Was ist das für den Menschen Gute?

What Is Good for a Human Being?

Was ist das für den Menschen Gute?

Menschliche Natur und Güterlehre

What Is Good for a Human Being?

Human Nature and Values

herausgegeben von/Edited by

Jan Szaif

und/and

Matthias Lutz-Bachmann

Walter de Gruyter · Berlin · New York

∞ Gedruckt auf säurefreiem Papier,
das die US-ANSI-Norm über Haltbarkeit erfüllt.

ISBN 3-11-017206-2

Bibliografische Information Der Deutschen Bibliothek

Die Deutsche Bibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über http://dnd.ddb.de abrufbar.

© Copyright 2004 by Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, D-10785 Berlin
Dieses Werk einschließlich aller seiner Teile ist urheberrechtlich geschützt. Jede Verwertung außerhalb der engen Grenzen des Urheberrechtsgesetzes ist ohne Zustimmung des Verlages unzulässig und strafbar. Dies gilt insbesondere für Vervielfältigungen, Übersetzungen, Mikroverfilmungen und die Einspeicherung und Verarbeitung in elektronischen Systemen.
Printed in Germany
Druck und buchbinderische Verarbeitung: Hubert & Co., Göttingen
Datenkonvertierung: Selignow Verlagsservice, Berlin

Vorwort

Durch die Grenzen, die sich in der gegenwärtig dominierenden Regel- und Prinzipienethik angesichts der ethischen Herausforderungen der Gegenwart zeigen, haben für die ethische Debatte Ansätze zu einer Ethik der Tugenden und des guten Lebens international wieder zunehmend an Bedeutung gewonnen. In Zusammenhang damit erlebt auch die Frage eine Renaissance, welche Rolle der Reflexion auf die menschliche Natur, insbesondere die Natur des menschlichen Strebens bzw. der menschlichen Affektivität, in der Ethik zukommt. Vor diesem Hintergrund ist es eine wichtige Forschungsaufgabe, die antiken und mittelalterlichen Bestände einer Strebens- und Tugendethik auf ihr argumentatives Potential hin kritisch-konstruktiv zu befragen. Dieser Zielsetzung war ein internationales Symposion gewidmet, das vom 27. bis 29. April 2001 an der Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität in Bonn stattfand. Die Beiträge des Symposions erscheinen nun in diesem Band, ergänzt um einige weitere Aufsätze.

Die Mehrzahl der Beiträge sind einer vornehmlich aristotelisch-stoischen Traditionslinie der Ethik in Antike und Mittelalter gewidmet. Diese Schwerpunktbildung lag nahe, weil in dieser Tradition auf exemplarische Weise, und auch wirkungsgeschichtlich sehr folgenreich, der Versuch unternommen worden ist, die zwei Grunddimensionen der Frage nach dem Guten – die Frage nach dem *guten Leben* und die Frage nach den Maßstäben des *moralisch* Guten und Gesollten – mit Hilfe der Reflexion auf die menschliche Strebensnatur zu vermitteln.

Der Band möchte auch dem Gespräch zwischen historischer Forschung und zeitgenössischer Philosophie dienen. In diesem Sinne versucht ein Teil der historischen Beiträge, die Interpretationsergebnisse auch in einen Bezug zu zeitgenössischen Fragestellungen zu setzen, während die Beiträge, die im Schlußteil dieses Bandes zusammengefaßt sind, sich der Thematik des Guten und der menschlichen Natur aus verschiedenen systematischen Blickwinkeln annähern.

Das Symposion wurde gefördert durch die Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, die Gesellschaft von Freunden und Förderern der Universität Bonn und das Albertus-Magnus-Institut Bonn, wofür wir an dieser Stelle noch einmal herzlich danken. Auch den studentischen Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeitern, die durch Mitarbeit bei redaktionellen Arbeiten und durch ihren Einsatz während des Symposions zum Gelingen

des Projektes beigetragen haben (Mona Heylmann, Gudrun Rhode, Stephanie Vesper, Anna Graf, Sabine Wanninger, Nils Fischer, David Wirmer, Marcel Debrus, Matthias Schmidt), sei herzlich gedankt.

Ein besonderer Dank geht an die Beiträger dieses Bandes. Allen voran aber möchten wir Prof. Dr. Dr. h. c. Ludger Honnefelder danken, dessen Emeritierung im Sommersemester 2001 Anlaß des Symposions war. Von seiner wissenschaftlichen Arbeit in Lehre und Forschung und seiner persönlichen Beratung und Orientierung haben wir, wie viele andere, sehr profitiert. Ihm sei dieser Band gewidmet.

Jan Szaif, Universität Bonn
Matthias Lutz-Bachmann, Universität Frankfurt a. M.

Inhalt

Vorwort V

I. Antike

Charles H. Kahn
Plato on the Good 1

Anselm Winfried Müller
Aristotle's Conception of Ethical and Natural Virtue:
How the Unity Thesis sheds light on the Doctrine of the Mean .. 18

Jan Szaif
Naturbegriff und Güterlehre in der Ethik des Aristoteles 54

Christopher Gill
The Stoic Theory of Ethical Development: In What Sense is Nature
a Norm? 101

Maximilian Forschner
Stoische Oikeiosislehre und mittelalterliche Theorie des
Gewissens 126

II. Mittelalter

Mechthild Dreyer
Quod sint multo plures
Albertus Magnus über die Freundschaft 151

Denis J. M. Bradley
Thomas Aquinas on the Role of Volition in Natural Law
Prescriptions 166

Klaus Jacobi
Kann ein Mensch mehrere Letztziele zugleich haben?
Ein Kommentar zu Thomas von Aquin, *Summa Theologiae*,
I–II, q. 1, a. 5 191

Eleonore Stump
Aquinas's Virtue Ethics and its Metaphysical Foundation 209

Georg Wieland
Vernunft und Natur. Das *Secundum naturam* in der Thomanischen
Strebens- und Güterlehre 229

Ludger Honnefelder
Ansätze zu einer Theorie der praktischen Wahrheit bei Thomas von Aquin und Johannes Duns Scotus 246

III. Zeitgenössische Perspektiven

Rosalind Hursthouse
On the Grounding of the Virtues in Human Nature 263
Matthias Lutz-Bachmann
Die Idee der Menschenrechte angesichts der Realitäten der Weltpolitik: Eine Reflexion über das Verhältnis von Ethik und Politik 276
Martin Seel
Überlegungen zum Begriff der Selbstbestimmung 293
Ludwig Siep
Gibt es eine menschliche Natur? 307

Die Autoren 325
Personenregister 329

Charles H. Kahn

Plato on the Good

The concept of good is clearly a fundamental theme in Plato's philosophy. The Form of the Good occupies a central position in the *Republic*, where it serves as the goal for the moral and intellectual training of the guardians. In a final vision that will complete their education, the perfected guardians "will lift up the beam of their soul to behold the source of light for all things, the Good itself, and they will use it as a model (παράδειγμα) to fashion their own lives and that of the city" (VII, 540 a). Another dialogue, the *Philebus*, is entirely devoted to discussing the nature of the good. And in the reports concerning Plato's unwritten teaching, we hear of a famous lecture entitled "On the Good". No topic could be more important for Plato. Even justice, the explicit concern of the *Republic*, is subordinate to the supreme concept of the good.

We may begin, however, by taking note of a philosophical problem. From a contemporary point of view, it is not easy to make sense of a conception of the good so strong that it is said to be the source of all knowledge, truth and reality (*Rep.* VI, 508 e–509 b). In fact today it is no small challenge to defend any notion of the good as objective, that is to say, as independent of what anyone holds to be good. In a well-known attack on the concept of objective value, J. L. Mackie has cited the Platonic Forms, and the Form of the Good in particular, as vulnerable to what he calls "the argument from queerness". Objective values, according to Mackie, would have to be "entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe", since they would have to be "intrinsically prescriptive", having the peculiar property of "obligatory-ness" or "to-be-pursuedness" somehow built into them. What is strange about this property, according to Mackie, is that objective values would have to be entities with the unique "power, when known, automatically to influence the will".[1] Incidentally, Mackie's attack on objective values in his "argument from queerness", with its insinuation that objective values were somehow

1 J. L. Mackie, *Ethics, Inventing Right and Wrong*, Harmondsworth NY 1977, 38–40.

logically abnormal, was unintentionally prepared by G. E. Moore's earlier characterization of the predicate "good" as referring to a "non-natural quality". Unlike Mackie, Moore believed that such qualities actually exist. But his description of them as non-natural prepared the way for Mackie's rejection of them as logically bizarre.

Now I do not propose to defend a thesis of objectivity in value. On the contrary, the term "objective value" seems to me an oxymoron. The notion of value conjures up something like market value or consumer demand. A value is something we give to things by valuing them, and it is not at all clear how the value of anything could be independent in principle from the desires and preferences of someone who values it. As a term for philosophical discussion, "good" has the advantage over "value" (or "valuable") of aspiring to be an ordinary descriptive adjective, as when we speak of a portrait as a good likeness or a marksman as a good shot. In such cases, where "good" means simply *good of its kind*, it makes sense to speak of goodness as objective, as independent of anyone's preferences or desires, since the relevant criteria of excellence are directly implied by the concept of a portrait or a marksman. Hence it is understandable that Étienne Gilson is said to have been outraged when an English translator of one of his works rendered "le bien" not by "the good" but by the language of value. Gilson complained, in medieval style, that a transcendental attribute (the good) had thus been reduced to an "extrinsic denomination", that is, to a non-essential external relation. I imagine that Gilson was sensitive to the fact that anyone who undertakes to defend objective values begins with a serious disadvantage built into the terminology. (This terminology is so convenient, however, that the temptation is great. I note that in the title of this volume "Güterlehre" was rendered in English by "values". I shall even use the term "value" myself, but as rarely as possible.) Anyone who is aiming at a sympathetic understanding of the ancients in these matters will be well advised to speak in terms of *good* and *bad*, *just* and *unjust*, rather than in terms of value.

I shall attempt, then, not to defend objective values but to give a sympathetic account of Plato's theory of the good, as presented in three dialogues: *Gorgias, Republic* and *Philebus*. To this end it will be best to begin not with the *Republic* but with the *Gorgias*, the earliest of the three. For one of the principal claims of the *Republic*, namely that all human actions aim at the good, is also presented in the *Gorgias*, but without the metaphysical framework that makes the doctrine of the *Republic* more problematic.

In the *Gorgias* this claim (namely, that all human action aims at the good) appears in a context where Socrates is maintaining, against Polus, the paradoxical thesis that tyrants do not do what they want, although they do whatever they please (466 d ff.). Socrates' argument depends upon the principle, accepted by Polus, that what everyone wants is the good, or something good, whereas the action that people perform may itself be neutral or even bad. The primary distinction here is between ends and means, between goals or actions desired for their own sake and actions desired for the sake of something else. The *Gorgias* text represents a milestone in philosophical literature, since the distinction between ends and means is clearly articulated here, probably for the first time. But the further claim, that all actions are done for the sake of the good (or for the sake of something good), goes well beyond the distinction between ends and means. We must take account of two major assumptions, left implicit in the text but fundamental for the understanding of Plato's claim.

1) First assumption: The notion of good, introduced here as the object of desire or wanting (βούλεσθαι), is implicitly limited in this context to the notion of intrinsic good, things desired for their own sake as ends of action rather than as means to further ends. Plato's terminology here for what we would call instrumental goods is not entirely consistent. Actions done only for the sake of something else are initially described as "neither good nor bad, but in between" (467 e–468 a), but they are also said to "share in the good", to be "beneficial" or to be "better for us to do" (467 e 7, 468 c 4, 468 b 2, 6). I suggest that Plato avoids the terminology of instrumental goods in this context precisely because he wishes to locate the notion of good in what is desired as an end, desired for its own sake. Thus Socrates gets Polus to agree that "when people act, they do the intermediate actions for the sake of things good, not good things for the sake of the intermediates" (468 a 5). So "good" here means "intrinsic good".

2) Second assumption. The notion of desire operating here is to be understood as rational desire (βούλεσθαι), by which I mean a deliberate desire for whatever upon reflection one regards as best or most advantageous. This concept of rational desire presupposes a judgment of what is the best end to be pursued "all things considered". Plato indicates a conception of desire that is rational in this sense by his systematic use of the verb βούλεσθαι in the argument with Polus, rather than the more emotional verb for desire ἐπιθυμεῖν, which he will use later in the dialogue to express the position of Callicles, who insists on satisfying all

desires without restriction. (This rational connotation for βούλεσθαι, "to want", is reinforced by the cognate terms βουλή, "council", and βούλευσις, "deliberation".) This is precisely the terminological distinction between two kinds of desire that becomes canonical in Aristotle, where βούλησις means rational desire for what is good (or what is perceived as good) while ἐπιθυμία designates animal appetite or desire for pleasure. Plato is not generally committed to such a technical vocabulary; and he will often use these two terms for desire interchangeably. But in the *Gorgias* he regularly observes the semantic contrast between βούλησις and ἐπιθυμία, which Aristotle will employ as a doctrinal distinction.

Thus with desire understood as rational and good limited to the end pursued in action, Socrates' claim that all actions are done for the sake of the good can be seen as an implicit definition of rational action, with rational desire conceived in terms of the "for-the-sake-of" relation, that is, in terms of the relation between ends and means. An action counts as rational, as the expression of βούλεσθαι, only if the agent has an end in view that he perceives as good and he deliberately pursues the action in question as a means to achieving this end.

This is Plato's fundamental contribution to the classical theory of action, which he offers here as a basis for his interpretation of the Socratic paradox that no one does evil voluntarily. Plato's interpretation posits a universal human desire (βούλεσθαι) for what is good, so that everyone who acts voluntarily is pursuing an end they perceive as good. In this, its weakest form, Plato's claim is little more than an identification of voluntary action with rational action in the sense just defined, action motivated by βούλησις; by deliberate desire. So it is not difficult to get Polus to accept this claim that all actions are done "for the sake of [something] good" (468 b). Polus does not raise the objection that might occur to a modern reader, beginning with Hobbes and Hume: namely, that we call something "good" simply because we desire it. On the contrary, that objection is ruled out in advance by the Platonic-Aristotelian conception of βούλεσθαι; as Aristotle says, we desire something because we judge it good, not conversely (*Metaphysics* 1072 a 29). And in the context of the *Gorgias*, Polus does not disagree.

This notion of voluntary action motivated by rational desire still leaves us rather far from the Socratic paradox. To move Polus closer to the paradox Socrates relies on the ambiguity between two interpretations of "good": on the one hand, good for the agent or advantageous, and on the other hand good absolutely or good of its kind. Although the

tyrant may do whatever he pleases, if his action leads to his political downfall he has done something bad, and hence something he did not want (βούλεσθαι, 468 d 5). He has, as it were, acted involuntarily. The conclusion is paradoxical, but the argument thus far relies only upon the subjective conception of good as an end perceived by the agent as advantageous or in his self-interest. It is in this sense that (as Aristotle says) every action aims at some good. The next step of the argument is one that Polus cannot really follow, since Plato wants to determine the good more narrowly and more objectively as an end of action that is "good of its kind", a good end for all human action to aim at. In effect, Plato means to ask: what is the end of action that is good for every agent and in every circumstance? The relatively innocuous claim that every action aims at some good is thus reinterpreted as the strong philosophical thesis that there is one good that every voluntary action should aim at, and would aim at if the agent knew what was really good, what was really in his interest. In the context of the *Gorgias*, this universal good or τέλος is conceived as the good state of the ψυχή, the soul adorned by the moral and intellectual virtues.[2] This is the good both for the individual and for the political art, which aims at making the citizens virtuous. Thus for Plato in the *Gorgias*, we have essentially the same conception of the good that is defined by the ἔργον argument in Aristotle's *Ethics* (except that Aristotle will add his characteristic distinction between potency and act, so that the good is not merely the possession of the virtues but their active exercise).

In the *Gorgias*, the argument for this view of the good depends upon two analogies: an analogy between virtue for the soul and health for the body, on the one hand, and an analogy between the excellence of the soul and the excellence of artefacts such as a painting, a house or a ship (503 e ff.). In each case excellence (ἀρετή) is said to be produced by order, arrangement and harmonious fitting-together. Latent here is a definition of the virtues as the harmonious cooperation between parts of the soul, that will be worked out in *Republic* IV. But the *Gorgias* does not work it out. There is no psychological theory here, and Plato's conclusion relies heavily upon the exemplum of Socrates' own life and character, and upon the ad hominem attack on Callicles' appeal to a life of sensual indulgence.

2 The semi-technical expression τέλος for the good as "the end of all actions" is introduced later in the dialogue (499 e). Here again an innovation in the *Gorgias* is taken for granted by Aristotle.

Before leaving the *Gorgias* we may point out that the parallel between psychic excellence and bodily health, a parallel that is more fully developed in *Republic* IV, suggests how we might proceed to explicate Plato's conception of an objective good. The notion of physical health is complex, just as the notion of sickness is clearly diverse. But it seems reasonable to maintain that there is an objective difference between health and sickness, and that health is the better condition of the two. The Platonic conception of the good in the *Gorgias* can be interpreted as making a similar claim for the healthy state of the psyche, that is, for the human character and cognitive condition that is defined as virtue in *Republic* IV. We may or may not accept Plato's conception of psychic excellence. But there is nothing epistemically bizarre or ontologically abnormal about the quality or thing that figures here as the objective good. It is a certain state of the psyche which, it is claimed, is in everyone's interest to achieve, the end they would pursue in every action if they knew what was truly in their interest, that is, objectively good for them, just as health is objectively good for them. Given the notion of βούλεσθαι or rational desire for what is good (and hence also good for the agent), there is no mystery why a judgment that X is good, or that X leads to the good, should motivate the agent to do X. This is Plato's (and Aristotle's) answer to Mackie's argument from queerness. In effect, the classical theory of action, as we find it in the *Gorgias* and in Aristotle, takes for granted a certain version of psychological egoism, structured by a concept of βούλησις as deliberate desire. There may be theoretical problems with this concept of desire for an open-ended object, an object identified only as "what the agent judges to be best, all things considered". But such a conception of the end is not more indeterminate than the object of egoism generally, if that is understood as "what the agent judges to be in his or her best interest". The good as object of βούλησις is not more logically odd than self-interest conceived as the object of ordinary egoism.

So much for the *Gorgias*. When we turn to the *Republic*, there is a more complex story to tell. In Book VI we have not only the metaphysical background of the Forms and the realm of intelligible being; we also have the epistemic foreground of the Form of the Good, the greatest object of knowledge, of which no direct description can be given. Despite this larger perspective, the account of the good in *Republic* VI preserves direct continuity with the *Gorgias* in its claim that the good is "what every soul pursues and for the sake of this it performs all its actions"

(VI, 505 d–e). The same context alludes to debates about the τέλος of human life, similar to those we find in the *Gorgias*: "Most people think the good is pleasure, but the more refined think it is intelligence or wisdom (φρόνησις)" (505 b). And the refutation of Callicles is directly recalled when Socrates then reminds us that those who claim the good is pleasure must contradict themselves when they are forced to concede that some pleasures are bad (505 c 8).

So although the good in *Republic* VI is no longer conceived as the best state of the human soul, but instead as the best thing in the universe, the source of everything good, nevertheless the normative and teleological function of the good as the goal for all human action has been preserved and reinforced. The passage in *Republic* VI begins by claiming that it is "in conjunction with the good that justice and the rest become useful and beneficial. ... There is no use in possessing everything, if it is not good, or in knowing everything without knowing anything good" (505 a–b). In regard to what is just and honorable (καλόν), says Socrates, many would choose the appearances without the reality. But, he continues, no one is satisfied with what is good in appearance only; everyone seeks what is really good (505 d).

Leaving aside for the moment the specifically metaphysical and epistemological functions of the Good, we can say that in its practical function alone it plays a double role. On the one hand, it continues to figure as the τέλος presented in the *Gorgias*, as the goal of human life and the object of rational desire. On the other hand, the *Republic* introduces the dimension of Platonic metaphysics that is unknown to the *Gorgias*.[3] In the context of the theory of Forms as intelligible paradigms or models for the visible realm, the Good as supreme Form assumes a new role. It is by taking the Form of Good as model that the guardians, operating like artists, will be able to fashion a virtuous life for themselves, for the citizens and for the city as a whole. This imagery, the vision of the Good as an indispensable model for wise and benevolent action, provides the unifying link that ties together Plato's political doctrine, his theory of education, and his metaphysics.

Powerful as it is, such imagery does not tell us much about the good itself. Despite its supreme importance, Socrates does not offer an account of the good. He offers instead an analogy with the sun. This anal-

3 Are Plato's references to "the good" in the *Gorgias* ambiguous enough to allow for a proleptic allusion to the Good of the *Republic*? The grammar of τὸ ἀγαθόν would allow for this at *Gorgias* 468 b 7, but there is no clear hint of any metaphysical reading in the text of the *Gorgias*.

ogy indicates nothing about the intrinsic nature of the good; it illustrates only its function in the intelligible realm, as the source of knowledge, truth and reality. We do have the famous enigmatic statement that the Good "is not being (οὐσία) but beyond being, exceeding it in dignity and power" (509b). But what does this mean? The passages that follow in *Republic* VI and VII, namely the Knowledge Line and the allegory of the Cave, do not tell us what we want to know about the Form of the Good. How is it related to the Form of Justice or the Form of Virtue? In what sense are the other Forms dependent on the Good for their being and their knowability? Assuming that the Good is the "unhypothetical (or unconditional) first principle" that is said to stand at the summit of the Divided Line, how is the dialectician supposed to rise above the hypotheses of mathematics in order to proceed to this supreme principle? What exactly are the guardians supposed to see, or understand, when they lift the eyes of their soul to the vision of the Good?

The text does not provide us with answers to these questions. Rather than speculate on the unwritten sections of Plato's work, I suggest that we rely on four other textual references to partially fill the gap left by Socrates' refusal to describe the good in *Republic* VI. The first reference is the parallel account of αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν, the Beautiful itself, in Diotima's speech in the *Symposium*. A second reference is the implicit definition of justice in Book IV. A third reference is the system of moral education in Book III and above all the mathematical education in Book VII, which is designed to prepare the mind for the vision of the Good. Our fourth and final reference will be the long discussion of the good in the *Philebus*.

1. In our attempt to get a fuller understanding of Plato's Idea of the Good, we begin with the evidence from the *Symposium*. There is a close parallel between the ladder-of-love passage in the *Symposium* and the allegory of the Cave in *Republic* VI, since in both cases we have a cognitive ascent from sensible to intelligible reality, and each ascent has as its climax the intellectual vision of a supreme Form, the vision of the Beautiful in the *Symposium* and the vision of the Good in the *Republic*. Furthermore, in Greek the two terms καλόν (beautiful) and ἀγαθόν (good) are closely connected, both in meaning and in idiomatic usage, where καλὸν κἀγαθόν comes to mean something like "refined" or "the better sort". I suggest that we may take Diotima's account of the lover's climactic vision of the Beautiful as a model for the vision of the Good,

since in the *Republic* this vision is repeatedly referred to but never described. By contrast, Diotima reports in some detail how, when a lover who has been properly guided in the contemplation of beautiful things reaches the goal (τέλος) of his erotic pursuits, he will catch sight of something marvelously beautiful, something which "forever is (beautiful) and neither comes to be nor perishes, not being beautiful in one respect, in another respect ugly, not beautiful for some, ugly for others, nor beautiful at one time but not at another ... nor is it anywhere in something else ... in earth or heaven or anywhere else, but itself by itself with itself it is eternally uniform, while other things share in it in such a way that, as they come to be and perish, it becomes neither more nor less nor suffers any change" (*Symp*. 211 b). There if anywhere, says Diotima, is a life worth living for a human being, beholding the Beautiful itself (211 d). So much do we have from the *Symposium*. Now perhaps not every detail in this description would fit equally well for the Good itself. But given the close semantic link between καλόν and ἀγαθόν, and the position of both Forms as culminating point in an intellectual ascent, I think we may safely construe the final intuition of the Good after the model of the *Symposium* passage. Plato does not like to repeat himself, and he may have found it unnecessary to describe such a vision in the *Republic* precisely because he had done so at such length in the *Symposium*. But the profound cognitive conversion which prepares for, and terminates in such a vision is even more dramatically represented in the *Republic*, in the allegorical ascent from the Cave.

2. The vision passage of the *Symposium* proceeds largely by the *via negativa*: it tells us what the Form of Beauty is not—not changing, not relative, not located in a place. For a more positive account we may consider the implicit definition of the Form of Justice. No doubt the concept of good is more general and more fundamental than the concept of justice. But like beauty, justice is a close cognate to the good: ἀγαθόν, καλόν and δίκαιον are the three standard terms for normative evaluation in Plato. Now we can, in effect, discover a definition for justice in the *Republic*. In describing the virtues in Book IV, Socrates first defines justice for the city, in the distribution of roles between the social groups, and then defines justice for the individual, in the harmonious relationship between the parts of the soul. To get a Platonic definition of justice itself we need only generalize these two special definitions by limiting the formula to what they have in common. Such a generalization gives us something like the following: "Justice is a well-ordered whole", or,

more fully: "Justice is a unity of parts, each with its own nature, so related to one another that each part performs the task for which it is best fitted." It must be an abstract structure of this kind that Plato has in mind as the Form of Justice.

Of course such a definition of justice presupposes the notion of goodness (in the notion of *well-ordered* whole, or performing the task for which each one is *best fitted*). So a formula of this kind could count only as a partial definition or analysis of the good. Plato seems to have much more in mind, since he has Socrates claim that no one can know the Good itself, or any good at all, "unless he can delimit (or define, διορίσασθαι) the Form of Good in an account (λόγος) and separate it from everything else" (VII, 534 b). So it is clear Plato did not hold a view like that of G. E. Moore, that goodness was a logically simple, unanalysable object of thought. More plausibly, perhaps, we might compare Plato's view of the good to the medieval concept of transcendentals, as predicates that transcend the Aristotelian categories and are therefore not too simple but too general, and too fundamental, to define in the ordinary way. In any case, the definition of justice as a unified structure, a whole of well-ordered parts, should point us in the right direction for understanding Plato's conception of the good. In logical terms, since justice is a virtue or excellence, it must count as a species or instance of the good. But there is a more specific link which reinforces this conclusion. The account of justice in *Republic* IV concludes with a musical comparison that reverberates throughout Plato's work. The just individual is said to achieve psychic harmony by putting himself in order: "He harmonizes the three parts of himself like three limiting notes in a musical scale – high, low and middle. He binds together those parts and any others there may be in between, and from having been many things he becomes entirely one, moderate and harmonious" (443 d, transl. Grube-Reeve). In *Republic* V Socrates insists that the unity of the city is the supreme political virtue, and this text indicates that it is also an ideal for the individual. What this simile suggests is that musical-mathematical concord or harmony is an essential mark not only of unity but also of goodness. We shall see this confirmed at length both in the *Republic* and in the *Philebus*.

3. Our third reference point is provided by the curriculum of *Republic* VII. Why must the future philosopher-kings devote ten years to mathematical studies before engaging in the dialectical training that will culminate in the vision of the Good? And why is music, or rather mathematical harmonics, the last of the four or five mathematical sciences to

be found "useful for the investigation of the beautiful and the good?" (VII, 531c6) In a recent discussion of these questions Myles Burnyeat has shown how the study of mathematics is designed to introduce the student to a radically different view of reality, a view of intelligible being as more objective because more stable and more non-perspectival than the relativized and context-dependent world of ordinary experience. But since Plato's non-perceptual reality also includes what Burnyeat calls "objective values", mathematics in general, and harmonics in particular, will prepare the student for a deeper understanding of what is beautiful and good.[4]

How is this possible? How will the abstract structures studied in theoretical mathematics contribute to a recognition of what we may call fundamental values? How will the quantitative relations between numbers, lines and figures help to enlighten judgments about the good and the beautiful? Burnyeat shows that the key here lies in the role of numerical proportion as the principle of concord and attunement, συμφωνία and ἁρμονία. We must take quite literally Plato's insistence that the harmonics studied by the future guardians should be concerned not with the heard sounds of musical instruments but with the pure numbers of music theory and mathematical astronomy. Only in this way will these studies be "useful for the investigation of the beautiful and the good" (VII, 531c6). The harmonies audible to the ear are only sensible images of these intelligible structures. As such, the hearing and playing of music makes an essential contribution to the education of the young guardians. Book III tells us that training in music is the most important part of early education, because "rhythm and harmony will penetrate most deeply into the interior of the soul". Hence musical training will sharpen the young person's moral-aesthetic judgment, so that he or she will welcome and praise whatever is beautiful and noble (καλά) but despise and reject what is ugly and ignoble (αἰσχρά), "before they are capable of receiving a theoretical account (λόγος). When such an account arrives, the one who has been musically trained will recognize it as his own and embrace it willingly" (401d–402a). The λόγος in question, which the well-trained souls will recognize as their own, will include the whole range of moral teaching. But we may also see in this future λόγος a proleptic reference to the mathematical harmonics of Book VII. Since they have been trained in the sensible images of musical

4 M.F. Burnyeat, "Plato on Why Mathematics is Good for the Soul", *Proceedings of the British Academy* 103 (2000), 1–81.

concord, they will recognize these purely numerical harmonies as in some way familiar from childhood.

To understand this connection between music and mathematics in Plato's thought we must take account of the tradition of Pythagorean harmonics known to us from the fragments of Philolaus and Archytas. It is precisely in this connection that Plato cites the Pythagoreans for the view that astronomy and harmonics are sister sciences (VII, 530 d). This turns out to be a quotation from Archytas (fr. 1); it is in fact the only explicit reference to the Pythagoreans in all of Plato's work.[5] What is typical of the Pythagorean musical tradition is its insistence on the numerical structure of the concords, and the analysis of the basic scale (ἁρμονία) into the ratios 2 : 1, 3 : 2 and 4 : 3. These are the so-called musical numbers. A more complex version of these ratios is used in the construction of the world soul in Plato's *Timaeus*. Plato's construction is so technical that no one can understand this section of the *Timaeus* without a considerable grasp of Pythagorean harmonics. (Incidentally, Aristotle's claim that Plato's philosophy is essentially derived from the Pythagoreans, which seems baseless in reference to the doctrine of Forms, is fully justified in connection with numerical harmonics.)

We see, then, that harmonics comes as the last mathematical science in Book VII because it is the fullest realization of the proportional principle of concord and attunement, the mathematical image of the Good. So in the *Timaeus* the goodness of the demiurge is expressed by his ordering the world soul according to number and articulating the world body according to geometric proportion, elementary triangles and regular solids. Different branches of mathematics provide different versions of rational order. We may still ask, of course, why are all these orders good? Perhaps there is no general answer. But Burnyeat suggests that "the reason why concord, attunement, and proportion are valued in Plato's *Republic* is that they create and sustain unity".[6] After all, the Neoplatonists knew what they were doing when they identified the One and the Good. Perhaps we may best understand the goodness of each example of mathematical structure in Plato as a particular expression of unity in plurality.

On the basis of this information from the *Republic* and the *Timaeus* we may draw two general conclusions. First, that the truest images of

5 Plato does once refer to Pythagoras himself, as an educational leader and the founder of a distinguished way of life (Rep. X, 600 b).

6 Burnyeat, "Plato on ..." (fn. 4), 74.

the Good are formal structures best illustrated from mathematics. (The normative status of such abstract structures is reflected in the formal definition of Justice as a unified whole of ordered parts.) And second, from the importance of music in moral training and the place of harmonics in higher education, we can see that there is no sharp distinction for Plato between the moral and the esthetic, between the good and the beautiful, the ἀγαθόν and the καλόν.

4. These two conclusions can be confirmed and refined by evidence from the *Philebus*. But the argument of the *Philebus* is complex and calls for careful interpretation. At first sight, the *Philebus* refers so frequently to "the good" (τἀγαθόν) that we might be tempted to suppose that in this late work Plato was finally prepared to give us that account of the Good itself, or the Form of the Good, that he so emphatically *refused* to provide in *Republic* VI. However, if we approach the *Philebus* with this expectation, we will soon be disappointed. For Socrates makes clear from the very beginning of the dialogue that the subject to be debated is not the good as such, or the good in general, but a more narrowly delimited topic: the good for human beings, or a good human life. The dialogue opens with a contest between pleasure and knowledge, and what is at stake is specified as: "what is the state or disposition of the soul that can make a life happy for all human beings" (11 d 4). Thus the official concern of the *Philebus* is identical with that of Aristotle's *Ethics*, the nature of the good life for human beings. And what we actually find in the text of the *Philebus* is not a general study of what we might call value theory (for lack of a better word) but rather an essay in moral psychology, with a detailed analysis of different types of pleasure.

That, however, is not the whole story. There is also a cosmic and even a metaphysical dimension to Plato's discussion of the good in the *Philebus*. First of all, the good life is defined neither by pleasure nor by knowledge but by a mixture of the two. And the notion of mixture is immediately analyzed at a very general level as the product of two Pythagorean principles, the Limit and the Unlimited. At this cosmological level, the good life belongs to a third item, the principle of Mixture itself, the logical space in which the principles of Limit and Unlimited are blended. Furthermore, this cosmological framework is completed by a fourth principle, the cause responsible for the mixture, which is identified as Reason or νοῦς.

The four cosmic principles of the *Philebus* do not appear in this form in any other Platonic work. Nevertheless, certain parallels suggest that a correspondence of some sort is implied with the scheme of the *Timaeus*,

so that Limit corresponds to the Forms, the Unlimited corresponds to the Receptacle, the Mixture to the world of Becoming, and the cosmic Reason to the demiurge. This mapping is far from being self-explanatory, but a correspondence of this type must be intended unless the cosmological theories of these two late dialogues are to be seen as totally incompatible.

In an anthropocentric perspective, the principle of Reason (νοῦς) is the preferred term for Socrates' candidate for the human good. But of course νοῦς is also Anaxagoras' name for the cosmic principle which organizes the world order; hence the parallel here with the demiurge of the *Timaeus*. The cosmic role that νοῦς plays in the *Philebus* made it possible for later Platonists to identify νοῦς and the Good. For example Numenius, the major predecessor of Plotinus, posits as the highest of his three gods a divine principle characterized both as νοῦς and as the Good itself.[7]

The position of the *Philebus* is, however, less straight-forward. νοῦς comes only third in the final ranking of goods at the end of the dialogue. (This subordinate place of νοῦς should correspond to the subordination of the demiurge to the Forms in the *Timaeus*; and compare *Phaedrus* 249 c 6: "[the Forms] by connection with which a god is divine".) The Good itself does not appear in the *Philebus*. At best we arrive "on the threshold of the good" (64 c 1), and we must be satisfied if we can locate its dwelling place (οἴκησις 61 a 9). All that the discussion here attempts to achieve, by studying the finest mixtures, is to learn "what is the nature of the good in man and in the All, and to guess at the form itself" (τὴν ἰδέαν αὐτὴν ... μαντευτέον, 64 a). In terms of the fourfold scheme, the good appears more than once, first as instances of mixture (in the happy life and in the world order) and again as Reason, the good-making cause of the mixture. And the final ranking, where measure appears twice at the head of the list, makes clear that the positive principle of Limit must also be seen as good-making, since it is expressed in numerical measures. Thus three out of the four cosmic principles of the *Philebus* represent the good. (The Unlimited is the only exception; it corresponds to the neutral or negative role played by the Receptacle as ἀνάγκη in the *Timaeus*.)

What have we learned here about the Good itself? At the conclusion of the dialogue Socrates says that "if we cannot catch the good with one form (ἰδέα) alone, we will chase it with three, with Beauty, Symmetry,

7 See my *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans. A Brief History*, Indianapolis 2001, 128.

and Truth" (65 a). By συμμετρία here Socrates means something like due proportion or commensurability. "Taking these three as one", he continues, "we may rightly hold this responsible for what is in the mixture, and it is because this is good that the mixture is good." Thus we have two distinct causal principles for the good mixture: Reason (νοῦς) was invoked earlier as the agent cause of mixture, while the trinity of Beauty-Symmetry-Truth is here introduced as the formal cause, the good-making principle in virtue of which the mixture becomes good. But just when we think we have understood this duality of causal principles, Plato bewilders us further in the final ranking of goods as ingredients in the mixture, where measure and symmetry appear twice (in the first two places), and reason and knowledge also appear twice, so that even the purest pleasures are ranked only in fifth place.

I will not attempt here to untie all the knots in this very convoluted account of the good, but I think we may risk a few general conclusions. First of all, the two explanatory principles, Reason as agent cause and Symmetry or Measure as formal principle, can also be seen as related to one another as cause and effect, but only if this is understood as an analytical relation in which the effect is logically prior to the cause. By this I mean that it is the notion of Symmetry as rational order that gives content to the notion of νοῦς as rational agent. In the *Gorgias* rationality was defined in terms of the subordination of action as means to the good as end. I suggest that a similar order is reflected here in the subordination of Reason to Symmetry in the final ranking. The notion of reason is analysed here as it were operationally, in the instrument by which it operates (namely Limit, or numerical measure) and in the result obtained, in the Beauty, Symmetry and Truth of the mixture. The same notion of rational structure is illustrated at the beginning of the dialogue in the account of dialectic as an analysis of unity and plurality in the system of phonemes organized in the alphabet, in the musical rhythms identified in the system of metres, and in the musical consonances articulated in numerical ratios. In these anthropocentric examples, as in the larger cosmic parallel, Reason operates by imposing Limit on the Unlimited, order on the unordered. Hence mathematical structures function twice in such a diachronic analysis, once as the principle of measure employed to impose order on the Unlimited, and again as the Symmetry or proportionality produced in the resulting mixtures. (Perhaps that is why measure must appear twice in the final ranking.) The principle of Reason is conceived here as a demiurgic power that is able both to apprehend formal structures and to impose them on the phe-

nomena described as Unlimited. And the conceptual subordination of reason to such formal structures, corresponding in the *Timaeus* to the dependence of the demiurge on the paradigmatic Forms, is indicated in the *Philebus* by the subordination of νοῦς to the principles of measure and symmetry in the final ranking.

In what sense does this discussion in the *Philebus* bring us to the threshold of the Good and locate its dwelling place? I suggest that the Form of the Good is reflected at least twice here: first in the principle of Limit which (on my reading) corresponds in the cosmological scheme to the role played by the Forms in the *Timaeus*; and again in the trinity of Beauty-Symmetry-Truth invoked towards the end to capture the elusive "form itself" (65 a). The dwelling place of the Good, then, is located in measure and symmetry or proportion. This can be seen once again in the final ranking at 66 ab, where τὸ μέτριον occupies first place and τὸ σύμμετρον comes in second.

Despite, then, the continuing discretion of the *Philebus* concerning the Good itself, this dialogue tells us a great deal more about the Form of Good than we can learn from the comparison to the sun in *Republic* VI–VII. First of all, the appearance of Beauty (τὸ κάλλος) in the trinity of forms used to capture the Good confirms the convergence between goodness and beauty that I have argued for on other grounds, and notably on the basis of the parallel between the ascent passages of the *Symposium* and the *Republic*. (So at 64 e the δύναμις of good is said to have escaped into the nature of the καλόν.) In the second place, the role of Limit, measure, symmetry and proportion confirms our conclusion from the curriculum of the *Republic*, that formal structures of a mathematical type provide us with the clearest picture of Plato's ultimate conception of the good. So in the famous lecture on the Good, the audience was said to be disappointed when Plato talked only about mathematics, number and unity.

On the other hand, this highly abstract conception of goodness should not distract our attention from the specific insight of the *Philebus* as a dialogue about the *human* good, the good for creatures like ourselves, who must organize a measured blend of knowledge and pleasure in our own lives. Thus, after all the metaphysical and cosmic explorations of the *Republic* and the *Philebus*, this dialogue returns us deliberately to the pragmatic perspective of the *Gorgias*, and once more pleasure figures as a contender for the goal of life. But now the discussion moves beyond the positions of Callicles and Philebus, where pleasure is conceived as an end in itself, to reinterpret pleasure selectively as a

necessary ingredient in a life dominated by the Socratic pursuit of knowledge and understanding.

Thus far my sympathetic reconstruction of Plato's view of the good as presented in three major dialogues. Let me conclude with a critical comment. Despite very great admiration for Plato's metaphysical and cosmic vision, and for his persistent commitment to, and refinement of, the Socratic moral position, I think a modern reader must find something lacking in a theory of the good which is so fundamentally aesthetic in conception. Both the convergence in Plato's thought between the good and the beautiful, and the paradigmatic role of mathematical proportion and musical harmony for an understanding of justice and the good – all this points to a normative ideal of abstract order and rational symmetry. What I find lacking in such a classical ideal is any basic moral concern for human personality, any fundamental respect for human beings as such. This is where the modern notion of the moral points to something that is generally lacking, or systematically underemphasized, in the ancient conception of the ethical. The virtues of altruism have no doubt been exaggerated, but some principled concern for the welfare of others has, in my view, become a basic element in western moral consciousness. This is the fundamental Judeo-Christian contribution to our tradition, whether expressed in the Biblical command to love thy neighbor or in the Kantian imperative to treat persons as ends also and not merely as means. The absence of this generalized concern for human dignity should, I think, be recognized as a limitation in the Platonic conception of the good, though not a limitation that is specifically Platonic. Aristotle's moral theory, which is much less aesthetically oriented than Plato's, is no less deficient in this regard, as we can see from his defence of slavery. I conclude by asking whether there is any pagan equivalent to the Scriptural notion of respect for all human beings as creatures made in the divine image. I leave it to other scholars to say how far the Stoics, for example, succeeded in articulating such a moral view, independently from the Biblical tradition. The Stoics certainly had the metaphysical resources to justify such a view, in their conception of a rational community linking human beings to the reason in the universe, but I am not sure how clearly they drew the relevant moral consequences.

Anselm Winfried Müller

Aristotle's Conception of Ethical and Natural Virtue

How the Unity Thesis sheds light on the Doctrine of the Mean

In his ethical writings,[1] Aristotle defends two famous doctrines: that an ethical virtue is a mean state (μεσότης) between excess and deficiency; and that you cannot have one virtue without having them all. I want to raise problems about the meaning and the credibility of both of these doctrines, in the hope that investigating them jointly may help us to make the best of both.[2]

My enterprise is to be exegetical only in part. On the one hand, I am going to *discard*, as incoherent, some of the claims that Aristotle seems to make concerning the mean. In this way, I am giving a twist to the doctrine of the mean which, though leaving it broadly Aristotelian, is not in every respect supported by the texts. On the other hand, in explaining the doctrine that the ethical virtues form an indivisible unity, I am concerned to defend not only the internal coherence of Aristotle's view but also its appropriateness to our ordinary thinking about the virtues. On the other hand, I am not going to question – or try to defend – very basic Aristotelian doctrines like the indispensibility of ethical virtue to a good human life.

The procedure is to be as follows: In order to set the stage, I'll first raise problems about the nature of the *unity* that is supposed to tie the virtues together (section 1), then clarify two conceptions of the *mean*, both developed but not successfully integrated by Aristotle (section 2), and discuss conditions of their compatibility (section 3). Then one of these conceptions, which I call the many-dimensional conception of the

1 Translations will be taken from Aristotle, 1915, unless otherwise indicated.

2 A first version of this paper was written while I held a Senior Visiting Research Fellowship at Corpus Christi College, University of Oxford, during Michaelmas and Hilary Terms of 1998/99. I wish to thank the Fellows of the College for their hospitality and encouragement. I originally gave the paper to the Classical Centre at Corpus in Trinity Term 1999, and much benefited from the discussion. I was also helped by critical hints from Peter Hacker, Anthony Price and Christopher Taylor, as well as by detailed comments from Lesley Brown, Philippa Foot, Rosalind Hursthouse and Gavin Lawrence.

mean, will be shown to connect up with, and in some way support, the unity thesis (section 4). Finally, I am going to draw on Aristotle's notion of a "*natural* virtue" (section 5) in order to show how the doctrines I am considering, and in particular the unity thesis, fall into place in the context of an adequate understanding of the *ethical* virtues (section 6).

In a way, I am going to offer a single solution to the two problems I have mentioned, viz. that of specifying how "μεσότης" should be understood and that of seeing the rationale of the unity thesis. The key to both these problems is a distinction between two elements that are present in any ethical virtue. The first of these is that element which marks any one virtue off from all the others: a good disposition with regard to what I'll call that virtue's "characteristic dimension". The second element marks each ethical virtue off from its "natural" variant; this relates to the situational or "critical dimensions" of the virtue's characteristic response.

1 *How are the virtues supposed to be united?*

1.1 Aristotle's argument for the unity thesis

Whereas the doctrine of the mean is explained and illustrated in the *Nicomachean Ethics* at great length in Books II and III. 6 – V, the unity thesis is stated, towards the end of VI, in half a sentence: "with the presence of the one quality, practical wisdom, will be given all the virtues".[3] Some justification is given a little earlier: "it is not possible to be good in the strict sense without practical wisdom, nor practically wise without moral virtue".[4]

In the light of this justification, Aristotle's argument seems to be this: The possession of any one ethical virtue, for its application to particular situations, requires the possession of practical wisdom (φρόνησις). But for wisdom the correct starting points of deliberation are needed, and so are therefore all the virtues. Hence, by the transitivity of requirement, the possession of any one ethical virtue requires the possession of all the ethical virtues.

3 "ἅμα γὰρ τῇ φρονήσει μιᾷ οὔσῃ πᾶσαι ὑπάρξουσιν" (1145 a 1 f.); in the *Penguin Classics* translation: "The possession of the single virtue of prudence will carry with it the possession of them all."

4 "οὐχ οἷόν τε ἀγαθὸν εἶναι κυρίως ἄνευ φρονήσεως, οὐδὲ φρόνιμον ἄνευ τῆς ἠθικῆς ἀρετῆς" (1144 b 31 f.; cf. a 36 – b 1).

Many present day readers of Aristotle seem to feel uneasy about this argument – without perhaps being able to locate the difficulty either in one of the two premisses that are being invoked, or in the relevant principle of inference. There is something suspiciously abstract about this argument. We are not given examples – at least not in the context of the argument.[5] What's more important, we are not really told what *kind* of example would illustrate the conceptual connections Aristotle seems to have in mind. And *conceptual* they are surely supposed to be – for to show that it was *psychologically* necessary to have all the virtues in order to have any one of them, a different kind of argument would presumably be needed.

Aristotle's argument seems to connect the virtues with each other by some kind of detour – via practical wisdom. This suggests two approaches to the unity thesis, since we may try to invoke either of two aspects of wisdom's practical significance. On the one hand, wisdom may be seen as holding together and somehow uniting the virtues by representing an *overarching*, *common* τέλος of virtuous feeling and acting (*NE*, VI, 1140 a 25–28; cf. I, 1102 a 1–3). On the other hand, wisdom has to ensure that the good disposition is well actualized in any given *situation*; and it could be at this point that we ought to expect the claims of one virtue to make contact with the claims of others.

1.2 Coordination of ends?

Let us try the first approach first. It is, of course, true that, according to Aristotle, the practical τέλος presented by any given virtue contributes to an overall τέλος of human life. But this circumstance does not, by itself, seem to have the desired implications.

Compare the τέλος of a meal. We may say that a number of τέλη contribute to, or are constitutive of, its overarching τέλος – in particular nu-

5 We may treat as illustrations of the unity thesis certain observations Aristotle makes elsewhere, for instance in his discussion of liberality. Here he says of prodigal people that "because they care nothing for honour, they take recklessly and from any source; for they have an appetite for giving, and they do not mind how or from what source. Hence also their giving is not liberal; for it is not noble, nor does it aim at nobility…" Also, such people may give "much to flatterers or those who provide them with some other pleasure. Hence also most of them are self-indulgent; for they spend lightly and waste money on their indulgences and incline towards pleasures because they do not live with a view to what is noble" (IV, 1121 b 1–10). Perhaps a sense of honour, and temperance, are to be seen, here, as virtues on which liberality depends. Cf. also fn. 21 *infra*.

trition, the reduction of hunger, the pleasures of eating and drinking, and communication. But, with some ingenuity, you can achieve any of these more limited τέλη without doing anything to achieve any of the other three.

So why shouldn't you be able, likewise, to achieve the τέλος of, say, courage without acting justly or generously? Aristotle himself, in a different context (and an unguarded moment?) admits that "the liberal are almost the most loved of all virtuous characters" (IV, 1120 a 21 f.) – suggesting, if not implying, that different people can have different virtues.

Of course, if the outcome of virtuous feeling and action is to be a good life, you must feel and act in accordance with all the virtues. But can we not, in principle, tell apart the contributions made by each of them to the overall τέλος – much the way we can in the meal case? And can you not, correspondingly, achieve a good life *in part* – indeed, isn't that what most people do?

Where would someone who adopted the meal analogy see the flaw in Aristotle's brief argument for the unity thesis? – The flaw would have to lie in the assumption that you need *the whole* of wisdom to practise any one virtue.

An alternative to this assumption, suggested by the meal analogy, is as follows: For the practice of a given virtue, your deliberation must not only be correct in the discovery of means and ways but also show an adequate grasp of a specific ἀρχή, the deliberation's starting point. But this starting point is, for each ethical virtue, a conception of the point of this particular virtue, not a comprehensive conception like an idea of the good life.

Given this understanding of the way the virtues cooperate, the unity thesis cannot be derived since any particular virtue requires partial φρόνησις only, while it is total φρόνησις that requires all the virtues.

Now I do not in fact believe that the meal analogy gives us the right model for understanding how in Aristotle's view the ethical virtues cooperate. It is not, however, easy to gather from his texts how these virtues *are* meant to relate to each other at the level of τέλος and why, in particular, their display should have to be guided by one overarching τέλος represented by one practical wisdom.[6] – So let us examine the sec-

6 Hence we find a keen Aristotelian like Broadie, 1991, 259, asking: "Cannot one be morally well disposed and intelligent, and therefore effectively virtuous, in one but not another area of life? Why should a given kind of virtuous action require the unrestricted practical wisdom that would be wise on every front? ... The ordinary notions of say, *courage* and *profligacy*, *courage* and *arrogance*, do not fall apart if we use them

ond approach, which has wisdom bring the virtues together at the level not of ends but of implementation.

1.3 Harmonizing particular demands?

In one version, this approach would appeal to the observation that a virtue V1 may be called for, but not realizable without the practice of V2 (as when truthfulness or fidelity require you to make a confession that requires courage). This observation, however, though to the point, is of limited significance only since it cannot be generalized. Not *every* virtue V1 seems to be such that, for *every* other virtue V2, circumstances are possible in which the practice of V1 depends on the possession of V2. (Thus, there may be situations in which you cannot realize liberality without temperance; but under what circumstances might liberality *be required for* the practice of temperance – or justice for the practice of courage?)

A second version of the second approach looks more promising. Its basic idea is this: Given any virtues V1 and V2, you may find yourself in situations where a response characteristic of V1 would be bad instead of good unless "checked" by V2. A *prima facie* virtuous feeling or action may, in a particular case, be either bad because excluded by another virtue, or bad unless qualified in a way required by it.

This idea is less complicated, and indeed more familiar to us, than it sounds. Think of somebody who stands his ground in the service of an unjust or foolish cause. I am going to call this case the "offensive example" because it highlights that implication of the unity thesis that is particularly liable to get people's backs up. And I am going to conduct most of the following discussion in terms of it, because objectors to the unity thesis tend to fasten on courage as its most glaring counterexample.[7]

---

compatibly. … A mixed pair of ethical terms can hold of the same subject, but then this subject is not an appropriate model, since a model should not send mixed messages." Broadie seems to take it for granted that different virtues can be said to qualify different *areas* of life and thus look after different and separable τέλη, each of which could be implemented by a separate wisdom, as suggested in *NE*, VI, 1144 b 17 f.; so that the *only* reason for requiring the virtues to be connected is the consideration that a person who did not have them all could *not always* act well and therefore not set a good example.

7 Aristotle seems to provide us with an example of misplaced fearlessness at III, 1115 a 23 f.: A man is not courageous "if he is confident when he is about to be

With respect to the offensive example we may argue as follows: Facing danger, although as such characteristic of the virtue of courage, need not always be an act of courage. If, as in the example, justice excludes it, it is unjust, and therefore bad, and therefore not an act of virtue, and therefore not an act of courage. (The idea that something could be an act of courage, hence an act of *virtue*, and at the same time *bad*, seems incoherent.) Hence we must insist that the *unjust (or foolish ...)* character of the action defeats its claim to being *courageous*. So in order to practise courage, you do need justice and, we may suppose, in other situations other virtues. Supposing this to be true not only of courage but of all the ethical virtues, we seem to obtain the unity thesis: any virtue is in need of any other.

In this form, however, the argument is open to the following objection: When you stand your ground for an unjust cause, it may indeed be wrong to call *this particular action* courageous[8] – because the idea of a bad act of virtue seems incoherent. But why should we say that *you* are therefore *lacking in* courage and *cannot ever* act courageously? In other words: We can call your action unjust, and bad; and perhaps, therefore, we should refrain from calling *it* courageous. But, for all we know, *you* are courageous nevertheless in that you show courage *whenever you should*. Your problem is that *in addition* you show the response characteristic of courage, or act in accordance with a motivational pattern typical of courage, in some cases *when you should not* because it is excluded by other virtues, like justice.

This objection to the unity thesis admits that the *motivational pattern* of courage, its *characteristic response or operation*, may be present without the ethical *virtue* of courage being *practised*. What the objection denies is that, in exhibiting the motivational pattern when you should *not*, you are showing a *defect* in courage. It denies that your *courage* is affected by a lack of justice or any other virtue. And in this way it denies what the unity thesis claims, viz. that the practice of any one virtue *depends on* the possession of all the others.

So to defend the unity thesis, one has to show that your exhibiting the characteristic response of a virtue in a particular case when you

---

flogged". (But perhaps this is because the situation lacks the κάλλος of the battle field?)

8 A cruder version of the objection will not even make this concession but simply claim that courage can be manifested in unjust actions as much as in just ones (though we may not so readily *call* it courage in the former case). My Aristotelian defence of the unity thesis in sections 4 and 5 will be directed against this version, too; it is not going to *rely on* the concession.

should not, can tell against your possessing that virtue. I believe that Aristotle's doctrine of the mean supports a defence of this kind. So let us now turn to that doctrine.

2 *What is meant by the "mean"?*

2.1 More than one conception

Following Broadie, we may start with a preliminary distinction:

> "In two ways ... moral excellence is a mean state, and in each because of its connection with actions or particularised responses. But on one side this is because it is a state that gives rise to responses considered individually as appropriate, and therefore as median or mean by contrast with possible wrong particular responses. On the other side, however, the concepts of excess and defect are applied on a frequentative basis, i.e. to a set of responses all of which, or none of which, are of a certain type, while what is said to be mean is a mixed set; each set gives rise to a state of the soul which in turn is called 'median', 'excessive' or 'deficient' after its cause." (Broadie, 1991, 98.)

The second of these ways of understanding virtue as a mean state relates, in particular, to the requirements of moral education. So we find Aristotle saying that "the man who flies from and fears everything and does not stand his ground against anything becomes a coward, and the man who fears nothing at all but goes to meet every danger becomes rash" (II, 1104 a 20–22). Your moral training should prepare you for the differential demands that arise from a virtue like courage in different situations.

We are not going to be concerned with this part of Aristotle's teaching. It is only the first of Broadie's two ways of understanding virtue as a mean state which I want to examine.

Consider the virtue of courage. A mean, or intermediate, response that reflects this particular mean state shows an amount of fear (or fearlessness) between more and less fear, and indeed between what is, by some standard accessible to reason, too much and what is too little in the particular situation.

But within this way of understanding the mean, Aristotle seems to specify two *different* conceptions – a one-dimensional and a many-dimensional conception.

2.2 Two aspects of virtue

To explain these two conceptions let me distinguish two aspects of virtue. The distinction is a simple one but vital, in my view, to a satisfactory understanding and assessment both of the doctrine of the mean and of the unity thesis.

1) Virtues are, in the first place, distinguished from each other by the sphere, or *characteristic dimension*, of feeling and action in which they operate. Thus, the dimension characteristic of courage is given by the range of possible answers to some such question as: "To what extent does X feel and/or show fear (in the pursuit of such and such ends) when faced with this or that danger?". It is, we might say for short, the dimension of fear and confidence or fearlessness.[9]

So the aspect of an ethical virtue V that distinguishes it *from the others* is V's characteristic *dimension*. Within that dimension we can identify a *kind of response* that is characteristic of V – what I have also called V's typical motivational pattern. Thus the characteristic response of courage consists in fearless facing of danger, taking risks, and accepting suffering, for the sake of some end; justice is characterized by respect for rights and deserts, concern for equality, etc.; patience, or good temper (πϱαότης), by calm (as opposed to angry) reactions. Every virtue seems to be characterized in this way by a typical kind of response – as well as by a specific kind of temptation, opposed to that response, which makes V both necessary to have and difficult to achieve.[10] – Assessment of a response in

9 I am ignoring the fact that, as in III, 1117 a 29–32, Aristotle often separates the dimension of confidence (and caution) from that of fear (and fearlessness). Problems arising from this duality are discussed by Urmson, 1988, 64 f.

10 If a virtue is thus characterized by some type of response, it shares this response with one and only one of the corresponding vices. (Confidently to face danger can be an act of courage *or* one of foolhardiness; but nothing is a characteristic response of courage as well as of cowardice: fear and flight, even where appropriate, never constitute *acts of* courage. Or take the example of patience: A calm reaction may manifest good temper *as well as* "lack of feeling" – whereas anger, even where appropriate, is never a manifestation of good temper.) A virtue is, then, related in quite distinct ways to the two vices it is opposed to. *This* asymmetry is far deeper than is suggested by an admission that the virtuous "middle" is *not equally distant* from the two vicious extremes. Should not Aristotle, for this reason, have abandoned the doctrine of the mean altogether? Perhaps he should have. As we shall see, it is not necessary, e.g., to treat foolhardiness as a vice *opposed to courage* in order to maintain, in accordance with the unity thesis, that the ethical virtue of courage is incompatible with display of its own characteristic response for the sake of foolish ends. I argue against Aristotle's doctrine of the mean in Müller, 1998, 153–160.

respect of V's characteristic dimension can count, relative to V, as *primary assessment*.

Note that, given my terminology, an *act* of V will always be a case of V's characteristic *response* but a response characteristic of V will not necessarily be a virtuous one (an act of V) – it may be "excessive", or perhaps, as in the offensive example, disqualified by some other defect.

2) The possibility of this other defect relates to the second of the two aspects of a virtue that I wish to bring out. This is the aspect that distinguishes V not from other virtues, but from a variant of V that Aristotle calls "natural virtue" (φυσικὴ ἀρετή).

It does not matter here whether this variant is "natural" in the sense of being innate, whether it is a genetic basis of its ethical counterpart, or whether it may be the result of inadequate training (cf. however *NE*, VII, 1151 a 18 f.). What the natural variant of V shares with V is the characteristic response. What distinguishes it from V is the fact that it is not shaped by wisdom (VI, 1144 b 1–17; cf. sections 5 and 6).

So the second aspect of an ethical virtue V is what right reason brings to it, namely its taking account of "circumstances" in a wide sense of this word. I mean its taking account of a) the point of practising V anyway (i.e., what V contributes to humans' living well), and b) the various respects in which it may, in consequence, be appropriate or inappropriate to exhibit V's characteristic response here and now. It is by bringing to bear on any given situation this knowledge of when and how to respond in this way, *and when and how not to*, that any ethical virtue is *unqualifiedly* good. As, however, the core of the concept of V relates to its characteristic dimension, assessment of a V type response in those *other* respects can be called *secondary*, as far as V is concerned.

Take the example of courage. Its characteristic dimension is that of fear and confidence. So to decide whether a particular action was courageous, you have to make a *primary* assessment of it in terms of the degrees of fear and confidence that were exhibited. From this point of view there is no objection to calling X's walking on a tight rope to impress his friends a courageous action; it has passed the first test. But you have to take account also of what the practice of courage is good for. Let us say that its point is to help us obtain, or keep, things that are essential or beneficial to the good life of the agent or of others in situations where the attempt to obtain or keep those things brings with it a certain amount of risk or suffering or the like – enough of it to attract fear, but not enough to dictate renunciation. Suppose now that X is not very good at keeping his balance, that the tight rope is more than five meters