HOMONYMY IN ARISTOTLE

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ARISTOTLE often claims that words are "homonymous" (*homōnuma*) or "multivocal" (*pollachōs legomena;* "said in many ways"). He claims this about some of the crucial words and concepts of his own philosophy—"cause," "being," "one," "good," "justice," "friendship." Often he claims it with a polemical aim; other philosophers have wrongly overlooked homonymy and supposed that the same word is always said in the same way. Plato made this mistake; his accounts of being, good, and friendship are rejected because they neglect homonymy and multivocity. In Aristotle's view Plato shared the Socratic assumption about words and definitions. Socrates thought that when he asked "What is F?" (justice, courage, etc.) some single definition of F could always be found to match the name "F." Aristotle thinks the Socratic question is important, but argues that it must be controlled by awareness of homonymy and multivocity.

What, then, are Aristotle's conditions for homonymy and multivocity? It is often assumed that the conditions are different, but that they both reflect differences in the senses of words.[1] I will argue

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[1] See K. J. Hintikka, "Aristotle and the Ambiguity of Ambiguity," in *Time and Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), chap. 1 (earlier version in *Inquiry* 2 (1959): 137–51). Other relevant papers of Hintikka's are "Aristotle's Different Possibilities," *Time and Necessity*, chap. 2, from *Inquiry* 3 (1960): 17–28; "Different Kinds of Equivocation in Aristotle," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 9 (1971): 368–72. I am especially indebted to the discussions of homonymy by G. E. L. Owen in "Logic and Metaphysics in Some Earlier Works of Aristotle" in *Aristotle and Plato in the Mid-Fourth Century*, ed. I. Düring and G. E. L. Owen (Göteborg: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1960), reprinted in *Articles on Aristotle*, vol. 3, ed. J. Barnes, M. Schofield, R. Sorabji (London: Duckworth, 1979); "Aristotle on the Snares of Ontology," in *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle*, ed. J. R. Bambrough (London: Routledge, 1965). Other relevant discussions, to which I have not made detailed acknowledgements below: J. Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, 2d ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1963), chap. 3; T. Barth, "Das Problem der Vieldeutigkeit bei Aristoteles," *Sophia* 10 (1942): 11–30 (mainly on likeness and analogy); W. Leszl, *Logic and Metaphysics in Aristotle* (Padua: Antenore, 1970), esp. pp. 83–113, 329–72 (lengthy discussion of many of the issues treated briefly below).

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that each of these assumptions is less than the whole truth; homonymy and multivocity are often the same, and neither is intended to mark different senses of words.

I

Aristotle begins the *Categories* with a definition of homonymous and synonymous things:

> Those things are called homonymous of which the name alone is common, but the account of being corresponding to the name is different . . . Those things are called synonymous of which the name is common and the account of being corresponding to the name is the same (1a1-4, 6-7).

On this account x and y are homonymously F if and only if the name "F" applies to both x and y, but a different definition ("account of being") must replace "F" in "x is F" and in "y is F."[2] This is a definition of homonymous things. Aristotle sometimes says in such cases that the name "F" is homonymous (*GC* 322b29-33).

The meaning of this definition depends on the meaning of "the name alone." Two views are possible:

1. The moderate view. Of two things that Fs might share, name and definition, homonyms must share only one—the name, but not the definition; the scope of "alone" is restricted to the two things considered. The division between synonyms and homonyms is exhaustive; but it allows Aristotle to recognize further distinctions among homonyms. He can allow "unconnected homonyms," with different definitions having nothing in common, and "connected homonyms," with different definitions having something in common.
2. The extreme view. "Alone" has unrestricted scope; homonyms have nothing at all except the name in common. On this view all homonyms are unconnected homonyms. The division is no longer exhaustive; things with connected definitions, counted as connected homonyms by the moderate view, will be neither synonyms nor homonyms on the extreme view.

Does Aristotle accept the moderate or the extreme view? If he

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[2] I have said "homonymously F" when Aristotle says only "homonymous" to make it clear that two things can be homonymously F (e.g., justice) and still synonymously G (e.g., virtue).

recognizes connected homonyms and takes the division to be exhaustive, he probably accepts the moderate view. If he does not recognize connected homonyms and does not take the division to be exhaustive, he probably holds the extreme view.

This passage by itself supports the moderate view. Aristotle does not suggest that the division is not exhaustive. More important, the last clause of the definition of homonymy is quite suitable for the moderate view and oddly feeble if Aristotle accepts the extreme view.[3] For he says that homonyms will have a different definition, whereas the extreme view requires something stronger, that the definitions should have nothing in common. The passage alone, then, supports the moderate view. But it cannot decide the issue. We must look at other appeals to homonymy.

II

First of all, why does Aristotle begin the *Categories* with a definition of homonyms? (He never uses "homonymous" again in this work; he uses "synonymous" at 3a34, b7.) The moderate view easily explains why; for connected homonyms are important in the argument. Aristotle offers no general definition of a being. He presents four different definitions of different types of beings.[4] Some beings are said of a subject, some are in a subject, some are both said of and in a subject, some are subjects neither said of nor in a subject (1a20-b6). Different types of beings are connected homonyms, since the definitions all mention a subject by reference to which the other beings are defined. Later Aristotle suggests that there are primary

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[3] Unfortunately Aristotle's example of homonyms is too ambiguous to decide between the moderate and the extreme views. He may mean (1) we call both a man and a picture of an animal "animal"; or (2) we call a man and a picture (of anything) a *zōon*. Here (1) supports the moderate view, since it requires related definitions (it will be an example of a spurious homonym, of the sort discussed in part 3 below); (2) is consistent with either the moderate or the extreme, view. I think (1) is right, but (2) cannot be decisively ruled out.

[4] The homonymy of being is mentioned in connection with the *Catg.* by Porphyry, *Isag.* 6.3-11, *in Catg.* 61.6-12—cf. Simpl. *in Catg.* 93.23-4. But he is not careful to avoid importing Aristotelian doctrines from other works into the *Catg.* Iamblichus suggests that the categories themselves are homonymous; see Simpl. *in Catg.* 22.1-9.

and secondary quantities: "only those mentioned are called quantities fully (*kuriōs*), but all the others by accident; for looking to these (sc. quantities *kuriōs*) we call the others also quantities" (5a38-b1). Primary and secondary quantities are quantities in different ways, with different definitions; but the definitions of the secondary will mention the primary. And so quantities should be connected homonyms.[5]

If these connected homonyms are genuine homonyms, as the moderate view implies, the point of beginning the *Categories* with a definition of homonyms is clear; each of the categories has a single name, but Aristotle warns us not to assume that members of the category share a single definition. In *Metaphysics* 5 he still maintains that several definitions may correspond to the name of each category.

More direct evidence shows that Aristotle recognizes connected homonyms, and so confirms the moderate view. In *Topics* 1.15 he requires us to look for the different definitions of homonyms (106a1-8). Some of the definitions show that he allows connected homonyms. Not seeing is sometimes not having sight, sometimes not using it (106b15-20)—sight is mentioned in each definition. The healthy is spoken of in many ways—sometimes as what produces health, sometimes as what preserves it, and so on (106b3-7; cf. 107b6-12); all the definitions mention health.

In *Physics* 7.4 Aristotle suggests that "much" is homonymous; though we might say that it is "such a quantity and more," "such a quantity" would indicate a different quantity for different things (248b16-19). Plainly homonyms need not be unconnected. Aristotle remarks that "some homonymies are very distant, some have some similarity, some are close in genus or analogy, so that they do not seem to be homonymies when they are" (246a23-5).[6] He assumes

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[5] These passages are relevant for evaluating Owen's claim, "Logic and Metaphysics," pp. 170–72, that when he wrote the *EE*, and possibly when he wrote the *Organon*, Aristotle did not yet suppose that substance is prior in definition to the other categories. It is true that priority in definition is not mentioned among the types of priority listed in *Catg.* 12—it would presumably be a case of "priority in order," 14a35-b3. But it does not follow that Aristotle must be unaware of this type of priority. He is clearly aware of it in 5a38 ff for quantities, and is quite probably aware of it at 1a20 ff for beings—cf. esp. 2a11-12 with 5a38.

[6] The moderate view of homonymy is reflected in Simpl. *in Phys.* 1096.24-1097.4, *in Catg.* 31.22-32.11, Alex. *in Met.* 241.21-4. The extreme view is reflected in Simpl. *in Catg.* 32.12-19, Alex. *in Met.* 240.23-241.7, 241.14-15.

that focal connection (the connection of healthy things to health) and analogy exclude "chance homonymy," not that they exclude homonymy altogether (*EN* 1096b26-31).

There are two homonymous types of justice, general and particular. They have different definitions, but are so closely connected that some people miss the homonymy, while the homonymy of chests, including breasts and boxes (to vary Aristotle's example) is more obvious (*EN* 1129a26-31). These "distant" homonyms recall the "chance" homonyms mentioned in *EN* 1.6. Aristotle need not mean that it is a complete accident that the same sound "chest" is applied to breasts and boxes, as the uses of "bear" might be a complete accident. He probably means that the nature of breasts and of boxes is so different that the definitions include no common element, and we can understand one definition without needing to understand any part of the other. The two types of justice are much closer. Particular justice is a species of general justice; since the definition of the genus applies to the species, they have to that extent the same definition, and to that extent are synonymous (1130a32-b5).[7] The extent to which the two homonymous types of justice are synonymous (without being altogether synonymous) marks the extent to which the two definitions are connected.

III

So far we have considered homonymous Fs that are none the less genuine Fs. The two types of justice are both genuine cases of justice, and the same is true for the other homonyms. Aristotle also recognizes "spurious homonyms," homonymous Fs that are not genuine Fs, but spurious Fs, called Fs simply because they resemble genuine Fs. Boxes and breasts are both called chests because they resemble each other, but neither sort of chest is defined simply as a resemblance of the other; some are defined as a type of box; others as

[7] Aristotle may just mean that they both belong to the same genus in so far as they are both related to others (see Anon. *in EN* 213.13-16). But what is the name for this genus except "general justice" (as suggested by Anon. 207.10-15)? If Aristotle thinks they are two species of the genus, he might find it hard to show that they are not called justice synonymously, as two species of animals are synonymously called animals.

a part of an animal, and they are all genuine chests. In spurious Fs the resemblance to real Fs is all that there is to their being F.

Two sorts of spurious homonyms are recognized; painted and sculpted Fs (spurious homonyms of real Fs that they copy), and dead organisms and their parts (spurious homonyms of the living organisms that they used to be). Aristotle seems to think his readers will find the first group clearer than the second. For he often defends his claim that dead hands are homonymously hands by appeal to painted and sculpted hands (e.g., *DA* 412b17-22, *Meteor.* 389b20-390a16, *Pol.* 1253a20-5, *PA* 640b30-641a6, *GA* 734b25-7). Sometimes Aristotle says that dead hands are not hands (*Met.* 1036b30-2, 1035b23-5); sometimes that they are "not hands, but only homonymously"—a formula never used for genuine homonyms. The homonymy of spurious homonyms does not make them genuine specimens of the kind whose name they bear homonymously.

The first group of spurious homonyms include pictures, sculptures and other artistic representations. Aristotle thinks that if we look at a picture of a man and say "That's a man," what we say is true; but it would be false if "man" were replaced by its normal definition, "biped animal," since we are looking at a painted canvas, not at a biped animal; and so the right definition here must be "semblance of a biped animal."

Aristotle uses these spurious homonyms to show how dead organs and parts are spurious homonyms too. Perhaps he does not always believe this (cf. *Catg.* 8b15-21); but he certainly comes to believe that organs no longer exist when they are dead or detached (*Met.* 1040b5-8).[8] He argues that an organism and its parts are to be defined by their functions, so that something lacking the functions of a hand cannot be a hand. A dead hand still looks like a hand, but it cannot do what a hand does; in these two ways it is similar to a painted or sculpted hand. The painted hand is no hand, but just an expanse of paint; the dead hand is no hand but just a lump of matter.

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[8] In the *Catg.* Aristotle is concerned with knowing what a hand or a foot is, not directly with the conditions for its existence. But he does seem to regard it as a substance, contrary to the view of *Met.* 7. 16; and his case in the *Catg.* would be weakened if he had to regard a dead hand as merely a homonymous hand. No dead homonyms are mentioned in the *Organon.* Some good questions about Aristotle's views are raised by J. L. Ackrill in "Aristotle's Definitions of *Psuchē*," *Proc. Arist. Soc.* 73 (1972–73), p. 127 ff. (reprinted in *Articles on Aristotle*, vol. 4).

Evidently a dead hand has more in common than a painted hand has with a real hand—it is made of the same stuff that belonged to a living hand; but it does not have enough in common to be a real hand. We can truly say "That's a hand" of a dead hand only if the definition "likeness of the grasping organ" is substituted for "hand." Neither dead hands nor painted hands are types of hands; they are spurious homonyms.

Spurious homonyms support the moderate view of Aristotle's definition of homonymy; for they all have definitions connected with those of their genuine homonyms. They may have much or little in common with the genuine homonyms; a severed hand has a lot in common with a living hand, while the Staffa Organ Pipes share only some aspects of their appearance with real organ pipes. Here as usual homonymy allows degrees of connection, and requires only different definitions—just as the moderate view implies.

IV

Often Aristotle speaks of the same things as multivocal and as homonymous; indeed the chapter on homonymy (*Top.* 1. 15) might just as well be called a chapter on multivocity (cf. 106a2, 9, 14, 21, etc.). Aristotle tests for multivocity by testing for non-synonymy; but this is equally the test for homonymy. Elsewhere too he does not distinguish the possibility that things are multivocal from the possibility that they are homonymous (e.g., *Top.* 182b10, 27). His argument about the two types of justice seeks to prove that they are multivocal and that they are homonymous; the same feature of them seems to constitute both homonymy and multivocity (*EN* 1129a26-31).

Sometimes, however, Aristotle implies that things are multivocal but not homonymous. These remarks challenge the moderate view of the definition of homonymy if they recognize intermediate cases, neither synonymous nor homonymous, and so imply that the division between synonyms and homonyms is not exhaustive. However, the moderate view is in no danger; for these are not cases of nonsynonymy.

Three sorts of cases are relevant:

1. "One science is of many things" is multivocal but not homonymous (*Top.* 110b16-25), probably because the "many" is multivocal—it may

refer to means and end, or to two ends, or to intrinsic and accidental object.[9] But "many" is not non-synonymous; it need not be replaced by different definitions in these different uses.

2. The admissible (or possible, *endechomenon*) is homonymous, defined as "not impossible (one-sided possibility) and as "neither necessary nor impossible" (two-sided possibility) (*APr.* 32a18-21, *DI* 23a6-16). It is also spoken of in two ways, applying both to what happens usually and to what happens by chance (32b4-22); these two applications do not reflect further homonymy because they require the same definition of possibility, the definition of two-sided possibility. One-sided possibility equally applies to different things (25a37-9).[10]

3. A word or phrase may be "amphibolous," the Aristotelian term closest to our "ambiguous." The Oracle's response, "Croesus crossing the Halys will destroy a great empire" (*Rhet.* 1407a39), was amphibolous because the great empire might have been the Persian or the Lydian. Homonymy is neither necessary nor sufficient for amphiboly; many of Aristotle's examples of amphiboly reflect no homonymy (e.g., *Top.* 166a7-14), and the homonymy of "deep" need not create amphiboly in "deep voice" or "deep hole." Nor need the multivocity of two-sided possibility create amphiboly.[11]

These three cases of non-homonymous multivocals do not refute the moderate view of homonymy. For they are not intermediate cases between synonymy and homonymy, but all synonymous; Aristotle can still maintain that all non-synonymous multivocals are homonymous. It is quite consistent for him sometimes to identify multivocals with homonyms and sometimes to distinguish them. He identifies them when he has non-synonymous multivocals in mind; he

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[9] Owen, "Snares," p. 72, n. 1, and Hintikka, "Ambiguity," p. 21 f., assume that here the multivocity belongs to the whole sentence. But nothing in the text requires us to find it there rather than in a single word. The most likely word is "many"—and that is what Aristotle's explanation suggests.

[10] Hintikka, "Possibilities," pp. 27–38, explains these passages differently.

[11] The evidence for Owen's view ("Snares," p. 72, n. 1) that amphiboly normally belongs to phrases rather than to words is weak. He cites (a) 110b16-25—see n. 9 above; (b) 129b31-2, 130a9, probably not a case of amphiboly; (c) 166a15-16, which may mean that either the name or the *logos* can be the source of homonymy and amphiboly alike; (d) *Rhet.* 1407a32, 37, *Rhet. ad Alex.* 1435a33, *Poet.* 1461a26, where single words are amphibolous. Owen may not be right to call (d) "deviant."

distinguishes them when he considers synonymous multivocals. As the moderate view requires, the division between synonymy and homonymy is exhaustive. Moreover Aristotle clearly recognizes connected homonyms, even when he also recognizes non-homonymous multivocals. He does not think things are non-homonymous multivocals just because they have connected definitions—for the two homonymous possibilities have connected definitions. Here again the moderate view is confirmed.

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This explanation, however, will not always work. For sometimes Aristotle recognizes non-synonymous, non-homonymous multivocals (*GC* 322b29-32, *Met.* 1003a33-4, 1030a32-b3, 1046a4-11). Some multivocals, such as being, are focally connected because the definitions of the non-focal cases all contain the definition of the focal case.[12] Aristotle thinks focally connected multivocals are neither synonymous nor homonymous. In the *Topics* he claims that being is homonymous (182b13-27), but in the *Metaphysics* he denies it.

But is focal connection really meant to exclude homonymy?

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[12] The term "focally connected" is partly borrowed from Owen's "focal meaning"; see "Logic and Metaphysics," p. 169. I alter Owen's term to avoid the misleading suggestion that Aristotle means to indicate a relation between senses of a word (Owen speaks of "*to on* and other cognate expressions") rather than between the things the word applies to. If Fs are focally connected, then the focus F1 has the definition "G," and subordinate Fs have the definition "G + H," "G = J," etc. F1 is primary and the focus because other Fs include its definition in theirs. See *EE* 1236a18-23, *Met.* 1028a34-6, 1045b29-32. Sometimes it is not clear if the focus must itself be one of the Fs—see perhaps *Met.* 1003a34-5; and sometimes the definitions of the subordinate Fs seem to include the name, rather than the definition, of the focus (ibid.; however, the name can presumably be replaced by the definition, according to Aristotle's usual rules). Definitions may be connected, as definitions of analogous multivocals are, without being focally connected. Moreover, only genuine Fs can be focally connected with genuine Fs. That is why spurious homonyms are not focally connected with their genuine homonyms; here as in *Met.* 1046a6 (see below, n. 15) mere similarity is not enough for focal connexion. See Owen, "Logic and Metaphysics," p. 188 f.

D. W. Hamlyn, "Focal Meaning," *Proc. Arist. Soc.* 78 (1977–78): 1–18, regards Aristotle's doctrine of focal connection as a doctrine about meaning, and raises some reasonable objections to it, so regarded.

Elsewhere Aristotle contrasts focal connexion with "complete" or "chance" homonymy (*EE* 1236a18, b25-6, *EN* 1097b26-7) or "homonymy, but according to nothing common" (*Met.* 1060b33-4).[13] In these same works he recognizes connected homonyms—justice and circle for instance (*EN* 1129a26-31, *Met.* 1035b1-3);[14] and so he probably does not think that only "complete" homonyms are real homonyms—the extreme view of homonymy will not explain his practice here. Most probably, then, the claim that focally connected multivocals are not homonyms means simply that they are not complete homonyms—and that is what Aristotle says when he states his claim in full.

The simplest explanation, then, of Aristotle's different claims about homonymy and multivocity implies no doctrinal conflict between different works. Sometimes he says "connected and not completely homonymous," making the point of contrast explicit. Sometimes he says "connected and not homonymous," relying on the context to show that by "homonymous" he means "completely homonymous." He does not strain our understanding. If we are familiar with his normal appeals to homonymy, we will not suppose that when he contrasts homonymy with connected multivocity he means by "homonymy" what he usually means; and it is easy to supply "completely" from the context.[15] Aristotle need not believe anything dif-

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[13] In *EE* 1236b25-6, *hōs homōnumoi kai hōs etuchen echousai pros hautas*, the *kai* may be explicative, showing that Aristotle uses "homonymy" here to mean "chance homonymy," or restrictive, explaining the specific type of homonymy that is being considered here. In *Met.* 1060b33-4, *homōnumōs, kata de koinon mēden*, the force of the *de* is uncertain in the same way.

[14] *EN* 5 on justice may be a Eudemian book. That does not matter for our present purposes, since both *EE* 1236a16-18, b23-7 and *EN* 1096b26-31 recognize focal connexions. We cannot assign *EN* 5 to a period in Aristotle's career when he was unaware of focal connection. The use of "homonymy" in *EE* 7 is not completely clear; see n. 13 above. But "completely homonymously" in 1236a18 suggests that there is a type of homonymy that is not complete. In *EN* 1096b26-7, "for it does not look like homonyms by chance at least," the "at least" (*ge*) suggests that there are other types of homonyms, too. W. W. Fortenbaugh, "*EN* 1096b26-9," *Phronesis* 11 (1966): 185–94, explains the apparent claims about focal connection differently.

[15] *Met.* 1046a6 dismisses the type of *dunamis* that is so called homonymously, referring to *dunameis* in geometry that are so called by "some similarity." 1019b23-4 says that these are called *dunameis* by metaphor. "Similarity" here must mean "mere similarity"; for Aristotle would not deny that two synonymous Fs are similar in being F. Just as we can rely on the

ferent when he says "being is multivocal, not homonymous" and when he says "being is homonymous." Therefore we cannot appeal to such remarks to support any claim that his views have changed.[16]

I have argued that Aristotle's different uses of "homonymy" imply a difference of terminology, not of doctrine. I have not argued this because I assume that he must be consistent or because I think an interpreter ought to find the maximum possible consistency. The argument for consistency rests on the contrasts drawn in different contexts; when the contexts are understood, no difference in doctrine remains.[17]

VI

Some readers may have wanted Aristotle to change his mind about homonymy. Since they regard homonymy as difference of sense, they find in Aristotle the implausible claim that all the homonymous words he recognizes have different senses corresponding to their different definitions. It is a relief if he later comes to see connections between some of these senses. But is this general view of homonymy and multivocity correct? Are Aristotle's claims about different senses of words at all?

We may not be sure what the sense, or a different sense, of a

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context here to gather that by "similarity" Aristotle means "mere similarity," we can rely on contexts to gather that by "homonymy" he means "complete homonymy" or "mere homonymy."

[16] Owen, "The Platonism of Aristotle," *Proc. British Acad.* 50 (1965): 146 (reprinted in *Articles on Aristotle,* vol. 1), thinks Aristotle changes his mind about the relation between types of being between the *Organon* and *Metaphysics* 4. But the moderate view of the *Categories* definition does not require Aristotle to dismiss "being" as "a mere source of puns" (Owen). Since it does not exclude connected definitions, Aristotle need not in the *Organon* be denying or overlooking anything that the *Met.* affirms about the connections between beings. In "Snares," e.g., p. 73, n. 1, Owen is rightly more cautious about finding some major change in Aristotle's views on the homonymy of being. There may still be important changes in Aristotle's views on a science of being; see Irwin, "Aristotle's Discovery of Metaphysics," *Review of Metaphysics* 31 (1977–78): 210–29.

[17] Hintikka believes that the amphiboly (as he supposes) of "the science of many things is one" (*Top.* 110b16-25; see n. 9 above) explains Aristotle's claims about the science of being in *Met.* 4. But amphiboly in this sentence is neither necessary nor sufficient for focal connection among beings.

word is supposed to be.[18] But we have some rough ideas. If a word has different senses, we expect them to be recorded in a correct entry in a dictionary, we expect them to be a possible source of puns, and we expect a speaker to be able to learn one of them without learning the others. We might understand "stand" in "I'll stand in the corner" without understanding "I'll stand you this drink" or "I'll stand for Parliament." "The Honourable Member stood for twenty years before sitting" might be a poor joke playing on two senses of "stand," and perhaps of "sit." We might detect different senses through paraphrases expressing the sense of the word in the different sentences. "I'll remain on my feet in the corner"; "I'll pay for this drink for you"; and "I'll be a candidate for Parliament" may be taken to indicate three different senses of "stand."

Aristotle, however, seems to think that any important difference of the right kind between Fs justifies our saying that Fs are homonymous; and it is hard to see what the right kind of difference is. Some types of pleasures have pains opposite to them, and some do not; Aristotle infers that these types of pleasures are homonymous (*Top.* 106a36-b1). He assumes that if the same word indicates differentiae of different non-subalternate genera, it is homonymous (107b19-26).

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[18] Discussions of homonymy frequently assume that difference of sense is the relation familiar to us that is closest to homonymy. This seems to be Hintikka's distinction ("Ambiguity," p. 15) between "conceptual" disparity and other disparity of applications. See also Owen, "Snares," p. 74; "'Cape', then, is homonymous, a word with more than one meaning." J. Barnes, "Homonymy in Aristotle and Speusippus," *Classical Quarterly* 21 (1971): 66, makes difference of sense part of the definition of homonymy. Aristotle requires the definition to replace the name while preserving truth, e.g., *Top.* 147b13-15, to *dunasthai* the same, *APr.* 49b3-5, and to *sēmainein* the same, *APo.* 92b26-34 (see Owen, p. 73). But these remarks do not tell us that he is after differences of meaning unless we know that *sēmainein* is meaning; and we do not know this.

On word-sense see D. R. P. Wiggins, "On Sentence-Sense, Word-Sense, and Difference of Word-Sense," and W. P. Alston, "How Does One Tell if a Word Has One, Several, or Many Senses?" in *Semantics*, ed. D. D. Steinberg and L. A. Jakobovits (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1971), especially Wiggins's discussion of some of Aristotle's examples at pp. 31 ff, (he also thinks Aristotle tries to distinguish different senses), and Alston's general cautionary remarks, pp. 44–46. See also W. V. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1960), pp. 129–34, P. Ziff, *Semantic Analysis* (Ithaca: Cornell U.P., 1960), pp. 176–82. I have not followed Ziff's picturesque efforts to distinguish difference of sense from difference of meaning. (see p. 180 f). I am not sure which my example of "stand" would be.

If two Fs are not commensurable they are homonymous (107b13-18). Aristotle seems to imply that if Fs are different enough sorts of things, they are homonymously F. And he seems to accept this implication when he suggests that "much" in "much water" and in "much air" is homonymous because water and air are different, and that "one" is homonymous in "one man" and "one thought" because men and thoughts are different (*Phys.* 248b15-21).[19] Similarity must be differently defined for colors and shapes because it is something different for shapes to be similar (in shape) and for colors to be similar (in color); therefore "similar" is homonymous (*APo.* 97b28-37, 99a6-16).

Does Aristotle mean that we must learn a new sense of "much" or "one" or "similar" according to the different sorts of things that are so called? That would be a heavy and unnecessary task. If I hear that two electrons are similar, I assume that "similar" has precisely the sense it has in the statement that two dogs are similar. I do not assume that the electrons have similar coats, markings or ears, but that they share some of their properties; and I need not know what the relevant properties are. On Aristotle's tests must I not conclude that "pie" has different senses just because an apple pie and a steak and kidney pie are both pies?

But is Aristotle concerned with different senses? Homonymy is indicated by different definitions; but do they mark different senses of the word replaced? Aristotle's definitions signify the essence of the thing defined, the same essence that is signified by the word replaced (*Top.* 101b37-102a1).[20] Now an essence is not a meaning; it is a real property, a real feature of the world, an Aristotelian universal. A homonymous name can be replaced by many definitions because it signifies many real properties, not because it has different meanings. "Light" will be homonymous because lightness of weight can be measured on one sort of scale, compared with heaviness, has particular phenomenal effects, and so on, while lightness of color must be

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[19] We may wonder whether Aristotle accepts all the cases of homonymy that he suggests in this difficult and aporetic discussion in *Phys.* 7. 4. But we should not assume that he thinks the suggestion about "one" is absurd, since he accepts it elsewhere, e.g., *Top.* 182b13-27.

[20] In detecting homonymy the kind of *logos* that Aristotle wants to substitute for the name is clearly the *horismos*, the definition signifying the essence; see, e.g., *Top.* 107a36. I have discussed signification further in "Aristotle's Concept of Signification," forthcoming.

measured on a different sort of scale, compared with darkness, and has different phenomenal effects. If one pleasure has a pain opposed to it, and another pleasure has none, the two pleasures will be two different sorts of things (*Top.* 106a36-bl); for instance, one may be pleasant only if the opposed pain precedes it, but this condition will not apply to the other pleasure.

When Aristotle describes the proper method of taxonomy, he advises us to beware of "concealed" homonymies, to define sharpness for sounds and knives separately, and similarity for colors and shapes separately (*APo.* 97b28-37, 99a11-16). The treatment of taxonomy in *Parts of Animals* 1 explains what is wrong with these homonymies. For two species cannot have the same essential property; if being biped or being blooded is essential both to men and to birds, it will be two different properties (*PA* 643a1-7); it follows that one differentia cannot belong to two or more species (643a7-9). Aristotle can allow a single name "biped" and a single paraphrase "two footed"; he denies that the single paraphrase signifies one genuine property.

Some of Aristotle's more surprising cases of homonymy may now look more plausible. When he says that "one" and "much" are homonymous, he does not mean that they are semantically uncontrollable because of their huge number of senses. He means that they name many different properties; being much is being a quantity of water or fire or goodwill, and so on. We may not endorse his treatment of these terms; but we should not criticize him for multiplying different senses.

Sometimes Aristotle allows a single paraphrase to replace a homonymous term. He allows a common description of life; "change of a kind that is nourished, belonging to it naturally" (*Top.* 148a27-8). But he argues that this description cannot really be a definition, because it belongs to animals no more than to plants. This may well seem an unreasonable objection; why should a good definition not belong equally to everything in the extension of the name? Aristotle means, however, that life is not the same property in plants and in animals; being alive is something different in each since their vital processes and activities are different, and therefore the definitions must be different (148a23-37).

These views about the multivocity of life are reflected in Aristotle's own definition of the soul. He does not reject a common definition of life and soul; indeed he offers one himself. But he does not

claim that this is enough to tell us the essence of each type of soul; for that we require a distinct definition of each type of soul, nutritive, perceptive and rational (*DA* 414b20-32). Here the common description is not only true and harmless, but a necessary part of a complete definition; it is the schematic formula that is to be filled in differently for each type of soul.[21]

The treatment of the "four causes" reflects a similar attitude to multivocity and the common schema. Aristotle says that causes are spoken of in four ways (*Phys.* 195a3, 29). Does he mean that there are four senses of the word "cause"? This would be an unfortunate claim. For he also claims that the student of nature will look for all four causes when it is appropriate, because they provide a complete answer to the question "Why?" (198a21-4). Now if there are four senses of "cause," they will presumably correspond to four senses of "Why?" since "Why does this happen?" can be truly replaced by "What is the cause of this thing's happening?" If someone asks "Why does this happen?" we should first ask him in what sense he means "Why?" The question "Why?" or "What is the cause?" could then hardly be a way of asking for all four causes.[22]

Aristotle's claim is more reasonable if he does not assume four senses of "cause." The initial question is a single question with a single sense; but "cause" is multivocal because it names different sorts of things, and we should not assume that every cause we find will be of the same type, though it will answer the same question. Some unity of sense here is not only consistent with the multivocity of "cause," but even necessary for it. For the four causes provide four complementary answers to a single why-question; it is when we see that this single question points us to four different sorts of things that we see the multivocity of complementary causes; we could never see this if the question itself had several senses.

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[21] Owen, "Logic and Metaphysics," p. 173, thinks the definition of soul is meant to display a type of focal connection, since *DA* 414b20-33 puts the nutritive soul first in the order of souls. But (i) we do not define the higher types of soul by mentioning the nutritive soul or its definition—a higher soul is only potentially a lower soul, 414b28-33; (ii) the definition belongs to the nutritive soul no more fully or strictly than to the other types of soul. The normal criteria of focal connection are absent.

[22] Some dangers resulting from failure to distinguish senses and kinds are clearly explained by G. B. Matthews, "Senses and Kinds," *Journal of Philosophy* 69 (1972): 154–56.

VII

It is best to approach Aristotle's most important and controversial claims about homonymy and multivocity, his claims about being and good, from an examination of easier cases. Since I cannot discuss these hard cases fully here, I simply suggest a few possible consequences of our results about homonymy in general.

Does Aristotle think the verb "to be" has many different senses? Usually he argues for the multivocity of being from the doctrine of the categories (*Met.* 1017a22-30, *APr.* 48b2-4, 49a6-10). The categories pick out the different types of beings that are mentioned in different sorts of essential predication—we reach something's category by asking "What is it?" at a more and more general level (*Met.* 1017a22-30, *Top.* 103b27-39). Aristotle argues that the types of things mentioned in this series of questions end with substances, qualities, quantities, and so on; there is no further question that picks out a genuine property called "being," belonging to all these. That is because Aristotle thinks there is no interesting or important set of features that all beings have in common that makes them all beings; especially we cannot say, as the Platonists want to say, that each being is a being by its participation in the appropriate separated Form. We need not deny that the categories are a list of types of being, in a single sense of "being," or that there are important connections between them.

Nor is every category synonymous. Substances, qualities, quantities are all so called in different ways.[23] But they have enough unity, in Aristotle's view, to justify his treatment of them as the basic elements in his treatment of beings. He does not assume for every purpose that there are just ten types of beings, and hence ten ways that being can be spoken of. What "being F" refers to depends on what F is, and sometimes Aristotle allows as many ways of speaking of being as there are kinds of beings (*Met.* 1042b24-31)—he is not proposing a multiplication of the senses of "to be." He can consistently recognize that for some purposes it is reasonable to recognize ten types of beings.

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[23] Aristotle may not mean to say that qualities are homonymous; see Simpl. *in Catg.* 220.1-221.11, J. L. Ackrill, *Categories and De Interpretatione* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 104. But he does not clearly offer the sort of single definition that would meet the challenge of *Top.* 107b6-12.

"Good" raises some similar questions. It would be unfortunate if Aristotle claimed that "good" has as many senses as there are types of being. A good knife is sharp, a good argument is cogent; but surely we need not recognize two senses of "good" here. Even the more modest claim that "good" has ten senses corresponding to the ten categories will puzzle a lexicographer. However, Aristotle need not accept either the extreme or the modest claim. He argues that good is multivocal because it is said in all the categories. The mere fact that it is predicated of things in all the categories would hardly prove multivocity; we might as well say that "amusing" or "strange" is multivocal because both substances and qualities can be amusing or strange. Goodness is different because a different definition of goodness has to be supplied for items in different categories. The property that makes an F a good F depends on what F is, and so different properties will make different kinds of things good. It follows that goodness must be different in the ten categories; for beings do not constitute a single kind. The most general properties that support claims about goodness are the properties belonging to the categories; something is good by being good as a substance, good as a quality, and so on; there is no one sort of goodness for all beings. This is Aristotle's argument for the multivocity of good in the categories (*EN* 1096a23-9, *EE* 1217b27-36, *Top.* 107a3-12, *MM* 1183a9-12).[24]

This is not the limit of the multivocity of good. Aristotle argues that even within one category goodness is different for the different sciences (*EN* 1096a29-34, *EE* 1217b36-1218a1, *MM* 1183a9-19). He does not say that this diversity creates further multivocity in goodness, but he cannot easily avoid saying so. For each science corresponds to a different universal (cf. *Peri Ideon* = Alex., *in Met.* 79.18-19); the scientific universal is what we try to define (*APo.* 97b25-31); different types of goodness should produce different definitions of good, and therefore produce multivocity.

Has Aristotle any reason to resist this conclusion? He would

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[24] Two homonymously good things need not be in different categories. If Socrates is good, a good quality (a virtue) belongs to him. Aristotle paraphrases sentences about "being" in the same way at *Met.* 1017a22. See further J. L. Ackrill, "Aristotle on 'Good' and the Categories," in *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition*, ed. S. M. Stern, A. Hourani, V. Brown (Oxford: Cassirer, 1972), pp. 17–25 (reprinted in *Articles on Aristotle*, vol. 2).

have one if the multiplication of multivocity meant multiplication of senses. But if it means multiplication of natures, it does not necessarily make "good" unlearnable or uncontrollably hard to use. We do not challenge Aristotle if we insist that the sense of "good" is the same in "good knife" and in "good microscope," even if different people know about knives and about microscopes. He does not need to deny this. He insists that goodness is not a single genuine property marking out a single genus for scientific study; it is many properties marking out genera for many different studies—medicine, knife-grinding, political science, and so on. While the meaning of "good" need not be learned separately for each kind of thing, the different properties that constitute the goodness of different kinds of things must be learned separately, by knowing what the different kinds are, and what makes members of them good.

Aristotle's claims about the multivocity of good allow a single true description of good, parallel to the single description of life or of cause. The *Magna Moralia* describes the good as "the best in each of the things that are—that is what is choiceworthy because of its own nature" (1182b7-8; cf. b20-2). This description is never challenged in the *Magna Moralia* or in the other ethical works; indeed it seems to be accepted (cf. *EN* 1097a18-22).[25] This common description explains the difference of goods; goods are different because they are ends, and ends are different.

The difficulties in Aristotle's doctrine of the multivocity of good and being do not all disappear as soon as we see that they are not about different senses of "good" or "being"; but we can perhaps now distinguish the real from the imaginary difficulties. The imaginary difficulties are about differences of sense. These need not concern Aristotle. The real difficulties are about differences of essence and differences of real properties. We know that he faces these difficulties anyhow; his views about homonymy and multivocity are a part of his views about natural kinds.

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[25] J. M. Cooper, "The *Magna Moralia* and Aristotle's Moral Philosophy," *American Journal of Philology* 94 (1973): 340 f., believes that *MM* 1182b7-8 conflicts with the homonymy and multivocity of goods asserted in the *EE* and *EN* (and in the *Top.*). I am not sure that there is a conflict, or that the *MM* differs from the other works as much as Cooper thinks.

VIII

To summarize and confirm our results we may list ways Aristotle thinks we benefit from the recognition of homonymy. He is concerned with Socrates' "What is it?" question, and tries to modify the assumptions that guided Socrates and Plato. He insists that a single name does not always signify a single nature, and that if we see this we benefit in several ways.

If we trust our intuitive judgments about real Fs, and try to embrace all apparent examples of Fs in a single definition, the definition may be empty and uninformative; it may reveal too few, or too indefinite, properties to be the object of fruitful study. This is Aristotle's complaint about efforts to give a general definition of life, being, good, or cause; he allows a true description of all cases, but sees no single real essence with a single account.

On the other hand, someone who insists on an informative definition, but overlooks homonymy, may make the opposite mistake. Since a single informative definition will not cover all the apparent Fs, some must be rejected as non-genuine Fs. This is Aristotle's complaint about the Platonic account of friendship, that it applies only to one case of friendship, and not to the other equally genuine cases of it. Such a definition cannot cope with all the "appearances" or "common beliefs" as Aristotle thinks it should (*EE* 1236b21-7, *Top.* 148b16-22). Aristotle tries to maintain the common beliefs and established use of names (*Top.* 148b21-2); and to do this he thinks he must recognize homonymy.

However, we can do justice to the common beliefs without agreeing that all the things normally called Fs are really Fs, even real homonymous Fs. Aristotle appeals to homonymy not only to distinguish ways in which genuine Fs can be so called, but also to distinguish genuine Fs from spurious homonyms that are called "F," but in fact are "not F, but only homonymously F." These are the painted, sculpted, and dead Fs. Here justice to the common beliefs does not, for Aristotle, require their complete acceptance. Most people will agree with his view that painted and sculpted hands—understood in the way suggested—are not real hands. To explain why we say of such things "That's a hand," but do not believe they are real hands, homonymy may be useful; if we assume the normal definition of hand, we are simply expressing a belief that we know, in Aris-

totle's view of representations, to be false. Homonymy saves us from self-contradiction or repeated deception. But for dead things Aristotle's view probably conflicts with common beliefs. While we may be persuaded that there is something odd about "That's a finger and that's a finger," said of a painted finger and a living finger, we probably find nothing odd in a similar remark about a dead and a living finger. Aristotle argues that what we say is true, but only if we admit the same sort of homonymy as we admitted for painted fingers. What we say cannot be true if the same correct definition of finger is substituted for both occurrences of "finger"; for a finger is essentially part of a living organism performing its functions. This definition rests on Aristotle's theory of natural kinds; and the appeal to homonymy defends that theory with minimum disturbance to common beliefs.

Appropriately, then, we must watch for homonymy when we are looking for natural kinds (*APo.* 97b28-37, 99a6-16). Here as usual we should begin with ordinary names and ordinary beliefs, but we should not follow them uncritically; they may sometimes leave a real nature unnamed (98a13-19, *PA* 644b1-8), sometimes apply the same name to several natures.

These views on the benefits of detecting homonymy result from Aristotle's interest in finding the real natures of things. They show why homonyms may be connected or unconnected. These reasons for recognizing homonymy are equally good for connected and for unconnected homonyms. They give us no right to assume that if Aristotle had recognized connected homonyms he would have said so every time he identifies homonyms that are in fact connected.[26] Sometimes it is appropriate and relevant for him to remark that the

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[26] Owen, "Logic and Metaphysics," p. 174, mentions cases where he thinks Aristotle would have appealed to focal connection in the *Top.* if he had been aware of its general application. (1) Aristotle ignores it for the explanation of metaphor; but that may be because focal connection holds only between genuine Fs (see n. 12, 15 above). (2) It is not mentioned in 134a26-b13 to show how both the soul and its rational part can be called wise, or how a man perceives because an animal does, or how a body is coloured because its surface is. It is not clear that Aristotle thinks different definitions should replace "wise," "perceives" and "colored" in the two different subjects; and so focal connection might be irrelevant. (3) Owen mentions other passages where materials for claims about focal connection are present but unused. He correctly does not claim that mention of focal connection would have been relevant for Aristotle's arguments.

homonyms are connected; and then he says so. Aristotle's views about why it is useful to detect homonymy are the right views for the conception of homonymy that we have found in him.

IX

I have described some features of Aristotle's conception of homonymy by contrasting it with a conception of difference of sense. This is not an ideal contrast, since "difference of sense" has no sharp, agreed, definite use with clear criteria for detecting different senses. Someone might say that I have interpreted it too rigidly, and that it can properly be taken to cover the sorts of differences that Aristotle ascribes to homonymy.

But still, however, we describe it, there is an important question at issue. When Aristotle invites us to recognize homonymy and multivocity, how does he mean to persuade us? If I argue about different senses, I normally appeal to someone's intuitive judgments about meaning, linguistic oddity, translation, lexicography, and so on—in general to what is accessible to the normal competent speaker of the language. Our view about the strength and nature of these sorts of intuitive judgments will determine our views about the nature and value of appeals to different senses of words.

When Aristotle looks for homonymy, however, he is not primarily concerned with the ordinary competent speaker's judgments of different senses, but with how things really are. Homonymy need not be accessible to the ordinary competent speaker. Aristotle cannot list the homonyms there are without listing the natural kinds there are that we have names for. The different definitions that correspond to a homonymous name do not expound the ordinary concept that expresses the sense of the name; they are accounts of real natures. It is sometimes tempting, and not always anachronistic, to associate Aristotle with the kind of conceptual analysis, the analysis of ordinary language and ordinary concepts, that was popular in philosophy some years ago. But when we consider his account of homonymy, we must resist the temptation to suppose that he is concerned with meaning and conceptual analysis. His interest in homonymy is an interest in words and reality, not in words and concepts.

A related contrast with a modern philosophical tendency should

be noticed. Some have agreed with Aristotle's view that a single name need not reflect a single essence. They have inferred (not only for this reason) that the search for essences is misguided altogether; ordinary concepts, some or all of them, just reflect a "family resemblance" in the different things they apply to, and are none the worse for that.[27] This is not Aristotle's intended conclusion. His search for homonymy is not meant to encourage skepticism about the existence of essences for words to name, but to forestall skepticism that might result from the rejection of the Platonic attempt to see one essence for every name; Aristotle does not want to renounce the search for essences, but only to recognize different essences correlated with the same name. While the Wittgensteinian arguments about family resemblance are arguments against essentialism, Aristotle's arguments are a defence of essentialism. The difficulties in his doctrine of homonymy are difficulties in his general views about real essences.

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[27] See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 2d ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), #65–77. His views about family resemblances are applied to questions about universals by, among others, J. R. Bambrough, "Universals and Family Resemblances," *Proc. Arist. Soc.* 60 (1960–61): 207–22. Wittgenstein seems to identify the search for a single essence (#65; "the essence of a language-game") and the search for a single meaning (#77; "the word (e.g., 'good') must have a family of meanings").