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## Aristotle on Good and Bad Actualities

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This paper is a discussion of one of the more neglected passages in the central books of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Θ 9 1051a4-19. In this passage Aristotle makes some assertions concerning relations that hold among potentialities and actualities, both good and bad. These assertions seem to be made as an afterthought, and their relation to the analysis of potentiality and actuality that precedes is unclear. I shall argue that in this passage Aristotle is in effect providing a metaphysical foundation for the normative component of a teleological analysis of composite substance.

I consider certain difficulties in reconciling the text with the account of potentiality and actuality presented earlier in *Metaphysics* Θ. I then briefly explore some of the implications that this passage has for our understanding of Aristotelian teleology.

### I

In *Metaphysics* Θ 9, 1051a4-19, Aristotle writes:

It is clear from the following considerations that the actuality is better and more valuable (καὶ βελτίων καὶ τιμιωτέρα) than the good (σπουδαίας) potentiality. Whatever is

said in respect to potentiality is such that the same thing is potentially contraries. For example, that which is said to be potentially healthy is the same as that which is said to be potentially ill, and these potentialities occur together. For the potentiality for being healthy is the same as that for being ill, and likewise for the potentialities of being at rest and changing, for building a house and demolishing it, and for being built up to be a house and for falling down. So the potentiality for the one contrary occurs together with the potentiality for the other (τὸ μὲν οὖν δύνασθαι τάναντία ἅμα ὑπάρχει). But the contraries, such as being healthy and being ill, cannot occur together. It follows that necessarily one or the other of these is the good, but both potentialities have the same status as good, or neither does (ὡστ' ἀνάγκη τούτων θάτερον εἶναι τάγαθον, τὸ δὲ δύνασθαι ὁμοίως ἀμφοτέρων ἢ οὐδέτερον). It follows that the actuality is better. But among bad things, the end and the actuality must be worse than the potentiality, for the same thing is potentially both contraries.

It is therefore clear that there is no badness apart from things. For the bad is by its nature posterior to the potentiality.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Here and elsewhere, all translations from the Greek are my own.

Aristotle begins by asserting his conclusion: a good potentiality is not as good as the actuality to which it is correlated. In what sense is a potentiality good? Is Aristotle talking about a potentiality *for* a good? Or is he talking about an ability or disposition that is good insofar as it is especially conducive to its correlative actuality? As often happens, the conclusion for which Aristotle is arguing becomes clear only by tracing the course of the argument.

## II

This argument begins with the assertion that whenever a potentiality for some X inheres in a subject, the potentiality for the contrary of X likewise inheres in that subject. Aristotle presents the example of a living body. By virtue of being a living body, it has both the potentiality for good health and the potentiality for bad health. On what basis is Aristotle able to say that all potentialities are similarly correlated to contraries? Aristotle's reasons are presented in the previous chapter, Θ 8, in which he argues that actuality is prior to potentiality on the grounds that the necessary eternal motions, on which all other motions depend, involve no potentiality.<sup>2</sup> This is so, he says, because "everything which is potentially admits of not being in actuality" (τὸ δυνατόν δὲ πᾶν ἐνδέχεται μὴ ἐνεργεῖν); accordingly, potential beings are perishable (1050b10-11). Here δυνατόν does not have the sense of the logically possible, that which is not impossible. Rather, it denotes a metaphysical principle of change, absent in respect to those features of a thing that do not change. Any

<sup>2</sup>The reliance on this earlier argument is an indication that the argument of Θ 9 is not an unrelated observation simply tacked onto *Metaph.* Θ, as may first appear.

substrate of this sort of δύναμις for some x will be such as can be either x or not x.<sup>3</sup> The contrary to any x will be the absence of x, within that substrate that admits of x. For the presence and absence of some characteristic are "those that are the most opposed to each other, of those that are in the same receptive subject" (*Metaph.* Δ 10 1018a28-29). This is why any subject that has the potentiality for X will also have the potentiality for the contrary of X.

So even though potentialities for contrary attributes cannot be simultaneously actualized, they nevertheless accompany each other within the same subject. This is not problematical, as far as it goes. But in Θ 9 Aristotle goes on to say that this is why there is the *same potentiality* for the contraries. The basis on which Aristotle makes this inference is not clear. The statement is doubly puzzling because it seems to contradict points made earlier in *Metaphysics* Θ.

At Θ 2 1046b4-24 Aristotle contrasts rational potentialities (those that are μετὰ λόγου) and nonrational potentialities, on the grounds that while a potentiality of the first kind is a potentiality for contraries, a potentiality of the second kind is correlative to only one actuality. While the hot has a potentiality to heat but not to chill, and the cold has a potentiality to chill but not to heat, one with an art has the potentiality to produce both the product of that art and its contrary. This point, familiar from Plato's *Republic*

<sup>3</sup>See also *Cat.* 10 13a17-20: "When that which admits of contraries is present, it is possible for each contrary to change into the other, unless the one contrary belongs to some subject by nature, as hot belongs to fire."

(I 333E-334B)<sup>4</sup> is explained by the fact that one with an art has an account by virtue of which one understands the cause of the coming-to-be of the product of that art. One would be in a position to ensure that the product of that art would be absent through the purposeful withholding or removal of the cause of that product. Because not every subject is such as can accept the product of that art, being *deficient* in respect to the product of that art is a contrary, not a contradictory, to having that product. This is why a rational potentiality such as an art is correlative to *contraries*.

Hence rational potentialities stand in contrast to nonrational potentialities, each of which is correlative to one and only one effect. Aristotle elsewhere makes clear that if a nonrational potentiality is brought together with an object on which it can produce its effect, it is just that effect, not its opposite, that will be produced (*Metaph.* Θ 5 1048a6-7). But if an artisan and that on which the artisan can work are brought together, it is not necessarily the case that the product of the art will come about.<sup>5</sup> A third thing is required, which Aristotle at Θ 5 1048a10-11 calls the authority (τὸ κύριον), identified as the desire or choice (ὄρεξις ἢ προαίρεσις) of the artisan, which determines whether or not the means for the artistic production would

<sup>4</sup>Cf. *Meno* 87E-88D and *Ion* 531D-532B.

<sup>5</sup>At *Metaph.* Θ 8 1050b30-34, as well, Aristotle contrasts nonrational and rational potentialities on this basis. He indicates that the only respect in which a single nonrational potentiality will be correlative to opposites is insofar as its presence and absence would lead to opposite results.

be present. In the case of Aristotle's example, a physician will be the one who knows what human health is, and, as long as the patient is curable, can provide the conditions for the actualization of health. But by virtue of that same knowledge, the physician knows how to withhold these conditions, and assure that health is not actualized. Instead disease would be actualized. For on the Aristotelian understanding, disease is not an actuality unto itself, as it sometimes is for us, when it is the flourishing of a certain microbe. Rather, it is the body's state when its potentiality for health is not actualized (*Metaph.* H 5 1044b29-34<sup>6</sup>).

<sup>6</sup>Aristotle's account in H 5 is actually a bit more complicated than this. The body is said to be related to health and disease as is water to wine and vinegar; in each case the latter two terms are the contraries to which the first term is related as matter. In each case "It is the matter of the one in respect to disposition (ἐξίς) and form, and it is the matter of the other in respect to privation and perishing contrary to nature" (1044b32-34). Thus, the body without the form of health is diseased. To preserve the analogy, it should follow that any water without the form of wine is vinegar. This of course is not so. Aristotle posited water as an element, with its own nature, and vinegar as a compound (μίξις) of water and earth, in which there is a preponderance of water (*Mete.* IV 7 384a3-16, 10 389a7-11). The continuation of the passage is even more puzzling. It is a *corpse* which is said to be related to the body as is vinegar to water. Aristotle seems to be saying that a body, as such, is alive, for it is the corpse (not the body) which is said to be the matter of the living body. Aristotle apparently gives health and life equal status as being a positive state. Likewise disease and

Returning to  $\Theta$  9, we see that one of Aristotle's examples of a single potentiality that is a potentiality for contraries is indeed an instance of a rational potentiality: the potentiality that allows one to build a house is that which allows one to demolish a house. (This is explained by the fact that one must know the cause of the internal coherence and stability of a house in order to build one. With such a

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being a corpse have here an equal status as privation. The thought seems to be that disease is partial death, through (partial) absence of form, allowing the organized body to fall back into a mass of unorganized chemical constituents. The identification of the body and the living body rests on the thesis, prominent in *Metaph.* H, that matter and the form that it admits constitute a unity in such a way that the matter, as such, is not what it is apart from this form. On this account, the matter that pre-exists the composite substance no longer exists, except "potentially." (Some have taken this teaching to play a key role in the resolution of the puzzles of *Metaphysics* Z and H. See, for example, M. L. Gill, *Aristotle on Substance: the Paradox of Unity* [Princeton, 1989].) Leaving this issue aside, it is clear that the analogy with water, wine, and vinegar is forced in another respect. Though the water of the wine is not an independent constituent in the wine, there can be water as such that is not wine. But even if we disregard the difficulties involved with the vinegar example, because Aristotle is not always consistent on the question of the pre-existence and survival of matter as such, this passage alone does not tell against the thesis that within *Metaph.*  $\Theta$ , the contrary to an actualized form is simply the privation of that form within the matter that accepts the form.

knowledge its coherence and stability can be easily removed.) But how are the other examples to be accounted for?

We note that when Aristotle states the principle that every potentiality is the principle of only one change, he concentrates on those principles that he takes to be potentialities in the strict sense of the term: principles of motion or change *in something else* or in a thing itself insofar as it is something else. These are the active potentialities, such as heat, cold, or the soul. In  $\Theta$  1 Aristotle distinguishes these from passive potentialities. A passive potentiality is that feature of a substrate that is the principle of its being acted upon and changed, were it to come into requisite contact with the correlative active potentiality ( $\Theta$  1 1046a11-13). These are said to be potentialities in a secondary sense, for they are both conceptually and ontologically derivative from active potentialities (1046a15-16). We note that  $\Theta$  9's examples of nonrational potentialities that are correlative to contrary actualities are passive potentialities. This is clear in the case of the potentiality for being built up and for being knocked down. Less clear are the cases of the potentialities for motion and rest, and for health and disease. For motion can be a natural process, of which the source is within the subject, as can progress towards health. On the other hand, both cases can be passive processes, as in the cases of being healed through surgery and what Aristotle calls "violent" motion. And even in those cases in which the motions are natural, Aristotle makes an ontological distinction between the active and passive aspects of the substance undergoing natural change (*Physics* VIII 4 254b7-33).

We have seen that in  $\Theta$  2 and 5 Aristotle makes explicit why a single rational potentiality is correlated to contrary actualities. He nowhere gives such an explicit

account as to why this is also the case for a single passive potentiality. But one can be reconstructed. Ontologically, the potentiality to be acted upon is nothing other than the nature of the substrate of that potentiality, which renders it susceptible to the action of active potentialities. For example, any body is such as can be chilled or heated. Which occurs depends on the active potentiality of that with which it comes in contact, not on anything internal to the subject about to be heated or cooled. There is no metaphysical principle of being heated apart from that of being cooled. This will also be the case for those passive potentialities correlative to complex actualities, such as health and disease.

I suggest that Aristotle's assertion that the same potentiality is correlated to contrary actualities holds for both rational potentialities and passive potentialities. One may well ask why Aristotle does not come out and say this, if this is indeed his meaning. Why does he not explicitly assert that this principle does not hold for the remaining logical possibility, that of two active potentialities, correlated to contrary actualities?

I propose that this is because, in the last analysis, Aristotle does not admit that such a case is *metaphysically* possible. Whenever there is a pair of contrary actualities, there be a real metaphysical principle of causation for only one of these. For only one actuality is there a real active potentiality by virtue of which this actuality emerges. The other actuality is merely what is predicated of the substrate when this substrate does not stand in the required relation to such potentiality, or when the active potentiality is in some way otherwise prevented from doing its work.

For suppose that there is a substrate S for some passive potentiality for X. Let Y be the contrary to X, which will be predicated of S to the extent to which X is

absent.<sup>7</sup> We have seen that Aristotle asserts that when the nonrational active potentiality for X stands in the right relation to the passive potentiality for X, the potentialities will be actualized, and X will be predicated of S. But if these two potentialities do not stand in the right relation, or do so only to a certain extent, the privation of X is inherent in S. The privation of X, the absence of X in a subject such as to admit X, will be the contrary of X. So to the extent to which the condition of having the potentialities stand in a certain relation is not met, Y will be inherent in X. To return to the example of health, the matter of a sapling has the potentiality for attaining the final cause of being a tree, that is, for being all and doing all that is involved in being a mature, flourishing tree. We can call this goal the healthy life of the tree. (Health is the permanent state by virtue of which this life is led; it in turn comes about through the living of a healthy life.) The active potentiality is the form of the tree, its soul, already

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<sup>7</sup>In *Cat.* 10 12a1-30, 12b27-35, Aristotle distinguishes contraries that have intermediates from those that do not. Thus, for some pairings of contraries X and Y it is possible for a subject to be partially X and partially Y, and for others, it is not. Aristotle presents health and disease as an example of a pair of contraries with no intermediate, but surely this is a linguistic point, indicating the lack of a term to denote an intermediate, as "grey" denotes an intermediate between white and black. For it is manifest that one can be healthy to a greater or lesser extent. Another possibility is that health, considered as an actualization of substantial essence, would, in the early phase of Aristotle's thought to which the *Categories* belongs, be an all-or-nothing predicate.

within the sapling. If the sapling is not given enough water or light, it will be unable to fully meet this goal. The tree's active potentiality will be prevented from standing in the appropriate relation to its passive potentiality. To that extent it will have predicated of it the contrary of the "healthy life," that is, it will be living in an unhealthy way.

In such a case there is no need to posit an active potentiality for the contrary of X. Those agencies that do seem to be actively responsible for the contrary of X (such as drought or logging, in the case of the tree) can be understood as having their causal power because they make impossible the proper functioning on S of the active potentialities for X.

It should therefore be no surprise that in the argument being considered Aristotle omits considering the possibility of two different potentialities, each directed toward one of a pair of contrary actualities.

### III

Aristotle's assertion in  $\Theta$  9 that the same potentiality is in respect to contraries is made to clarify the various relations that hold among good actualities, bad actualities, good potentialities, and bad potentialities. Aristotle makes clear in the *Categories* that goodness and badness are examples of contrary attributes for which there are intermediate attributes between them (*Cat.* 10 12a13-17, cf. 11 13b36-14a6). It follows that it is the same rational active potentiality for good and bad results. Again, Aristotle's example of health and disease sheds light on this: the art of medicine is a potentiality making possible both the healing of a patient, presumably a good in some noncontroversial sense, and the poisoning or infecting of a patient, likewise something patently bad. Again, the passive potentialities for goods are likewise potentialities for those

bad characteristics that are their contraries. For both rational active and nonrational passive potentialities, the potentiality as such will be neutral between goodness and badness. Because the potentiality for the good and for the bad are one and the same, and both are neutral in respect to goodness and badness, Aristotle asserts that the good actuality is better than its potentiality, and the bad actuality is worse than its potentiality. For, presumably, in some sense the good actuality *is* good and the bad actuality *is* bad, but all of the potentialities involved are *in themselves* neither good nor bad.

Here, two points need to be made in passing. First, it is now clear that the good potentiality, which in the beginning of our passage is said not to be as good or valuable as the actuality, must be understood as good insofar as it is a potentiality *for* some good. Second, the neutrality of the potentiality in respect to goodness or badness is contrasted with the case of actualities, because in *that* case, Aristotle says, one *must* be good and the other bad. This is a rather strong claim. Will not many actualities be neutral in respect to goodness and badness? We need to return to this point.

Aristotle concludes by inferring that "it is therefore clear that there is no badness apart from things. For the bad is posterior in nature to the potentiality." What does this mean, and on what grounds is it argued?

First, what problem is this meant to address? In the previous chapter, Aristotle had argued that actuality is prior to potentiality in  $\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ , in time, and in  $\omicron\upsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ . But if this is so, a problem arises in the cases of good actualities that are correlative to contrary bad actualities. For, as we have seen, in the case of rational potentialities and nonrational passive potentialities, a good actuality and its contrary, a bad actuality, share one and the same potentiality. It would

appear, then, that both the good and the bad actualities share the status of priority in λόγος, time, and οὐσία to the potentiality to which they are both correlated. This would entail a kind of metaphysical Manicheism, according to which both good and bad principles are implicit in a complete account of a potentiality, temporarily precede its coming-to-be, and are implicitly present as form and final cause within the being that has this potentiality. With the possible exception of his account of the hot, the cold, the wet and the dry,<sup>8</sup> nothing in Aristotle's writings prepares us for this vision of pairs of competing, equal, and opposite forms and final causes.

To argue against this possibility, Aristotle presents as a premise "the bad is posterior in nature to the potentiality." How is this to be argued for? Again, we need to consider three different cases. The potentiality for the badness, which is said to be posterior to this badness, can either be a rational potentiality, a passive nonrational potentiality, and/or an active nonrational potentiality.

As we have seen, a single rational potentiality is correlative to both a good and a bad actuality because the rational agent who has a λόγος expressing the cause of some possible end thereby also has the λόγος of the privation of the cause of this end, and so is best able to keep the end unactualized. Here it is clear that the rational potentiality is prior in λόγος, time, and being to the bad actuality correlated to that potentiality. One can explain how to make one unhealthy only by negating the account of

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<sup>8</sup>On the other hand, at *GC* I.3 318b17-20 Aristotle suggests that hot may be a positive attribute and cold a privation, but the suggestion is made tentatively, for purposes of illustration.

how to preserve and produce health; thus the account of health is prior in λόγος to the account of the ability to induce disease. Likewise the medical art (which in turn is posterior to actual health both in time and in essence) must already exist before it is employed to make patients unhealthy. Hence we have the temporal priority of the potentiality, as well as priority in οὐσία, taken either in the sense of definitional essence or in the sense of reality.

The situation of nonrational potentialities correlated with good or bad actualities is simpler. Since the good actuality X and the bad actuality Y are contraries, there will be the same passive potentiality for each. Y is simply the absence of X in the subject S, which is such as to admit of X. Y is therefore conceptually and metaphysically derivative on S, which is defined as that with the potentiality for X. Likewise, as we have seen, Aristotle would be led to deny the existence of a separate active nonrational potentiality for Y. Y, the bad actuality, is simply what one has when the relevant nonrational passive potentiality for X, the good actuality, is not actualized. In the case of active nonrational potentialities, too, the bad actuality will be metaphysically and conceptually posterior to the single potentiality involved.

#### IV

We have seen evidence for attributing to Aristotle the view that, with possible exceptions at the elemental level, all contraries are such that one is a positive attribute and the other the privation of that attribute. The actualized privation has no contrary with any independent ontological status. Certain such privations are called "bad" insofar as they are contrary to other actualities, called "good."

Before exploring the philosophical ramifications of this view, it would be good to examine one more passage in



which Aristotle seems to be putting forward a similar teaching. At *Physics* I 9 Aristotle contrasts his account of the principles of change with the Platonic account. "The others" posit only two such principles, on the one hand, "the Great and the Small," which is the analogue to Aristotle's matter, and, on the other, a principle analogous to Aristotelian form. They are said to have erred in maintaining that what is one in number is one in δύναμις. Accordingly, the only principles required for two contraries X and Y would be the principle of X and the principle of Y. Of any such pair, the principle of one would be form, and that of the other would be the Great and the Small.

They overlook the other nature. For there is that cause which remains and, along with the form (μορφή) is responsible for the things that come to be, in a maternal way. But, to the one paying attention to the malignant aspect of it (πρὸς τὸ κακοποιῶν αὐτῆς),<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Simplicius (*Physics* 249.6-11), Philoponus (*Physics* 186.25-187.17), Themistius (*Physics* 32.30-33.5), and W. D. Ross, *Aristotle's Physics: A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), pp. 348, 497, take κακοποιῶν to mean "causing perishing," referring to the tendency of a privation of form to lead to the onset of φθορά. But it need not be so narrowly construed. After all, the passage is considering the role of privation in the process of coming-into-being, before there is anything that can perish. Accordingly, I follow Charlton, *Aristotle's Physics: Books I and II* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 21, 82, in giving the phrase the sense of "evil," or, more literally, "responsible

the other part of the opposition often appears not to exist at all. For while there is something divine and good and desired, we say that on the one hand the contrary to this exists, and on the other hand, that there exists that which by nature desires and craves this, according to its nature. But for them it turns out that the contrary craves its perishing. Yet the form cannot desire itself, since there is no need, nor can the opposite desire the form, since contraries are destructive of each other. But that which desires the form is matter, just as the female might desire the male, or the ugly might desire the beautiful. But in this case, the matter would be female or ugly only accidentally. (192a12-25)

There is a great deal going on in this famous passage. Three main questions present themselves. First, exactly what is the argument against the Platonists, stripped of metaphorical embellishment and normative talk? Second, what sense can be given to the apparent identification of *all* actualities as good? Third, do the roles played by goodness and badness in this passage lend support to the interpretation of good and bad actualities, sketched above?

On Aristotle's account, the Eleatic argument that nothing comes from nothing convinced the Platonists that there needs to be something underlying change, which is not the same as the end of the change. But insofar as they

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for badness," where badness can, as we have seen, simply be the absence of some actuality considered good.

hold to the mistaken principle that a single thing can have only one potentiality, they were blinded to the recognition of *passive* potentialities, and hence to the substrate of passive potentialities, matter. Their own account, identifying the persistent substrate with the privation, is wholly inadequate, for it left unexplained what metaphysical principle within this substrate is responsible for the progression from the privation to the contrary. No being has within itself an internal need for its own destruction.

The second and third questions must be approached jointly. In our passage Aristotle again supplements a consideration of potentiality, actuality, and change, by the consideration of goodness and badness. There are two aspects of this. First, the privation is considered as responsible for badness, and it is for this reason, Aristotle says, that one is tempted to say that it does not exist at all. Second, the actuality that is the contrary of the privation is considered something good, and on this basis Aristotle presents a series of metaphors and examples to clarify the relations holding among a substrate, a privation, and a form.

Aristotle does not himself take the position that a privation does not exist at all. It does have a sort of ontological status: it is that which is predicated of a certain substrate in which the positive attribute is absent. It has a sort of shadow status. As an absence, it, unlike matter, is a non-being in itself (οὐκ ὄν καθ' αὐτήν, 192a4-5). On the other hand, Aristotle insists that, unlike that of the Platonists, "we say that the contrary . . . exists" (τὸ μὲν ἐναντίον φακεν εἶναι, 192a17-18). Were this not so, Aristotle would not have been taking pains to argue that it, along with the substrate, must be counted as a principle of change. It is rather the Platonists who move from the "malignance" of the privation to its non-being. What sense can be made of such an inference?

The answer can be only speculative, since the first explicit Platonic argument identifying evil and nonbeing seems to be that of Plotinus (*Ennead* 2.4), who employs the Aristotelian conceptual machinery of matter, potentiality, and actuality to argue for this conclusion. But we can be reminded that, at least in the metaphysics of the *Republic*, it is the form of the Good that is ultimately responsible for all being. This is, as Santas has shown,<sup>10</sup> the form responsible for the "ideal attributes" such as intelligibility and immutability that belong to forms as such. One could consider it the form of Being, in the strict sense. It would follow that any being, in the strict sense, would be good, and hence productive of good. So to the extent to which something is malignant, it is not!

We might be tempted to read Aristotle as taking all talk of goodness in a metaphysical context as a kind of superstitious Platonism. But Aristotle does not argue in this way. He joins the Platonists in calling the positive term of change something "divine, good, and desired." His argument is only that we need to distinguish the bad in itself, which is merely the absence of the good within a certain substrate, and perishes when that good comes to be, from the substrate which, prior to the change, happens to be bad, but, on account of its own nature (presumably, on account of its passive potentiality, and, in some cases perhaps, on account of a natural active potentiality) becomes good in this process of change.

<sup>10</sup>G. Santas, "The Form of the Good in Plato's *Republic*," in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, v. 2, eds. J. P. Anton and A. Preus (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), pp. 232-263.

From this it is clear that for any change from one contrary to another, one of these contraries is form and the other is the contrary of the form. Aristotle calls the form good; accordingly the contrary is bad. We now see why, in the passage from *Metaph.* Θ 9 that we have been considering, Aristotle says that of every pair of contraries one is good and the other is bad: the positive attribute or form is, as such, good.

The text is clear evidence that those actualities that are bad in a nontheoretical way are privations of certain "good" actualities. Of any good/bad pair, one must be the privation and one must be a positive form. And it is clear that Aristotle accepts without question the general thesis that badness, when it exists, is caused by some kind of privation. Aristotle follows the Platonists in rejecting metaphysical Manicheism.

#### V

I now turn to some implications the above account has for our understanding of Aristotelian teleology.

Two major problem areas in the metaphysics of Aristotle's teleology have surfaced. First, to what extent does a teleological account commit one to positing beings other than those posited by a strictly physicalistic account?<sup>11</sup> Second, what are the metaphysical implications

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<sup>11</sup>There is extensive literature devoted to this question. Representative arguments for the irreducibility of form (to which appeal is made within a teleological account) can be found in A. Gotthelf, "Aristotle's Conception of Final Causality" in *Philosophical Issues in Aristotle's Biology*, eds. A. Gotthelf and J. Lennox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 204-242, and J. Cooper,

of the *normative* element of a teleological explanation? We explain a feature of a living thing by indicating that it is for the sake of the *good* of that being. What is this goodness? Can it be identified in non-normative language with some feature of the being in question? Clearly the resolution of this aspect of Aristotle's meta-biology will have large implications for the metaphysical foundations of Aristotelian ethics. For this aspect of Aristotelian teleology will determine the relation between is-statements and ought-statements, and accordingly will shed light on exactly how Aristotle grounds his account of the human good on his account of human nature.

In regard to this second question, there appear to be two main alternatives. According to the first, goodness is a real irreducible attribute of things; a complete account of something that is good will need to mention its goodness, in addition to all of its other attributes. On the other account, the goodness of a being is to be identified with some other characteristic of that being, which can be accounted for in non-normative language. Such an account

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"Aristotle on Natural Teleology," in *Language and Logos*, eds. M. Schofield and M. Nussbaum (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 197-222. Arguments for some kind of ontological reducibility of form can be found in M. Nussbaum, *Aristotle's De Motu Animalium: Text with Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 59-106, and R. Sorabji, *Necessity, Cause, and Blame: Perspectives on Aristotle's Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1980), pp. 155-174.

was suggested by Balme<sup>12</sup> and has been fully argued for by Gotthelf.<sup>13</sup> According to this account, the good of a being is simply the actualization of all of its irreducible potentialities, determined by that being's form. So if teleological explanation proceeds by showing how some attribute or activity is for the sake of an organism's good, it in effect shows how this attribute or activity either makes possible or facilitates the activities in which that organism can by nature engage.

The two sets of problems are to a certain extent interrelated. If a complete explanation of the activities and characteristics can in principle be given by identifying the underlying material stuffs and their natural characteristics, both form as such and goodness as such would be dispensable in explanation, and neither would be present in an inventory of the basic ontological constituents of that organism. This is to be expected, since the final cause, which Aristotle identifies with the good, is also identified with the form. On the other hand, if the form is not a

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<sup>12</sup>D. M. Balme, "Teleology and Necessity," in *Philosophical Issues in Aristotle's Biology*, eds. A. Gotthelf and J. Lennox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 277.

<sup>13</sup>A. Gotthelf, "Aristotle's Conception of Final Causality," in *Philosophical Issues in Aristotle's Biology*, eds. A. Gotthelf and J. Lennox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 233-234, and "The Place of the Good in Aristotle's Natural Teleology," in *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, v. 4, eds. J. Cleary and D. Shartin (Latham, Md.: University Press of America, 1989), pp. 113-139.

being unto itself, but a set of motions of the elements that are not on account of the natures of those elements,<sup>14</sup> we could still posit goodness as such as a basic irreducible characteristic of these motions. Still, whether one posits form as a *per se* being or identifies it as a set of motions, it is possible to deny to goodness any independent irreducible status.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>This was the final proposal of Balme, in "Teleology and Necessity," pp. 282-285, and in "Aristotle's Biology was Not Essentialist," in *Philosophical Issues in Aristotle's Biology* eds. A. Gotthelf and J. Lennox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) pp. 292-293.

<sup>15</sup>Thus the passage from *Physics* I 9 discussed above can be read as developing an extended analogy, involving no attribute of goodness as such to form. Supporting this reading is the fact that, within his biological and psychological writings, Aristotle is clear that desire (*δρεξις*), in the strict sense, is a faculty possessed only by animals (*DA* II 3 414a29-b16). But there are many substrates of change that are not animals. So in saying that something is good we are saying that there is some substrate which is related to it as is the substrate of desire towards the object or attribute desired. One version of such an account would posit goodness as nothing but the object of desire (cf. *NE* I 1 1094a1-3). Any ascription of goodness would thereby be dependent on the speaker's interests, or desires. Goodness as such would have no independent ontological status. When we call something good we are simply saying that we, the speakers, have a certain potentiality of desire directed towards it, or we are indulging in a bit of harmless anthropomorphization in

One objection that has been raised to the Balme/Gotthelf account of teleology is that Aristotle grants the existence of both good and bad actualities, and that it is an essential, and often reiterated condition of an Aristotelian teleological explanation that it show how some attribute, organ, or activity of a being contribute to the *good* of that being.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, a teleological explanation does more than show that something comes about on account of some "irreducible potentiality."

One of the results of the present paper is that a careful consideration of those few texts in which Aristotle does consider the relationships that hold among goodness, badness, potentiality, and actuality shows that this objection

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ascribing such desire to some other substrate.

<sup>16</sup>See J. Cooper, "Aristotle on Natural Teleology," in *Language and Logos: Studies in Ancient Greek Philosophy Presented to G. E. L. Owen*, eds. M. Schofield and M. C. Nussbaum (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 197, and C. Kahn, "The Place of the Prime Mover in Aristotle's Teleology," in *Aristotle on Nature and Living Things: Philosophical and Historical Studies Presented to David M. Balme on his Seventieth Birthday* ed. A. Gotthelf (Pittsburgh and Bristol: Mathesis, 1985), pp. 197-198.

is unfounded.<sup>17</sup> Badness is simply the privation of some actuality that is good.

The refutation of this objection does not in itself clinch the case that there is nothing metaphysically involved in goodness other than actuality as such. There is another key objection, which I am not able to here address. This is that Aristotle sets up a hierarchy of actualities, so that some are of more value or have a greater share of the divine than others.<sup>18</sup> Is this simply an extension of the metaphor of the scale of nature, by which some beings have greater complexity and a *quantitatively* greater range of actualities than others?<sup>19</sup> Or is the high regard in which Aristotle holds those actualities that involve awareness, continuity, and eternity a sign of an irreducibly normative element within his ontology? A third possibility, which we cannot dismiss out of hand, is that Aristotle never gave sustained attention to this issue, to which we, living in the shadow of the is/ought distinction, are inevitably drawn.

However we deal with this difficulty, it should be clear that Aristotle did give some sustained attention to the

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<sup>17</sup>In "The Place of the Good," pp. 116-17, Gotthelf defends himself against Kahn's criticism by pointing out imprecisions in Kahn's expression of the objection, but does not directly address the question of the metaphysical status of good and bad actualities as such.

<sup>18</sup>Relevant passages (such as *GA* II 3 736b29-33, *PA* 5 645b22-25 and *Metaph.* Λ 7 1032b13-30) are discussed by Gotthelf in "The Place of the Good," pp. 127-31.

<sup>19</sup>This is the suggestion of Gotthelf, "The Place," p. 128.

role of goodness within his teleological account of substance. In so doing, he showed the basic strategy for integrating an account of goodness and badness with his account of actuality and potentiality.

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## Book Reviews

### Hermetica Bibliography

The occasion for this note is the publication of a 42-page pamphlet:

Elizabeth Ann Ambrose, *The Hermetica: An Annotated Bibliography*, #30 in the Sixteenth Century Bibliography series, published by the Center for Reformation Research, St. Louis, MO, 1992.

It is a useful publication: Ambrose reviews the history of the texts (and manuscripts), especially as that history would be seen from a sixteenth century perspective, and provides one-paragraph accounts of about twenty-six books, monographs, dissertations, and articles on Hermetica. It is also rather selective; there is no attempt to be exhaustive. One crucially important publication that Ambrose does not discuss (although it is mentioned parenthetically, p. 32) is:

Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind*, Cambridge University Press 1986.

For people working in Neoplatonism, this book is an excellent introduction to Hermetism, since it places the Hermetic texts very effectively into the milieu of late antiquity. Fowden carefully