15

THE CARPENTER AND THE GOOD

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My question is how good an argument Aristotle has at the end of *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6, in his final criticism of Plato's Form of the Good. Aristotle says (numbering is mine, for ease of reference later):

> [1] Even if there is some one good which is predicated of goods in common, or some separate good 'itself by itself', clearly it could not be realised [*prakton*] or attained [*ktêton*] by man; but we are now seeking something attainable. [2] Perhaps, however, someone might think it worth while to have knowledge of it with a view to the goods that *are* attainable and realisable; for, having this as a sort of pattern [*paradeigma*], we shall also know better the goods that are good for us, and if we know them shall attain them. [3] This argument has some plausibility, but seems to clash with the procedure of the sciences [*epistêmai*]; for all of these, though they aim at some good and seek to supply the deficiency of it, leave on one side the knowledge of the good. Yet that all the practitioners of the crafts [*technitai*] should be ignorant of, and should not even seek, so great an aid is not probable. It is hard, too, to see how a weaver or a carpenter will be benefited in regard to his own craft by knowing this 'good itself', or how someone who has viewed the Form itself will be more of a doctor or more of a general. [4] For a doctor seems not even to study health in this way, but the health of man, or perhaps rather the health of *this* man; for it is individuals that he is healing.[1]

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1 *Nicomachean Ethics* (hereafter *NE*) I.6, 1096B32–7A13; quotations from the *NE* are from the revised Ross translation, sometimes with further revisions (Aristotle

This *argument from the crafts* is by my reckoning the seventh, last and most promising argument offered in *NE* I.6.[2] Unlike most of the others, it seems to be a distinctively *ethical* argument, concerned with the bearing of the Good on practical reasoning.[3] And its immediate conclusion, that the Good is simply useless for the practice of the crafts, seems – if true – a very damaging one. For the Forms are, I take it, conceived by Plato as (broadly speaking) *explanatory* entities. That is, he affirms their existence not because he has encountered them in a state of revelation, or because his aesthetic preferences are the reverse of Quine's, but because they offer to do work of some necessary kind, by rendering intelligible the phenomena and, in the case of the ethical Forms, by informing rational deliberation and evaluation. Thus in the *locus classicus* of *Republic* VI, the Form of the Good is introduced because knowledge of it is essential to the expert ruler (504E–6A). The argument from the crafts claims that the Good fails to have any bearing on the crafts, which are uncontroversially the spheres of practical rationality *par excellence*; and the counterpart discussion in the *Eudemian Ethics* (I.8, 1218A33–B14) makes it explicit that this includes the craft of the ruler, political science (*politikê*) (1218A34). If the Form of the Good is quite generally useless for practical reasoning, Plato is not entitled to postulate its existence.[4]

(footnote 1 *continued*)
1980). Other translations from Aristotle are, except as noted, by various hands from the Revised Oxford Translation, sometimes with revisions: Barnes 1984.

2 I parse the arguments as follows: (1) 'good' is used in multiple categories, so there cannot be a single Form set over it (1096A17–23); (2) since it has as many senses as 'being', 'good' cannot be a simple universal (1096A23–9); (3) if there *were* a single Form of the Good there would be a single science of it as well (1096A29–34); (4) 'the X itself', used to pick out the Form, adds nothing (1096A34–B3); (5) neither does the claim that the Form is eternal (1096B3–5). If we are to restrict the scope of the Form to things which are good in themselves (1096B7–16), (6) we must say either that only the Form is good in itself, in which case it is 'empty', or that diverse things like honour and wisdom are good; but they are good in virtue of fundamentally different properties (1096B16–26). Just what unifies our application of 'good' is a question for another branch of philosophy (1096B26–31); and (7) the argument from the crafts as quoted above (1096B31–7A14). For other, largely similar divisions, see e.g. Broadie's commentary *ad loc.* in Broadie and Rowe 2002 and Gerson 2005: 261–2.

3 That the argument from the crafts is an argument from practical reasoning is signalled by Aristotle's introduction of it at 1096B31–2 with 'Likewise in the case of the Form', where the immediately preceding claim is that the question of how goods are one should be deferred to another branch of philosophy (1096B26–31). Thus the argument is presented as showing that the Form of the Good is not a suitable object of *ethical* inquiry, the end of which is action.

4 Earlier, Aristotle takes it to be a refutation of the Form to show that it would be 'empty', i.e., devoid of any participants and thus lacking any practical or explanatory role (1096B20). Given Plato's own commitment to the practical salience of the Good in the *Republic*, arguments against its practical relevance are tantamount to arguments against its existence.

I THE ARGUMENT FROM THE CRAFTS

However, it is far from obvious how the argument from the crafts is supposed to work. Aristotle both opens and closes the argument, in a kind of ring-composition, with the objection that the Good differs from the goods of the crafts in not being 'doable' (*prakton*), that is, achievable or realisable in action ([1] and [4] above, at 1096B34 and 1097A11–13; cf. *Eudemian Ethics* 1218A38). But as Aristotle almost concedes, the 'not doable' objection is a weak one. For it is one thing to say that the Good (or any more specialised norm) is not subject to *realisation* by some craft, and quite another to infer, invalidly, that the study of it is *useless* or irrelevant to that craft. Moreover it is strictly speaking only *particular* goods which are *prakta* anyway, as Aristotle himself notes (1097A10–14): if the 'not doable' objection were valid, it would apply equally to the human good as such, the end of *politikê* on Aristotle's own account. The argument from the crafts is evidently introduced to remedy the feebleness of the 'not doable' objection by independently proving a stronger claim: the Good is not merely unrealisable but *useless* to practical reason.

So I will take the argument from the crafts strictly speaking to be limited to [3] of the passage quoted above. It seems to have the following structure:

1 If there is a Form of the Good, knowledge of it must be of some practical use.
2 If knowledge of the Form of the Good is of practical use to anyone, it is useful to all craft practitioners.
3 If it is useful to all craft practitioners, it is useful to carpenters and weavers.
4 Knowledge of the Form of the Good is not useful to carpenters and weavers.
5 Therefore, knowledge of the Form of the Good is of no practical use to anyone. (2+3+4)
6 Therefore, there is no Form of the Good. (1+5)

Allowing for some roughness of phrasing, this is a valid argument; (1), as I have suggested, is accepted by Plato, and (3) seems indisputable. Premise (2) is advanced more clearly in the counterpart *Eudemian Ethics* argument, in the form of a plausible dilemma for the Platonist: the Good must be relevant to all the crafts or to none (1218A36–7). To support the all-important (4), Aristotle introduces the closely related pair of observations found at *Nicomachean Ethics* 1097A4–11; and here, it seems to me, we have the real heart of the argument from the

crafts. Aristotle's first observation is that the postulation of the Form 'seems to clash with the procedure of the sciences'. That is, it is highly implausible that there is a Good knowledge of which is required for the successful practice of all the crafts, and yet that none of their practitioners has ever noticed this fact or attempted to remedy the deficiency (1097A4–8). Second, it seems bizarre to claim that a weaver or a carpenter, or even a doctor or general, would perform his craft better by viewing the Form of the Good (1097A8–11). This comment is used to introduce the dead-end 'not doable' objection, but it makes a stronger point in its own right. Would a weaver who had studied at the Academy really weave differently from – and better than – his professional peers? How and why would that be? These observations are probably not so much sub-arguments as attempts to make the truth of (4) more vivid, thereby giving (2)–(3) the colouration of a *reductio*. Just imagine weavers and carpenters deciding they had to go to the Academy and study metaphysics to do their work! Ridiculous! Grotesque!

In order to repudiate the conclusion of the argument, Plato would have to reject at least one of premises (2) and (4), along with the reasoning which supports it. Which is it to be? We might be tempted to suppose (2), since in the *Republic*, knowledge of the Form of the Good is a closely guarded prerogative of the Guardians. However, a central feature of the ideal city of the *Republic* is the systematic supervision under which all the crafts are to be practised. Craftspeople will not need to know the Good themselves, but their practices will be thoroughly subordinated to and informed by the knowledge of the Guardians. The Guardians are to determine which lines of work are to be practised (imitative poets need not apply, 595A), how they are to be practised (medicine in the *kallipolis* will be of the brisk variety, 405A–8D), and who is to practise them on the basis of what education. Moreover, we are told that guidelines [*tupoi*] are to be provided for at least some craft practitioners (379A, 387C, 412B). Plato gives us a sense of what these *tupoi* will involve for the crucial case of poetry and music (377B–400E); and it is emphasised that all craftspeople, explicitly including builders and weavers, will be governed by similar requirements to produce what is fine and graceful, thereby contributing to an environment conducive to moral education (400E–2A, esp. 401A2–3). Moreover, it is clear that the options and incentives of craftspeople will be radically different in a society from which wealth and poverty are carefully excluded (421C–2A), and in which the ruling class practises communism to the point of not possessing private houses (416D–9A). In the *kallipolis*, there will be no *nouveaux riches* customers for vulgar cloaks or luxurious mansions, and no prospect for craftspeople themselves to get rich by pandering to such corruption. In sum, the practices

of weavers and carpenters will be very different in the *kallipolis*, where they will have neither the opportunity nor any incentive to deviate from *tupoi* informed by knowledge of the good.

Given Plato's picture of craft in the *kallipolis*, neither of Aristotle's observations holds any water. So what if craft practitioners in our society do not seem to worry about the Platonic Good? We are not entitled to assume that their practices are in good order; crafts in a society genuinely oriented to the good would look very different. And Plato's division of epistemic labour in the *kallipolis* shows that in such a society, crafts could be informed by knowledge of the Good without their practitioners having to study metaphysics themselves.

This response is all the more powerful because Aristotle himself accepts a deeply Platonic vision of society as naturally ordered in a hierarchy of crafts under an architectonic political science. The *Nicomachean Ethics* sets out this vision in its opening chapters:

> Now, as there are many actions, arts, and sciences, their ends also are many; the end of the medical art is health, that of shipbuilding a vessel, that of strategy victory, that of economics wealth. But where such arts fall under a single capacity – as bridle-making and the other arts concerned with the equipment of horses fall under the art of riding, and this and every military action under generalship . . . – in all of these the ends of the master art are to be preferred to all the subordinate ends; for it is for the sake of the former that the latter are pursued . . . the good and the best thing [*to agathon kai to ariston*] . . . would seem to belong to the most authoritative art and that which is most truly the master art [*kuriôtatê kai malista architektonikê*]. And political science [*politikê*] appears to be of this nature . . . the end of this science must include those of the others, so that this end must be the human good [*to anthrôpinon agathon*]. (*NE* I.1–2, 1094A6–B7)

This passage is a compendium of ideas taken from Plato. The idea of ethical knowledge as the architectonic craft, qualified to rule all the others, is introduced in the *Charmides*, under the name of temperance (165C–175A, n.b. esp. 171D–3D). (It is presented there as distinct from the knowledge of good and evil; but the dialogue ends in an *aporia* which is probably designed to show that the one must consist in the other.) In Plato's *Euthydemus*, the 'kingly craft' (*basilikê technê*) is ruler because it knows how to use the products of the other crafts correctly, just as in Aristotle's account of rider and bridle-maker (291C–E; cf. *Republic* 601C–2A, *Cratylus* 390A–E). And, as I have noted already, in the *Republic* the correct management of the crafts is presented as a

central task of government, one which must be informed by knowledge of the Good.

So an understanding of *politikê* as the architectonic art, oriented to the good and charged with the management of the ordinary crafts, is common ground between Plato and Aristotle. This means that the argument from the crafts can't simply be voicing an assumption that weaving and carpentry are untouched by any higher considerations about the good. Aristotle doesn't believe that; and he is right not to. On the traditional Greek understanding, a craft (*technê*) is a skilled practice which improves human life by achieving some specialised good or end;[5] and it can hardly do so in a normative vacuum. In fact, the practice of the everyday crafts raises deep normative questions, about goods which far outrun the particular good the craft provides. To take Plato's favourite example of craft: what *is* the end served by shoemaking? The production of good shoes; but is the good shoe a comfortable shoe, a beautiful shoe, an appropriate shoe for the wearer? Should Simon (the shoemaker friend of Socrates)[6] make pumps and stilettos, loafers and Birkenstocks, or jackboots and clogs? Or should he make whatever his customers will pay the most for? (What if that includes foot-binding for upper-class girls?) Tell me what you wear on your feet, the reflective shoemaker will argue, and I will tell you your theory of the good.

Shoemaking is, as I will say, *normatively insufficient*. Plato takes up the topic of normative insufficiency in a number of dialogues, and shows that it comes in several flavours. One which we have already noted relates to *understanding*. The shoemaker must grasp the end of his craft, and be able to give an account of his procedures in terms of it (*Gorgias* 500E–1B; *Phaedrus* 268A–9C). So he needs to understand what is good for feet; ultimately, this requires understanding the good of the body, which means understanding the good of the soul, which means understanding the human good as such and, for Plato, the Form of the Good as well. (It follows, somewhat problematically, that only the philosopher-king can be a truly expert shoemaker.) Then there is the question of *motivation*. The shoemaker might, it seems, know the end of shoemaking without having any particular motivation to attain it: notoriously in the ancient world, the doctor is also the most skilled poisoner, and in the *Hippias Minor* Plato explores the possibility that all crafts and skills might be bipolar in this way (cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IX.2, 1046B6–7).

Plato's preferred stance is to conceive of craft in an enriched way, as incorporating both motivation and at least partial understanding. A

5 Cf. Nussbaum 1986: 94–8; Roochnik 1996: 17–63. A central ancient text on *technê* is Aeschylus (?), *Prometheus Bound* 441–506.

6 Diogenes Laertius II.122–4; cf. Kahn 1996: 9–11.

doctor, he points out in the *Phaedrus*, is not just anyone possessed of a bag of tricks to induce vomiting and so forth, but the person who knows when, how and why to apply medical techniques in order to attain the end of health (268Aff.). And in Book I of the *Republic* Socrates argues that the doctor *qua* doctor acts so as to serve the end of medicine, namely the health of the patient (341C–7A). This is intended, I think, as a claim about moral psychology as well as the metaphysics of descriptions. A doctor who works as a poisoner in the off-hours is only defectively a doctor; the full possession of a craft incorporates a fixed disposition to pursue its end.

There remains a further variety of normative insufficiency, one which it is hard to envisage the individual shoemaker or doctor transcending. This is what we might call the problem of *incompleteness*, stemming from the local and defeasible character of the end the craftperson serves. Good shoes are in themselves good, but the normativity of their goodness, in any particular situation, can be overridden by the demands of the context – that is, by rival goods and by the greater good of the whole. This is part of what Aristotle means in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.1 (1094A14–16) when he says that the end of the higher, 'master' art is 'preferred' (*hairetôteron*) over the lower: it trumps the other whenever, exceptionally, the two come apart. There might be situations in which bad shoes are better for a person, by serving the higher good of his psychological health. As for medicine, Nicias points out in the *Laches* that it is no part of the craft of the doctor (or even of the seer) to tell whether in any particular case it will be a good thing for someone to live or die (195C–6A).[7]

In sum, on Plato's view the ordinary crafts, though they realise genuinely distinct goods, are not fully discrete or self-sufficient. For if the craftsperson is to have full understanding of the good of his craft, be rationally motivated by it, and grasp its relation to other goods, his craft-knowledge must be informed by a broader and more authoritative master art, and ultimately by knowledge of the human and civic good.[8]

7 This becomes a familiar thought in Stoicism, and crucial support for their claim that all 'goods' other than virtue are not really goods at all. See Menn 1996. Plato seems to vacillate between (1) the Stoic view; (2) the view that goods other than virtue are good only contingently on being possessed in conjunction with virtue, but are genuinely good when they *are* good; and (3) the view that the conventional goods are genuinely good in themselves, but that for bad people their goodness is outweighed by the harm to the soul involved in their acquisition and (mis)use. See *Meno* 87E–88E; *Euthydemus* 278E–81E; *Gorgias* 477A–8E; *Laws* 631B–D, 660E–1E.

8 I will assume for simplicity's sake that for both Plato and Aristotle the civic good pursued by the *politikos* is just the good of individual human beings writ large: I will use the phrase 'the human good' to include the collective good of the city as well. This obscures some important problems and distinctions, but I do not think they make any difference to the present argument.

Now Aristotle agrees that the ordinary crafts are normatively insufficient; as the opening of the *Ethics* shows, each is to be informed and supervised by a master craft, culminating in *politikê*, which knows the good, as ruler of all. And this may seem to leave him with no opening against Plato at all. What is the difference, after all, between saying that the carpenter should know the good, as Aristotle accuses Plato of doing, and saying (as Aristotle himself does) that he is to be supervised by a ruler with that knowledge? (There is of course a *political* difference between those two pictures, but since both Plato and Aristotle in fact opt for the latter – elitist and hierarchical – model, that is not in question here.)

I conclude that, at a first pass, the argument from the crafts fails. For one thing, Plato has every right to reject Aristotle's (4), and to deny the relevance of the observations offered to support it. The Platonic claim that the crafts are normatively insufficient is in no way vitiated by the fact that craftspeople in ordinary societies generally (with the exception of Simon) do not study the good; Plato can insist that in a well-governed society, they would be governed by rulers who do. Moreover, Aristotle himself seems to accept this central normative claim. And he is, I would suggest, right to do so: it is perfectly reasonable to suppose that the everyday crafts are in a better position to attain their ends if informed by a higher and broader understanding of the good.

None the less there is still a real and unresolved dispute in the vicinity. Where Plato and Aristotle really do part company is not over the weaver and carpenter, but over what the *politikos* must know to supervise them. And it is possible to read the argument from the crafts as a proxy battle over this very question (raised explicitly in the counterpart *EE* passage, at 1218a34–5) – as an attempted *reductio* of the Platonic claim that the expert ruler must know a Good above and beyond the human good. In that case, to make explicit the real stakes of the argument we would have to add an intermediate premise: (1b) if knowledge of the Form of the Good is of practical use to anyone, it is useful to the *politikos*; and an intermediate conclusion: (5b) therefore, knowledge of the Form of the Good is of no practical use to the *politikos*. So read, the argument from the crafts is Aristotle's attempt to turn the architectonic picture of the crafts which he and Plato share against the latter. For on this picture, the *politikos* is defined by his knowledge of how to manage and use correctly the particular goods provided by the crafts; and surely, Aristotle insinuates, it is ridiculous to suppose that this could be knowledge of anything over and above the human good.

Reading the argument in this way does not make it any stronger, since it can do nothing to bolster the fatally weak premise (4). But it does raise the possibility of an alternative strategy: the Aristotelian

could argue directly for the independence of *politikê* from any knowledge of the Form, and so indirectly for the truth of (4) as well. From here on I will construe the 'argument from the crafts' broadly, to include whatever arguments Aristotle might offer from the crafts, including *politikê*, to the practical irrelevance of the Form of the Good.

II THE HIGHER GOOD AND THE GOOD ITSELF

The real question at issue between Aristotle and Plato can now be put as follows: is knowledge of the human good normatively sufficient? Does the reasoning of the wise ruler terminate with the human good; or does it, like the knowledge of the weaver, need to be guided in turn by knowledge of something 'higher', such as the Form of the Good?

Now it might be objected that this way of putting the question actually elides the crucial difference between Plato and Aristotle. For (one might argue) on Plato's account the human good is not even an insufficient way-station; when the Guardians return to the 'cave' of political office, they put their knowledge of the Form of the Good itself directly to work. 'When you are used to it,' Socrates promises his Guardians, 'you'll see vastly better than the people there. And because you've seen the truth about fine, just, and good things, you'll know each image for what it is and also that of which it is the image' (520c3–5).[9] This might suggest that the job of the Guardians is to recognise, in a kind of immediate intuition, instances of the good, fine and just as they flicker past, unmediated by any science of the human good in particular. But I think this 'intuitionist' picture must be too simple. 'Good' as applied in the Cave will be a concept with many mediating layers, in the form of dialectically defensible *reasons* for deeming something good, and those reasons will converge on the Guardians' understanding of the human and civic good. Suppose, for instance, that a Guardian charged with educational policy decides that it would be good to select a certain poem for the primary education of the auxiliaries. The poem may be a good selection because it will help to make the young auxiliaries unafraid of death; and what makes them unafraid of death aids in making them courageous; and what makes them courageous helps the city to be courageous; and courage is a virtue; and virtue is essential to the happiness of the city and its people; and happiness is the good for individuals and their communities. For a Guardian to understand fully the goodness or badness of a policy is for her to grasp the chain of supervenient properties which constitutes it as such – or, more

9 Translations from the *Republic* are by G. M. A. Grube, revised by C. D. C. Reeve, with some revisions; translations of all Platonic dialogues are from the complete Hackett edition, Cooper and Hutchinson 1997.

Platonically put, to grasp the associated Forms in which it participates, up to the Form of the Good. And it is natural to suppose that the penultimate link in the chain, uniting all instances of goodness which are of interest to the *politikos*, is the good of human beings and their communities.

So Plato can agree with Aristotle that the reasoning of the expert ruler will always lead up to, and work down from, considerations about the human good. Where he will disagree is with Aristotle's claim that the ruler's reasoning can *end* there. (Alternatively, we could say that Plato has an 'enriched' conception of the craft of the *politikos*: his knowledge of the human good *is* normatively sufficient, but only because it necessarily includes knowledge of the Form of the Good. I will treat these as amounting to the same position.) To put it in more positive terms, Plato affirms and Aristotle denies[10] *the Higher Good thesis*: the claim that there is a Higher Good which stands to the human good in a position of explanatory priority, such that the expert pursuit of the human good can and should be governed by it.[11] For Plato, that Higher Good is of course

10 My concern here is with the views of the mature Aristotle in his surviving works. The *Protrepticus* explicitly endorses the Higher Good thesis, using *philosophia* to designate a wisdom which is at once theoretical, studying 'the good as a whole' (*hê to holon agathon theôrousa*), and, as such, qualified to use and give orders to all the other sciences (B9 Düring/ROT, fr. 4 Walzer/Ross). As Jaeger 1948: ch. 4 rightly emphasised, the *NE*'s contrast between *phronêsis* and *sophia* is a deliberate repudiation of Aristotle's own earlier position. My argument here is that this change is philosophically unfounded, given the philosophical merits of the case and Aristotle's other ongoing commitments – in particular, given his agreement (1) that there is a goodness *simpliciter* which is explanatorily prior to relational goodness (the conclusion of the argument from relational goods), and (2) that our happiness indeed depends on our association with objects which are good *simpliciter* in the highest degree (the incorporation model).

11 I will here treat the Higher Good thesis as a fuller specification of the claim that *politikê* is normatively insufficient. In principle, of course, one can distinguish between the claim of normative insufficiency and the further claim that there is a Higher Good, knowledge of which can remedy it. One might indeed accept the former and deny the latter. On that view, even the wisest *politikos* would be doomed to the condition of the unphilosophical shoemaker. The shoemaker makes shoes as well as he can; but he cannot explain and defend his conception of what makes a shoe a good shoe. He thus necessarily lacks a certain kind of rational motivation for making good shoes (even if he does make good ones), since he cannot know what is good about the shoes he makes; and we can imagine that his practices will be subject to instability (his conception of a good shoe will be easily changed), will lead to conflicts with other goods (the incompleteness problem) and so on. If *politikê* is normatively insufficient, the *politikos* will be unable to explain and defend his conception of the human good, and will be unclear as to what is good about it; he will thus lack both an important kind of support for his particular conception of the human good and an important kind of motivation for pursuing it; moreover, he will be unable to adjudicate rationally its claims in relation to those of any other good. I take it that both Plato and Aristotle are committed to a conception of *politikê* as a fully rational craft in a way which precludes this somewhat pessimistic

the Form of the Good, and to study it would be to study both the universal 'good' (as later philosophers would be inclined to put it) and the privileged instantiation of it which causes all the others.

Aristotle's most extended treatment of the Higher Good thesis is in *Eudemian Ethics* I.8. The occasion is an inquiry into the 'best' in relation to ethics:

> We must inquire what the best [*to ariston*] is, and in how many ways it is said . . . they say that the Good Itself [*auto to agathon*] is best of all, and that the Good Itself is that to which it belongs to be both first [*prôton*] among goods, and the cause [*aition*] by its presence to other things of their being goods. Both these things, they hold, belong to the Form of the Good. (1217B1–6)[12]

The Good Itself is supposed to be both the best thing or first good and in some sense a cause of goodness to other things. These roles are not much specified, but we learn that being a final cause (as happiness is in the human case) is a way of satisfying the latter. Presumably there are in principle other ways of satisfying it, or the Form of the Good could hardly get a fair hearing: if the Platonists claim that the Form holds the role of Good Itself, it must be as a formal cause or (setting aside Aristotle's classification of causes) as a kind of origin or source of goodness, as the sun is of light. Aristotle's discussion of its candidacy includes the counterpart passage to the argument from the crafts (*EE* I.8, 1218A33ff.), where the Form is decried successively as useless to political science; useful to no science, since it is not useful to all; and not realisable. (Perhaps these are intended as arguments that the Form cannot meet the criterion of being a cause: otherwise there seems to be no particular connection between these criticisms and the roles the Good is supposed to fill.) And Aristotle concludes that the human good, happiness, is the only 'Good Itself' there is. Hence my talk of a debate over the 'Higher Good' thesis, rather than over the 'Good Itself'; Aristotle *does* accept that there is an ethically relevant Good Itself, but he identifies it with the human good (from which a Higher Good, as object of a craft or science other than *politikê*, would *ex hypothesi* be distinct).

Strikingly, this is *not* because Aristotle denies the existence of a good in some sense 'higher' than the human. On the contrary, he is insistent that the heavenly bodies and their ultimate cause, the prime mover, are

option; hence my treatment of normative insufficiency and the Higher Good thesis as interchangeable.

12 Translations from the *Eudemian Ethics* (hereafter *EE*) are by Michael Woods 1992, with some revisions.

better than us; the latter may even win the title, reserved for human happiness in the *Eudemian Ethics*, of 'best' (*Metaphysics* 1075a11–15). What Aristotle denies is that the study of these higher and better objects stands in any kind of hierarchical relation to political science. In *Nicomachean Ethics* VI, Aristotle argues at length for an anti-Platonic separation of *phronêsis*, practical wisdom, and *sophia*, wisdom (*NE* VI.5, 7, 8, 12–13). The two are, he argues, distinct branches of knowledge, one practical and the other theoretical, so that they even belong to different parts (in some sense) of the soul (*NE* VI.1) and have two different kinds of object (one subject to change, the other eternal). And *sophia* does not stand in any kind of supervisory relation to *phronêsis* (or, as he is more concerned to explain, the other way around, 1143b33–6, 1145a6–11). One obvious reason for this is that a theoretical science has no *end* in the manner of a practical one; and according to *Nicomachean Ethics* I.1, it is by reference to its end that a master art guides the crafts subordinate to it. Strictly speaking, no theoretical knowledge could qualify as a master art in Aristotelian terms.

Still, this argument does little to settle the question. Aristotle's formal strategy for distinguishing practical and theoretical sciences is dubious: the *Nicomachean Ethics* itself belongs to the practical science of ethics, yet deals with general and unchanging features of human nature. Medicine likewise must either be thought to have a heavy theoretical component itself or to be in some way governed by the theoretical sciences of biology and physiology. So the Platonist might well dispute that there is a deep difference in kind between theoretical and practical sciences, such that the one could not properly supervise the other. And if, as the Platonist insists, the human good *is* normatively insufficient, and there *is* a Higher Good, knowledge of which can supply its deficiencies, then some room must be found for that knowledge to count as a master art in a broad sense. If this result is blocked by Aristotle's distinction between practical and theoretical sciences, or by his understanding of how a master art must be constituted, so much the worse for his views on those points.

So I now want to consider who is right about the Higher Good thesis: in other words, is the human good normatively insufficient or not? In the next two sections I will develop two lines of argument for the Platonic position – and will argue that Aristotle himself seems to be largely committed to them.

III THE ARGUMENT FROM RELATIONAL GOODS

Why might Plato, or anyone else, think that the human good is an insufficient terminus for practical reasoning? Well, we can imagine a

challenge to the Aristotelian stance easily enough: granted that some craft ultimately serves the human good, *what's so good about that?* That is: 'What's so good about the human good?' This is superficially at least a sort of 'open-question' argument. But where Moore's open-question argument was supposed to point to a gap between the concept 'good' and anything one might use to define it, this question seems to point to a conceptual gap between the good *of* someone or something – even the human good as such – and the good *simpliciter*.[13] That there is such a gap is suggested by the familiar cases in which the good *for* or *of* doesn't seem to translate into the good *simpliciter*. I might say, for instance, that the fact that something is good for the Mafia, good for the spread of cholera or good for the Republican Party doesn't make it *good*. What the distinction seems to amount to is as follows. Talk of what is good *for* a thing involves a descriptive claim in relation either to the good *of* a thing or to its being good *as* the kind of thing it is. Plant food is good for plants because it promotes healthy growth, which is the good of plants. (I am for the sake of argument taking 'good of' to be unproblematic, and setting aside all puzzles about how we are to identify a thing's good.) Sharpening is good for knives because it contributes to making them good knives, i.e., good as knives. I will refer to goods which are *of*, *for* and *as* as *relational goods*. (I speak of different goods here for convenience; properly speaking, of course, these are different ways of being good, which can be instantiated by the same things.)[14] In general, talk of relational goods has commending force only in conjunction with a concern for things of the relevant kind; when we affirm that a relational good is really good, we're affirming that in this case the commending force does go through. Talk of the good of a plant, for instance, only gives me a reason to buy plant food if I happen to care about plants; what is good for the Mafia would motivate me only if I valued the Mafia. By contrast, to say that something is simply good, or a 'good thing', is evidently to endorse or commend it – apparently

13 On 'good', cf. Moore [1903] 1988: secs 1–17; Ross 1930: chs 3–4; von Wright 1963; Korsgaard 1983; Zimmerman 2001; Thomson 1997; as well as the other works listed in n.16. However, most of these works have little if anything to say about the precise distinction which concerns me, between the good *simpliciter* and all relational goods; though I cannot properly argue the point here, I doubt that this distinction is reducible to any of the others more often discussed, such as that between intrinsic and extrinsic, final and instrumental, or conditional and unconditional.

14 Indeed, it might be that something can only be good *simpliciter* if it is also good in some relational way. In that case, Thomson would not be far wrong in claiming that things are good by virtue of being good in some particular way. (Her 'first-order ways' of being good overlap significantly with the varieties of relational goodness, though the categories are not quite the same.) But it still would not follow that 'all goodness is goodness in a way', if this is intended (as it is by Thomson) to mean that 'there is no such property as goodness' (1997: 276).

unhypothetically and without reference to any particular context – as an appropriate object of desire or approval. So by goodness *simpliciter* I will mean a way of being good which is *not* reducible to goodness *for*, *of* or *as*, and which is represented by the purely commending use of 'good' – as in the second occurrence in: 'The good of the Mafia isn't really good.'

It is worth asking what makes one relational good commendable and another not. If the good of the rainforest (say) gives us a reason for action where the good of the Mafia does not, this suggests a general principle: if the relational goods related to some x are also good *simpliciter*, it must be because x'es are in some way good themselves. There must be something *good about* them, as we say. And what is good about something cannot gain that status, circularly, from its being or contributing to the good *of* that thing. It might consist in contributing to the good of something else (of a larger whole, for instance); but about this in turn one can ask: what's so good about that? It seems to me that on pain of infinite regress or circularity, 'goodness about' will ultimately require explanation in terms of a goodness *simpliciter* not reducible to any relational good.[15] If this is right, then the good *for*, *of* and *as* are dependent for their value – their normative standing, their being really good – on the right kind of relation to the good *about*, while that good *about* is either an instance of or (if its goodness is conditional on its relation to something else) depends upon the good *simpliciter*.

Of course, some philosophers have argued that the good *simpliciter* is a phantasm.[16] 'Good', the argument goes, is always either explicitly 'attributive' or short for some relational phrase, for it is always applied

15 Admittedly, one might deny that such a circularity would be a vicious one. Perhaps what is good about frogs is their ability to contribute to the good of a healthy ecosystem, and the good of snakes and fish in particular; what is good about snakes is their contribution to the good of a healthy ecosystem, and to the good of frogs in particular; and so on. On this conception the 'good of' is taken as the primary value in terms of which the 'good about' is understood, so that it offers no answer to the question of why we should care about the good of frogs, snakes and fish in the first place: it simply shrugs off the question, 'what's so good about the good of x?' But I doubt that this sort of coherentist conception of the good is what either Plato or Aristotle has in mind. Cf. Thomson 1997, who at 289ff. takes benefit to underlie the various 'first-order' ways of being good; and Terry Penner's reading of Plato's Good as Advantage (cf. n.20).

16 The *locus classicus* is Geach 1956. Similar attacks on the good *simpliciter* include Thomson 1997 and Foot 1985, which is more particularly an attack on the concept of a good state of affairs. Foot is right, I think, to point out that 'the idea of the goodness of total states of affairs played no part in Aristotle's moral philosophy' (1985: 209). But the part of the concept that is missing from (or unimportant to) Aristotle is that of a total state of affairs, not goodness *simpliciter*. More or less effective refutations of Geach include Hare 1957; Pigden 1990. *Contra* Jarvis Thomson, see Zimmerman 2001: ch. 2.

in some context which provides an implicit normative standard. I think this has some plausibility as a claim about our everyday uses of the term. When we ask whether the good of the Mafia is good *simpliciter*, there's an implicit relational context of evaluation, provided, ultimately, by the human good writ large. The good of the Mafia is not good inasmuch as it is not good for the broader human society to which the Mafia belongs. The good of the rainforest, on the other hand, is good for various human societies in a wide range of ways. This suggests an objection to our question, 'What's so good about the human good?' For if the human good is *always* the terminus for explanations of relational goodness, then it is the final, most authoritative context of evaluation: there is no higher standpoint from which we could call its value into question.

But there are two problems with this objection. First, whether the human good *is* the most authoritative of normative contexts is a substantive question of normative ethics, not something we can expect to discover by inspecting the term 'good'. (So the question 'What's so good about the human good?' would at worst turn out to be like 'Is the pope Catholic?' – a question with an obvious answer, but not illegitimate.) Second, it isn't obviously true that the human good *is* the most authoritative of normative contexts. It isn't, after all, the broadest context: it doesn't embrace all the relational goods that there are, as any ecologist will point out – or any Aristotelian who recognises each species of organism as possessed of its own *telos* or end. So the human good cannot claim authoritative status on the formal grounds of completeness.

Indeed, nothing in our ordinary ways of thinking about 'good' gives us any reason to suppose that the human good is uniquely exempt from reflective questioning – that is, from the question 'What's so good about it?' A proponent of 'deep ecology' might perfectly well ask that question, meaning 'Why should I pursue the good of my species, as opposed to that of any other, or of some larger whole?' [17] And a possible answer would be that she has *no* good reason to do so.

It might be objected that the status of the questioner as a human being gives the human good a special status: my good cannot be of questionable normativity *to me*. But that response begs the question at least twice. First, my own good might or might not be normatively compelling to me (as in the case of the deep ecologist), and for good reasons

17 See for instance the Deep Ecology Platform (www.deepecology.org): '1) The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: inherent worth; intrinsic value; inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes. 2) Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.' Cf. more fully, e.g., Attfield 1987.

or bad ones: there is nothing in the nature of ethical reflection that makes an egoistic perspective mandatory even part of the time. Second, it begs the question in favour of something like Aristotelianism: even supposing that I do care about *my* good, it is not obvious that I must care about my good *qua* human being, as opposed to my good *qua* member of my family, community, religion and so on as the case might be. Species membership is only one of many identities from which we may draw our reasons for action, and quite a lot of philosophical theorising (in an Aristotelian or Kantian vein, most likely) must be accepted before it has any kind of trump status.

The more general objection could still be pressed, of course, that apparent instances of the 'good simpliciter' are always tacitly relational. When the ecologist says that a rainforest is a good thing, it will be insisted, she must *really* mean that it is good for the creatures in it; or for the other ecosystems around it; or for the aesthete, ecologist or creator God who rejoices in it. Still, some ecologists and aesthetes will flatly deny that this is what they 'really' mean: rather, they will insist that their rejoicing in the ecosystem expresses their belief that, quite independently of them, *it really is a good thing*.[18]

Intuitions divide sharply as to whether this position is commonsensical or absurd; and at this point it seems to become impossible to keep questions about the logic of 'good' distinct from more substantive questions: the meta-ethical question of whether there is objective value and the normative question of the moral standing of non-human beings. Without venturing into these vast realms, it is important to note that the good *simpliciter* offers powerful advantages to practical reasoning, not least for the task of identifying, evaluating and adjudicating the claims of various relational goods. In complex cases it is not always obvious what the good of something (or goodness as that kind of thing) consists in. There are deep normative puzzles, for instance, as to what is good for a nation state, what makes a nation state a good one, and what its good (its 'health', as we might say) consists in. We can best answer such questions in the light of an account of what is good *about* nation states – their end or *raison d'être* – in the first place. (The disbeliever in the good *simpliciter* will of course insist that this is to be reduced in turn to the various relational goods which nation states may serve.) The putative goods for and of nation states can then be assessed by their tendency to realise that 'goodness about'. Such an explanation of the good about something can at once provide or confirm an understanding of the relevant relational goods, give us reason to pursue those goods (by

18 Cf. Moore [1903] 1988: 83–5. Cf. also David Wiggins's point that an activity of incorporation (as discussed in the next section) may depend on our taking its object to have a value which outruns that activity: Wiggins [1976] 1998: esp. secs 5–6.

displaying what makes them genuinely commendable), and supply a common currency (goodness *simpliciter*) for adjudicating their claims against competing relational goods.

In other words, a case can be made for the claim that relational goods are as such normatively insufficient, and that a grasp of the good *simpliciter* is the cure for that insufficiency. For to understand such goods fully, to be motivated rationally by them and to adjudicate their claims in relation to each other, we need to see them in relation to the associated 'goods about' and, ultimately, what is good *simpliciter*. If this is so, then any craft which is oriented to a relational good must ultimately be governed by a 'master art' which is not. *Politikê*, which has the human good as its constitutive end, must be governed by some higher study able to reveal what is good about human beings, why we should be motivated to pursue the human good, and how that good is related to whatever other goods there are. This is the first argument I have to offer on the Platonist's behalf, which I will refer to as the *argument from relational goods*.

Nothing much like the argument from relational goods appears in Plato's writing. But this is, I suspect, because Plato takes it as *obvious* that there is such a thing as goodness *simpliciter*, and that it stands in this kind of explanatory priority to merely relational goodness.[19] Thus the demiurge constructs the cosmos so as to be good, with no suggestion that its goodness could be resolved into the merely relational kind (*Timaeus* 29A, 29E–31A). Moreover, the *Philebus* offers a sketch of the good in terms of beauty, reality and proportion (64E–5A) – properties which, though they may supervene on relational states, are not relational in themselves (cf. also the account of the Beautiful at *Symposium* 211A–C). And of course in the *Republic*, the claim of the philosopher-king to govern is grounded on his or her vision of the Form of the Good: on his or her grasp, in other words, of a perfectly comprehensive science of value, and in particular of an object which, transcending the

19 One factor in this may be Plato's insistence that we desire the good – meaning what really is good, not what we happen to *think* good (*Gorgias* 467A–8E; *Meno* 77B–8B; *Republic* 505D–6A). Of course, this is still compatible with the view that the human good, correctly understood, is the end of the evaluative story. But it may have prompted Plato to suspect that this would not be a genuinely independent and explanatory option. Either our good is good *simpliciter*, and that is *why* it is good for us, or the phrase 'our good' is being used, misleadingly, to smuggle in some relativistic or subjectivist notion ('good from our point of view'). This move is much more tempting if we conceive value in aesthetic terms, as Plato so often did, treating the *kalon* (beautiful, noble or fine) as an adequate proxy for the good (*Philebus* 64E). The *kalon* is always *simpliciter*, though how it gets realised depends on the nature of its bearer. I suspect that on Plato's view the good for us is just that portion of the good *simpliciter* which is fitted to us, which falls within our grasp. What is good for us is so *because* it's good *simpliciter*, and we are (in a weaker way) good ourselves.

merely human good, both exemplifies and is identical with goodness as such. [20]

Does Aristotle accept the argument from relational goodness? Officially, so to speak, his denial of the Higher Good thesis entails that he rejects it. At the same time, he has a clear answer to our question, 'What's so good about the human good?' A human being, he affirms, *is* a good thing – or more precisely, as he says in the *Eudemian Ethics*, 'one of the things which are *spoudaios* [worthwhile, valuable or serious] by nature' (1237A16–17).[21] And he is very explicit as to what is good *about* us, namely our rationality. Aristotle invokes this 'good about' in *Nicomachean Ethics* X, in order to explain and thereby support his account of human happiness and virtue. Understanding, *nous*, is, he declares, the best thing 'in' us (*NE* X.7, 1177A13–21, 1177B34–8A3). Thus its virtue, wisdom, is the best virtue open to us, and its activity, contemplation, is the best activity *for* us: 'If happiness is activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with the highest virtue; and this will be that of the best thing in us' (1177A12–13). The life of contemplation also provides a standard for the possession of other goods, determining the extent to which they are really good for us (*EE* VIII.3, 1249B16–23). In sum, all the different relational goods involved in human life turn out to be organised around what is 'good about' us – rational intellectual activity – which is evidently good *simpliciter*. Thus Aristotle's theory in fact embodies, however tacitly, the argument from relational goods.

Moreover, this is not the only important occasion on which Aristotle relies on goodness *simpliciter*.[22] The natural scientific works contain

20 So I take it that the argument from relational goods would rule out the conception of the Platonic Good as advantage proposed by Terry Penner in his chapter 5 in this volume. If Plato (like Aristotle) recognises a goodness *simpliciter* which is not reducible to relational goodness, and if the natural understanding of this good *simpliciter* is in terms of the more or less aesthetic conception of the *Philebus*, then 'advantageous' is not even coextensive with 'good'.

21 Cf. also the *Protrepticus*: human beings are the 'most honourable' (*timiôtaton*) of animals (B16 Düring/ROT, fr. 11 Walzer/Ross; and note the collocation of *beltista kai timiôtata* just above).

22 I here bypass Aristotle's discussion of the distinction between the good *haplôs* (= *simpliciter*) and the good 'for someone' in *NE* VII.12: in this context the good *haplôs* is just the human good in general. I also set aside, as ambiguous, the opening statement of the *NE* that 'every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit is thought to aim at some good' (I.1, 1094A1–2). Richard Kraut (n.d.) has argued that this must be short for 'aim at something good *for someone*' rather than an invocation of the good *simpliciter*. But I suspect that Aristotle's inexplicitness here is deliberate. For one thing, he is here presumably invoking an *endoxon* (note the *dokei* in 1094A2), and it is unclear that pre-philosophical intuition really distinguishes between the two possible claims. Moreover, to say that all crafts and actions aim at the good for someone would immediately invite the question *for whom*, and this is a tricky question: given that the practice of *technê* is as such disinterested, the

numerous invocations of the good, fine and honourable as non-relational values, invoked to supplement teleological explanations of the phenomena. Nature generally places 'the better and more honourable' part of an animal above rather than below, on the right rather than the left, and in front rather than at the back; for these are the more honourable positions, and nature is always a cause of what is better from among the possibilities (*De Partibus Animalium* 658A23–4, 665A23–6; cf. *De Incessu Animalium* 706B10–16).[23] Moreover, in *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.7 Aristotle makes it clear that this evaluative *scala naturae* has ethical implications. For he relies on it in arguing for the central anti-Platonic claim that wisdom, *sophia*, and practical wisdom, *phronêsis*, are distinct. *Phronêsis* studies the human good, whereas wisdom must be of the highest objects of knowledge: 'Of the highest [*timiôtata*] objects, we say; for it would be strange to think that the art of politics, or practical wisdom, is the best knowledge, since man is not the best thing in the world' (1141A20–2). The heavenly bodies are better than us, by virtue of the eternal order and regularity of their motions (1141A35–B1; cf. *EE* I.7, 1217A33–5). There is also the crucial, if sadly opaque discussion of the good in *Metaphysics* XII.10 (1075A11–15):

> We must consider also in which of two ways the nature of the cosmos contains the good and the best [*to agathon kai to ariston*], whether as something separate and by itself, or as the order of the parts. Probably in both ways, as an army does; for its good is found both in its order and in its general, and more in the latter; for he does not depend on the order but it depends on him.[24]

answer cannot be 'for the agent'. Whatever Aristotle is claiming here, it is not identical with (or entitled to any plausibility accruing from) the egoistic principle that all action aims at self-benefit. And taken in detachment from that principle, 'all action aims at some good for someone' seems no more endoxic than 'all action aims at some good' (the 'bare desirability' claim, as Kraut calls it). In any case it seems to me reasonable to suppose that the meaning of 'good' gains a more determinate content as the *NE* proceeds; the disqualification of the good *simpliciter* as an end is part of the point of *NE* I.6, and so should not be presupposed earlier.

23 Such explanations are criticised by Theophrastus' *Metaphysics* (11A5–7–12) and seem to be renounced (either fleetingly or later in life) by Aristotle in *Physics* II.7, where he says that teleological explanations must show how 'for this reason it's better this way – not *simpliciter* [*haplôs*] but in relation to the nature of each thing' (198B9). But elsewhere, degrees of betterness *simpliciter* pervade and structure the natural world on Aristotle's account: 'soul is better than body, and the living, having soul, is thereby better than the inanimate, and being is better than not being and living than not living. These are the reasons for the generation of animals' (*De Generatione Animalium* 731B28–31; cf. *De Generatione et Corruptione* 336B25–35).

24 Cf. also the critical discussion of the good as principle at *Metaphysics* XIV.4–6. The dialectical context here makes the extraction of Aristotle's own views problematic, but he seems to assume that it is appropriate to include the Good (*simpliciter*, evidently) among philosophical first principles (cf. XIV.5, 1092A9–11).

Here, *contra* Aristotle's findings in the *Eudemian Ethics*, there does seem to be a Good Itself distinct from the human good: namely God, the prime mover. God satisfies both criteria for the Good Itself set out in *Eudemian Ethics* I.8, by being both the best thing and, as Aristotle here claims, the cause of goodness to the rest. The only way to reconcile this text with *Eudemian Ethics* I.8 is, I take it, to read the latter as tacitly restricting the discussion to candidates for an *ethically relevant* Good Itself – what I have been calling a Higher Good. But then Aristotle seems to owe us an argument for his assumption that this would exclude God.

At any rate Aristotle has no qualms about the claim that some things are good *simpliciter*, and to a higher degree than ourselves. So far as I know, Aristotle never quite explains exactly why this goodness should be constituted by rationality. Perhaps the fact that god engages in – or rather, *is* – rational intellectual activity (*Metaphysics* XII.7) is the ground of its goodness: rationality is good in us by being an imitation or approximation of the divine. More likely, rationality has properties which are good in themselves (such as beauty, order and honourableness, perhaps), and it is in virtue of these that it is appropriate to the divine (cf. *Metaphysics* XII.7; *NE* X.8). Ultimately, the value of rationality may derive from highly formal metaphysical grounds. Being is better than not being, according to Aristotle (*De Generatione et Corruptione* 336b25–35; *De Generatione Animalium* 731b24–30); and since it can take the form of a pure and eternal actuality, rational activity is the most perfect mode of being.

For our purposes, the main upshot is that Aristotle has left himself with very little room to manoeuvre in response to Plato. His rejection of the Higher Good thesis cannot depend on any claim that there is no such thing as goodness *simpliciter*; or that all goods must be derivative of the human good; or that since human beings are the best things our good is necessarily the highest good there could be; or that though there is such a thing as goodness *simpliciter* – and a cosmic Good itself and Best to boot – it is irrelevant to the good for us. For Aristotle believes none of these things. On the contrary, he himself accepts the crucial move in the argument from relational goods, the claim that relational goods need to be understood in relation to what is good about their subjects (in our case, rationality), where that 'goodness about' is good *simpliciter*.

IV THE ARGUMENT FROM INCORPORATION

This still does not bring us to anything very much like the Platonic Form of the Good. In principle, the argument from relational goods as

I have presented it shows only that there must be such a thing as goodness *simpliciter*, and that some science which studies it is appropriately a master art over the arts which provide relational goods. And this is compatible with any number of substantive positions.[25] It is compatible, for instance, with what we might call Brute Pessimism: the Good *simpliciter* is some property which nothing instantiates – non-existence, perhaps – so that nothing, including the human good, has any goodness *simpliciter*. As we have already seen, Plato and Aristotle, far from embracing this possibility, assent as well to some reasonable-sounding corollaries to the argument: goodness *simpliciter* is instantiated; human beings are good *simpliciter*; other things are so to a higher degree; and some instances of goodness *simpliciter* do not depend on any kind of relational goodness. Still, to support the candidacy of the Form as Higher Good, a different kind of argument is required. This is what I'll call *the argument from incorporation*. Simply put: the human good plausibly consists in activities of incorporation; the value of such an activity is determined by the value of the object incorporated; so the human good, to be really good, must consist in the incorporation of things which are good *simpliciter* in the highest degree.[26]

For Plato, those goods are of course the Forms, and a recurrent project of his, notably in the *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Republic* and *Phaedrus*, is to work out what it means for them to be incorporated into our lives. To abstract and oversimplify, incorporation seems to have three aspects. One is *association*. The good is the object of our desire, which seeks, as Plato says in the *Meno*, 'to possess or secure' its object for oneself (77c7–8). But in coming to understand what really is good, we must also ascend to a more refined conception of what its 'possession' amounts to. To understand the real good is, among other things, to grasp that we benefit not from owning it, ruling it, eating it or wearing it, but simply from being together with it (*sunousia*); which, given the kind of thing the Forms are, can only mean contemplation of it in thought. The second aspect of incorporation is *assimilation*. The company you keep shapes your character. The Forms, being beautiful,

25 The argument as I have presented it is also compatible with a range of conceptions of the 'master art' in question. Perhaps it would simply have for its object the universal 'good', or as Aristotle puts it *to koinon*: what all good things have in common. (Aristotle considers *to koinon*, the 'common' or universal good, and rejects its claim to be the Good Itself, in *EE* I.8.) But the master art could also be conceived as studying a particular set of objects which are good *simpliciter* in a privileged way, so as to be explanatory of the human good. The philosopher-king's knowledge of the Good would combine these conceptions; Aristotle strenuously rejects the former but is, I argue, largely committed to something like the latter.

26 My discussion of Platonic incorporation is very much influenced by the excellent account given by Richard Kraut 1992.

are naturally attractive; human behaviour is naturally plastic and imitative; so association with the Forms is continuous with coming to resemble them (*Phaedo* 79C–E, 81A–D; *Theaetetus* 176E–17A; cf. assimilation to the divine in the *Phaedrus* 252D–3C and to the heavenly bodies at *Timaeus* 47A–C). The third moment of incorporation is *generation*. To associate with the Forms and become assimilated to them is a fertile business: its effects naturally overflow the individual to sprout new manifestations (*Symposium* 212A–B). For all such purposes, the incorporation model seems to require that the objects incorporated are or behave like *individuals*. We are to spend time in company with the Forms as we do with our friends; admire and imitate them as we do our heroes; generate together with them as we do with lovers.

So where the argument from relational goods is, as it were, a matter of meta-ethical principle, tending to establish only the universal goodness *simpliciter*, *incorporation* belongs to moral psychology – we could almost say to physics – and goes naturally with a conception of an individual Higher Good. It's a theory about the mechanisms by which we interact with objects better (*simpliciter*) than ourselves, in order to attain what is good for us. And as Richard Kraut has argued, Plato is on to something intuitively powerful here, if seen at a high level of generality: namely the principle that 'the goodness of human life depends heavily on our having a close connection with something eminently worthwhile that lies outside of ourselves'.[27] Kraut points out that something like this principle can also be found in various religious traditions and in the Romantic conception of the value of nature.

Why Plato adopts this incorporation model of happiness, and how it could be supported, are huge questions which could take us far afield. For present purposes I will just note that, as I suggested at the outset, Platonic Forms are above all solutions to explanatory problems; and this seems to apply to the role of the Forms in happiness. Introducing the Form of the Good in *Republic* VI, Socrates observes that the good is the most important object of knowledge, for it's by its relation to the good that justice and everything else becomes beneficial (505A6–B1). But what *is* the good? The two obvious and leading candidates are pleasure and knowledge: 'the majority believe that pleasure is the good, while the more sophisticated believe that it is knowledge [*phronêsis*]' (505B5–6). Both claims run into immediate difficulties: the partisans of pleasure must admit that some pleasures are bad, and the proponents of knowledge lapse into circularity: they 'can't tell us what sort of knowledge it is, however, but in the end are forced to say that it is knowledge of the good' (505B8–10). And though Plato does not here

27 Kraut 1992: 329.

press the point, these two inadequacies share a common denominator. For neither 'knowledge' nor 'pleasure' is a complete description of an experience or state. More fully specified, both are as I've called them activities of incorporation: knowledge is knowledge *of* something, pleasure is pleasure *in* or *from* something. And as Plato will emphasise in Book IX (and Aristotle likewise in *NE* X.3) pleasures in different things *are* very different things. Likewise, not all knowledge is equal because not all objects of knowledge are equal. So to say that happiness consists in pleasure and/or knowledge is to say nothing useful until you have said pleasure *in what* and knowledge *of what*. Thus neither candidate is acceptable as presented. It isn't that they're wrong: in the *Philebus*, the happy life will indeed be described in terms of both pleasure and knowledge (20C–2C, 61A–7B), and roughly the same seems to be true in *Republic* Book IX (see esp. 580D–8A). But here in Book VI, the two candidates can serve only to propel the introduction of the Good, as the best object of knowledge and truest source of pleasure.

Now Aristotle too accepts a version of the incorporation model. For he shares the Platonic view that our happiness depends on activities involving other things which are good *simpliciter*, including both knowledge (broadly speaking) and pleasure. He also agrees that activities of incorporation are dependent for their value on the object incorporated. Pleasures 'differ in kind: for those from noble things are different from those from shameful things' (*NE* X.3, 1173B289). And in the case of knowledge, we have already seen that it is definitive of wisdom that it relate us to the best and most divine objects. The best human life is best by virtue of its engagement with the things which are best *simpliciter*.

At this point Aristotle's rejection of the Higher Good thesis begins to look *ad hoc* and perhaps untenable. If it is the job of the *politikos* to promote the human good; and if that good consists in engagement with objects which are better than ourselves, then it is hard to see how his work can be done without being informed by a grasp of those objects. And how full an understanding of contemplation and its objects can the *politikos* have, without understanding those objects himself? Again, according to Aristotle, contemplation provides us with a yardstick for the acquisition of wealth and worldly goods: we should pursue such things only so far as they promote contemplation of the divine (*EE* VIII.3, 1249B16–23). But how can the *politikos* apply such a yardstick without knowing in some detail what contemplation consists in and therefore requires – or accepting the guidance of someone who does? Aristotle is free to stipulate that, given the formal difference between *sophia* and *phronêsis* as theoretical and practical sciences, the former cannot quite count as a 'master art' within the terms of

Nicomachean Ethics I.1–2. But such formal considerations do nothing to counter the substantive point that the promotion of the human good, as Aristotle himself understands it, must be informed by a grasp of wisdom and its objects: and a full grasp of wisdom and its objects just *is* wisdom. Aristotle's own commitments seem to leave him with no principled grounds for objection to the Higher Good thesis: as he practises his craft, the Aristotelian *politikos* will need a Platonist metaphysician looking over his shoulder.[28]

V RESULTS

I have tried to show that the argument from the crafts stands as a somewhat misleading proxy for a much deeper quarrel. Given his own commitment to a Platonic hierarchy of the crafts, Aristotle cannot mean to argue that carpentry and weaving are untouched by higher normative considerations. Rather, his claim must be that those higher considerations are closed off at the human good. Aristotle invokes carpentry and weaving to give a tinge of *reductio* to his rejection of Platonic *politikê* – more precisely, to his rejection of the possibility that the knowledge needed by the *politikos* might require traffic with a Higher Good.

Without wanting to claim that they settle the matter, I have sketched two lines of counterattack open to the Platonist. First, the human good, like the more specialised goods of the subordinate crafts, is not a natural or inevitable terminus for practical reasoning. As a relational good, it must be understood in relation to something 'higher' (even if this is only the universal, goodness *simpliciter*, taken as the object of a comprehensive science of value): such a Higher Good is a necessary postulate of *politikê* understood as a fully rational craft. For to grasp fully and pursue successfully our good, the *politikos* must understand what it consists in and *why* it is good; and to do this he must understand what is good *about us*, which in turn means grasping the nature of goodness *simpliciter* and our relation to it. Second, on a plausible and widespread understanding of our good (the incorporation model), it consists in engagement with objects which are good *simpliciter* in the highest degree. In that case, it seems reasonable to suppose that the *politikos* only really understands the human good to the extent that he himself understands those objects.

In principle, these two lines of argument seem to generate different kinds of good. The argument from relational goods can be taken as generating only the universal (as we would take it to be) goodness

28 Cf. Lear 2004: 111–12: 'whereas the practically wise person takes the nature and value of happiness as given, the student of cosmology understands why human happiness is ordered in the way that it is'; see also the whole of her ch. V.

simpliciter; and though that is plausibly the object of a broader and more authoritative science than *politikê* it does not look much like the Platonic Form. The incorporation model, on the other hand, requires the instantiation of that goodness *simpliciter* in objects with which we can have 'association' (*sunousia*). It is striking that Aristotle takes this further Platonic step. Since his heavenly bodies and divine movers are good *simpliciter* in a more powerful way than ourselves, they can play exactly the role required by the incorporation model – the kind of role in our lives which other people more usually play, as objects of love, emulation and fertile interaction.

Where Aristotle does depart from Plato is of course in holding these two kinds of goodness *distinct*. The prime mover may be the best thing, but he is certainly not identical with the universal goodness *simpliciter* (on Aristotle's view a cross-categorical monstrosity to begin with). And the text of the argument from the crafts in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6 suggests that Plato's refusal to distinguish the two is – as so often – the real root of Aristotle's critique. For the designation under which Aristotle attacks the Form here is as a 'pattern', *paradeigma* (1087A2). This is the term Plato himself invokes when he speaks of the bearing of the Forms on practical reasoning: as Socrates tells Euthyphro, 'Tell me then what this form itself is [the form of piety], so that I may look upon it, and, using it as a model [*paradeigma*], say that any action of yours or another's that is of that kind is pious, and if it is not that it is not' (6E4–7). *Paradeigma* is itself a concept from the crafts, and building in particular: among other things, a *paradeigma* is a sample capital which the builder uses as a model for production of all the others.[29] Aristotle's reference to the Platonic Form as a *paradeigma* points to its role as the model to which a craftsman looks in shaping his materials, including the divine craftsman who creates the cosmos and the *politikos* who creates a just city. It is as a *paradeigma* that the Form is at once a universal essence (conceived as a standard, or a set of specifications, or a blueprint imposed on its instances), a best instantiation of that essence, and the cause of it to the other instances.

So examination of the argument from the crafts brings us back, in the end, to a very familiar place. The only criticism in the vicinity which remains genuinely open to Aristotle, given his own commitments, turns out to be his old favourite: namely, that Plato's Good, as a *paradeigma*, is required to do the metaphysically impossible by serving as both the universal goodness *simpliciter* and a causally active instantiation of it. (I am not at all sure that this is a fair criticism either, but that is a subject for another day.) I conclude that the argument from the crafts fails – or

29 See Patterson 1985: ch. 2 esp. 13–14.

at any rate fails to be what we and Aristotle might have hoped for, namely a genuinely independent argument against the Platonic Good as a postulate of practical reason. If the Form of the Good *is* misconceived, it is for reasons which have wholly to do with the metaphysics of universals and particulars, and nothing to do with what practical reason might legitimately want from a theory of value. And the real source of the dispute about the Good between Plato and Aristotle is, as it turns out, Plato's excessive ontological parsimony.

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