

# Aristotle's Criticism of the Platonic Idea of the Good in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.6\*

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In *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.6 Aristotle sets out to examine the notion of a universal Good and discuss thoroughly what is meant by it. In the introduction to this chapter, he alludes to Plato and uses as the starting point for this discussion the confession that such an inquiry is made an uphill task by the fact that the Forms have been introduced by his own friends.<sup>1</sup> Still, his decision as a philosopher or lover of wisdom is to sacrifice even his clos-

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<sup>1</sup> We must recall the passage in the *Republic* (*R.* 595b9–c3), which is notoriously recognized as a parallel, because Plato refers to Homer in a way similar to Aristotle's allusion in *EN* 1.6. Flashar (1988: 219, n. 26 [1965: 241]) asserts that Aristotle has borrowed the word *ῥσιον* (*EN* 1096a16) from the Platonic words: ἀλλὰ γὰρ τὸ δοκοῦν ἀληθὲς οὐχ ῥσιον προδιδόναι (*R.* 607c7–8), which belong to another passage that refers to Homer within the frame of Plato's criticism of his poetry. Cf. *Smp.* 201c6–9; *Phd.* 91c1f.; *Sph.* 246d8–9; *Phlb.* 14b5–7. In all my references to Flashar, the translation is my own.

est personal ties in defense of the truth; for while both are dear, piety requires to honor the truth above one's friends.<sup>2</sup> This statement implies that he believes that he will present arguments which question the validity or highlight the insufficiency of the Platonic Form of the Good, i.e., arguments which are imposed by the truth itself. The first mention of this distinctively Platonic thesis in the *Nicomachean Ethics* occurs at 1095a26–28: “But some have held that there is an absolute good, distinct and apart from the many goods here, and the cause of goodness in all of them” (transl. Allan). D.J. Allan notes that the noun ἰδέα (Idea) is not used in this passage, but we find it at 1096b32; he believes that the latter passage is a backward glance at the first statement.<sup>3</sup>

### 1. The argument from the Platonic thesis that there is no Idea of things arranged in order

In *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.6, Aristotle formulates a criticism articulated by means of six or seven arguments (their number in the sequence depends on the line of interpretation), a reference to the Pythagoreans, a Platonic objection which is used as a defense of the

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<sup>2</sup> Flashar 1988: 204 [1965: 226] notes that in this chapter, at the beginning of his criticism of the Platonic Idea of the Good, Aristotle underlines his closest personal ties with Plato in a way that is unique in the entire Aristotelian corpus. Following an analogous inference of Jaeger, which was drawn from a careful study of a poem composed by Aristotle and addressed to Eudemus, Flashar poses the question whether we have to suppose that Aristotle made this strictly personal confession about his close relation to Plato soon after Plato's death. This impression, according to him, might be enforced by the fact that Aristotle, in order to express his friendship and the feeling of belonging to Plato's circle, uses the style of the first plural person which is comparable to the style he uses in *Metaphysics* book A. Ross (1953: Vol. I, 191) notes that the use of the first person in the sense of “we the Platonists” is common to books A and B of the *Metaphysics* and that the same tone may be detected in *EN* 1096a 13. Nevertheless, I believe that Flashar is correct when he stresses that no one should be so naïve as to assume that these words are the first shy appearance of a criticism rather than, conversely, a mature manifestation of Aristotle's consciousness of his closest personal ties with Plato, which would be aligned with an elder wisdom. I agree with him that the phrase τὰ οἰκεία ἀναρπεῖν reveals Aristotle's feeling of belonging to the Academy. For different opinions about the time when Aristotle must be still considered as a member of the Academy, see Flashar (1988: 204, 218, n. 20, 21, 22 [1965: 226, 240]). Eustratius (*In EN* 42.2–4), in his Commentary on the *EN*, notes that even the verb δόξετε in 1096a14 proves that Aristotle presents his counter arguments against the Platonic theory of the Good with respect, trying to avoid being impertinent. In all my references to Eustratius, the translation is my own.

<sup>3</sup> Allan 1963–1964: 275. Allan (1963–1964: 279) notes that “in *EN* Aristotle has treated ‘absolute good’ simply as another description of the Idea, and has consequently discarded it as part of the Platonic baggage. In *EE*, he has chosen to adopt for his own use the name and notion of an absolute good; and this vitally affects both the form and the content of his criticism.” He believes that “in *EN* the expression ‘absolute good’ is used with some degree of scorn, whereas in *EE* a cajoling tone is employed.” We should note that in *EE* 1.8, Aristotle uses the term ἰδέα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ (*EE* 1217b6, 14, 20–21; 1218b7) as well as the expression αὐτὸ τὸ ἀγαθόν, the latter to denote both the Platonic Good (*EE* 1217b3–4, 1218a33) and his own ultimate Good (*EE* 1218a38–39; 1218b7–8). In *EN*, Aristotle uses the expressions, καθόλου (*EN* 1096a11), ἰδέα (*EN* 1096b20, 32), κοινὴ ἰδέα (*EN* 1096a23), κατὰ μίαν ἰδέαν (*EN* 1096a30; b16), κοινόν τι κατὰ μίαν ἰδέαν (*EN* 1096b25–26), κοινόν τι καθόλου καὶ ἔν (*EN* 1096a28), κοινῇ κατηγορούμενον ἀγαθόν (*EN* 1096b32–33), χωριστὸν αὐτὸ τι καθ' αὐτό (*EN* 1096b33), to refer to the Platonic Good (ἰδέα) or the universal Good (κοινὸν ἢ καθόλου).

Platonic doctrine, and the answer to this objection or the Aristotelian counter-argument.<sup>4</sup> His first argument, presented in passage 1096a17–23, is of ontological value and is based on the assertion that the originators of the theory of Forms did not posit Ideas of groups of things within which they recognized an order of priority and posteriority; for which reason they did not construct an Idea of numbers in general. But Good is predicated alike in the categories of Substance, of Quality and of Relation (*pros ti*), while that which is *per se*, i.e. substance, is prior in nature to the relative; so that there could not be a common Idea set over all these goods.<sup>5</sup>

In my opinion, Allan is correct when he stresses that the function of the criticism in *EE* 1.8 and *EN* 1.6 is not the same, but in spite of the striking difference in terminology, the two chapters set aside the same Platonic doctrines for much the same reasons, and leave the same path open; thus, to some extent the two discussions are complementary, rather than parallel, to one another.<sup>6</sup> With regard to the terminology, I believe that we frequently see that Aristotle is not consistent in its use, since we can see the terms with a different meaning in different contexts, although this is less important when we attempt to compare passages from his different treatises. In my opinion, what is more important is the comparison of the philosophical content and argumentation. Aristotle uses the same argument in *EE* 1.8, 1218a1–9. It would be useful for us to exploit the justification of the Platonic thesis that he offers in this latter passage, in order to understand why according to the testimony of the *EN*, the Platonists<sup>7</sup> did not posit a general Idea of number or, in other words, why they denied the existence of a separate Idea of number.<sup>8</sup> In this passage

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<sup>4</sup> Shields (2015: 95) states that “it proves difficult to state with precision all of Aristotle’s anti-Platonic arguments in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.6. There is already a significant question as to their number and then also as to their relation to one another; several of the arguments are highly compressed and all are enthymematic to at least some degree.” See also Shields 2015: 95, n. 33.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout this paper, I partly follow the translation by Ross (1925) and partly that by Rackham (1926).

<sup>6</sup> Allan 1963–1964: 280–281.

<sup>7</sup> Flashar (1988: 218, n. 25 [1965: 240]) notes that the words οἱ δὲ κομισάντες τὴν δόξαν (*EN* 1096a17) show clearly that what is meant here is Plato’s theory and not some theory of the later Platonists.

<sup>8</sup> Mueller (1986: 113) states that this passage of *Ethics* is the only evidence that Plato did not posit a general idea of number. Nevertheless, we must note that the *EN* passage is not the only evidence that Plato did not posit an idea of number; there is also passage 999a6–14 in the *Metaphysics*. Many scholars believe that the *Ethics* passage cannot be dissociated from the passage in the *Metaphysics*. Bury (1904:17) believes that the latter passage proves τὸ πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον to refer to logical (κατ’εἶδος) production and sequence; according to his reading, the view stated there is that so long as the process (γέννησις) which involves πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον is going on, we have not yet arrived at an εἶδος proper; this we do only when that process comes to its term in ἄτομόν τι. Ἀριθμός, e.g., is divisible into a variety of εἶδη, and, hence, does not constitute in itself an idea. Wilson (1904: 248) does not accept this interpretation as a true inference from this passage because he believes it is not necessary to enquire if it refers to some process of γέννησις. Moreover, according to him, the principle stated in this passage is not applied to the Platonic Ideas at all; and if it were, he adds, the result would be that there was no Idea of number, not because ἀριθμός was divisible into εἶδη, but because its εἶδη stand to one another in the relation of πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον. What Wilson (1904: 248, 256) understands from this passage is that “if a group of things stand in the relation of πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον, their common predicate (τὸ ἐπὶ τούτων) cannot be some common element distinguishable (παρὰ) from them”; since τὸ ἐπὶ τούτων means the common predicate of certain species, εἶδη does not mean “Ideas” but simply species as contrasted with the γένος. Alexander of Aphrodisias (*In Metaph.* 208.28–209.14; transl. Madigan 1992) proposes a similar interpretation. According

of the *Eudemian Ethics*, it is stated that wherever there is a sequence of factors, a prior and a subsequent, there is not some common element beyond, and, further, separable from, them, for, then, there would be something prior to the first; for the common and separable element would be prior, because with its destruction the first would be destroyed as well. For example, if the double is the first of the multiples, then the universal multiple cannot be separable, for it would be prior to the double, if the common element turns out to be the Idea, as it would be if one made the common element separable.<sup>9</sup> H. Flashar notes that in the parallel passage of the *EE* (*EE* 1218a1–9), one cannot discern Aristotle’s attempt to link this critical argument with Plato’s doctrine. Furthermore, he notes that no reader of this passage could imagine that, according to what is said in the *EN*, this reasoning corresponds with Plato’s theory. He also points out the different way in which the argument is treated in the *EE*, which is so conspicuous that one is left wondering if there really is any intention to use it with the same meaning in both *Ethics*.<sup>10</sup> Both Flashar and Hardie believe that passage 1019a1–4 in *Metaphysics*, where different senses of “prior and posterior” are examined and elucidated by Aristotle, testifies about Plato’s doctrine the same thing as that stated in the *EE* passage, especially at 1218a4–6.<sup>11</sup> In *Metaph.* 1019a1–4, Aristotle attributes to Plato a kind of division (*dihairesis*): “there are things which are prior and posterior in respect of nature and substance, i.e. those which can be without other things, while the others cannot be without them – a distinction which Plato used” (transl. Hardie). In my view, the passage in the *Metaphysics* does not relate precisely the same thing as the one in the *EE*. The former describes a thesis which could originally be Platonic, while the latter combines two Platonic theses with an Aristotelian one. According to my reading, the *EE* passage includes firstly the Platonic doctrine that the common factor of the things which constitute a multitude is something separable, i.e. an Idea. Secondly, it contains the Platonic doctrine that the separable can be without

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to him, Aristotle presents this argument in support of the view that the ultimate genera, that is, the indivisible species, must be termed principles to a higher degree than the highest and most common kinds. For the kinds that are predicated of the species are not even anything at all distinct from the species of which they are predicated. He proves this by evoking the cases where there is a prior and a posterior; numbers are a case of prior and posterior. If in the case of numbers two or three is the first of the numbers, there does not exist some further nature of number, distinct from these numbers, two and three and those that follow, of which it is predicated as a kind. Alexander explains that Aristotle assumes this as being the view of those thinkers as well – the disciples of Plato – for they were the ones who posited the highest kinds as principles of beings, as he has related: One and Being, and the Great and the Small. He adds that as Aristotle relates in other places, but especially in the first book of the *EN*, they asserted that where there is a prior and a posterior, the common factor is not anything distinct from the things of which it is predicated. This was, at any rate, according to Aristotle, the reason why they said that there was no Idea of these things either. Furthermore, Alexander (*In Metaph.* 209.15–22) distinguishes between what Aristotle ascribes to the Platonists and what he states, speaking in his own name. Madigan (1992: 149, n. 265) is right when he recognizes two possible interpretations of Aristotle’s argument offered by Alexander. Although there is a lacuna, the first can be reconstructed as follows: if kinds are not distinct in cases of prior and posterior, then they also are not distinct in other cases. The second is based on the assumption that all kinds are cases of prior and posterior.

<sup>9</sup> I partly follow the translation by Rackham (1935) and partly that by Solomon (1915).

<sup>10</sup> Flashar 1988: 206 (1965: 228).

<sup>11</sup> Flashar 1988: 218, n. 25 (1965: 240); Hardie 1968 (1980, 1999): 52.

the other things, whereas the others cannot be without it. But, by using his own terminology, Aristotle transforms the latter as follows; the destruction of the separable entails the destruction of the others which cannot be without it. In parallel, the same passage presupposes the Aristotelian view that the common predicate or common element of the many things, i.e. the universal (or the universal predicate), does not exist beyond them. In my opinion, the *EE* as well as the parallel *Metaphysics* passage involve the doctrine of the ontological priority of the separable within the Platonic context and of substance within the Aristotelian context. Nevertheless, this kind of ontological priority is not compatible with the sense in which the ideal numbers are said to be related as prior and posterior. In what follows, I will show that the order of the ideal numbers does not imply any ontological dependence.

Hardie<sup>12</sup> refers to another Aristotelian passage in the *Categories*, that in my view presents a sense of “prior and posterior”, which is highly compatible with the case of the numbers. This is corroborated by the fact that this passage gives, as an example of the definition of priority it offers, the priority of a number to its successor: “Secondly, one thing is said to be ‘prior’ to another when the sequence of their being cannot be reversed. In this sense ‘one’ is prior to ‘two’. For if ‘two’ exists, it follows directly that ‘one’ must exist, but if ‘one’ exists, it does not follow necessarily that ‘two’ exists: thus, the sequence subsisting cannot be reversed. It is agreed, then, that when the sequence of two things cannot be reversed, then that one on which the other depends is called prior to that other” (*Cat.* 14a29–35; transl. Hardie).<sup>13</sup> The latter passage is more effective than the others in helping us understand the meaning of the sequence or the order when we refer to numbers. Let us now come to the ideal numbers and see what the order means in terms of ontological relations in this specific case of numbers.

In passage 526a1–7 of the *Republic*, Socrates speaks of the numbers which are accessible only to the intelligence and which are constituted of indivisible units that are all equal and quantitatively indifferent.<sup>14</sup> Cherniss<sup>15</sup> refers to Alexander of Aphrodisias, who commenting on *Metaphysics* 991b22, states that units can differ only in position, but then he adds that units with position are no longer units but points.<sup>16</sup> According to Aristotle, units are not to be identified with points; besides numbers and units have order (τάξις) instead of position (θέσις) and succession (ἐφεξῆς) but not contact (ἄφῆ).<sup>17</sup> The ideal numbers, being inadmissible and, thereby, entirely outside of one another, since none is

<sup>12</sup> Hardie 1968 (1980, 1999): 52.

<sup>13</sup> I believe that the next passage in the *Categories*, namely 14a35–b3, would also help in a way to understand the sense in which numbers are related as prior and posterior.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Arist. *Metaph.* 1080a15–36; 1081a5–7; 1081a17–21.

<sup>15</sup> Cherniss 1944 I: 518.

<sup>16</sup> Alex.Aphr. *In Metaph.* 112.5–13. With respect to the thesis that units can differ only in position, Alexander evokes what Aristotle himself states in *De An.* 409a18–21; see also 409a6.

<sup>17</sup> Arist. *Cat.* 5a30–33; *Metaph.* 1069a12–14; 1085a 3–4; *Ph.* 227a17–23 and 27–32.

part of any other, stand to one another in the relation of prior and posterior and this serial order is their only distinguishing feature.<sup>18</sup> However, the Aristotelian argument formulated in the *EN* is invalid, since the priority and posteriority of which the Platonists speak is the one that we see in an ordered series, such as the series of ideal-numbers, and it is irrelevant to the ontological priority of substance over the other categories or the ontological posteriority of the other categories in comparison with substance. The order of the ideal numbers does not imply the ontological dependence of one number upon another. As Cherniss remarks, “what distinguishes each of the ideal numbers from all the rest is its position in this series, as is shown by the fact that Plato defined the ideal two as the ‘first number’, the ideal three as the ‘second number’, and so on. This order is not one of ontological priority, however, for in the ontological sense each ideal number is called ‘first’ or ‘primary’ in relation to the respective numbers which are aggregates and not ideas (so, for example, the ‘second number’ is the ‘first three’) and in this sense ‘the first number’ is used not of the idea of two but collectively of the whole series of ideal numbers.”<sup>19</sup>

Mueller believes that this passage of the *EN* refers only to numbers and not specifically to ideal or idea numbers. He stresses that Plato need not have taken this ordering as a special feature of ideal numbers because, presumably, anyone who knows what numbers are, knows that they are related as prior to posterior. He adds that if these numbers are simply numerical forms, then there is no way to order them directly; twoness neither precedes nor follows threeness, although it would be easy enough to construct an order on the basis of an independent concept of number.<sup>20</sup> However, Tarrant explains how from the “ordinal” aspect of the phenomenal numbers we can conclude the character of the relation which the ideal numbers have to one another, according to the Platonists. He states: “Phenomenal numbers, i.e. those composed of sensible units and those composed of abstract monads, stand to one another in the relation of prior to posterior; we see this when we count. Since phenomenal numbers participate in, or imitate, the ideal numbers, it follows that also the ideal numbers have a relation of prior and posterior to each other, a relation which must be independent of the fact that phenomenal numbers are congeries of units. Otherwise, according to Plato, we should not have

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<sup>18</sup> Cherniss 1944 I: 518–519; 1962: 35.

<sup>19</sup> Cherniss 1962: 35–36. Wilson (1904: 247) examines first in parallel the *EN* passage and *Metaphysics* 1080b11–16, and further he shows that a seeming contradiction arose simply from a misinterpretation of the first clause in the passage from the *Ethics*, which was taken to mean that there were no Ideas at all in the case of things related as πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον. He stresses that the first clause of the *Ethics* passage means, not that the Platonists allowed no Ideas at all in the sphere of the πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον, but rather that in the case of a group whose members were in this relation, there was no one single Idea to correspond to the group as such; consequently the Ideal numbers had no one Idea of number corresponding to them as a group. He, then, shows (1904: 248) that a third passage, *Metaphysics* 999a6–14, when combined with the above passages is perfectly coherent with them. Flashar (1988: 218, n. 25 [1965: 240]) also stresses that there is no contradiction between the *EN* passage and *Metaphysics* 1080b11–16 because in the first one it is not meant that the particular members of this series should not have the character of Ideas. Cherniss (1962: 36; 1944 I: 522–524) also adds that Aristotle generalized this principle and used it to refute in general the existence of Ideas which Plato certainly posited.

<sup>20</sup> Mueller 1986: 113.

been able to count.<sup>21</sup> Hardie believes that there is no need to discuss here the distinction between ideal numbers or Forms and mathematical numbers. He states that it is enough to refer to the evidence that the numbers here are Forms; according to him, what Aristotle is saying that the Platonists denied is not that the numbers, i.e. the members of the series of integers, are Forms but that there is a Form of number in general. By comparing the *EN* with the parallel passages of the *EE* and *Metaphysics* M 6 and B 3, he concludes that we find in them the evidence that we can confidently reject the eccentric opinion that the numbers in *EN* 1.6 are mathematical numbers and not Ideas.<sup>22</sup>

I believe that Flashar offers a more moderate interpretation, when he suggests that we should not ask whether Aristotle means here the ideal-numbers or the mathematical numbers, since he only presents a general example which can be applied to both kinds of number. According to Flashar, when one reads about the relation of the prior to the posterior between the numbers, one immediately thinks of the ideal numbers; but in the *EE* it is obvious that he speaks of the ordinary numbers. Flashar notes that the statement here is completely general and cannot be taken as corresponding to some concrete phase of the Platonic theory. He aligns himself with Gigon, who believes that neither are the numbers here restricted to the realm of the ideal numbers, nor is the whole argument exclusively related to the ideal numbers.<sup>23</sup> Apart from these remarks, I believe that it is questionable whether the justification which Aristotle offers in the *EE* for the argument presented in both *Ethics*, is the Platonic explanation of this thesis in its full account.<sup>24</sup> Hardie traces in it an inconsistency which I consider serious: that the assumption of the separate Idea would lead to the contradiction only if the Idea would be prior to the first term of the series in the sense of being its immediate predecessor; but the Idea would be prior not to the first term of the series but rather to the series as a whole.<sup>25</sup> It may be that we can trace the real meaning of this argument provided in both *Ethics* to passage 990b17–22 of the

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<sup>21</sup> Tarrant 1981: 14–15. For the difference between not only the ideal but also the mathematical and the other kinds of number, see also *Pl. Phd.* 96e–97b, *R.* 525c–526b, *Phlb.* 56d–57a; *Arist. Metaph.* 1080b11–14.

<sup>22</sup> Hardie 1968 (1980, 1999): 53–54. I agree with him that in the *EE* passage (*EE* 1218a 8) the idea which corresponds to the “Idea embracing all numbers” in the *EN* (*EN* 1096a19) is the common predicate “multiple” (*to pollaplasion*). Also, my view is that since in the *EE* context plurality or multiplicity is characterized as common and separable, plurality or multiplicity is what Plato called a Form, and what later was called by Aristotle a universal. Hardie stresses that this interpretation is confirmed by such passages in *Metaphysics* as 1080b11–14 or 999a6–9. But I believe that it is questionable whether the two or the double, i.e. the first number, has the character of a Form in *EE*, because there is no internal textual evidence for this. Flashar (1988: 219 [1965: 241]) believes that Aristotle clearly operates in the *E.E.* passage with the usual notion of number.

<sup>23</sup> Flashar 1988: 219 (1965: 241).

<sup>24</sup> Allan (1963–1964: 281, 283) notes that the argument plays a different role in each of the two versions of the *Ethics*, because in the *EN* it is used in conjunction with the doctrine of categories. Although it is in the *EN* that Aristotle informs us that this principle is derived from the teaching of the Academy, it is in the *EE* that he sets out to analyze and justify it. Allan believes that Aristotle might have varied his tone according to what he knew regarding the qualifications of the audience; the hearers of the *EE* were probably more accustomed to technical discussion. According to his view, generally, the *EE* is throughout more demonstrative and didactic in its tone, assuming on the part of the hearers fuller knowledge both of the Academic background and of Aristotle's system.

<sup>25</sup> Hardie 1968 (1980, 1999): 55.

*Metaphysics*. Alexander of Aphrodisias explains that the main point of Aristotle's criticism of the Platonic Forms in the latter passage is that the arguments that establish the Ideas destroy the principles, which are principles of the Ideas and of the numbers as well. These principles are the One and the indefinite Dyad. According to Aristotle's argument, if there is something separated, i.e. an Idea, over all the things that have a common predicate, and if Dyad is predicated even of the indefinite Dyad, there would be something prior to the indefinite Dyad and an Idea of it; and, thus, the indefinite Dyad would no longer be a principle.<sup>26</sup> The same argument maintains that neither would the Dyad, in turn, remain both prior and a principle for number is predicated in turn of it too, since it is an Idea. The Platonists assume that the Ideas are numbers, so that for them number, being a kind of Idea, would be the first thing. In that case, number will be prior to the indefinite Dyad, which for them is a principle, while not conversely, the Dyad to number. Similarly, the Dyad would no longer be a principle, since number becomes prior to the Dyad. Hence, number which is relative (for every number is a number of something) will become prior to the principle, i.e. to what exists independently.<sup>27</sup>

In my view, it is important to understand why *Metaphysics* 990b17–22 can be seen as the best complementary passage to both the parallel passages of the *Ethics*, through the structure of the argument in the *EN* passage. In the latter passage, Aristotle conspicuously presents the argument derived from the teaching of Plato and the Academy in conjunction with the doctrine of the categories, since he uses as a premise the doctrine that being has as many senses as the categories signify. The first premise of the argument is the Platonic doctrine about things that form an ordered series and the second premise is based on the Aristotelian doctrine of the categories.<sup>28</sup> The passage in the *Metaphysics* also uses as a basis of the criticism of the thesis that there is an Idea of all the things that have a common predicate the doctrine of the categories, by placing emphasis on the priority of what exists independently to what is relative and secondary. But we must not forget that in both *Ethics* the reference is to an exception to this Platonic thesis, since the Platonists did not posit Ideas of things in which they recognized an order of priority and posteriority, as it is the case of numbers. Thus, the link between the passages in the *Ethics* and *Metaphysics* is the connection between the theory of numbers and the doctrine of

<sup>26</sup> Alex.Aphr. *In Metaph.* 85.13–24; transl. Dooley (1989).

<sup>27</sup> The argument in its fully developed form continues as follows in Alexander (*In Metaph.* 86.8–13): it is absurd the relative to be prior to what exists independently for whatever is relative is secondary. It is very important to note that Alexander in his exegesis of what a relative (*pros ti*) means refers to the *Ethics* and, what is more, to *EN* 1096a21–22. He states that "the relative (*pros ti*) signifies the relation of an antecedent underlying nature which is prior to the relation that belongs to it only incidentally; for as Aristotle says in the *Ethics* relation is like an offshoot of being." From the use of the words, παραφυσάδι γὰρ ἔθηκε τὸ πρὸς τι, ὡς εἶπεν ἐν τοῖς Ἠθικοῖς (Alex. Aphr. *In Metaph.* 86.10), we can infer that Alexander refers to *EN* 1096a21–22: παραφυσάδι γὰρ τοῦτ' ἔθηκε καὶ συμβεβηκότι τοῦ ὄντος. Alexander adds in the conclusion of the argument that even if someone were to say that number is a quantity and not a relation, the consequence for the Platonists would be that quantity is prior to substance; and the Great and the Small are themselves among the relatives.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Allan 1963–1964: 283; Hardie 1968 (1980, 1999): 51. The doctrine of the categories is presupposed in both *Ethics*.

the categories. Aristotle applies the Platonic thesis about things within which they recognized an order of priority and posteriority to his doctrine of the categories, so as to prove that there cannot be a common Idea corresponding to the absolute Good. This argument, in terms of the categories, is approximately the same as, or at least it can be reduced to, the one formulated in chapter 4 of Book *Lambda* of his *Metaphysics* (*Metaph.* 1070a33–b10). In this passage, he states that one might raise the question whether the principles and elements are different or the same for substances and for relative terms, and similarly in the case of each of the categories. Aristotle answers that it would be paradoxical if they were the same for all; for, then, from the same elements would proceed relative terms and substances. He further maintains that the principles, that is to say the elements, are not the same for substances and relatives or the other categories, and generally that there is nothing common to and distinct from substance and the other categories, namely those which are predicated.<sup>29</sup> According to the doctrine of the categories, substance and the other categories are ultimate, irreducible and heterogeneous types of predicates and there cannot be some common category, namely a category above all the others, a super-category, that would include both substances and relatives and thus, presumably, all kinds of being.<sup>30</sup>

I have shown that Aristotle's argument about the priority of substance is not compatible with the sense in which the ideal numbers are held by the Platonists to be related as prior and posterior, because the latter by referring to numbers did not mean any kind of ontological priority. Hardie is correct when he blames Aristotle for identifying what exists *per se* (*kath' auto*), what is self-subsistent, i.e. the Idea for the Platonists, with the category of substance.<sup>31</sup> Hence, the Aristotelian argument fails in its aim to refute the Platonic doctrine about the Good by using another Platonic thesis, since it misinterprets the Platonic thesis it evokes. The Aristotelian argument would be more effective if it refuted only the thesis that an Idea is just the common element or factor in things not arranged in order but situated in the same plane. The consequence of this would be that Aristotle could again repeat his familiar criticism of the Platonists' theory, in which according to Allan, they make the Idea a separated universal, while according to Hardie<sup>32</sup> they make the universal, i.e. the common predicate, a superior or perfect particular.

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<sup>29</sup> I follow the translation by Ross; cf. *Arist. Ph.* 200b33–201a1. See ps.-Alex. *In Metaph.* 678.31–679.6; see also Mouzala 2008: 140–141 and n. 170.

<sup>30</sup> See Crubellier 2000: 145–146.

<sup>31</sup> Hardie (1968 [1980, 1999]: 48) notes that, at least according to Aristotle, Plato asserts, or at least implies, that a Form (and the Good under criticism is a Form) "is a substance in the sense in which a lump of gold, or a horse, or a physical atom is a substance; a subject of predicates which endures and is liable to change – except that a Form is not liable to change."

<sup>32</sup> Allan 1963–1964: 284; Hardie 1968 (1980, 1999): 49.

## 2. The categorial multisignificance of *agathon*

According to the second Aristotelian argument, ‘good’ has as many senses as ‘being’ (for it is predicated both in the category of substance, as of God and of reason, and in quality, i.e., of the virtues, and in quantity, i.e., of that which is moderate, and in relation, i.e., of the useful, and in time, i.e., of the right opportunity, and in place, i.e., of the right locality and the like). So, clearly it cannot be a single and universal general (or common) notion (*koinon ti katholou kai hen*);<sup>33</sup> for, then, it could not have been predicated in all the categories but in one only. This argument is also of ontological value and shows that good is in close relationship to being (*on*), since it is spoken of in as many ways or senses as being. It is also consistent with the Aristotelian theory of being considered as *pollachōs legomenon*, as it is presented in chapters Δ 7 and Ζ 1 of the *Metaphysics*.<sup>34</sup> Flashar notes that in the parallel *EE* passage (*EE* 1217b27–33), the union of being and good as well as the assumption that the same categorial differences can be discerned equally in both are more rigid than in the *EN*.<sup>35</sup>

Allan aptly remarks that by these examples it is shown that good exhibits itself in each of the categories; the immediate inference is that goods cannot be reduced to one type.<sup>36</sup> Hardie states that in the phrase *tagathon isachōs legetai tō onti* (*EN* 1096a23–24) *to on* means “what has being” and not “being”. That is why he believes that Joachim’s way of taking the words seems preferable to that of Ross in his translation, but he also recognizes that the decision between the two ways of reading does not make any difference to the doctrine.<sup>37</sup> It is useful to see how Alexander of Aphrodisias analyzes and interprets being (*to on*) as *pollachōs legomenon* at *Metaphysics* 1017a22–30 in order to understand the meaning of the words *tagathon isachōs legetai tō onti* (*EN* 1096a23–24). Alexander states: “Hence, he is saying that essential being has ten senses, and he explains why this is so. For the verb ‘to be’ stationed next to each of the things that exist signifies the same as that with which it is aligned, since being, which is equivocal, signifies the existence appropriate (*oikeian hyparxin*) to each thing. But if there are ten differences by reference to the supreme genera, ‘being’ and ‘to be’ will also have ten meanings. For when aligned with substance, the verb ‘to be’ signifies substantial (*ousiōdē*) existence; when aligned with quantity or quality, it signifies the existence of something as quantified or qualified, and

<sup>33</sup> I follow the translation by Ross with the exception of this last sentence, where I follow the translation by Rackham. Alternatively, one could follow the translation by Ross (“clearly it cannot be something universally present in all cases and single”), but my preferences lie with Rackham because Ross interprets to a certain degree.

<sup>34</sup> Arist. *Metaph.* 1017a22–30; 1028a10–14.

<sup>35</sup> Flashar 1988: 206 (1965: 228).

<sup>36</sup> Allan 1963–1964: 283.

<sup>37</sup> He refers to Joachim’s interpretation of *tagathon isachōs legetai tō onti* (*EN* 1096a23–24). These words are understood by Joachim as meaning that “a subject which is good is called good in a number of senses corresponding to the senses in which something which is is said to be” (Hardie 1968 [1980, 1999]: 56).

similarly in the case of the other genera.”<sup>38</sup> In an analogous way, when Aristotle states that *tagathon isachōs legetai tō onti* (EN 1096a23–24), he probably means that the word *agathon*, when stationed next to each of the things that exist and belong to a certain category, signifies the same as that with which it is aligned, i.e., the goodness of the appropriate existence of that to which it is attached. Hardie notes that the examples offered by Aristotle are sentences with “good” as predicate and entities which are instances of various categories as subjects. Furthermore, he correctly stresses that to say that “good” is predicated in different categories surely cannot mean merely that it is predicated of subjects which are in different categories.<sup>39</sup> In my view, Aristotle’s examples show that these are predications within which “good” is assigned as a predicate to certain subjects or certain predicates among the predicates which fall under each category. In the latter case (e.g. *to metrion*, *to chrēsimon*), the predicates become subjects. Each subject or predicate which

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<sup>38</sup> Alex.Aphr. *In Metaph.* 371.20–26. I follow the translation by Dooley (1993). Dooley (1993: 144, n. 161) traces in Alexander’s words the relation between *hyparxis* (existence) and *to on* (being), and explains it. According to him, “as being is equivocal, i.e. analogous, so too is the existence (*hyparxis*) that being signifies. Thus, ‘the existence appropriate or peculiar (*oikeia*) to each thing’ means the way in which different things have their being (*to einai*): whether, that is, as substance or accident.” Dooley makes a really important inference, stressing that *hyparxis*, like *ousia* in the sense of ‘reality’, signifies a specific mode of existence. He explains that he borrows these words from a phrase used by ps.-Alexander in expanding a text of Aristotle (*Metaph.* 1070a36): “we are not debating whether mathematical objects exist (for we assert that they do), but about the mode (*tropos*) of their existence, how sc. they possess being (*to einai*): whether they exist actually and independently, or in sensible things, or by abstraction” (ps.-Alex. *In Metaph.* 725.25). In my view, it is not accurate to say that *hyparxis*, like *ousia* in the sense of ‘reality’, signifies a specific mode of existence. According to my reading, the *oikeia hyparxis hekastou* signifies the specific mode of existence of each being. We have to pay due attention to the word *oikeia*, otherwise we miss the real meaning. What Alexander of Aphrodisias says in this passage is that since within the categorial ontological context being (*to on*) is equivocal, being has not a unique meaning but signifies each time the *oikeian hyparxin* of each thing. Being lacks an independent and autonomous meaning and in each case signifies the peculiar mode of existence or the *oikeian hyparxin* of that to which it is attached. See also Mouzala 2013: 265–266. We must also keep in mind that according to what is said in Book *Gamma* of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle denies that being is a genus of all things, since, according to him, being is spoken of in many ways but not homonymously. Rather, it is spoken of as those things which are dependent upon some primary sense or principle (*aph’ henos kai pros hen*); Arist. *Metaph.* 1003a33–b10. Alexander of Aphrodisias (*In Metaph.* 241.3–9; 15–21; translation Madigan: 1993) explains that in the latter passage Aristotle draws a distinction among things that are ranged under some common predicate: equivocals (*homōnuma*), univocals (*sunōnuma*), and things said by derivation from some one thing or by reference to one thing (*aph’ henos tinos ē pros hen legomena*). By using this distinction, Aristotle shows that being is neither a genus of the things of which it is predicated nor an equivocal, but something intermediate between equivocals and univocals; for between these there are things said by derivation from one thing and by reference to one thing, and among these there is being. According to Alexander, the latter do not maintain towards one another the equality of claim to what is predicated of them that is characteristic of the univocals; nor, in turn, do they have the utter and unmitigated diversity of equivocals; rather they have a certain commonality (*koinōnia*) insofar as they are what they are said to be because there is a certain nature of that object from which they are derived, and this nature is somehow observed in all of them. Alexander recognizes two reasons for which they have come to share its name: a) they are derived from this *prag-ma* b) they bear some relation (*logos*) to it. What is important in terms of the position that Aristotle presents in *Metaphysics* Δ 7 about being (*to on*) considered as *pollachōs legomenon* is Alexander’s remark, within the frame of his comments on *Metaphysics* Γ 2, that “in other places, speaking less precisely, Aristotle placed this nature under the equivocals”, but in *Metaphysics* Γ 2 draws a more careful distinction, since he states that this type of beings differs from the equivocals (Alex.Aphr. *In Metaph.* 241.22–24). See also Madigan (1993: 146, n. 38) for the possible Aristotelian passages where “things said in many ways” are regarded as equivalent to “equivocal”. I believe this is what Alexander reads in *Metaphysics* 1017a23–24.

<sup>39</sup> Hardie 1968 (1980, 1999): 57.

becomes subject belongs to a certain category, but the same predication of good can occur in each category. The common predicate is the “good”, which bears a modified significance according to the thing of which it is predicated, so “good” achieves a “categorical multisignificance”, as Hardie notes.<sup>40</sup>

But this argument is inconsistent with the Platonic Ontology and ignores its general basic assumptions. According to these, the good as *eidetic* good is primary and one; it is common and universal only in the sense that it is prior to all the particulars and unrepeatable; moreover, it is conceived as a *paradeigma*, i.e., a perfect model or a pattern, for them. Also, it is homonymous with all the particular goods, since they borrow their name from it but do not share with it the same essence, and they exist to the degree that they participate in it.<sup>41</sup> In terms of the Good as the unhypothetical first principle of everything, the other Forms owe to it both their being and essence (*einai te kai ousian*), and the Good itself is not being but is still further beyond, surpassing being in dignity and power.<sup>42</sup>

### 3. The argument from the sciences

The third Aristotelian argument (*EN* 1096a29–34) is of epistemological value, although if we want to be precise we must note that in this argument Ontology and Epistemology intersect one another. Aristotle asserts that since of the things answering to one Idea there is one science, there would have been one science of all the goods. But as a matter of fact, there are many sciences even of the things that fall under one category; for example, opportunity (*kairos*) is not the object of a single science, because opportunity in war comes under the science of strategy, in disease under that of medicine; and the due amount in diet comes under medicine, in bodily exercise under gymnastics. The Aris-

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*. Hardie states that the statements adduced by Aristotle are not simply propositions in which good is a predicate asserted of various subjects. He maintains that they are definitions, because in this case the predicate expresses the essence, or part of the essence, of the subject. He further traces the application of the distinction between definitory and non-definitory statements about subjects in different categories in the *Metaphysics* (*Metaph.* 1030a17–23; 1028b1–2) and in the *Topics* (*Top.* 103b27–39). I doubt this thesis in light of the *EN* passage. Even if in the case of the first example the predicate expresses a part of the subject’s essence (since the goodness inheres in the essence or nature of the God), I cannot see how we could construe it as a definition. I also find the same difficulty in such sentences as “that which is moderate is good”, “that which is useful is good”, or “the right opportunity (*kairos*) is good.”

<sup>41</sup> *Pl. Phd.* 78e; 100d–101d. According to Alexander of Aphrodisias (*In Metaph.* 241.12–15; transl. Madigan 1993), equivocals share nothing else with one another, as regards what is predicated of them in common, but the name alone – given that equivocals are things which have a common name but a different formula of the essence corresponding to the name.

<sup>42</sup> *Pl. R.* 509b6–10. While Hardie (1968 [1980, 1999]: 48) claims that Aristotle does not in this chapter refer to the peculiar doctrines of the *Republic* about the Idea of the Good and it is unlikely that he had the *Republic* specifically in mind, Santas (1989: 145) argues for the opposite. He maintains that even though Aristotle does not explicitly invoke the distinction between proper and ideal attributes, which he himself makes elsewhere, there is evidence that the theory he had in mind for criticism is the theory of the *Republic*. I am in favor of Santas’ argument, because I cannot imagine that Aristotle sets aside the doctrines of the *Republic* – his criticism is of the entire theory.

totalitarian argument that things that come under a single Idea must be objects of a single science is consistent with what is said in book *Gamma* of the *Metaphysics*,<sup>43</sup> namely that every genus is investigated by a single science. More specifically, Aristotle states that “it falls to one discipline to study not only things called [what they are] by virtue of one thing, but also things called [what they are] with reference to one nature; indeed, in a certain sense the latter too are called [what they are] by virtue of one thing. Plainly, therefore, the things-that-are also fall to be studied by one discipline *qua* things-that-are... Every one genus falls to one perception and discipline” (*Metaph.* 1003b12–15; 19–20).<sup>44</sup> Flashar notes that in the *EE*, the argument which begins with the phrase, *pollachōs gar legetai kai isachōs tō ontī to agathon* (*EE* 1217b27–28), draws a parallel between being and *agathon* which is preserved and expanded at the conclusion of this reasoning by the statement, *oude epistēmē esti mia oute tou ontos oute tou agathou* (*EE* 1217b35–36).<sup>45</sup> According to Flashar, this inference is indisputably more strict and radical than the parallel remark made in the *EN*, that there are a number of sciences even for the goods which fall under one category. Owen, the scholar who establishes the expression “focal meaning” for the new treatment of being (*to on*) and other *pollachōs legomena* in *Metaphysics* Γ, believes that when Aristotle wrote the *EE*, he was already acquainted with the idea of focal meaning and used it to his stock example ‘medical’ and, then, in detail to ‘friendship’, but

<sup>43</sup> Arist. *Metaph.* 1003b11–22 and 1003b33–1004a1.

<sup>44</sup> I follow the translation by Kirwan (1993 [1971]). In his exegesis, Alexander of Aphrodisias (*In Metaph.* 240.33–241.5) explains why Aristotle in *Metaphysics* 4.2, sets out to clarify that being is *pollachōs legomenon* but not homonymous. His intention is to show the unity of science which examines being, since the latter belongs to the things said by derivation from one thing and with reference to one thing (*aph' henos tinos ē pros hen legomena*). According to Alexander, “Having said that there is a science concerned with being insofar as it is being and with its principles and causes, and having confirmed that this is wisdom (*sophia*), he next shows how it is possible for there to be one science concerned with being, despite the fact that being seems to be an equivocal (*homōnumon*), and equivocals have neither one nature (*phusis*) nor one art nor one science nor are their principles the same” (Alex. Aphr. *In Metaph.* 240.33–241.3; transl. Madigan 1993). At the end of his comment on *Metaph.* 1003a33, Alexander summarizes this as follows: “Having shown that being is said in the way that healthy and medical are said – these are said with reference to one thing and by derivation from one thing, and so is being: it is said with reference to substance – he assumes, in line with the likeness between them and it, that there is also one science of being. For as there is one science of all healthy things – which are said in many ways but not equivocally... so there is one science for all the other things that are said in a manner similar to those, such as medical things and beings. For it is impossible for there to be one science of things which are equivocal and have nothing in common but the name, because nothing proper is expressed by the common name, but each science is concerned with one genus, i.e. some one nature. It is things whose commonality is not limited to the name, whose commonality of name depends on a commonality among the objects themselves, that belong to one science” (*In Metaph.* 243.17–28; transl. Madigan 1993). We have to keep in mind these words of Alexander in order to ascertain whether Aristotle's statement in the *EN* is compatible with what he states in the *Metaphysics*. Kirwan (1993 [1971]: 79) stresses that Aristotle now considers an objection to metaphysical inquiry which is conspicuously stated in the words of 1060b33–35: “If that which *is* is so called homonymously and in respect of nothing common, it is not under one discipline, for there is not one genus of such things.”

<sup>45</sup> Flashar (1988: 206 [1965: 228]) correctly notes that what in the *EN* consists of two separate arguments, the second and the third (*EN* 1096a23–29; 29–34), in the *EE* is a single unified argument (*EE* 1217b27–1218a1) with two parts which are tightly bound to each other, since the second part begins with a sentence (*EE* 1217b34–36) which occurs as the inference of the introductory sentence of the first part (*EE* 1217b27–28).

he has not seen its application to such wholly general expressions as *being* and *good*.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Flashar poses the question as to how this radical denial of the existence of one science of the being, and in parallel of *tagathon*, could be compatible with the Aristotelian doctrine of the *Metaphysics* Γ 2, where it is said that there is only one science of being *qua* being.<sup>47</sup> I believe that the best solution we can adopt in our effort to overcome this

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<sup>46</sup> Owen's expression denotes that when a term has a plurality of meanings there is, on the one hand, one meaning which is central or focal and primary and, on the other, a systematic relationship between this and the other different senses of this term. Thus, these are not cases of simple but of systematic ambiguity. Both Owen (1960: 165–169) and Hardie (1968 [1980, 1999]: 60) emphasize that the rejection of a universal science of being and of good was part of a polemic against Plato and the Platonists. Owen notes that the *EN* still retains the old argument against any general science of the good but adds that *all* the uses of *good* may be connected either by affiliation to some central use or else by analogy, and of this there is no hint in the *EE*. Flashar (1988: 207 [1965: 229]) believes that this difference between the two treatises is due to the different structure of the categorial argument in them. He does not think it plausible that this difference implies that Aristotle at the time of the *EE* had not yet conceived the *Metaphysics* in the sense of the unique science which examines the being *qua* being (*on ē on*), while this he achieved only later, at the time of the *EN*.

<sup>47</sup> Flashar (1988: 219, n. 27 [1965: 241]) describes how Theiler, Cherniss, Owen and Dirlmeier have tried to overcome and explain this apparent contradiction, by referring also to the discussion about the relation between the *EE* and the *Metaphysics*. He refers to Theiler's view that the being *qua* being is not the summarization of all the particular sections of the realm of being. He also refers to Cherniss' view that the First Philosophy does not involve in the task of the other sciences. But most of all, he pays attention to Ph. Merlan's view that one has to understand the being *qua* being not as the abstract universal in the sense of a *Metaphysica generalis*, but the Being which belongs to the intelligible immovable ontological sphere. According to him, the evolution of this notion of being is reduced to the academic doctrine of the contraries, hence it is not placed in a later period. See also Allan (1963–1964: 285–286), who, when reviewing Owen's position, also discusses the relation between the *EE* and the *Metaphysics*. In my opinion, we should also pay due attention to the way the philosophical tradition construes the difference of the science of being *qua* being from the others. Accounting for Alexander's interpretation would be enough to confirm that it is established that *sophia*, which is also called *philosophia* and "primary" or "first philosophy", is concerned with being in general (*katholou*); (Alex.Aphr. 238.3–5; transl. Madigan 1993). Furthermore, Alexander, in his comments on *Metaph.* 1003a22–26, stresses that the science concerned with being as being is different from the remaining sciences. This is clear from the fact that each of them treats of a kind of being (*ti on*), i.e. a part of being. For example, arithmetic treats of numbers, which are a kind of being; geometry treats of lines and planes and solids, which are also kinds of beings. Each of the other sciences is concerned with some part of being, and considers the essential properties of this part; for this is proper to the science concerned with each object. But the science which is not concerned with a kind of being, nor with a part of being, but simply (*haplōs*) with being insofar as it is being, the being through which particular beings are beings, and having this as its subject matter, would be different from those sciences (Alex.Aphr. 239.16–25; transl. Madigan 1993). In his comments on *Metaph.* 1003b16–18, Alexander (*In Metaph.* 244.10–20; transl. Madigan 1993), by referring to the examples of medicine and science of the goods, explains that in such cases, in which there is something primary which is said in the proper sense, while other things are derived from that thing (as is the case with things said by derivation from one thing and with reference to one thing), the science that concerns itself with that nature, on which the other things also bear, is in the proper sense and in the highest degree the science of that which is primary. Hence, the science concerned with goods is in the proper sense and in the highest degree concerned with the most complete of the goods. In my view, this last statement does not exclude the existence of other sciences concerned with goods that are not primary or complete. Nevertheless, despite the fact that with these readings the apparent contradiction between the *Metaphysics* and both *Ethics* is solved, Flashar (1988: 220, n. 27 [1965: 242]) believes that there still remains a contradiction within the context of the *EN* itself because there the *politikē* as supreme art is the single domain of knowledge which has as object the ultimate end of all human goods (*EN* 1094a1–b7). With regard to Flashar's point, I believe we must pay due attention to what Johnson (2005: 215) notes: "One must not confuse the idea of an architectonic science of politics with the subordination of all knowledge to social or political knowledge. Aristotle denies that this is possible, since there cannot be a singular science of good. His reason for this is that the good is not a singular object, and thus cannot be the object of a singular science." On the other hand, according to Allan (1963–1964: 284–285), there is no pretence of showing that there could not be a single science of goods if some subtler analysis of 'good' were offered; Aristotle only emphasizes that a plurality of arts is what *de facto* exists. Allan believes that this is

problem lies in Eustratius' explanation. Eustratius claims that since each thing qua particular (*hekaston*) is this or that something (*tode ē tode*), for example physical or mathematical or divine or celestial or terrestrial etc., we should not question whether each particular is conceived of according to a different way of understanding. Therefore, all the goods, to the extent that they refer to one thing since they participate in this one thing, should be the object of a single science; and it would be the task of this single science to grasp the one to which all the others refer. But each particular, qua it *is* per se or essentially (*kath' auto*) and qua it is this or that something (*tode ē tode*), is the object of a different science which is appropriate to its own nature and perfection.<sup>48</sup>

Still, within this argument as formulated here by Aristotle, the good is restricted to the domain of human activities. From the perspective of this restriction, the argument could be considered, *prima facie*, valid. But if we speak of the Idea of the Good in the Platonic sense, then according to that which is stated in the *Republic*, this is generally the ultimate cause of knowledge and the source of knowability of all the particular goods.<sup>49</sup> The Idea of the Good is the greatest object to be learned. It is by their relying upon the Form of the Good that just and other virtuous things become useful and beneficial. Therefore, the state will be perfectly ordered if we only have a Guardian who has this knowledge; he who does not know how the just and the beautiful are related to the Good will not prove a safe guardian of them.<sup>50</sup> Without knowledge of the Form of the Good, even if we were to know things to the maximum degree, it would be of no benefit to us, just as if we possess something without possession of the Good.<sup>51</sup> This knowledge is

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intended as an *argumentum ad hominem*, the principle that things falling under one Idea belong to one science being the part of the Academic doctrine.

<sup>48</sup> Eustr. *In EN* 47.13–27. Hardie (1968 [1980, 1999]: 60–61) asserts that Aristotle is to be understood as attacking the Platonic conception of a universal science, which is propounded in the *Republic* (R. 510b, 511b). He notes that it is surprising, at first sight, to find in the *Ethics* both focal meaning and the rejection of a general science of being. But he himself justifies this co-existence by explaining that the universal science in the Platonic sense is very different both from the Aristotelian *Metaphysics* as the science of being *qua* being and from the Aristotelian politics as a comprehensive practical science of goods. Hardie traces the difference between them in their operational structure; the Platonic science of being, considered as the dialectical knowledge of the Good in the *Republic*, has the form of a deductive system based on a single unhypothetical principle, and the 'hypotheses' which are the principles of the special sciences would be included in this system as deduced propositions. On the contrary, the science of the being *qua* being does not eliminate the independency and self-justification of the special sciences because it does not dictate premises to them; and politics as the supreme architectonic science does not dictate to the special sciences their techniques.

<sup>49</sup> Pl. R. 505a1–b3; 508e1–509a5; 509b6–7.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, 505d11–506b1. I partly follow the translation by Jowett and partly that by Shields (2008: 148).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, 505a2–b3. Also, we must not forget that according to Proclus' reading of the analogy of the Sun in the *Republic*, the Platonic Good is divided in three ontological levels as follows: the good within us (*to en hēmin agathon*), the *eidetic* good which is at the same level with all the other Forms, and the transcendental Good, on which all the others depend. Proclus traces the good existing within us, *to en hēmin agathon*, in passage R. 505b5–c11; see Procl. *In R.* (I. 269.14–22; in all my references to Proclus' *Commentary on the Republic*, the translation is my own). In my view, we can also trace it in passage R. 505d5–e4, where it is said that every soul pursues the Good and does all that it does for its sake; this means that every soul, even the uneducated, grasps the centrality of the Good, in an esoteric, intimate, and immediate way, although the occupants of the souls are in difficulty because neither can have any knowledge of its nature nor achieve the same confidence with respect to it as to

unique and superlative exactly as its object and is achieved only through Dialectic. Only this knowledge does activate knowledge of all other goods or of all other Ideas, which is why all other sciences depend on it.

#### 4. The question of the difference between *autoagathon* and the particular *agathon*

In the next passage of Aristotle's text, *EN* 1096a34–b5, it is disputable whether Aristotle formulates one or two distinct arguments. In my view, this passage includes two arguments which are complementary to one another; both of them are of ontological significance. According to the first argument, one might also raise the question what in the world the Platonists mean by their expression "a thing itself" (*autohekaston*), taking into consideration that in "man himself" and in a particular man the account of man is one and the same. For in so far as both are man, there will be no difference between them; and if this is so, neither will "good itself" and particular goods differ, in so far as both are good. In the sequence of this argument, Aristotle states what could be considered either as the same or a complement to the previous argument:<sup>52</sup> "But again it will not be good any the more for being eternal (*aidion*), since that which lasts long (*poluchronion*) is no whiter than that which perishes in a day (*ephēmeron*)." According to a certain line of interpretation, the first argument can be reduced to the argument of the third man which is referred to by Plato in the *Parmenides*;<sup>53</sup> the problem of similarity leads to a vicious infinite regress, since a man and "man himself" will be related to "man himself himself" and so on.<sup>54</sup> Although the argument is cryptic and rather elliptic, and one can only surmise its real meaning, I believe that the problem which Aristotle raises here is as follows. As we can deduce from the parallel *EE* passage (*EE* 1218a9–13), Plato does not only introduce the hypostatization of the universal but what is more, the hypostatization

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other things. I agree with Shields (2008: 150) that Plato introduces the Good as an ultimate and exceptionless feature regulating human contact, since most of the characteristics ascribed to it depict the importance of its relationship or connectedness with the things of the sensible world for their evaluation. De Lacy (1939: 101) stresses that the causality of the Platonic Idea of the Good has an axiological sense. By referring to Stenzel, De Lacy (1939: 100, n. 18) notes that Plato calls the Idea of the Good a cause of particulars only in the axiological sense; this Idea is the cause of value, knowledge, truth, and even being. But he adds that the causality of the Idea of the Good provides a suggestive basis for the general consideration of the causality of the Ideas. I only want to add to these remarks that in this case the criterion of the *axia* (value) of things in the realm of the human *praxis*, which is a part of the sensible world, is to be useful and a benefit for us (*R.* 505a3–4). In terms of this criterion, the Platonic Idea of the Good also has a certain teleological aspect which pervades every human activity, i.e. all human life.

<sup>52</sup> Flashar (1988: 207 [1965: 229]) believes that this is an autonomous argument; he adds that one can understand the real connection of it with the previous argument only by reading the parallel *EE* passage (*EE* 1218a9–16), where it is said that the prefix *auto-* (in itself) is added to the common definition and that this could denote nothing except that the good is eternal and separable.

<sup>53</sup> Pl. *Prm.* 132a1–b2; 132d5–133a7.

<sup>54</sup> Hardie 1968 (1980, 1999): 49.

of the definition or the common account, since the prefix *auto-*, i.e., the “absolute”, has to be attached to the common defining formula, which expresses nothing less than that this formula has been rendered eternal and endowed with independent reality.<sup>55</sup> However, the universal and the account (or the definition) have no independent and separate from the particular reality or existence. Moreover, as Santas correctly notes, Aristotle focuses on the Platonic view that the Form has the (ideal) attribute of being eternal, and then criticizes this difference.<sup>56</sup> It is useless to make a separate Idea of the Good because being eternal does not contribute to the intensity or maximalization of a quality.<sup>57</sup> As Santas puts it, the criticism is that the ideal attribute of being eternal does not make a Form what it is to a higher degree than its sensible participants which last only a little while.<sup>58</sup>

This argument violates or overlooks the basic assumptions of the Platonic Ontology, since according to the Platonists, that which is generable and perishable cannot have a definition at all because it always changes and becomes altered. Only the Idea which in the dialectical process we define as essence or true existence can be defined, because it is always what it is and does not admit of variation at all in any way or at any time.<sup>59</sup> Only the Platonic Form which always remains the same and immutable can have a definition. Aristotle claims that the ideal Good will not be good any the more for being eternal, since that which lasts long is no whiter than that which perishes in a day. The counter-argument to this claim would be that the ontological value of the Platonic Good itself, i.e. of the Platonic Idea of the Good, is superlative in comparison not only to any other particular good, but even to the *eidetic* good, since the former is the absolute transcendent and beyond the range of the latter.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>55</sup> In this reasoning, I am indebted to Allan (1963–1964: 284); see his analysis of the *EE* passage.

<sup>56</sup> Santas (1989: 151–152), who worked extensively on the basis of the alleged distinction between the ideal and proper attributes of the Forms, correctly stresses that being eternal is not the only ideal attribute of Platonic Forms. Moreover, let us recall that we can see such other attributes in the *Symposium* (*Smp.* 210e–211c), the *Phaedo* (*Phd.* 78d–79b) and the *R.* (e.g. *R.* 476a). Therefore, Santas is correct when he states that it is not true, as Aristotle charges, that Plato thought that by simply being an eternal F the Form is a better F than an F that lasts a little while.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Flashar 1988: 207 (1965: 229).

<sup>58</sup> Santas 1989: 151.

<sup>59</sup> Pl. *Phd.* 78d; transl. Jowett. As Santas (1989: 153) puts it, what Plato wants to state is that the definition is completely and strictly satisfied by the Form but not by the sensible particulars.

<sup>60</sup> See again Proclus' ontological division of the good in three levels (*In R.* I. 269.14–22). Santas (1989: 151) aptly notes that one problem with Aristotle's criticism is that it treats Plato's Form of the Good as if it were on a par with any other Platonic Form. He claims that Aristotle is clearly attacking Plato's view of Forms as transcendent ideal exemplars. Gadamer (1986: 131–132) correctly wonders: “Precisely in regard to the Idea of the Good, is not talk of the *chōrismos* (separation) especially misleading?” He stresses that Aristotle must play down the “transcendence of the good”, which, if he did not, would set it apart from all Ideas. He finally adds: “He must put the Idea of the Good in the same class as the other ideas. Consequently, he must be particularly emphatic in insisting that ‘like other ideas’ the Idea of the Good exists for itself separately (*chōriston*).” Hardie (1968 [1980, 1999]: 48) correctly notes that the arguments of the chapter are aimed at the theory of the Forms generally, i.e., against the doctrine of the Ideas as a whole. Allan (1963–1964: 284) wonders what would be the polemical value of the criticism of Plato so reconstructed; he believes that its weakness lies in the conversion of τὸ αἰδιον to τὸ πολυχρόνιον. He also adds that in the dialogues the Idea is viewed in two ways that are here outlined: as

As it is clearly indicated in the *Republic*,<sup>61</sup> the Platonic Idea of the Good surpasses being or *ousia* in dignity and power; and if any other good is only an image or an imitation of the *eidetic* good, which operates as the paradigmatic cause of all the other goods, all the more the Idea of the Good is incomparable to any other good.

### 5. Aristotle on the Pythagoreans' account of the good: the good and the one

Aristotle further states that the Pythagoreans seem to give a more plausible account of the good, when they place the one in the column of the goods. He adds that it is them that Speusippus seems to have followed. In passage 1072a30–35 of his *Metaphysics* he distinguishes the one of the two columns of the Pythagoreans for being intelligible in itself. In fact, what Aristotle means and refers to here is the intelligibility of the terms which constitute this column.<sup>62</sup> He also adds that the good as well as the choiceworthy or desirable in itself (*di' auto aireton*), i.e., that which is chosen for its own sake, are placed in the same column which is intelligible in itself. Pseudo-Alexander in his comment on the passage refers to this column as the column of the good.<sup>63</sup> From Aristotle's and pseudo-Alexander's account of the Pythagorean columns one can assume the superiority of the good over the one, since the latter falls under the good which is used to name and identify the whole column. It is probable that in this passage of the *EN*, Aristotle praises the Pythagoreans for giving a more plausible explanation of the relation between the one and the good because according to his understanding of their view, by placing the one in the column of the good they simply admit that the one is good or belongs to the goods

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a supreme instance possessing in fullness that which particulars strive to obtain with different degrees of success, and as a separated universal. In my view, Aristotle is not concerned in this passage with the Forms as transcendent ideal exemplars or supreme instances (*paradeigmata*); to be more accurate his problem is to show that it is useless to make the universal a supreme or perfect particular which is separate (see again Hardie: 1968 [1980, 1999]: 49), because this explains neither what the universal is nor what the particular is, all the more when we seek to find *the* Good. We must not forget that he is looking for the Absolute Good which is the ultimate End of the goods practicable for man; see *EE* 1218b9–14. It is also noteworthy that Santas (1989: 153–154) believes that there are respects in which Aristotle does not differ at all from Plato's position regarding the perfection which expresses the essence of a thing. As we can speak of degrees of reality, so too can we speak of degrees of goodness and when it comes to examples closer to Ethics, we see that according to Santas, Aristotle's theory of good is perfectionist. For example, his definition of man is "rational animal", and within the frame of his theory of the good man and the good for a man, a man can certainly be more or less rational; but the more so he is the more man he is and the better man he is. Thus, according to Santas, if we leave aside the Platonic separation of the essence, the perfection of the essence is a common belief for both Plato and Aristotle. The only thing I wish to add to his line of reasoning is that Aristotle does not conceive of the essence as *paradeigma* in the Platonic sense, because this term when ascribed to the Aristotelian form has a rather different meaning for Aristotle; see Alexander apud Simp. *In Ph.* I. 310.25–311.37.

<sup>61</sup> *Pl. R.* 509b5–8.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Laks 2000: 225. Laks notes that this passage is the only one in the corpus which considers the two opposing series under the aspect of intelligibility, a fact which underlines the Platonic horizon of Aristotle's approach here.

<sup>63</sup> Ps.-Alex. *In Metaph.* 694.18–21. Cf. Arist. *Metaph.* 1093b11–14.

or is one of the goods; but they do not believe that the good is one, since they are many goods which appear under the same column.

Cherniss notes that this passage has been taken to imply that Plato made the good identical with the one or an attribute of it. He objects to this thesis and stresses that it has no such implications because there is no reference to the "idea-numbers" in the preceding argument and the idea of good is attacked not on the ground that it is *the* one or a mere attribute of Unity but because it is *a* unit just as every idea is a unit. Cherniss believes that in saying that the Pythagoreans make *the* one *a* good Aristotle is approving only what he interprets as an agreement with his own contention that there is not one good but many, and the Platonic doctrine implied in this comparison is not that *the* one is *the* good but that *the* good is *a* one, i.e., a single unit.<sup>64</sup>

Eustratius asserts that by placing the one in the column of the goods the Pythagoreans display its nature which offers to the things salvation or preservation and brings them to perfection. He states that each thing becomes perfect and good and ensures its salvation by being preserved in the one, being unscattered and indivisible.<sup>65</sup> When it scatters, it is destroyed. This interpretation of the relation between the one and the good entails the superiority of the one over the good. According to a different approach, namely Proclus' view expressed in his essay on the essence of the Good in the sixth book of the *Republic*, everything ensures its perfect being what it is by being good.<sup>66</sup> Proclus makes the distinction between *einai* and *eu einai* and then stresses that anything that preserves and salvages and makes things perfect exists as a good (*agathon*). Thus, Proclus establishes the idea that the good is the cause of the salvation of being, although this idea is not new in the Greek philosophical tradition, but rather a *locus communis*.<sup>67</sup> The thesis that a thing has its being in its good is a common belief and, what is more, according to my reading of Proclus, the good causes the salvation of being one and not vice-versa; namely the good is superior over the one, because being perfect and being one continuously, i.e., being preserved as a being which has a complete unity (or oneness), presupposes being good.

## 6. The division of the goods into two main categories

In the sequence of the chapter, at 1096b8–14, Aristotle refers to an objection which may be raised by the Platonists against the aforementioned arguments on the ground that the Platonic theory was not intended to apply to every sort of good, because they have not

<sup>64</sup> Cherniss 1944: 382, n. 301.

<sup>65</sup> Eustr. *In EN* 51.10–14.

<sup>66</sup> Procl. *In R.* 270.13 ff.

<sup>67</sup> In my opinion, the same connection between the good and the preservation of being can be deduced from the comment by Alexander of Aphrodisias on the very first sentence of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: "and the perfection of each thing is in every case its good (*agathon*), and in its good each thing has both its being and its preservation (*to einai te kai sōzesthai*)" (*In Metaph.* 1.6–7; transl. Dooley 1989). See also Dooley 1989: 12, n. 5.

been speaking about all goods. The alleged objection is based on the claim that only the goods that are pursued and loved for themselves are called *good* by reference to a single Form, while things productive or preservative of these in any way, or preventive of their opposites, are said to be *good* by reference to these and in a different sense, namely in a secondary sense.<sup>68</sup> This objection leads the Aristotelian inquiry to the division of the goods into two main categories: a) goods that are pursued for themselves because they are good in themselves b) goods which are called so by reference to the former because they are pursued as a means to these. Immediately after this passage, Aristotle calls the first category *kath' auta* (good in themselves) and the second *ōfelima* (useful), and decides to examine separately the former in order to consider if these are called *good* by reference to a single idea.<sup>69</sup> If we ask what sort of goods would one call *good in themselves* the answer would be, those that are pursued even when isolated from others, such as wisdom (*phronein*), sight (*horan*), and certain pleasures and honours (*hēdonai times kai timai*).

The Aristotelian answer to the Platonists' objection or the Aristotelian counter-argument is split into two disjunctive possibilities: a) in case there is nothing else good in itself except the Idea of the Good, the species or the Form will be empty, namely of no use b) if, on the contrary, the class of things good in themselves includes such things as wisdom, sight, and certain pleasures and honours, the same account of good ought to be manifested in all of them just as that of whiteness is identical and is equally manifested in snow and in white lead. But, as a matter of fact, all these, i.e., honour, wisdom, and pleasure, have different and dissimilar accounts, precisely insofar as they are goods.

We can note here again that Aristotle's approach to the good is strictly classificatory and clearly anti-Platonic, since he simply construes the Platonic Good as a class or a species, all the particular members of which must have the same account. His conclu-

<sup>68</sup> Wilson (2000: 195–197) notes that both the *EE* and the *EN* offer considerable evidence for a focal arrangement among means and ends. He stresses that “means, though they qualify as focally derivative because they are homonymous with the focus and imply the focus in their definition, are also peculiar in that they actually share some properties with the focus. For the final good and the derivative good are both objects of desire and both are pursued” (Wilson 2000: 196). In his opinion, this is obviously one of the reasons why Plato was led to the idea of the Good, and it is precisely this fact that allows goods to be treated analogically as well as focally. In my view, although Wilson traces correctly the reason why goods are treated analogically as well as focally, he fails to see Plato's reasons for being led to the Idea of the Good, because he construes Plato's theory of the Good from the same perspective from which Owen (1960) construed Aristotle's universal science of being in *Metaphysics Gamma*. Plato did not see his Idea of the Good as a focal notion or a focal meaning – we must keep in mind that this was his first unhypothetical principle. Furthermore, Wilson states that in the *EN* passage (*EN* 1096b8–14), Aristotle maintains the focality of ends and means, although he does not use the standard expression for this, because in this section the means are not related πρὸς ἕν but πρὸς πολλά. Yet, he insists that the language of focality is unmistakable, because the way in which the means are described at 1096b11–13 reminds us of the standard formulae of *Metaphysics* Γ 2; see esp. *Metaph.* 1003a34–36; 1003b16–17. But we can clearly note, as also Wilson (2000: 197) aptly remarks, that the *EN* also moves beyond the ends-means focality because at 1096b14–26 it abandons the language of focality.

<sup>69</sup> Watson (1909: 31–32) connects the *EN* passage with passage 990b15–17 in *Metaphysics* and, referring to Zeller, notes that Xenocrates like Plato admitted only two categories; the absolute and the relative. See Pl. *Sph.* 255c; *Phlb.* 53d–54a.

sion, that the good is not some common element or a general term, corresponding to a single Form, reaffirms only that the good and, of course, also the Platonic Good, either the *eidetic* or the Good as the first principle, cannot be a universal in the Aristotelian sense or a Form in the Platonic sense. This is because according to his justification such goods as wisdom and certain pleasures and honours have an irreducible specificity which does not permit them to be described as particular instances or exemplifications of the Good, when considered either as universal or as a separate universal which corresponds to a Form.<sup>70</sup> These three goods that Aristotle refers to here do not constitute an arbitrary collection, since in chapter 1.5 of the *EN* pleasure, honour and wisdom have been proposed as candidates for the human good corresponding to the most prominent types of human life: the life of pleasure, the life in pursuit of honour and the life of the intellect. Aristotle's remark that their accounts are different precisely insofar as they are goods is striking and is aimed towards emphasizing that each one has a different relation to the goodness, so there is not a common explanatory factor which could effectively bind all these goods with a common thread and have the ontological value and status of a Form over and above them. What is important is the variety of evaluative judgements, considerations and justifications which people follow in order to decide whether something is good. If we consider that vindication of the different theories about what is good involves a different justification for each theory, we can infer that the perspective from which we evaluate something as good equates with the determination of a different cause of goodness in each case.<sup>71</sup> This explains why the various goods, i.e., things and situations that have a different relation to the goodness, have a different account precisely insofar as they are goods; although their *logoi* need not be totally unrelated, so as to recognize in them fortuitous equivocation.<sup>72</sup> Thus, the question is whether there is a single character common to all things which are called *good per se*.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Segvic (2004: 151) emphasizes that Plato is not the only target of Aristotle, because he directs the same line of criticism against the theory of "the common good" and against the hedonism of Eudoxus. According to her (2004: 154), what Aristotle is concerned to combat is the very idea of the good being subsumable under a single explanatory scheme. Segvic believes that Aristotle's point in rejecting such a scheme is not to affirm that there are a lot of different kinds of good out there, but to insist that ethical theory, i.e., theory concerned with how one should live, should give this variety its due weight. Segvic also stresses that Aristotle seems to have been inspired by Protagoras in some of his ethical concerns (2004: 168). I believe that Segvic correctly understands the Aristotelian thesis that the plurality and variety of goodness in human life, which mainly constitutes of *praxeis*, removes the possibility of a monistic ethical knowledge. But, in my opinion, this is not Aristotle's main point. His main point is the need for a *zētēsis of auto to agathon*, a *zētēsis* which has not yet been effectively accomplished as we can understand from both the *EE* and *EN*, and not just a rejection of the Platonic theory of the Good.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Segvic 2004: 152–154; 169.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Fortenbaugh 1966: 191.

<sup>73</sup> Fortenbaugh (1964: 187–188) claims that in the different kinds of desirable things the common character is differentiated so that their goodness appears different; but the different kinds of goodness are still related generically, so there is no fortuitous equivocation. He believes that in *EN* 1096b26–29 Aristotle indicates two ways in which the single predicate "good" might be used without fortuitous equivocation to characterize the different things desirable in their own right. Apart from the analogy, which is clearly stated by Aristotle as the second way, Fortenbaugh maintains that the phrase ἀφ' ἑνὸς εἶναι ἢ πρὸς ἕν ἅπαντα συντελεῖν, which illustrates the first way, denotes that the desirable things may possess a common generic character, i.e., it implies the

Furthermore, one could expand this question by extending it to all the good things.<sup>74</sup>

Aristotle raises the question in what sense are all these different things called *good*; for they do not seem to be fortuitously equivocal, i.e., they do not bare the same name merely by chance. He, then, suggests three ways in which things bear the same name, i.e. *good*, without being fortuitously equivocal. Things are called *good* in virtue of being derived from one good; or by all contributing to one good (ἀφ'ένος εἶναι ἢ πρὸς ἓν ἅπαντα συντελεῖν);<sup>75</sup> or, perhaps, good things are rather one by analogy, so they are called *good* by way of a proportion: as sight is good in the body, so is intelligence good in the soul, and similarly another thing in something else. This passage, which contains the so-called “analogy argument”, brings to our minds the analysis of being and the relation between being and one which are presented in book *Gamma* of the *Metaphysics*.<sup>76</sup> This is verified by the statement in the next passage, where it is said that this question must be dismissed for the present, since a detailed investigation of it belongs more properly to another branch of philosophy, meaning the First Philosophy or *Metaphysics*.

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notion of generic affiliation. Fortenbaugh (1966: 189–191) attempts to support this interpretation by evoking one passage from the *Physics* and two from the *Posterior Analytics*. He believes that Aristotle in the *EN* is not primarily concerned with things productive or preservative of some goal, because the goodness of these things may be demonstrated by the syllogistic analysis found in both the *EE* and the *Posterior Analytics*. He claims that Aristotle's primary concern is with things desirable in their own right because if these goods are called “good” for unrelated reasons, then it is impossible to relate all predications of “good”. Thus, the treatment of this case allows Aristotle to introduce these two ways in which the goals may be related: generically or by analogy. I believe that Fortenbaugh's interpretation fails to explain what Aristotle means here by the phrase ἀφ'ένος εἶναι ἢ πρὸς ἓν ἅπαντα συντελεῖν; it is implausible that Aristotle would, on the one hand, reject the Good as genus and, on the other, pose the question whether the commonality between the many goods is that they belong to the same genus.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Fortenbaugh 1964: 193.

<sup>75</sup> I agree with Wilson (2000: 197) that these two disjuncts are to be treated as a unit.

<sup>76</sup> See again notes 38 and 44; see also the determination of the things which are by analogy *hen* (one) at *Metaph.* 1016b31–35. Wilson (2000: 194) states that *EN* 1096b26–29 is the only passage in the corpus that mentions analogy and focality immediately together. He further (Wilson 2000: 198–200) sets out to show that the *per se* goods contribute to a single good without being elements of that good and in addition that they contribute to a single end through a variety of focal relationships without being means to that end. Wilson also argues (2000: 202) that at *EN* 1096a23–29, although there is no explicit mention of analogy in this passage, the claim that the good is said in as many ways as Being, encourages an analogical view along the same lines with potentiality. Based on *Physics* 200b26–28 and 201a9–10, I would say “along the same lines with potentiality and actuality” (see also Mouzala 2003: 67–75). However, Wilson believes that analogy among the goods at a categorical level is not especially useful for Aristotle because it would probably be inappropriate in the context of his critique of the Platonic doctrine of the unity of the Good (see his analysis of the problems, Wilson 2000: 202–205). At the end of this chapter (“The Good”), he stresses (Wilson 2000: 205–206) that analogy and focality are not merely compatible means of providing necessary scientific relations among terms, but rather they bear a fixed and determinate relation to one another. He concludes that the concept of good is best adapted to the unification provided by focality and it is dominated by focality; furthermore, as a result of the priority of focality over analogy, the good largely dispenses with analogy. I believe we should make a distinction between the analogy at the categorical level along with its problems and the analogy as it is presented by Aristotle at *EN* 1096b26–29. This second explicit reference to analogy is not very far from those that Plato himself used in the parable of the Sun in the *Republic* (*R.* 506d5 *ff.*), although Plato's analogies there have major ontological implications and differ significantly from the ethical context of Aristotle's reference in the *EN* passage. At *EN* 1096b26–29, Aristotle proposes analogy as a totally distinct method of explanation and does not seem to concede at all that it is inadequate for the context of the theory of the Good. But since what he intends to show by analogy is the unity or the commonality, it would be correct to say that focality merges with analogy here.

### 7. The last Aristotelian argument: the *prakton* and *ktēton agathon*

The chapter closes with the last Aristotelian argument (*EN* 1096b31–1097a14), which constitutes his final and more acute criticism of Plato's Idea of the Good. It seems to be a mixture of epistemological and ethical argument, because it examines the applicability of this Idea in the field of *praxis* and human life as well as its relation to practical reasoning and the actual procedure of the sciences.<sup>77</sup> This argument which also has an important ontological aspect, since it refutes the usefulness of the Good considered as *paradeigma*, is also known as the argument from the crafts.<sup>78</sup> The crucial point of it is that the Platonic Idea of the Good does not fulfill the *prakton* and *ktēton* requirement. Aristotle clarifies that even if the Good predicated of various things in common really is a unity or something which exists separately and in itself, it clearly cannot be practicable and attainable by man; but the Good which we are now seeking, he says, is something attainable. It is totally evident throughout this chapter that Aristotle makes his criticism not only against the Platonic Idea of the Good but also against the good considered as universal, which can also be verified by the *EE*.<sup>79</sup> As Segvic correctly notes, it is clear from his discussion there that the common good is for him a separate dialectical target.<sup>80</sup> The reason for this polemic can be no other than the fact that *praxis* is concerned with the *kath'hekasta* (particulars).<sup>81</sup>

At this point there emerges the crucial problem of the relationship between *theōria* and *praxis*. *Praxis* is a specifically human mode of life and is always oriented towards

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<sup>77</sup> I will make use of a point by Gadamer (1986: 139) in regard to the *EE*, because I believe that it perfectly fits within the scope of this last argument in the *EN*. While the particular question of the Idea of the Good has been examined up until now exclusively along the paths of logic and ontology, one may note that the last argument used here, although partly ethical, confirms the special status of the Idea of the Good – perhaps unintentionally.

<sup>78</sup> Barney (2007: 294 and n. 4) believes that this argument seems to be a distinctively ethical one, i.e., concerned with the bearing of the Good on practical reasoning, and also a very damaging one. For her, the Forms are conceived by Plato as explanatory entities, which means that they offer to do a necessary kind of work, by rendering intelligible the phenomena and, in the case of the ethical Forms, by informing rational deliberation and evaluation. So, if it is quite useless for practical reasoning, as Aristotle claims, then Plato is not entitled to postulate its existence.

<sup>79</sup> See Arist. *EE* 1218a41–b13. In this passage, Aristotle states that similarly, the *common good* (or the good as universal) is neither the *Good itself* (for it would belong even to a small good) nor is it *prakton* (practicable) (partly transl. Segvic 2004: 159). He then adds that the good is said in many ways and neither the Idea of Good nor the *common good* is the *Good per se* or the *Good itself* that we are actually seeking; for the one is unchanging and not practical, and the other though changing is still not practical (I partly follow the translation by Solomon 1915).

<sup>80</sup> Segvic 2004: 161. With regard to Woods' puzzle why Aristotle should discuss the common good at all, except as a consequence of the Platonic ideal theory, Segvic sets out to justify why Aristotle directs his criticism also against the universal good. She refers to the possibility that Plato also envisaged the existence of a character common to various changeable good things. As an alternative, she discusses Aristotle's conviction that Socrates did not separate forms and was after a common form in his definitions. Alternatively, she suggests that Aristotle might have had in mind a theory of the good of some later Academic, who disagreed with Plato about the separateness of Forms.

<sup>81</sup> Arist. *EN* 1141b14–16.

the *kath'hekasta* (the particulars).<sup>82</sup> On the other hand, a good is *prakton* (practicable) if it is an object aimed at (*to hou heneka*),<sup>83</sup> but the good in things unchangeable is not practicable, as it is said in the *EE*. I agree with Segvic that in this case a *telos* is primarily something that is aimed at in human action by the agent, i.e., the genuine end of human action, and *prakton* is a term which connects the good with *praxis* and makes it a human good.<sup>84</sup> *Ktēton* is also a term which connects the good with possession, ownership, control or occupancy of it, and that can only occur within the frame of human goods, because the goodness which is supra-human or supra-natural or transcendental cannot be occupied by humans.<sup>85</sup> Still, we must not forget that it is Plato himself who introduced the terms *kektēmetha* and *ktēsis* in the philosophical context of the transcendental Good, in *Republic* 505a7–b2. We should, therefore, not think that it is only by chance that Aristotle uses a cognate word in his criticism of the Platonic Idea of the Good. Moreover, in the *EE*, Aristotle adds that the object aimed at as End is the chief good, and is the cause of the subordinate goods and first of all. According to the Aristotelian view, the *Good itself* would be this – the End of the goods practicable for man. And this is the good that comes under the supreme of all the practical sciences, which is Politics and Economics and Wisdom.<sup>86</sup>

From these statements, we can infer that Aristotle stresses two things. First, *telos* which is connected with *praxis*, i.e. *prakton*, is something which is determined in a human way, even if it is the supreme end of the goods practicable by man. Secondly, Aristotle does not reject the hierarchy and the culmination of ends nor the assumption that there is a chief good, an absolute Good, which is unique. But this does not belong to the realm of the unchangeables;<sup>87</sup> conversely, it is appropriate for the supreme forms of

<sup>82</sup> *Ibidem*, 1139a18–20. The lower of the animals have sensation but no share in action (transl. Ross).

<sup>83</sup> Gadamer (1986: 128–129) notes that the good appears in Aristotle's physics as well as in his practical philosophy – in his physics as the *hou heneka*, in his practical philosophy as the *anthrōpinon agathon*. Gadamer states that this double function of the good can be demonstrated by referring to the text of his criticism of the Idea of the Good. He stresses that, thus, one sees that his philosophy of human practice remains embedded in the whole of his conceptualization of reality. I totally agree that Aristotle's teleology pervades all his work. I believe this view is already a *locus communis* in Aristotelian scholarship.

<sup>84</sup> Arist. *EE* 1218b4–8 (transl. by Rackham 1935); cf. *EN* 1139b1–4. Segvic (2004: 154–157) claims that if we understand the thesis that the Platonic good is not *prakton* as meaning that this good is not realizable or attainable in human action, then we miss the basic sense it carries when predicated of a good in Aristotle; realizability, according to her, is only a derivative feature.

<sup>85</sup> For this matter see ps.-Alex. *In Metaph.* 695.34–39.

<sup>86</sup> Arist. *EE* 1218b10–14 (transl. by Rackham 1935).

<sup>87</sup> Johnson (2005: 217) correctly notes that “what Aristotle settles for, then, is the determination of a practicable good at which humans can aim... Other kinds of things have other aims, and it is not possible to determine a good at which both humans and all other things aim, but it is perhaps possible to determine that at which all humans ultimately aim.” Barney (2007: 303–304) correctly points out that this thesis does not mean that Aristotle denies the existence of a good in some sense higher than the human. He acknowledges the goodness connected with the ontological superiority of the celestial bodies and the prime unmoved mover (see especially chapter *Lambda* 7 and 10 of his *Metaphysics*). Barney stresses that what he denies is that the study of these higher and better objects stands in any kind of hierarchical relation to political science. I would rather say that what Aristotle denies is that this study is relevant to political science; although he acknowledges that the First Philosophy or

organization of human life. Furthermore, there are two basic issues that we have to keep in mind and consider when we analyze Aristotle's criticism of Plato's theory of the Good. The first is that human life includes both *theōria* and *praxis*. The second is the multiplicity and diversity of goods that man aims at during his life.

Regarding the first issue, Aristotle acknowledges two distinct branches of knowledge, one practical and the other theoretical, and, correspondingly, two kinds of *dianoia*, one theoretical and the other practical, which are aimed towards different goals. The former aims at the truth and the latter at practical truth, which is tantamount to the pursuit of the good in *praxis* by following practical reasoning and practical wisdom.<sup>88</sup> While in the *Protrepticus* *philosophia* is presented as the kind of knowledge which studies the good as a whole and, therefore, is qualified to use and give orders to all other kinds of knowledge according to the principles of nature,<sup>89</sup> in *EN* 6 Aristotle proceeds to a radical separation of *phronēsis* (practical wisdom) from *sophia* (wisdom) and endows it with an autonomous value without leaving space for the subordination of the former to the latter.<sup>90</sup> In the *EN*, not only does Aristotle state that practical wisdom is not concerned merely with universals but it must also recognize the particulars because it is practical, and *praxis* is concerned precisely with particulars. He also stresses that this is the reason why some people who do not know, and especially those who have experience, are more practical than others who do know.<sup>91</sup> In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle also emphasizes that with a view to action experience seems in no respect inferior to art, and men of experience succeed even better than those who have theory without experience. The justification he offers is that experience is knowledge of individuals, art of universals, and actions and productions are all concerned with the individual.<sup>92</sup> Hence, in general, knowledge of the particulars or individuals is evaluated as more effective than any other kind of knowledge in the domain of *praxis*.

That is why Aristotle in *EN* 1096b35–1097a8 questions the usefulness of the Platonic Idea of the Good considered as *paradeigma*. The argument that someone might think it worthwhile to recognize its value with a view to those of the goods that are *ktēta* and

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*Sophia* is at the head of all sciences, he believes it is irrelevant to the goals of human *praxis*. But we should also take into account what Gadamer (1986: 129–130) notes concerning the closing sentence of the *EE* A 8. This sentence, according to Gadamer, virtually seems to demand the investigation of the multiple meanings of *agathon* with an eye to the *ariston pantōn*, once the *ariston tōn praktōn* (*EE* 1218b25–26) has been treated. Gadamer asserts that in any case the author of the *EE* also has the broad sense of a comprehensive *agathon* very much in mind. In my view, by following this reasoning Gadamer reaches an important conclusion: in all three of his ethical treatises Aristotle does not limit himself to what for him is the decisive argument concerning the practical relevance of the Idea of the Good. Instead, he finds himself forced beyond the confines of his theme of practice.

<sup>88</sup> See Arist. *EN* 1095a5–6; 1139a8–15; 1139a21–36; *De An.* 433a14–20. For the difference in the task between the two kinds of *dianoia*, see also Eustr. *In EN* 269.25–270.5; 280.12–21.

<sup>89</sup> See B 9 and B 46–54 Düring.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Barney 2007: 302, n. 10; 304.

<sup>91</sup> Arist. *EN* 1141b14–18 (transl. Ross).

<sup>92</sup> Arist. *Metaph.* 981a12–17 (transl. Ross).

*prakta* is answered by him as follows: “even if this argument has some possibility, it seems to clash with the procedure of the sciences. For all of these, though they aim at some good and seek to supply the deficiency of it, do not trouble about a knowledge of the Ideal Good. Yet, that all the exponents of the arts should be ignorant of, and should not even seek, so great an aid is not probable.” He, then, points out at 1097a8–14 that it is hard to see how a weaver or a carpenter will be benefited in regard to his own craft by knowing this *Good itself*, or how the man who has contemplated the Idea itself will be a better doctor or general thereby. At *EN* 1097a11–13, by focusing on the case of a doctor, he stresses that the doctor seems not even to study health in the abstract, but the health of man, or perhaps rather the health of a particular man; for it is individuals that he is healing. At *Metaphysics* 981a18–24, Aristotle explains in a much more detailed and emphatic way that the doctor does not cure man, except in an incidental way (*kata sumbebēkos*), but rather the individual which happens to be a man. He stresses that it is the individual that is to be cured and establishes a knowledge-theoretical thesis which impugns the superiority of the theory to experience as a source of knowledge with regard to the individual. If a man has the theory without the experience, and recognizes the universal but does not know the individual included in this, then he will often fail in *praxis*, which concerns the individual.<sup>93</sup> Aristotle construes here the *katholou* (universal) as comprehensive of the particular and not something which inheres in it. Moreover, with a contradistinction to the usual conception about the formation of the *katholou* through *epagogē*,<sup>94</sup> he leaves open the possibility of knowing the *katholou* without knowing the relevant *kath’hekaston*.<sup>95</sup>

As I have already mentioned, the first problem which Aristotle places at the centre of his criticism is the relation between *theōria* and *praxis* with regard to the good. The second thorny problem he faces is the multiplicity and diversity of human goods. In *EE* 1218a30–39, he asserts that to say that all existing things desire some one good is not true; for each seeks its own special good (*idion ti agathon*). Thus, the assumption that there is a good *per se* is bound up with these difficulties and, furthermore, it would be useless to political philosophy, which like all the other disciplines, has its particular good.<sup>96</sup> More-

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<sup>93</sup> I mostly follow the translation by Ross.

<sup>94</sup> Arist. *APo.* 1.18; 2.19, 100b1–5; *EN* 1139b28–31.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Arist. *APo.* 79a4–6. Alexander of Aphrodisias believes that Aristotle does not say that it is impossible to acquire art without experience, but that art was initially discovered through experience, since, as he will say, some men can be experts in an art although they lack experience (Alex.Aphr. *In Metaph.* 5.9–11; transl. Dooley 1989). See also Mouzala 2013: 228–230.

<sup>96</sup> Similarly, the good for everything cannot be found in politics (or in theology, cosmology etc.), because there is no single science of the good; see Johnson 2005: 216. This might also be justified by what Wilson (2000: 203) notes: “Aristotle consistently interprets the good as something different from the essence of the thing for which it is the good... The good of each thing, then, is not what the thing is, but some additional accident of it.” Wilson invokes the *ergon* argument, saying that even this follows this pattern, since *aretē* is added to the *ergon* (*EN* 1098a7–17). If we take this for granted, then it would be expectable that there is no single science of that which occurs in different cases of different categories as an accident. But this interpretation has to do with the categorial context. In my view, a representative part of Greek philosophical thought faces the good as some-

over, Aristotle presents an argument which he refers to as something already stated: the Idea itself of Good is useful to no art or to all arts in the same way. But the question is how are all these goods connected with one another and how do they gain a unity? What is the thread that binds them together so as to avoid the risk that man will disperse in the plurality of the goods that he pursues and lose the unity of his self and/or his soul? As Segvic correctly notes, all practical, i.e., human, goods are dependent on a human perspective; our finding and considering things good, our choice in other words, is to a certain degree or in part what makes them good.<sup>97</sup> How can man supervise all these goods and make them combine with each other without getting entangled in contradictions and conflicts between them? Moreover, how can this be achieved within the frame of a political community where people must co-exist and ensure the presuppositions of their common life?

I believe that Plato definitely foresaw these questions and made provisions for the relevant problems. For him, the practical truth originates from *theōria* because *theōria* and *logos* are much closer to the truth and, consequently, to *agathon*, than *praxis*.<sup>98</sup> Deciding whether Plato dissociates the Idea of the Good from the domain of *praxis* and human goods is a matter of interpretation. It is one thing to say that Plato's Idea of the Good is not *prakton* (practicable) and *ktēton* in the Aristotelian sense of *prakton*, i.e., that which is the *telos* or *hou heneka* (end or goal) of a specific human *praxis*, and quite another thing to say that this Idea as *paradeigma* is not useful for human *praxis*. Plato takes pains to make it crystal clear that the Idea of the Good is something that every human soul pursues and does all that it does for its sake, having a presentiment that there is such an end, and, yet, hesitating about its nature. Moreover, Plato stresses that no one wants, as Shields puts it, the ersatz good, i.e., what only appears to be good without being really good, because in such affairs which are connected with the realm of the good everyone prefers knowledge and reality and disdains belief.<sup>99</sup> It is astonishing that in this very passage Plato uses terms which are connected with the realm of human *praxis* and belief: *πράττειν, κекτῆσθαι, δοκεῖν, δοκοῦντα, κτᾶσθαι*.

Yet, Plato's Idea of the Good, while being "impractical" in the sense of not being itself a goal of each specific action, is placed on a metaphysical level which endows the level of human life and *praxis* with knowledge, rational deliberation, evaluation and understanding, and renders useful and beneficial not only the things of the sensible world but even

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thing which is an extra and added to the essence, but something that, at the same time, retains and preserves the essence. Hence, the good could not be an accident; see notes 66 and 67. I believe that this thesis, at least with regard to *aretē* and *ergon*, originates from Plato (e.g. *La.* 189e–190c; *Chrm.* 163b–d). Cf. also Arist. *EN* 1139a15–17.

<sup>97</sup> Segvic 2004:169.

<sup>98</sup> *Pl. R.* 473a1–8.

<sup>99</sup> *Pl. R.* 505d5–e2. See also Shields (2008: 149), who emphasizes that while Plato's general descriptive contention may invite scrutiny, it is noteworthy for our understanding of his attitude towards the Good that this passage implies that everybody, even a lazy person, disparages the seeming goods and turns away from them in favor of the real thing.

the other Forms.<sup>100</sup> All crafts and craftsmen are supervised by the Guardians (*Phulakes*) and guided by their knowledge. Generally, knowledge of the Idea of the Good is a *sine qua non* presupposition of the accomplishment of the philosopher-ruler's task.<sup>101</sup> Thus, there is an unbroken continuity between the Idea of the Good and human goods. Moreover, it is worth noting that Proclus, in his Commentary on the *Republic*, traces, analyzes and emphasizes the interrelations between the good within us or within our souls,<sup>102</sup> the *eidetic* Good, and the Good as the first unhypothetical principle. He also recognizes the immediate dependence of the two lower ontological levels on the transcendental level of the Absolute Good.<sup>103</sup>

It has been claimed that the argument from the crafts is evidently introduced by Aristotle in order to remedy the ineffectiveness or feebleness of the objection about the non-practicable character of the Platonic Good, by formulating a stronger assertion<sup>104</sup>: that the Platonic Good does not prove to be useful for improving the practice of each craft in each particular case. However, as I have explained, Aristotle seems to say here nothing more than what is said in *Metaphysics* A 1. He emphasizes that with regard to *praxis* (action) experience, which is knowledge of individuals, seems in no respect inferior to art (*technē*), which is knowledge of universals, and men of experience succeed even better than those who only have theory without experience. Moreover, not only does he make the distinction between art and experience or *theōria* and *praxis*, but he also establishes a considerably broad division of human activity when he states in his *Metaphysics* that *pasa dianoia* (all thought) is either practical or productive or theoretical.<sup>105</sup> Thus, Aristotle is in favor of drawing certain dividing lines.

On the other hand, Plato in the *Laches* implies that knowledge of all things good and bad, regardless of time and in all circumstances, would not be only a part of virtue, but rather *aretē* as a whole and that this could be understood as a general account of virtue.<sup>106</sup> In the *Charmides*, through the narrative focusing on the holism of the Zalmoxian medicine, he seems to praise the holistic principle underlying Greek medicine. This holistic approach is also repeated at the end of the dialogue, where a kind of ethically determined knowledge, the knowledge of good and bad, is in a way the architectonic or the ruling knowledge, which renders useful the products of the craftsmen and the objects of other knowledges and offers *eu prattein* and *eudaimonein*. The lack of this superior knowledge will not prevent any craftsman from doing his work, but it is acknowledged that this is

<sup>100</sup> Pl. *R.* 505a ff.; cf. Barney 2007: 296.

<sup>101</sup> Pl. *R.* 401b1–d3; see also Barney 2007: 295–297.

<sup>102</sup> Segvic (2004: 161) believes that this kind of good is presumably a character common to all changeable things, i.e. a kind of *katholou*.

<sup>103</sup> See Procl. *In R.* I. 269.14 ff.

<sup>104</sup> See Barney 2007: 295.

<sup>105</sup> Arist. *Metaph.* 6.1.

<sup>106</sup> Pl. *La.* 199b3–e4. See also Kahn 1997: 167–168.

the knowledge which contributes most to happiness and that no science can produce any benefit in the absence of the knowledge of good and bad.<sup>107</sup> In Plato's *Euthydemus*, the kingly craft (*basilikē technē*) rules because it knows how to use the products of the other crafts correctly and tells us how to use them.<sup>108</sup> In the *Cratylus* the dialectician is the man who directs and rules and evaluates the work of the legislator or the name-maker.<sup>109</sup> These passages fit perfectly with what is said in the *Republic* about the holistic way in which the Idea of the Good renders useful and beneficial not only things which are *prakta* and *ktēta*, but even the other Forms, and through the method of Dialectic provides men with the supreme and useful for the realm of *praxis* knowledge. Does Aristotle ignore or even disdain this holistic and henistic approach?

In my view, Aristotle entirely consciously establishes a Dialectic of the ends (*Dialektikē tōn telōn*, I would say in Greek), i.e., of the goods considered as *telē*, as goals. For him, it is not sufficient to say that the Idea of the Good endows with knowledge, essence, usefulness and beneficial effects all the inferior ontological levels. This is the reason why, after using a series of disputable ontological arguments in *EN* 1.6, he chooses to culminate his criticism by putting forward a strong ethical or rather practical and simultaneously epistemological argument from which a dialectical *postulatum* emerges. This argument implies that we have to discover the dialectical stages or grades which constitute the relation between the ultimate End, i.e., the Good *simpliciter* or the absolute Good, and the relational goods till the last *prakton* good to which each specific *praxis* ends. This Dialectic of the ends (*Dialektikē tōn telōn*) or Dialectic of the goods (*Dialektikē tōn agathōn*) lays the emphasis on the descent to the special and specific good which is appropriate to and cognate with each individual, either person or *praxis* or science or craft. This might be relevant to Aristotle's tendency to establish in the *Nicomachean Ethics* a separation of *phronēsis*, i.e., practical wisdom, from *sophia*, i.e., wisdom.

It is true that practical reason tries to give a kind of unity to our various pursuits, because to unify is generally the role of reason, and certainly the unity that practical reason brings to deliberation about practical goals is not intended to be that of an aggregate. Evidently, there is a dependency of the goals on each other, because a human life as a whole constitutes a context; but, on the other hand, the relations between these goals do not have the cognitive advantages of the relations between the parts of an organic unity, i.e., they are not equally clear and recognizable. It is disputable whether man can manage to have a stable standpoint of life as a whole, since he is continuously subjected to the mutability of circumstances and of his own nature.<sup>110</sup> While for Plato the human good

<sup>107</sup> Pl. *Chrm.* 174b11–d7.

<sup>108</sup> Pl. *Euthd.* 289b–292e.

<sup>109</sup> Pl. *Cra.* 390b–e.

<sup>110</sup> In this paragraph as a whole, I comment on the interesting analysis of the issue by Segvic (2004: 170–176). Although I agree with her view that there is nothing organic about the unity of a good human life, I object to what she states in the following lines: "The reference point for him is the general framework within which particular goals acquire their meaning. It is not a single thing that explains the goodness of the variety of things that are

is not a sufficient terminus for practical reasoning,<sup>111</sup> for Aristotle the assumption that the Idea of the Good is the source of value to the other goods does not help us to understand the whole range of goods and above all the *eschaton prakton agathon*. This argument is reinforced by the fact that the highest good is not the sole good *per se*, since there also exist other goods *per se*, which are not simply means to it. So, there is an unavoidable necessity to search out the relation in which this highest Good stands to all the other goods below it.<sup>112</sup>

Aristotle's motivation is to shift the focus of the Dialectic from the highest to the most proximate to *praxis* good, to the *praktion agathon*, which according to his view can only be reached by a process reverse and qualitatively different from that of the Dialectic in the *Republic*.<sup>113</sup> While in the *Republic* the descent from the first unhypothetical principle must ignore the sensibles and stick only with the intelligible Forms, this kind of Dialectic must take into consideration all things attainable by humans in *praxis* until the accomplishment of the goal of each specific *praxis*. Moreover, although it also recognizes the importance of the *Good itself*, considered as the supreme end of all human action,<sup>114</sup> it pays no less attention to the final practicable good, because this is its ultimate dialectical target at the bottom level and it is evaluated as equally precious to the target at the highest level. In this way, he establishes a kind of Ontology of the *praktion agathon*. He is interested in searching not only for the *telos* (end) of all human action, which is furthest away, but also the *telos* which is nearest to the agent of each action, by investigating also the dialectical stages between them. According to this perspective, it is only this two-way process that will finally lead to the explanation and understanding of *praxis* and human life.

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good" (Segvic 2004: 171; see also 175). Segvic believes that Aristotle's emphasis is on the variety of goods or on the variety of appearances. In my view, if that was his main point he could not dispute effectively Plato; because Plato tries to remedy exactly the illness derived from the variety of things, opinions, perspectives and goods. As I understand it, Aristotle's task is to indicate the need for the reverse dialectical process, i.e., one that leads to the *eschaton praktion agathon*.

<sup>111</sup> See Barney 2007: 304.

<sup>112</sup> Broadie 2007: 144–145.

<sup>113</sup> Pl. R. 511b6–c2.

<sup>114</sup> See again Arist. *EE* 1218b10–13.

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#### Aristotle's Criticism of the Platonic Idea of the Good in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.6

In *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.6, Aristotle directs his criticism not only against the Platonic Idea of the Good but also against the notion of a universal Good. In this paper, I also examine some of the most interesting aspects of his criticism of the Platonic Good and the universal Good in *Eudemian Ethics* 1.8. In the *EN*, after using a series of disputable ontological arguments, Aristotle's criticism culminates in a strong ethical or rather practical and, simultaneously, epistemological argument, from which a dialectical *postulatum* emerges. This argument aims to show that we

have to discover the dialectical stages or grades which constitute the relation between the ultimate End, i.e., the Good *simpliciter* or the absolute Good, and the relational goods till the last *prakton* good in which each specific *praxis* ends. According to the present reading, Aristotle sets out to establish a kind of Dialectic of the ends (*Dialektikē tōn telōn*) or Dialectic of the goods (*Dialektikē tōn agathōn*), which puts emphasis on the descent to the specific good, which is appropriate to and cognate with each individual, be that a person, *praxis*, science or craft. It is also suggested that this might be relevant to Aristotle's tendency to establish a separation of *phronēsis*, i.e., practical wisdom, from *sophia*, i.e., wisdom, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

KEY WORDS

Aristotle, Aristotle's criticism of Plato, Plato's Idea of the Good, *praxis*, *prakton agathon*, *phronēsis*