9 vs. 1079a5, 990b11 vs. 1079a7, 990b16 vs. 1079a12, 990b18-19 vs. 1079a14-15, 990b23 vs. 1079a20, 991b7 vs. 1080a6}

⁸Alexander 196,20-24 seems to interpret the first person plurals correctly, as rhetorical. Jaeger is right that there is a difference in M, which avoids these first person plurals, but this is because M is not exhorting to the pursuit of wisdom but simply criticizing a false path to wisdom (namely the path to the ἀρχαί as στοιχεῖα of unmoved things, see Iγ2d); the positive lesson for "us" is only to learn how to avoid others' difficulties or at least to fare no worse
⁹get reference, note on translation, following Code

¹⁰the idea of Platonizing Peripatetic editors seems more plausible if you assume, as Natorp did, that the Eudemian Ethics is by Eudemus. I summarized in a note in Iα1 (I hope) Natorp's main strategies: denying the authenticity of K, surgical excisions in E1 so that it will identify first philosophy with ontology and not with theology (and denying the authenticity of even the post-surgery E); he treats some of Aristotle's references to first philosophy (all of which are in some way theological) as "deviant," others as referring to one particular part of ontology, namely the part that determines the extension of "being" or of "substance" to see whether it is coextensive with "body." he interprets AB as ontological rather than properly archeological, by importing a post-Kantian sense of "principle": "Ihren [= the desired science's] Gegenstand bilden die πρώτα ἀρχαὶ καὶ αἰτίαι (982b8). Das Wort πρώτος hat hier natürlich [!] den für Aristoteles feststehenden, technischen Sinn des begrifflich Fundamentalen, Allem zu Grunde Liegenden; es handelt sich demnach um das Allgmeinste, Abstracteste, von dem, was überhaupt Gegenstand wissenschaftlicher Untersuchung sein kann. Dieser höchste, weil allgmeinste und abstracteste Gegenstand ist aber, wie wir Γ1

of wisdom as a science of eternally unmoved substances to replace the Forms (which had already been discredited, whether by Aristotle's own criticisms or by others'). And this is basically correct, although it would be more accurate to say that the project of these books is archeological, rather than theological, i.e. that wisdom will be an account of the ἀρχαί whether these turn out to be unmoved or not; Aristotle and most of his audience expect that the ἀρχαί will be unmoved, but the physicists' proposals about the ἀρχαί are also fair game for discussion, and are indeed discussed, in parallel with the dialecticians' and mathematicians', in AB. (So we can grant Natorp's point that AB never restrict the domain of discussion to theology, while continuing to insist that they say almost nothing about ontology.) But there is no reason to restrict this theological or archeological conception of wisdom, or Aristotle's criticizing and "reconstructing" Plato within a broadly Platonist community, to any one period of Aristotle's life. Jaeger concludes that a text is middle-period or "semi-Platonic" (by which he means that it is not yet really Aristotelian, even though Aristotle wrote it) by measuring it against ZHΘ, which with Natorp he takes as the normative Aristotelian statement of wisdom as a general science of substance (interpreted as "the universal in the particular"). His overwhelming interest is in the "deviant" texts, and he never seriously examines ZHΘ or reflects critically on the inherited conception of "mature Aristotelianism." Jaeger does briefly argue that ZHΘ cease to carry out the program of the Metaphysics as set out in B or even in E, but as we will see when we come to discuss these books in Parts Two and Three, his arguments are almost ridiculously easy to answer. And without Jaeger's assumptions about the "mature" Aristotle, most of his arguments about chronology collapse. But the most interesting issue is in any case not chronology, but what Aristotle's program was in the Metaphysics and to what extent he carried it out. And perhaps the picture of Aristotle as "the philosopher of immanent form," and the interpretation of ZHΘ to fit this picture, were so widely accepted in Jaeger's time that Jaeger could have come to see crucial elements of the real Aristotle only by representing them as not-yet-Aristotelian, separating the "semi-Platonist" AB from the "mature" and "truly Aristotelian" ZHΘ rather than rethinking what Aristotelianism really was. Jaeger's greatest service was that, in pursuit of his developmental story, he called attention to texts that either conflict, or appear to conflict, with the texts privileged by most modern scholars--and this is valuable whatever solution we finally come to. And Jaeger's greatest disservice was (beyond what people usually complain about, that his method gave rise to endless equipollent chronological hypotheses, and that it encouraged a lazy acceptance of apparent contradictions in the text rather than an effort to think them through philosophically) that he gave an excuse for later scholars to ignore these same texts by dismissing them as immature and not-yet-Aristotelian.¹¹ But to make proper use of Jaeger's contribution for understanding the Metaphysics, we have to start by reading AB (and ΓΔΕ) much

erfahren werden, den Grundbegriff vom 'Gegenstand überhaupt,' wie wir fast im kantischen Ausdruck das aristotelische ὄν ἢ ὅν wiedergeben dürften" ("Thema und Disposition," p.39). earlier German critics going back to Buhle and Tennemann in the late 18th century, had tended to ignore Aristotle's theological descriptions of metaphysics, or assumed that theology could be incorporated as a part of a larger metaphysical project, taking Wolff's metaphysics as their paradigm; Buhle actually translates τὸ ὄν as "das Ding" and τὸ ὄν ἢ ὅν as "das Ding an sich," and regards Aristotle's metaphysics as a forerunner of the Wolffian science of things-in-themselves, including God, which had been exploded by Kant; even the descriptions of wisdom as a science of first causes can be handled by saying that the thing-in-itself is the first cause of appearances. Tiedemann, who does notice that Aristotle is at least sometimes saying that theology is first philosophy (not that it is part of first philosophy), accuses Aristotle of constantly wavering between the different conceptions of metaphysics. as I think I noted in Iα1, Patrizi in 1581 had already claimed that wisdom = first philosophy = theology and ontology were simply two different sciences, and that the last line of E1 identifying them was a forgery by Apellicon

¹¹ alas, even Aubenque, despite his excellent principled statement on the issue (d eliminate duplication from Iα1)

more carefully than Jaeger did, to see what their program really was; and then we have to read ZHΘ (and subsequent books as well) much, much more carefully than Jaeger, to see how far they carry out or depart from that program.

Wisdom as *περὶ ἀγαθοῦ*

An at least equally important "Platonic" feature of the wisdom Aristotle is proposing, beyond the incorporeality and unchangeability of the ἀρχαί, is that the ἀρχή of all things will be the good, and "the best in all nature." Aristotle in fact attributes this thesis, not only to Plato, but also to Anaxagoras and Empedocles,¹² but he is chiefly responding to, and trying to improve on, the claims that Plato had made about the good as an ἀρχή, both in the Republic and in his lecture on the good. It has often been missed in how strong a sense Aristotle intends to vindicate the Platonic thesis that the good is the ἀρχή: since this intention is important for the overall structure of the Metaphysics, missing it can lead the reader badly astray, and it is worth discussing it now, although the content of Aristotle's understanding of the good as an ἀρχή (and of his criticisms of his predecessors' understandings of it) can only emerge in the later course of the discussion.¹³

Metaphysics Λ10 begins by asking "in which way the nature of the universe possesses the good and the best, whether as something separate and itself-by-itself [κεχωρισμένον τι καὶ αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό], or as [the universe's own] order" (1075a11-13): Aristotle answers his own question by saying that it has the good in both ways, but that the good primarily is a separate good-itself, and the goodness in the order of the universe is derivative from the separate good that is its cause (a13-15).¹⁴ Here Aristotle is using deliberately Platonic language to ask whether there is indeed a separate good-itself, as the Republic asserts; and his answer is yes, there is. This is especially striking because Aristotle uses similar language elsewhere in the Metaphysics to ask whether there is a separate one-itself, and whether there is a separate being-itself, and his answer is emphatically no: the good is evidently a special case. But on the question of a good-itself, Aristotle is consistent: there are no texts in the corpus that deny the existence of a good-itself,¹⁵ and there are several that affirm it, though none so clear on its separateness and substantiality as Metaphysics Λ10. Metaphysics Θ9, strikingly, argues that evil does not exist *παρὰ τὰ πράγματα* (1051a4-21, conclusion a17-18), while making no such judgment about good. Once again, this is Platonic language, which Aristotle uses in asking whether "the genera exist *παρὰ* the individuals" (B#8 999a31) or denying that "we would posit the existence of a House *παρὰ* the individual houses" (999b19-20): when Aristotle raises the question whether there is an X *παρὰ* the many X's, his intention is usually to deny it. But he is committed to exhibiting the good as an ἀρχή: Metaphysics Λ10 protests, against Speusippus who had denied it, that "in all things the good is most of all an ἀρχή" (1075a37), and N4-5, asking "whether any of the *στοιχεῖα* and ἀρχαί is what we call the good-itself and the best, or not, but these arise later" (N4 1091a32-3, cf. 29-31), answers that "it is impossible not to posit the good among the ἀρχαί" (N5 1092a9-10).¹⁶ For this reason, since "the ἀρχή and cause must exist *παρὰ* the *πράγματα* of which it is the ἀρχή, and be able to exist when it is separated from them" (B#7 999a17-19), Aristotle is committed to showing that the good-itself, unlike the other X-itselfes that Plato had posited

¹²on Aristotle on Anaxagoras and Empedocles on the good, see Iβ1 below

¹³see especially IIIγ3; also some material in Iβ1, Iβ2c, and Iγ2d

¹⁴note "the good and the best," epexegetic: several parallels

¹⁵note, as in "Aristotle and Plato on God as Nous and as the Good," on EE I,8 1218a33-4: *aporiai*, but solvable *aporiai*

¹⁶note on the conditional in this last sentence, note argument against Annas's interpretation of the passage in Iβ1

beyond their many instances, does indeed exist separately and *παρὰ τὰ πράγματα*.

Aristotle does deny that there is an idea of the good, and this is why he has often been thought to deny that there is a good-itself. But he does not use the expressions "idea of the good" and "good-itself" as equivalent. Rather, he thinks that Plato, like himself and like some other philosophers, was seeking a good-itself as an ἀρχή, and that the "idea of the good" was an entity Plato had posited as a candidate for such a good-itself. This becomes clear from Eudemian Ethics I,8, which considers three candidates for the good-itself--namely "the idea of the good," "the universal [κοινόν] good" (i.e. the goodness present within all good things), and "that for the sake of which" (1218b7-11)--rejecting the first two and endorsing the third; this chapter is thus forced to say something both about what it would mean for something to be "the good-itself" and about what an "idea of the good" would be. The good-itself is "that to which it belongs both to be first among goods, and to be by its presence the cause to the others of their being good" (1217b3-5).¹⁷ Plato thinks that the idea of the good meets both these conditions, but Aristotle argues, not only that there is no idea of the good, but also that even if there were one it would not be the good-itself. An "idea of the good" will not be the universal good (1218a14-15), but rather what would result "if one were to make the universal separate" (a9) by positing an "eternal and separate" instance of it (a12). Aristotle's claim here (as elsewhere) is that the Platonists conceive the "idea of X" simply as one more member of the species X, falling under the same λόγος of X as the other members, which happens to be eternal: he knows that the Platonists say they conceive the idea of X as differing in other ways than merely by being eternal, but he denies that they can give any further content to the difference.¹⁸ An "idea of the good" so conceived could not satisfy the criteria of a good-itself, since the good-itself must be more good than other good things: not just quantitatively better, but good in a more primary way, so as to be "by its presence the cause to the others of their being good." But, as Aristotle says, the idea of the good is simply one more good thing, and "it will not be more good by being eternal,"¹⁹ for "what is white for many days is no more white than what is white for one day" (EE I,8 1218a12-13). This sentence is a deliberate parody of Plato's remark that "a small pure white is whiter than a great mixed white" (Philebus 53b4-5): Plato recognizes that we cannot discover what is best or whitest by taking ordinary good things or white things and making them more spatially extended; for the same reason, Aristotle says, if we take the familiar good things and make them more temporally extended or even eternal, we will not discover something that is truly more good than they. For similar reasons, the good-itself cannot be the immanent universal goodness, since this "would belong even to a small good" (1218b1): what we are looking for is not a predicate that all good things share by virtue of being good, but a cause that explains why they are good, because it is itself most good and they are good to the degree that they are related to it. A final (rather than a formal) cause of good things, "the for-the-sake-of-which as the τέλος", will satisfy both these criteria (1218b10-12): the means are good because they are means to the end, and, having their goodness only through their relation to the end, they are essentially less good than it is (b16-27). So if there is one ultimate end for whose sake everything else should be chosen, "the τέλος of things achievable for a human being," "this will be the good-itself" (b11-12). This, Aristotle says,

¹⁷note the Hippias Major parallel, as in "Aristotle and Plato on God as Nous and as the Good"

¹⁸note the rhetorical question about the added "αὐτό", EE I,8 1218a11-12; parallels elsewhere. references e.g. in the fifth aporia of Metaphysics B. for falling under the same definition: I10 on sameness in species, reference on synonymy thus same λόγος τῆς οὐσίας, the Topics on refuting a definition by showing that it does not apply to the Idea

¹⁹NE I,6 1096b3-4. A parallel passage has apparently dropped out of the manuscripts of the EE at 1218a14; rather than cite the editors' reconstructions, I cite the Nicomachean parallel.

is the goal that φρόνησις and πολιτική aim at, which he will describe in the rest of the Ethics (b12-16).²⁰

But although Aristotle maintains that there is a good-itself in the sense of EE I,8, it might still be thought that this cannot be a good-itself in the metaphysical sense. The good-itself that he is seeking in EE I,8, the one that is relevant for the purposes of ethics, is "the τέλος of the things achievable [πρακτόν] for a human being," and thus must itself be something πρακτόν. One reason Aristotle gives for rejecting an idea of the good as a candidate for the good-itself is that the idea of the good would be unchangeable [ἀκίνητον], and therefore cannot be πρακτόν: "this kind of good, the for-the-sake-of-which, is πρακτόν, and the [kind of good that exists] among unchangeable things [τὸ ἐν τοῖς ἀκινήτοις] is not" (1218b6-7).²¹ But in the Metaphysics Aristotle is looking not for the human good, but for "the best in all nature" as an ἀρχή of the universe: such an ἀρχή must be eternal, and preferably also unchangeable, like the idea of the good. So it might seem that, although the Eudemian Ethics gives a legitimate Aristotelian interpretation to the notion of a good-itself, this could not apply to the good as a metaphysical ἀρχή.

But this is wrong. The claim in EE I,8 that a for-the-sake-of-which must be πρακτόν and therefore cannot be something unchangeably eternal, although it is plausible (and is repeated even in the Metaphysics as a plausible proposition, B2 996a22-9 and K1 1059a34-8),²² is not Aristotle's final position even in the Eudemian Ethics. As we saw in Iα2, the final paragraph of the Eudemian Ethics distinguishes two senses of for-the-sake-of-which, the to-benefit-whom [τὸ ὧ] and the to-attain-which [τὸ οὗ]: an unchangeable being, such as a god, cannot be a to-benefit-whom, but it can be a to-attain-which of human action, since we can act in order to come into some appropriate relation with it, notably in order to contemplate it. And the god that σοφία contemplates is indeed the ultimate aim, the for-the-sake-of-which as τὸ οὗ, that φρόνησις is directed to (EE VIII,3 1249b12-16): Aristotle has been gradually leading up from the description of ordinary human goods to this god, who satisfies the criteria of the good-itself from EE I,8.²³ The ἀρχή that is called the good-itself in Metaphysics Λ10 is clearly identical with this god (Aristotle argues that it is a god at Λ7 1072b24-30). And in Λ7 Aristotle invokes the same distinction as in EE VIII,3 between two senses of for-the-sake-of-which, in order to argue that "τὸ οὗ ἔνεκα [sc. as τὸ οὗ] [is] ἐν τοῖς ἀκινήτοις" (1072b1-2), the contradictory of the provisional conclusion of EE I,8 1218b5-7. Since this god, besides being "the best in all nature," is the for-the-sake-of-which not only of human actions but also of the motion of the heavenly bodies, and is thus the cause of the goodness of the order of the universe, it certainly meets the criteria to be the good-itself in the sense of EE I,8.²⁴ Aristotle thus has no quarrel with Plato's

²⁰note on the attitude of NE I to the good-itself, really the same as EE I but less obvious; also note on the equivocity of the good, and on the primary sense in which it is said of νοῦς

²¹translating the text of the manuscripts, accepted by Walzer-Mingay: Spengel (followed by Woods) emends τὸ (before ἐν τοῖς ἀκινήτοις) to τοῦτο, yielding "and this does not exist among unchangeable things"

²²but note on problems in text and construal and the possibility that the K passage is based on a misunderstanding of the B passage; discussion in Iβ2c

²³note here the role of EE V,12-13 = NE VI,12-13, esp. the concluding lines, where φρόνησις ἐπιτάττει for the sake of σοφία (or more precisely of the exercise of σοφία in contemplation), as that to attain which; to attain wisdom or θεωρία is to attain (to come into the appropriate relation to) its object, and Aristotle makes an explicit comparison to πολιτική ruling for the sake of the gods as to attain whom (as the objects of θεωρία in civic festivals); references to wherever I treat this elsewhere

²⁴all of this will be discussed in detail in IIIγ3. the text at 1072b1-3 (although not the bit I've actually quoted here) depends on an emendation, supported by the Arabic version; I am in agreement with Christ and Ross and Jaeger, but the text remains controversial, see discussion in IIIγ1. note on the στρατηγός comparison, note μάλλον and διὰ as in

positing a separate eternal good-itself as the ἀρχή of all things and also as the ultimate standard of human action: he merely thinks that Plato's positing of an idea of the good fails to achieve what was desired, either in metaphysics or in ethics.

In fact, Aristotle seems not to take the idea of the good very seriously as a candidate for the good-itself. Surprisingly, he never mentions it in the Metaphysics.²⁵ Instead, in the Metaphysics he discusses only what he regards as Plato's more serious attempt to explain what the good-itself is, namely, by saying that it is the one. He attributes this identification to Plato in A6-7, and he thinks that, for Plato, this identification explains what the good is (rather than, say, explaining what the one is), by revealing the underlying essence that "good" is primarily predicated of: "some of those who say that the unchangeable substances exist ['some' = Plato as opposed to Speusippus] say that the one-itself is the good-itself; but they thought that its substance was especially the one [rather than the good]" (N4 1091b13-15). It is not clear what Aristotle's source is here--it is not anything in Plato's dialogues--but it is very plausibly Plato's lecture on the good, since we know both that (on Aristotle's own report) Plato had there identified the good with the one, and that Aristotle was preoccupied with what Plato had done wrong in this lecture.

As Aristotle always used to explain, this is what happened to most of those who had come to listen to Plato lecture on the good. For [Aristotle used to say] each of them had come supposing that he would grasp some one of these things which are humanly judged to be goods, like wealth and health and power, or in general some marvelous happiness; but when the arguments turned out to be about mathematics and numbers and geometry and astronomy, and finally that [the] good is [the] one,²⁶ then I think it seemed to them something entirely paradoxical; and some of them scorned the whole subject [ὑποκατεφρόνουσιν τὸ πρῶγμα], and others made criticisms [κατεμέφοντο]. (Aristoxenus Elements of Harmonics II,1)

By Aristoxenus' account, Aristotle told this story to show how important it is for the lecturer to give a προοίμιον explaining to the audience "the road that is to be followed" (ibid.), so that they will not be confused or disappointed by what follows;²⁷ this is why Aristoxenus himself repeats the story, and he, like Aristotle, is careful to avoid Plato's mistake. But it is clear that Aristotle's criticism was substantive and not merely stylistic. While no text in the extant Aristotelian corpus says exactly what Aristoxenus says Aristotle always used to say, a passage from the Eudemian Ethics discussion of the good-itself is pretty close; and, read together with the Aristoxenus text, it shows that Aristotle's criticisms extend to Plato's strategy for arguing to a good-itself, to his choice of mathematics as a discipline for leading us to knowledge of the good, and ultimately to

EE I,8; the comparison is not perfect since God does not rule epitaetically, the order is not so because the leader commanded it but for the sake of the commander

²⁵indeed, his only discussions of the idea of the good are in EE I,8 and its parallels in NE I,6 and MM I,1. he also mentions an αὐτὸ τὸ ἀγαθόν (which since it is in a discussion of the ideas is presumably an idea of the good, although he does not call it so explicitly) in Metaphysics Z6 1031a28-b15, but there it is merely an example, alongside αὐτὸ τὸ ζῶον and αὐτὸ τὸ ὄν. an idea of the good is also implied at Topics 147a5-11; these are apparently the only references

²⁶note text and translation issue, and controversies; on which see now Brisson in Lectures de Platon, arguing for what I think is the wrong view. (I agree on the minimalist reading of πέρας, but not of ἔν; I think the EE parallel, discussed below, is good evidence against Brisson's minimalism)

²⁷"It was for just these reasons that Aristotle himself, as he used to say, would give those intending to hear him [i.e. study with him] a preliminary account of what the course [πραγματεία] would be and what things it would be about" (ibid.).

his identification of the good with the one.

The good-itself ought to be shown in the reverse way to the way they show it now. For now from things which are not agreed to possess goodness they show that the agreed-on [goods] are good: they show from numbers that justice and health are good, on the ground that these are orders and numbers, and that the good belongs to numbers and units because the one-itself is good [or, accepting an emendation: the one is the good-itself]. But one should [show] from things agreed [to be good], such as health and strength and temperance, that the καλόν is even more in unchangeable things [έν τοῖς ἀκινήτοις], [on the ground that] all these things [health etc.] are order and stability: so if these things [health etc.] [are good], then those [unchangeable] things are more so, for [order and stability] belong to those things more. But it is hazardous [παράβολος]²⁸ to show that the one is the good-itself, on the ground that numbers desire [it]: for it is not said clearly how they desire, rather they assert this too absolutely; and how could someone suppose that there is appetite in things which do not have life? One must make a study of this, and not assent without reasons to something which it is not easy to believe even with reasons. (EE I,8 1218a16-29)

The parallel with the Aristoxenus passage is close, and it shows that the person that Aristotle is criticizing here is Plato (rather than, say, Xenocrates).²⁹ Plato should have begun by talking about the agreed-on goods, in order to make a connection with what his audience already believes to be good and is already interested in hearing about; he could then have used the deficiencies of these ordinary goods to motivate the search for a higher good, and argued that his candidate for the good-itself can satisfy the expectations so raised. By launching into his main theme, the one as the good, without a προοίμιον, Plato fails to make the audience well-disposed and attentive to what he wants to communicate; he thus runs the risk that the audience will lose patience and will fail to follow the arguments, even if what Plato is saying is right. The Eudemian Ethics passage records the same basic description and criticism as the Aristoxenus passage, while leaving out the name "Plato" and the fact that Plato's lecture actually got the rejection it was courting (the most plausible reason for this tactful silence in the Eudemian Ethics passage is simply that Plato was still alive, and that Aristotle, lecturing in the Academy, was trying to win back the students that Plato had lost). But the Eudemian Ethics passage shows that Plato's lecture could not have been repaired simply by tacking on a προοίμιον. Plato's whole strategy for arguing to the good-itself, beginning from unchanging mathematical objects and not from the changeable things that are agreed to be good, is a mistake. And it is a deep-rooted mistake, since it reflects Plato's conviction that mathematical things are prior to physical things and more immediately connected to the ἀρχή, so that we would reach the ἀρχή by ascending from mathematical objects to their starting-point the one, rather than directly from considerations about changeable things. Aristotle's criticism of Plato's use of mathematics to reach the ἀρχή is not simply pedagogical: his point is that mathematics simply cannot lead to knowledge of the good. Even if mathematics leads to knowledge of the one as the first ἀρχή of all things, and even if this ἀρχή also happens to be good or even the good-itself, it will not be a cause to mathematical objects by being good--

²⁸the adjective παράβολος occurs only here in Aristotle, and Bonitz suggested, possibly rightly, to write παράλογος instead (Index Aristotelicus, s.v. παράβολος)

²⁹reference to Brunschwig's article, in Untersuchungen zur Eudemischen Ethik.

it cannot be a τέλος or an object of desire for mathematical objects--and arguing to the ἀρχή as the cause of these effects will not give us any knowledge of its goodness. Plato sees that something is missing, and he tries to make the connection by saying that the numbers desire the one (perhaps because they would relapse into an undifferentiated material substratum if they did not participate in the one, cp. Parmenides 158b5-d8), and therefore that the one is the source of good to the numbers and so to things that are ordered by imitating numbers. But Aristotle thinks it is simply absurd to say that unchangeable things desire anything (they cannot acquire or be benefitted by anything, which was why they could not be for-the-sake-of-which as τὸ ᾧ; they do not themselves have final causes, since "the τέλος and for-the-sake-of-which is the τέλος of some πράξις, and every πράξις is accompanied by motion," B2 996a26-27): Plato is just mythologizing to cover the lack of connection between mathematics, his chosen discipline for reaching the ἀρχή, and the good that he wants it to reach.

The most obvious danger of Plato's way of arguing for the good-itself is that the auditors would become disillusioned with theoretical philosophy (as Aristoxenus says, ὑποκατεφρόνουσιν τὸ πρᾶγμα): if they remained interested in wisdom, they might seek it in Isocrates' more practical lessons on how to achieve the good. But Aristotle is equally worried about the opposite danger, namely, that the auditors, having been convinced that Platonic philosophy is not (despite its pretensions) really about the good, but only about the one as the ἀρχή of numbers, may decide to keep pursuing wisdom through mathematics, and give up the hope that wisdom will yield knowledge of the good.³⁰ This is what Speusippus did.

On one of the few occasions where he attributes a position to Speusippus by name,³¹ Aristotle says that Speusippus thought that "the most beautiful and best are not in the beginning [ἐν ἀρχῇ]," but that, in the universe as in individual plants and animals, what is perfect develops out of an imperfect starting-point (Metaphysics Λ7 1072b30-34): this is to say that "the good-itself and the best" is not one of the ἀρχαί, but is "generated afterwards" (N4 1090a32-3). Speusippus, like Plato, took the one to be the first ἀρχή (N4 1091b23-25), so he cannot have identified the one with the good. Speusippus cited different pairs of ἀρχαί for each of the different genera of being (by name, Z2 1028b21-4; hence the charge that his account of the universe is "a series of episodes, like a bad tragedy" in the parallels Λ10 1075b37-1076a4, N3 1090b13-20): so the one (with its contrary "plurality"), although it is the first ἀρχή, is not an ἀρχή of all things, but only of the first genus of things, namely numbers (so geometricals proceed not from the one, but from the point which is "like" the one, and from a correlative ἀρχή which is "like" plurality, M9 1085a31-4). Wisdom will be the knowledge of the highest ἀρχή, the one, and we can reach this knowledge only by studying the things of which the one is the ἀρχή, that is, by studying numbers: this study (although it is a good activity) is not about anything good, for numbers are neither good in themselves nor receive anything good from the one.

Aristotle thinks (surely rightly) that Speusippus came to this position by beginning from Plato's account of the ἀρχαί and of what proceeds from them, and then trying to resolve the very real difficulties in Plato's account. In describing the difficulties arising from Plato's identification

³⁰cp. A9 992a9-b1, which quote, or refer to quotation and discussion elsewhere

³¹Aristotle names Speusippus only four times in the extant corpus, at Metaphysics Z2 1028b21 and Λ7 1072b31, NE I,6 1096b7, and EE VI,13 = NE VII,13 1153b5; but there was a lost On Speusippus and Xenocrates in one book, listed in the catalogues of Diogenes Laertius and the Anonymus Menagii. Many further passages can be referred to Speusippus with fair certainty (Ross, Plato's Theory of Ideas, p. 152, lists 25 in the Metaphysics alone). Sometimes two texts are parallel, and since Speusippus is named in one text we infer that he is meant in the other; sometimes he is referred to under apparently standard descriptions such as "those who say that there is only mathematical number."

of the good as the one, Aristotle says that Speusippus "fled the difficulty [δυσχέρεια] and gave up [ἀπειρήκασιν]" (N4 1091b22-3). The verb here is quite strong (LSJ say the usual meaning in the perfect is "fail, tire, sink from exhaustion"): it is not just that Speusippus gave up attributing goodness to the one, but also that in doing so he gave up on finding the good among the ἀρχαί, and so gave up on a fundamental ambition of Platonic philosophy.³² (In context, Aristotle is speaking of difficulties arising from Plato's making the good or one an ἀρχή by being a στοιχεῖον, and specifically a στοιχεῖον of numbers, and also from the consequence that the contrary principle, plurality or whatever it may be called, would be evil: thus "all the units will be kinds of good, and there will be a surplus of goods; and if the forms are numbers, all the forms will be kinds of good" (1091b25-7); on the other hand, "it will follow that all beings except one--the one itself--will participate in the evil, and numbers and magnitudes will partake of it in the most unmixed form, and evil will be the locus of good, and will participate in and desire what destroys it, since the contrary destroys its contrary" (1091b35-1092a4). The talk of numbers desiring the one suggests that it was the lecture on the good that Speusippus was responding to. Aristotle's own diagnosis of Plato's difficulty, and his prescription for how to resolve it while still making the good an ἀρχή, are complicated: see Iβ2c, Iγ2d, and IIIγ3.) Aristotle also speaks of Speusippus "seeing the difficulty [δυσχέρεια] and fictitiousness of the ideas" (M9 1086a2-5, cp. N2 1090a7-10) and so giving up form-numbers (and forms as such) and positing only mathematical numbers. In "seeing the difficulty," Speusippus was (among other things) seeing the lack of any real causal connection between sensible things and their alleged ἀρχαί the numbers, which Plato tries to cover over by talking about "participation" (so A9 992a24-9): Speusippus, more frankly than Plato, admits that there is no connection, and posits different (though "like") ἀρχαί for the different kinds of things. Here, as with the identification of the good with the one, Speusippus is recognizing a real difficulty in Plato; and here too it leads him to give up a fundamental Platonic ambition, in this case of showing that the posited intelligible substances (the numbers) are the causes of ordinary things, and the first ἀρχή of the intelligible substances (the one) is the ἀρχή of all things.

Aristotle agrees with Speusippus' judgment that the different elements of Plato's doctrine cannot all be preserved together, and for this reason he finds Speusippus a more honest and useful dialogue-partner than Xenocrates, and in some ways even than Plato, because Speusippus recognizes (some of) the difficulties in Platonism and is trying to answer them. Speusippus is trying to save what he judges to be the essential core of Platonic philosophy; having realized that not everything can be saved, he is willing to throw some elements of Platonism overboard to save the others. And Aristotle can only approve. At the same time, he is appalled by Speusippus' choice of which elements of Platonism to preserve and which to reject. Speusippus preserves and elaborates the Pythagorizing numerology which Aristotle considers to be the most futile and ridiculous aspect of Platonism; by contrast, in rejecting the project of tracing sensible things back up to their intelligible causes, and the claim that the first principle is the good, Speusippus is renouncing precisely those aspects of the Platonic promise of wisdom that Aristotle is trying hardest to maintain.

Speusippus' philosophy, as much as the disappointment of the popular audience of the lecture on the good, helps to show what was wrong with Plato's presentation of wisdom. Plato had conveyed much more interest in numbers and the one than in the good or in the causes of changeable things, and Speusippus was in a sense making the natural choice about which to

³²on Speusippus fleeing δυσχέρεια and giving up, and on the whole context of argument in N4, see Iγ2d (and other discussions?)

preserve: as the Xenophontic Socrates says (Memorabilia III,xiii,4), when a slave misbehaves it is not the slave who should be punished but the master, for it is the master's task to make the members of his household good. But once again, the criticism of Plato is substantive and not merely a matter of presentation. Speusippus shows that Plato has failed to deliver the promised knowledge of the good, and so he helps Aristotle motivate a new (non-mathematical) attempt to achieve a knowledge of the good as the ἀρχή of all things. At the same time, Speusippus allows Aristotle to present himself as the savior of what is really important in Platonism, rescuing a good-itself and refuting Speusippus' conclusion that the good is not the ἀρχή. Here again Jaeger was perceptive (p.190 ET) in seeing that Aristotle presents himself, in texts such as N4, as defending the true core of Platonism against Speusippus; Jaeger's mistake was to suppose that the "mature" Aristotle would no longer have presented himself in this way, or that he would have ceased to speak of a "good-itself."

This context for Aristotle's project helps to explain an otherwise puzzling feature of the Metaphysics, the sharp attack on Speusippus in Metaphysics Λ10: not only the complaint about those who "do not even make the good and evil [to be] ἀρχαί, although in all things the good is most of all an ἀρχή" (1075a36-7--Aristotle does not say, and does not believe, that evil is an ἀρχή), but also, at the very end of the book, the attack on "those who say that mathematical number is first," who "make the nature of the universe episodic ... and posit many ἀρχαί": "for the beings are unwilling to be governed badly: 'the rule of many is not good, one ruler let there be'" (1075b47-a4). The latter part of Λ10 inevitably reads as an abrupt comedown from the earlier heights of contemplation of God and of the good: above all, why must Aristotle end the whole positive argument of the Metaphysics with an outburst against Speusippus, a rather minor figure in the history of philosophy, whose views Aristotle has so far scarcely mentioned and never critically discussed? But this outburst is not something new and unprepared: the response to Speusippus has been one major motivation of the Metaphysics, and it will be one major theme of Aristotle's argument, from aporiai occasioned by Speusippus in Metaphysics B to the final resolution of these aporiai at the end of Λ. Aristotle's response to Speusippus, and his vindication of a good-itself as the ἀρχή of all things, is in a sense a vindication of Platonism: but Aristotle is also arguing that, in order to save what it is important to save, a radical reconstruction of Platonism is necessary.³³

³³for all this see IIIγ3