unchanging things), those who assert that the mathematical sciences say nothing about the beautiful or the good are wrong. For these sciences say and demonstrate the most about them. Just because they do not speak of them by name, but demonstrate their effects and ratios (λόγοι), that does not mean they say nothing about them. The chief forms of beauty are order (τάξις) and proportion (συμμετρία) and definiteness (τὸ ὁρισμένον), which the mathematical sciences demonstrate most of all. (Metaphysics XIII 3, 1078a 31–b 2)

This is his reply to Aristippus' extremist view that mathematics is useless because it teaches nothing about good and bad. It is a reply that distances him from the mind-sharpening vindication as well. In the ancient debate about the benefits of learning mathematics, Aristotle is closer to Plato than to Isocrates, because he agrees that the content of mathematics is relevant to understanding value as an aspect of the world as it is objectively speaking.

16. On the Good

I close with the story Aristotle liked to tell when beginning a course of lectures, about what happened when Plato announced a public lecture on the Good:

Everyone came expecting they would acquire one of the sorts of thing people normally regard as good, on a par with wealth, good health, or strength. In sum, they came looking for some wonderful kind of happiness. But when the discussion turned out to be about mathematics, about numbers and geometry and astronomy, and then, to cap it all, he claimed that Good is One [i.e. that Goodness is Unity — καὶ τὸ πέρας ὑπὸ ἄγαθον ἑκὼν ἕν, or 'all is One'] it seemed to them, I imagine, something utterly paradoxical (παντελῶς ... παράδοξον το). The result was that some of them sneered at the lecture, and others were full of reproaches. (Aristoxenus, Elementa Harmonica II 1, p. 30.20–31.2 Meibom)

114 Aristotle does not always confine 'good' to the sphere of action in this way. In the Eudemian Ethics passage unchanging things are good because they are beautiful, but he has just warned that this kind of good is not an end you can realise in action (1218b 4–7). In Metaphysics XII 7 the unchanging Prime Mover is both the most beautiful and the best.

115 P. 4 above.

 Appropriately, our source for this story is an anti-mathematical, anti-Pythagorean, treatise on harmonics by Aristoxenus of Tarentum, who agreed with Aristotle that concord resides only in sound. Aristoxenus himself draws a moral from the story that would be approved by the quality control inspectors who currently tyrannise British universities: the audience should know in advance what kind of discussion to expect, so lecturers should start (as Aristotle used to do) with a clear outline of what they are going to say. But the moral I think we should draw in the Academy is that Platonism is a philosophy which is paradoxical by deliberate intent. It goes knowingly παρὰ δόξαν, against the common opinion of humankind.

116 For a good, balanced introduction to the problems and controversies connected with the Aristoxenus passage, see Konrad Gaiser, 'Plato's Enigmatic Lecture "On the Good",' Phronesis, 25 (1980), 5–37.

117 The extremely paradoxical nature of the proposal that philosophers should rule is thrice emphasised: 472a 7 (ὁστὶ παράδοξον λόγον), 473e 4 (πολό παρὰ δόξαν), 490a 5 (σφάδρα παρὰ δόξαν). The reason why it is paradoxical is the opinion people have of what philosophers are like. The entire argument down to the end of Book VII is designed to overcome that opinion by displaying the true philosopher as someone whose passion for knowledge and truth enables them to overcome the power of opinion within their own soul.

118 In writing this essay I have learned much from the discussion of successive versions, first at the original Symposium at the British Academy, later at meetings in Oxford and the University of Illinois at Chicago, finally at the annual Princeton Colloquium on Ancient Philosophy in 1998, where my commentator was Charles Kaln. Special gratitude is due to the members of a term-long seminar in Pittsburgh on the central books of the Republic. Individuals who have been helpful include Julia Annas, David Fowler, Carl Huffman, Dan Jacobson, Constance Meinwald, Reviel Netz, Ruth Padel, Michael Rohr, Heda Segvic, Leonid Zhitom.