

# Aristotle's teleological luck

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Objekttyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie = Revue philosophique et théologique de Fribourg = Rivista filosofica e teologica di Friburgo = Review of philosophy and theology of Fribourg**

Band (Jahr): **63 (2016)**

Heft 2

PDF erstellt am: **16.05.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-760719>

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## Aristotle's Teleological Luck

1

In his *Physics* 2.5 Aristotle discusses lucky events (τὰ ἀπὸ τύχης), that is, events which are the outcomes of luck (τύχη). Lucky events make a subgroup of chance events (τὰ ἀπὸ ταῦτομάτου): while luck concerns only human rational actions, chance extends in addition to non-human animals and inanimate beings. Among other things he says about lucky events, Aristotle insists that they are amenable to teleological account, in that they can be characterized as being “for the sake of something” (ἔνεκά του). In this paper I want to clear up some problems with such a characterization. Aristotle's discussion of luck and chance in *Physics* 2.4-6 raises many important issues which I will not pursue here. I will confine myself instead to his teleological characterization of lucky events and will not discuss his account of chance in general.

On the one hand, to say that lucky events can be characterized in teleological terms seems expectable and reasonable. For it is precisely because they are significant for the agents, contributing to their plans, projects and goals, that the events discussed by Aristotle can be called lucky outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Without evaluative components, such events could not be called lucky, but only accidental or coincidental. Thus, to take Aristotle's example to be discussed below, if I go to the market place for marketing and meet a friend whom I wished to meet but did not expect to find at the market place, then this is a lucky outcome for me, since I can ascribe significance to it: it is fulfillment of some of my plans. But if I go to the market place for marketing and meet an acquaintance whom I did not expect there but toward whom I am in every respect indifferent, then I would not say that I am lucky to meet her. Such an event is just a coincidence, or accidental

<sup>1</sup> Recent writers on luck usually identify three conditions which an event must satisfy to be called lucky: significance condition (it must have some evaluative status); chanciness condition (there was a large chance that it would not occur); and control condition (it is beyond an agent's control) (see COFFMAN, E.J.: *Thinking about Luck*, in: *Synthese* 158 [2006], 385–398). Seminal works are RESCHER, Nicholas: *Luck. The Brilliant Randomness of Everyday Life*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux 1995, esp. 19–40, and PRITCHARD, Duncan: *Epistemic Luck*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005, esp. 125–144. Even though all these conditions can be found in Aristotle, his analysis of luck is not mentioned in recent discussions (but see LATUS, Andrew: *Constitutive Luck*, in: *Metaphilosophy* 34 [2003], 465 note 17, who notes similarity of Rescher's analysis to Aristotle's). Aristotle's understanding of each of these conditions (especially of the chanciness condition), however, differs from the contemporary ones.

conjunction of two unrelated events, mine and my acquaintance's arrival at the market place at the same time.

Admittedly, it can be difficult to determine precisely when a coincidence or accidental conjunction is such that it can be characterized as a lucky event and that we can say that it is for the sake of something in this broad sense of that phrase. An obvious assumption would be that an accidental conjunction is lucky if an agent can ascribe some significance to it, whether positive (so that it is a case of good luck, εὐτυχία) or negative (bad luck, δυστυχία). Or, to put it in more Aristotelian terms, an accidental conjunction is lucky if it would make sense to say, if it were not accidental, that one conjunct is for the sake of another.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it would make sense to say that I would come to the market place to meet my friend if I decided so, but I would not come to the market place for the sake of meeting with someone whom I don't want to meet and toward whom I am indifferent. It seems that this is why accidental conjunction of bathing and solar eclipse (*Phys.* 2.6, 197b24) or of walking and lightning (*APo.* 1.4, 73b10-13) are not instances of lucky events. However, such an account of the distinction between lucky and non-lucky coincidences is not fully satisfactory as it stands, since whether one conjunct can be said to be for the sake of another or not depends on many background assumptions and on a full description of the situation. For it is not impossible that I take a bath for the sake of solar eclipse or that I take a walk for the sake of lightning, since it is conceivable that my life project includes having an experience in such activities, so that I can ascribe some significance to such events. Finding a treasure while digging a hole for a plant, to take another Aristotle's example (*Metaph.* Δ.30, 1025a15-16), is normally a lucky event (see perhaps *EN* 3.3, 1112a27; *Rhet.* 1.5, 1362a8-9), but it need not be: a Stoic would presumably be indifferent toward it. These considerations, however, are not crucial for understanding Aristotle's discussion of luck, since his intention is not to find a criterion on the basis of which we will be able to distinguish lucky coincidences from non-lucky ones. His intention is rather to show that people are right when they call some events lucky or caused by luck.

On the other hand, to say that lucky events are for the sake of something seems odd.<sup>3</sup> According to Aristotle, to say of an event that it is for

<sup>2</sup> Cf. also 2.6, 197b22-29, where Aristotle argues that, if A is done for the sake of B but does not result in B, then A is done "in vain" (μάτην); analogously, if A is not done for the sake of B but does result in B, then A is done by chance (αὐτόματον). Consequently, we might say that an accidental conjunction is lucky if it would make sense to say, if it were not accidental, that one conjunct is not "in vain" with respect to another. Aristotle's argument is somewhat strange. Perhaps it is based on his belief that the word αὐτόματον is derived from μάτην; see ROSS, William David (ed.): *Aristotle's Physics. A Revised Text With Introduction and Commentary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1936, 523.

<sup>3</sup> Besides, Aristotle himself elsewhere opposes luck and "for the sake of something": see, for instance, *APo.* 2.11, 95a8-9; for a fuller list of references, see JUDSON, Lindsay: *Chance and*

the sake of something cannot amount to saying that it is significant or valuable for the agent.<sup>4</sup> If an event A is characterized as being for the sake of something, then there is a further event or state of affairs, “something for the sake of which” (τὸ οὗ ἕνεκα), B, which is A’s *aition*, that is, A’s cause or explanation. It sounds odd to say that the accidental meeting at the market place, as in the example above, is *aition* of my going to the market place. For in a strict (albeit somewhat simplified) sense, A is for the sake of B, which is its *aition*, if B governs the very process of A’s coming about. Lucky events are certainly not for the sake of something in this sense: meeting a friend did not contribute to my going to the market place. Or, to take a less realist view of Aristotelian causes, we may say that A is for the sake of B because B explains the occurrence of A, that is, A’s coming about can best be explained by referring to its being for the sake of B. This also does not seem true in the case of lucky events: if A is a lucky event, then its occurrence is either unexplainable – after all, this is a part of what is meant by calling an event lucky – or, if we think that it can be explained, we will look for an explanation elsewhere and not in B – in this case, of course, we will not consider A as a lucky event. (This is actually the position of Aristotle’s opponents in *Phys.* 2.4, as we will see below).

Hence, it seems that the classification of lucky events among things which are for the sake of something should be taken in a weaker sense or that we should find some special sense of the phrase “for the sake of something” that applies especially to them. Several suggestions have been made and the evidence for them found in Aristotle. Thus, Aristotle’s idea is perhaps that, while coming to the market place is not for the sake of meeting, it is for the sake of marketing; hence, perhaps we should say that, while lucky events are not for the sake of their actual outcomes, they nevertheless are for the sake of something, just because they are human actions, which are normally for the sake of something.<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, we might say that, while coming to the market place is not for the sake of meeting, it might have been so, i.e. it would have been so if I had known that my friend would be there; hence, perhaps we should interpret Aristotle as saying that lucky events are for the sake of something because they are the kind of events that might have occurred by rational planning that is typical

“Always or For the Most Part” in Aristotle, in: JUDSON, Lindsay (ed.): *Aristotle’s Physics. A Collection of Essays*. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1991, 77.

<sup>4</sup> But see also below, note 7.

<sup>5</sup> Such a view was first proposed by Porphyry (see Simplicius: *In Phys.* 336.27–29; see also LENNOX, James: *Aristotle on Chance*, in: LENNOX, James: *Aristotle’s Philosophy of Biology. Studies in the Origins of Life Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001, 251–252). I discuss this view below, 449–453.



of teleological processes.<sup>6</sup> Finally, while coming to the market place is not for the sake of meeting, it certainly is for the sake of the agent, since it brings about something that is good for him; hence, lucky events are, if not for the sake of something, at least for the sake of someone.<sup>7</sup> In what follows I will try to show that there is no need to qualify Aristotle's teleological description of lucky events in any of these ways. Aristotle's idea is rather that lucky events *are* (unqualifiedly) for the sake of their outcomes, even though they have not *come about* for the sake of their outcomes.

## 2

Before turning to his own account of luck and chance, in *Phys.* 2.4 Aristotle gives a brief survey of views of his predecessors. Of special interest for our problem is the view of those who deny that there is such a thing as luck:

They say that nothing comes to be as an outcome of luck, but that there is a determinate (ὁρισμένον) cause of everything which we say comes to be as a chance outcome or as an outcome of luck. Thus when we say that a man as the outcome of luck came into the market place, and found there someone he wished but did not expect to find, they claim that the cause was wishing to go marketing (*Phys.* 2.4, 196a1-5).<sup>8</sup>

The view of these people deviate from common opinion, according to which certain events are rightly called lucky.<sup>9</sup> Aristotle, of course, cannot discard their position just because it is at odds with common sense. As we know from other contexts, his intention is to keep and, if needed, make coherent the common and reputable opinions, but not necessarily all of them, and not at every cost (for a *locus classicus*, see *EN* 7.1, 1145b2-7). In this case, ordinary people rightly call some events lucky and assume that their cause is luck, and there is a deeper theoretical reason why the deniers of luck are wrong.

Their main mistake lies in their conviction that it is possible to identify a single determinate cause of every event, including the event that is ordi-

<sup>6</sup> Such a view was first proposed by Simplicius (*In Phys.* 335.33-336.5) and defended by LENNOX: *Aristotle on Chance* and JUDSON: *Chance and "Always or For the Most Part" in Aristotle*, 77.

<sup>7</sup> Such an interpretation is based on Aristotle's distinction between the two senses of "that for the sake of which": this phrase can refer either to a beneficiary of the process (in this sense, "that for the sake of which" of medicine is a patient) or to the goal (in this sense, "that for the sake of which" of medicine is health) (cf. *De An.* 2.4, 415b1-3, 20-21; *Metaph.* Λ.7, 1072b2-4). See LENNOX: *Aristotle on Chance*, 256-257. However, there is no trace of this distinction in *Phys.* 2.4-6.

<sup>8</sup> All translations from *Physics* are by CHARLTON, William (ed.): *Aristotle's Physics. Books I and II*. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1970, occasionally with modifications.

<sup>9</sup> According to Simplicius (*In Phys.* 330.14-20), Aristotle's opponent here is Democritus.

narily characterized as an outcome of luck. Aristotle is here silent about the reasons because of which one might hold such a view. We may safely assume, I believe, that the arguments of his opponents here in *Physics* are the same as, or at least similar to, the arguments advanced by causal determinists, his opponents in *Metaphysics* E.3.<sup>10</sup> Causal determinists also believe that every event has a single non-accidental cause, from which they conclude that everything happens of necessity (1027a29-32). The explanation of this is simple: take any event and trace its causes, one by one, back in time, and you will always come to a determinate cause, in the present or in the past, which initiated the entire process. Since the causal chain is transitive, the first member of the chain is also the cause of the event from which we began. Likewise the opponents in *Physics*: wishing to go marketing is a determinate cause of the event which is wrongly regarded as the outcome of luck. (Since the text is silent about whether they consider causation as necessitation, we should be cautious in characterizing Aristotle's opponents in *Physics* as causal determinists.)

Note, however, that there is a certain ambiguity in Aristotle's description. I can say (1) that I am lucky in coming to the market place; (2) that I am lucky in meeting a friend; and (3) that I am lucky in coming to the market place *and* meeting a friend. Aristotle's opponents would deny that any of these events is an outcome of luck. Since they endorse the transitivity of causal relationship, they would hold that it is irrelevant whether we take wishing to go marketing as a proximate (as in [1]) or a distal (as in [2]) cause. (3) is somewhat more complex. It includes two overlapping causal chains, mine and my friend's, so that Aristotle's opponents cannot identify a single determinate cause of the coincidence, but must refer instead to at least two causes. They might use the idea that causation is agglomerative, i.e. that from "*a* is the cause of *b*" and "*c* is the cause of *d*" we can infer "*a* and *c* are causes of *b* and *d*".<sup>11</sup> In any case, they will insist that there are determinate and storable causes of every coincidence.

<sup>10</sup> The interpretation of *Metaph.* E.3 is a vexed question, into which I do not need to enter here. See, above all, SORABJI, Richard: *Necessity, Cause, and Blame. Perspectives on Aristotle's Theory*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1980, chapter one; MADIGAN, Arthur: *Metaphysics E 3: A Modest Proposal*, in: *Phronesis* 29 (1984), 123–126; FREDE, Dorothea: *Aristotle on the Limits of Determinism. Accidental Causes in Metaphysics E.3*, in: GOTTHELF, Alan (ed.): *Aristotle on Nature and Living Things*. Pittsburgh: Mathesis Publications 1985; WEIDEMANN, Hermann: *Aristoteles und das Problem des kausalen Determinismus. Met. E 3*, in: *Phronesis* 31 (1986), 27–50; DONINI, Pierluigi: *Aristotle and Determinism*. Louvain-la-Neuve: Peeters 2010, Chapter 2. For my own proposal, see GRGIĆ, Filip: *Aristotle against the Determinist. Metaphysics 6.3*, in: *International Philosophical Quarterly* 38 (1998), 127–136. For a detailed analysis of *Metaph.* E.3 based on the evidence from *Phys.* 2.5, see PANAYIDES, Christos Y.: *Aristotle on Incidental Causes and Teleological Determinism. Resolving the Puzzles of Metaphysics E. 3*, in: *Journal of Philosophical Research* 37 (2012), 25–50.

<sup>11</sup> On agglomerativity and transitivity of explanation, see OWENS, David: *Causes and Coincidences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992, 11–19.

Now Aristotle would not accept agglomerativity because he rejects the assumption that coincidences may have determinate causes (see e.g. *Metaph.* E.2, 1027a7-8). However, his main problem here is not agglomerativity but transitivity: while wishing to go marketing may be taken as the cause of the succeeding event (say, opening the door), it is not the cause either of (1) coming to the market place or of (2) meeting a friend. (There is no need to choose between [1] and [2]. [1] is simpler and perhaps intended in the text, since the text specifies the good or the goal that has been achieved [meeting a friend], while in [2] we should specify the goal ourselves [I am lucky to meet a friend, since I always enjoy in her company].)

Thus, Aristotle must show that it is possible that there are events which have indeterminate causes. Indeterminate causes are accidental causes, i.e. they include everything that may happen to the genuine cause (cf. 2.5, 196b24-29). Thus, while the genuine (efficient) cause of a house is that which can build (*τὸ οἰκοδομικόν*), its indeterminate cause is anything that is accidentally connected with that which can build, e.g. the fact that the builder is male, pale, a flute-player, a doctor, etc. It is important to consider what exactly is meant by indeterminateness here. It is true that there is an indeterminate number of properties that can be accidentally connected with that which can build. However, whichever property or a combination of properties is picked out, the description of that which can build using that property or properties will always refer to a single, determinate thing. In other words, while it is obvious that *the pale man* or *the flute player* are accidental causes of a house, why would Aristotle call these things *indeterminate* causes?

Indeterminateness of these descriptions does not concern just the fact that their number cannot be determined. It concerns the fact that that of which they are accidental causes is a determinate kind of thing. Its being a thing of a certain kind defines the scope of what can be cited as its cause and everything which is outside that scope is among its indeterminate causes. House is a certain kind of artifact, a product of an art that involves following certain procedures, using specific tools and materials, etc. The efficient cause of a house as a kind of thing determined in this way can be only that which is capable to produce such a kind of thing, i.e. *τὸ οἰκοδομικόν*, since *τὸ οἰκοδομικόν* is just “that which is capable to build (*τὸ δυνάμενον οἰκοδομεῖν*)” (*Metaph.* Θ.8, 1049b14-15). Whatever else is cited as a cause will be outside the scope defined by the kind of thing a house is, and since this scope is indeterminate, it can be called an indeterminate cause. If the description of a thing whose cause we want to identify is itself indeterminate, then there is no determinate cause of that thing. Thus that which can build is not the determinate cause of a *pleasant house*, since, on the one hand, it falls outside the scope of this description and, on the other, this description is itself indeterminate (a house that is pleasant for

some can be unpleasant and even harmful for others) (cf. *Metaph.* E.2, 1026b6-10).

Hence, what Aristotle has to do to refute his opponents is to show that the proper description of an event that is commonly called lucky is such that it has an indeterminate cause, which can then be called "luck". His opponents insist that *coming to the market place, meeting a friend* and *coming to the market place and meeting a friend* are not such descriptions. Before we turn to Aristotle's response, let us take a brief look at the first characteristic of lucky events, namely, the fact that they happen neither always nor for the most part in the same way.

### 3

His own account of lucky events Aristotle begins with a classification:

In the first place, then, since we see some things always, and others for the most part, coming to be in the same way, it is plain that luck or its outcome is not called the cause of either of these – of that which is of necessity and always, or of that which is for the most part. But since there are other things which come to be besides these, and all men say that they are the outcome of luck, plainly there is such a thing as luck and chance; for we know that things of this sort are the outcome of luck, and that the outcome of luck is things of this sort (2.5, 196b10-17).

Thus, Aristotle begins by classifying things into those that come about always in the same way, those that come about for the most part in the same way and those that come about "besides these", which are identified as outcomes of luck and chance. The phrase "always or for the most part" is very common in Aristotle, but it is not quite clear whether he uses it always in the same sense, and if he doesn't, whether its various uses have a certain focal meaning. This is not a question that needs to be discussed here at length, but some explanation must be given, especially because here we have a somewhat special usage of the phrase "always or for the most part": while it is standardly used as a characterization of natural things and processes, in *Physics* 2.5 it is applied to human actions. In addition, as we will see, a proper understanding why exactly lucky events are said to happen neither always nor for the most part in the same way can contribute much to understanding in what sense they have indeterminate causes and are for the sake of something.

In our passage Aristotle does not talk about the manner in which things exist, or are the case, or possess a certain property. This is one of the frequent uses of the phrase "always or for the most part" found in some other texts (cf. e.g. *Metaph.* E.2, 1026b27-31), and such a usage gives a classification of things in those which always exist (or are always the case, or always possess a certain property), those which exist (or are the case, or possess a certain property) for most of the time, and those which exist (or are the



case, or possess a certain property) only occasionally or rarely. By contrast, in our passage Aristotle is interested in how things come about or happen, that is, in the characteristic of the process which brings about the occurrence of some event.

To say that something comes about always or for the most part in the same way can also mean various things. What Aristotle is interested in here is the manner in which something comes about given that something else comes about or is the case.<sup>12</sup> Thus, how we shall characterize coming about of the event A, whether as something that proceeds always or for the most part in the same way, depends on how its coming about is connected with another event, B. A comes about always in the same way if it is always the case that A's coming about is connected with B, i.e. if we can say "Always (When A, then B)" or "Always (If A, then B)". The same holds for "for the most part". For instance, we can say, to use Aristotle's example, that stifling heat (*Metaph.* E.2, 1026b33-35) is the kind of thing that happens for the most part in the same way because it is usually accompanied with summer, i.e. because we can say "For the most part (When stifling heat, then summer)". Thus, on this understanding, things come about always or for the most part in the same way if their occurrence is always or for the most part conjoined with the same type of thing.

This, however, cannot be all that Aristotle has in mind, at least in our passage. For, to say that stifling heat is the kind of thing that happens for the most part in the same way does not amount to saying that it is regularly, as a matter of statistical frequency, conjoined with summer. There is a further reason why they are regularly conjoined, that is, there is something about heat and about summer which is the reason why they are regularly conjoined. Thus, Aristotle standardly expresses what he means by "always" and "for the most part" in non-statistical terms "from necessity", "ἀπλῶς", and "naturally".<sup>13</sup> What interests us here is the use of these qualifications to describe human actions, and things are here somewhat more complicated.

To see what it would mean to say of a human action that it happens always or for the most part in the same way, let us look at another Aristotle's example of a lucky event (2.5, 196b33-197a5). A man is engaged in collecting contributions for a festival. He would have come to a certain place – say, Aegina – for the purpose of collecting contributions for the festival if he had known that he could find money there. But he has come for some other reason and thus accidentally achieved his goal.<sup>14</sup> Now, Aristotle says

<sup>12</sup> See 196b36, 197a4; 2.7, 198a4-9, 8, 198b34-199a3, 199b18-22. See JUDSON: *Chance and "Always or For the Most Part" in Aristotle*, 83, who calls this kind of judgment "judgment of conditional frequency."

<sup>13</sup> For the extensive list of references, see JUDSON: *Chance and "Always or For the Most Part" in Aristotle*, 82 note 23.

<sup>14</sup> There are several important textual variants in 196b33-197a5, which may lead to very different interpretations. The Greek text printed in Ross reads: οἷον ἐνεκα τοῦ ἀπολαβεῖν τὸ

that this event would not be a lucky event if the man in question had chosen to visit Aegina always or for the most part for the sake of collecting contributions (197a2-5). Suppose, then, that it is not a lucky event, and that the man has come for the sake of collecting contributions. In that case, we should classify it among events that happen always or for the most part in the same way. Why?

Obviously, the phrase “always or for the most part” refers to the connection between the man’s visiting Aegina and collecting money: he always or for the most part goes to Aegina when collecting. Now this can be interpreted in various ways, but it cannot mean that in the past he always or almost always visited Aegina when collecting money. For, this would imply that this event would not be classified among events that happen always or for the most part in the same way had it happened only once, that is, had the man in question never been engaged in collecting money before and visited Aegina for the sake of that. The qualification “always or for the most part” cannot apply to a human action *qua* particular, but only *qua* certain *kind* of event. I would propose that it applies to a human action because it is a kind of event in which there is a regular association of a goal

ἀργύριον ἦλθεν ἄν κομιζομένου τὸν ἔρανον, εἰ ἦδει· ἦλθε δ’ οὐ τούτου ἕνεκα, ἀλλὰ συνέβη αὐτῷ ἐλθεῖν, καὶ ποιῆσαι τοῦτο τοῦ κομίσασθαι ἕνεκα (196b33-36). At b34 I would read κομιζόμενος (adopted by Hardie and Gaye in ROSS, William David [ed.]: *Works of Aristotle translated into English*. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1930) instead of Ross’s κομιζομένου. κομιζομένου refers to the activity of another person, a debtor, who is himself getting contributions from a third person (thus Charlton, who follows Ross, translates “Thus the man would have come for the purpose of getting back the money when his debtor was collecting contributions”). Ross’s reading is motivated by two considerations. First, he supposes that the reference here must be to the same story as in 2.4, 196a1-5, which is about the meeting of two persons. But this is not necessarily so: a similar case is found later, at 2.8, 199b20-22, which is certainly not the same as the stories in 2.4 and 5. Second, Ross says that “κομισόμενος [also a possible reading] τὸν ἔρανον would be a very insipid repetition of ἕνεκα τοῦ ἀπολαβεῖν τὸ ἀργύριον” (*Aristotle’s Physics*, 520). Now this may be a repetition, but Aristotle stresses (at b35, 197a1 and 15) that the goal is κομίσασθαι or κομιδῇ. Besides, it would be awkward to use the same verb for the activities of two different persons. Hence, I think that κομιζόμενος makes a perfectly good sense: coming to Aegina is the means, getting the money is the goal, and collecting contributions is a further, superordinate goal.

A further problem is with καὶ ποιῆσαι τοῦτο τοῦ κομίσασθαι ἕνεκα (b35-36). As I will argue below, what is accidental, or has an indeterminate cause, is not the man’s coming to the market place taken by itself (for it has a determinate cause, say, the wish to go marketing), but his coming to the market place and achieving the goal, collecting contributions. Hence I think that the text should stay as it is printed in Ross. BONITZ: *Aristotelische Studien I*. Wien: Sitzungsberichte der phil.-hist. Classe der K. Akademie der Wissenschaften 1862, 240, and Hardie and Gaye proposed to delete the words τοῦ κομίσασθαι ἕνεκα. They were obviously motivated by the wish to remove the appearance that the action was done for the sake of something, which I think is unnecessary. Obviously for the same reason, CHARLTON: *Aristotle’s Physics*, 48 and translation, and JUDSON: *Chance and “Always or For the Most Part” in Aristotle*, 77 and note 3, read τοῦτο τὸ τοῦ κομίσασθαι ἕνεκα.

Ross also proposes to delete the word κομιζόμενος at a4, which I think is also unnecessary. As I will argue below, it is the relationship between the goal (κομίσασθαι) and the means (φοιτῶν) which is governed by the phrase “always or for the most part”.



and the means chosen by deliberation, as is suggested by Aristotle's remark that the event would not be lucky if the man had *chosen* to visit Aegina to achieve the *goal* (197a3-5). In other words, we can say that it is always or for the most part so that, if there is a certain goal, and if an agent has chosen a particular means for this goal, then she will use this means for this goal. Thus, human actions also exhibit the pattern "Always (or for the most part) (If A, then B)", where B is the goal and A the means chosen by the deliberative process. To say of a person that she always or for the most part visits Aegina when collecting contributions is to say that it is always or for the most part so that, if her goal is to collect contributions and if she has chosen to go to Aegina, then she goes to Aegina. Regularity in human action concerns the fact that people usually use the means which they have themselves chosen to achieve their goals. Of course, they do not do that always – in the field of human actions nothing happens always in the same way – but Aristotle can disregard this fact here, since it is irrelevant for his main point.

In lucky events, there is also a goal that is achieved (collecting contributions)<sup>15</sup> and there is something that just happened to be a means for that goal (going to Aegina for some other reason). But the connection between the goal and the means is not of the type "Always or for the most part (If A, then B)" in the sense explained above. It is neither always nor for the most part so that people achieve their goals using means which are not, and cannot be, selected by deliberation, and this, I believe, is all that is meant by characterizing lucky events as being "neither always nor for the most part". It should also be noted that "neither always nor for the most part" cannot just mean "rarely", even though, of course, lucky events do occur rarely. To adopt Judson's terminology, we can distinguish between absolute and conditional judgments of rarity.<sup>16</sup> An event is rare in the absolute sense if it happens neither always nor most of the time nor very often regardless of the occurrences of other events. Aristotle obviously does not have in mind this type of rarity when he characterizes the event as "neither always nor for the most part".<sup>17</sup> But his point is neither the idea that lucky events are rare in comparison to other events of the same type. Suppose that a person is frequently engaged in collecting contributions and that more than 50% of her successful actions have been successful due to luck. This would not make these lucky outcomes events of the type "for the most part", but the minority cases would be of this type because they would manifest the pattern which is regularly found in human action. On the other hand, an

<sup>15</sup> In 2.5, 197a1 Aristotle explicitly says that collecting contributions is τέλος. See also 196b35 and 197a15.

<sup>16</sup> JUDSON: *Chance and "Always or For the Most Part" in Aristotle*, 83.

<sup>17</sup> As is rightly stressed by JUDSON: *Chance and "Always or For the Most Part" in Aristotle*, 85–86.

event is conditionally rare if it is rarely accompanied with another event. Judson suggests that it is this type of rarity that Aristotle has in mind here: "[...] what is relevant to whether the case is one of luck is whether the man regularly goes to [Aegina] *when collecting* – a point about conditional frequencies."<sup>18</sup> But again, it is utterly irrelevant whether going to Aegina and collecting have *ever* been associated: we would call our event lucky even if no one has ever gone to Aegina to collect contributions. What is relevant is rather whether the man regularly goes to Aegina when collecting *and* when he has chosen going to Aegina for the sake of that.

In short, there is more to "neither always nor for the most part" than just "rarely". This phrase is best understood as indicating that lucky events do not manifest the pattern regularly found in human action, and it is because of this that they have indeterminate causes. In lucky events, a certain goal is achieved using means which are outside the scope of what is available to agent's deliberation, given a specified goal. Being outside that scope, the means (or the efficient cause) can be just anything.

## 4

Let me finally turn to the qualification of lucky events as being for the sake of something. The most relevant passage is *Phys.* 2.5, 196b17-31:

Of things which come to be, some come to be for the sake of something, and some do not. Of the former, some are in accordance with choice and some are not, but both are among things which are for the sake of something. Clearly, then, also among things which are neither necessary nor for the most part, there are some to which it can belong to be for the sake of something.

Anything which might be done as an outcome of thought or nature is for the sake of something. Whenever something like this comes to be accidentally, we say that it is the outcome of luck. (196b17-24).

As has been said, then, whenever this [i.e. coming to be accidentally] happens over something which comes to be for the sake of something, it is said to be a chance outcome or the outcome of luck (b29-31).

There are basically two ways to understand Aristotle's insistence that lucky events belong to the class of events which are for the sake of something: either the qualification "being for the sake of something" applies equally to lucky and non-lucky events or there is a special, non-standard sense of that phrase that applies to lucky events. As I said, I do not think that there is such a non-standard sense. Let us look at some details in the text.

According to the first classification, events are divided into (1) those that happen always or for the most part in the same way and those that do not have this property. According to the second classification, events are

<sup>18</sup> JUDSON: *Chance and "Always or For the Most Part" in Aristotle*, 86.

divided into (2) those that happen for the sake of something and those that do not. Aristotle says that these two classifications can intersect, i.e. that it is possible that (3) some events that happen neither always nor for the most part in the same way are for the sake of something. He does not suggest that they are for the sake of something in some special sense which is not intended in the second classification. In other words, it is not suggested that ἐνδέχεται in 196b21 should be read *de re*, as if lucky events are for the sake of something in the sense that they can be for the sake of something.<sup>19</sup> Aristotle's conclusion is rather just that it is possible that some events that happen neither always nor for the most part in the same way can be qualified as being for the sake of something. This implies that it is possible that some events that happen neither always nor for the most part in the same way do *not* have this property. I presume that this heading would include accidental conjunctions like the one of bathing and solar eclipse.

Proponents of the idea that there is a special sense of “for the sake of something” that applies to lucky events usually point to the fact that Aristotle does not say that for the sake of something are things that *are done* as the result of thought, but those that *might be done* (ἂν πράχθῃ b22).<sup>20</sup> However, immediately after he says that when “such things” (τοιαῦτα: those discussed in b21-24, i.e. things that happen for the sake of something) come to be accidentally, then we call them lucky events. If “such things” were for the sake of something in a special sense of that phrase, then the clause “whenever something like this comes to be accidentally” would be redundant, since “such things” would already refer to the outcomes that are accidental. Yet Aristotle first says that there are things that might be done by rational planning *and then* singles out those among them that happen accidentally.<sup>21</sup> Hence, his point is that when the events that are for the sake of something in a standard sense occur accidentally, then they are lucky events. This is also confirmed by b29-30, where τὰ ἔνεκά του refers to the sort of things described in b21-22, without any hint that a special sense of ἔνεκά του is intended. The same holds, it may be argued, for all occur-

<sup>19</sup> As in SAUVÉ MEYER, Susan: *Aristotle, Teleology, and Reduction*, in: *The Philosophical Review* 101 (1992), 808 and note 19.

<sup>20</sup> See LENNOX: *Aristotle on Chance* and JUDSON: *Chance and “Always or For the Most Part” in Aristotle*, 77; see also below, 453-454.

<sup>21</sup> ROSS: *Aristotle's Physics*, 518, argues that there is a corresponding special sense of “that for the sake of which”, that is, “that which might have been the goal”. He points to *EN* 3.1, 1111a5-15, where Aristotle gives an example of acting in ignorance of the goal, a doctor's giving a medicine to cure a sick man and killing him. It seems that the actual goal, killing, is the goal in the special sense, “that which might have been the goal” (if the doctor acted voluntarily). This is true, but killing a patient by mistake is an event that happened accidentally, so that it would belong to classification (3) above, not (2).

rences of ἔνεκά του in 2.5.<sup>22</sup> By contrast, in parenthesis at b24-29 Aristotle explains what he means by “accidentally” and clearly indicates that it is the special use of this term that interests him here, namely “accidentally” as applied to causes.

Lucky events, then, are those that are for the sake of something and that happen accidentally. Now there is a sense in which my coming to the market place, to return to Aristotle's first example, has not happened accidentally, for, as Aristotle's opponents insist, there is a single determinate first member of the causal chain leading to that event, i.e. my wishing to go marketing. Hence, under this description, *coming to the market place*, this event does have a determinate cause and is not a lucky event. (The same holds for the other two candidates, *meeting a friend* and *coming to the market place and meeting a friend*.) Such a description, however, is not complete, for coming to the market place is a kind of event which can be characterized as being for the sake of something. Hence, if it is lucky event, it is such under the description *coming to the market place for the sake of something*, and the question is, what should we substitute for “something”? An obvious candidate is marketing, as is perhaps suggested by 2.6, 197b18-20:

Plainly, then, in the field of things which in a general way come to be for the sake of something, if something comes to be but not for the sake of that which results, and has an external cause, we say that it is a chance outcome; and if such an outcome is for the sake of something capable of choosing and is an object of choice, we call it the outcome of luck.

Thus, it may seem that lucky events are for the sake of something in the sense that they belong to the class of things which normally are for the sake of something, like human actions or natural processes, but are not for the sake of what actually results: arrival at the market place is for the sake of marketing, but not for the sake of meeting. There are at least two problems with such a view.

First, if we adopt this reading, then it is not clear how we can respond to the objection that coming to the market place for the sake of marketing still has a determinate cause, namely, wishing to go marketing. To be sure, coming to the market place does have an unintended and unexpected outcome, but it is not just the unintended outcome that makes it a lucky event, but an indeterminate causal history as well, that is, the fact that it has come about accidentally. However, under this description, *coming to the market place for the sake of marketing*, it *does* have a determinate causal history.

<sup>22</sup> 196b17, 19, 21, 30, 33, 197a6. 197a32-35 seems to be an exception, but it is not; see below, note 25.

Second, and more important, that for the sake of which an event has *come to be* and that for the sake of which it *is*, or turns out to be, need not coincide, and the existence of lucky events is obviously based on this distinction. My arrival at the market place has come about for the sake of something, and with regard to that it cannot be said that it has just happened to me that I came at the market place. But my arrival, once it has come about, obviously *is*, or at any rate turns out to be, for something else – meeting a friend – and with regard to *that* it *can* be said that it just happened to me that I came to the market place. For with regard to what this event, *coming to the market place for the sake of the meeting*, is, I might have come to the market place for whatever cause – I might have been kidnapped, thrown by the storm, etc. In other words, while Aristotle's opponents can state a determinate cause of *coming to the market place* or *coming to the market place for the sake of marketing*, they cannot state a determinate cause of *coming to the market place for the sake of the meeting*.<sup>23</sup>

That *coming to the market place for the sake of the meeting* is the most appropriate description of this event is clear from some of Aristotle's methodological considerations. The starting point of explanation, in his opponents' view, is the way in which an event has come about, and since it is possible to identify a determinate chain of causes in the process of its coming about, they believe that the event under discussion is not lucky. Aristotle's methodological principle, on the other hand, is that in explanation we should start with the kind of thing *explanandum* is and then go on to explain its coming about.<sup>24</sup> The fact that *explanandum* is such and such a kind of thing governs the way in which it comes about. The same principle should apply to the explanation of lucky events. A lucky event involves an achievement of a goal, even though this goal has not been inherent to the agent, and hence it is among events which are for the sake of something. We cannot hope to explain the agent's arrival at the market place without taking into account the fact that the arrival involves an achievement of a goal. If we ask "On account of what has he come?" disregarding the fact that his arrival has achieved a goal, then our question is only about one aspect of the event, not about the whole event, and the answer is not "On account of luck", but "On account of his wish to go marketing". But if we ask this question having in mind the outcome of the arrival, then the answer can be "On account of luck", and wishing to go marketing is as good an answer as any.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Thus I agree with JOHNSON, Kent: *Luck and Good Fortune in the Eudemian Ethics*, in: *Ancient Philosophy* 17 (1997), 86, that "whether or not an event is said to occur by luck is relative to the description of the event", even though I do not agree with the details of his account.

<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, *PA* 1.1, 640a10-14; *Phys.* 2.9, 199b35-200a5.

<sup>25</sup> One might object that 2.5, 197a32-35 contradicts such an interpretation: "As has been said, then, luck and chance are both accidental causes, in the field of things which are ca-



Aristotle says (197a1-2) that the goal achieved by lucky event is not internal to the agent, but that it is nevertheless the object of decision and thought; in other words, it is among his goods. It does not mean, however, that at the time of encountering a stroke of luck he must be aware of that. He may become aware of that *post hoc*, that is, only after he has become able to recognize what is really good for him. For instance, he may become aware that he was lucky to come to the market place and meet his friend only after he has completed his moral education and become a *phronimos* who fully understands the importance of cultivating friendly relationships.

Hence, to fully understand what lucky events are and why people are right in calling them lucky, we should, first, begin our explanation of these events not with how they come about but with what they are and, second, take into consideration their full description, including their further immediate outcomes. These advices can also help us understand two otherwise troublesome features of Aristotle's account.

First, it has been complained that Aristotle's account cannot accommodate the cases of bad luck.<sup>26</sup> If I am hit by a stroke of bad luck, it does not make sense to say that, even though I have not done something for the sake of the bad outcome, I might have done. It is also absurd to say that I am in any way a beneficiary of the process that resulted in bad luck. I believe, however, that Aristotle's account does make room for the cases of bad luck. Suppose I have come to the market place for the sake of marketing and then got killed by a group of bandits. Now this event, *coming to the market place and got killed*, certainly is not for the sake of anything (suppose I was accidentally shot), but it has come about for the sake of something, since there was a goal internalized in my wish to go marketing. Hence, this event is among things that come to be for the sake of something. In addition, under this description, *coming to the market place and got killed*, it has indeterminate cause – that is, its cause is (bad) luck – since with regard to its outcome, wishing to go marketing as an answer to the question “Why has he come?” is as good as any other answer. Thus, even though cases of bad luck are not for the sake of something, they have become for the sake of something and have an indeterminate cause.

Second, much stress has been made on Aristotle's definition of things that are for the sake of something as things that *might be done* (ἄν

pable of coming to be neither simply (ἀπλῶς) nor for the most part, and of such of these as might come to be for the sake of something (ὅς' ἂν γένοιτο ἕνεκά του). But it does not: *coming to the market place for the sake of the meeting* is capable of coming to be neither always nor for the most part (that is, it is such when it comes about due to wish to go marketing), and when it does come to be in this way, then it may be said that it *might* come to be for the sake of the meeting.

<sup>26</sup> See TORSTRIK, Adolf: *Περὶ τύχης καὶ τοῦ αὐτομάτου*: Arist. Phys. B 4-6, in: Hermes 9 (1875), 446; MANSION, Augustin: *Introduction à la physique aristotélicienne*, second edition. Louvain: Éditions de l'Institut supérieur de philosophie 1946, 307–308; JUDSON: *Chance and “Always or For the Most Part” in Aristotle*, 77–78 note 12.



πραχθείη) as an outcome of thought or nature (2.5, 196b22). Commentators usually take this definition as the strongest evidence for a Simplicius-style interpretation, according to which lucky events are for the sake of something in a non-standard sense, that is, they are for the sake of something in the sense that they might have been done by rational planning.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, Adolf Torstrik, dissatisfied with Simplicius' reading, even proposed the emendation πραχθῆ.<sup>28</sup> As I have said above, the text (196b17–21) does not suggest any non-standard sense of “for the sake of something”. I believe that Aristotle's point is simple, and that there is no need for such an emendation. You can ascribe to an event the property of being for the sake of something if you know that it has achieved the agent's goal, without knowing how it has come about. Without further inquiry you cannot say that it has come about by rational planning. For all you know, it *might be done* by rational planning, and even if it is not – if it is lucky outcome – it still is for the sake of something. Hence, I would not agree with Judson that “ὅν πραχθείη at 196b22 [...] suggests that here ἔνεκά του applies to more events than it does in the standard sense”:<sup>29</sup> it applies to *all* events that involve an achievement of a goal (external or internal to the agent), with ὅν πραχθείη indicating that it is left open whether the goal is achieved accidentally or not.

To conclude: an event has an indeterminate cause in the relevant (teleological) sense if it is for the sake of something – if it involves an achievement of a goal – even though it has not come about for the sake of that. If it involves an achievement of a goal but does not fit into the pattern “Always or for the most part (If there is a certain goal, and if an agent has chosen a particular means for this goal, then she will use this means for this goal)”, it is a lucky event. Thus there is no special sense of the phrase “for the sake of something” when applied to lucky events. *Qua event*, a lucky event has come about for the sake of something and thus unqualifiedly belongs among things that *come about* for the sake of something. But *qua lucky event*, it has not come about for the sake of that thing it has come about *qua event*, but it nevertheless *is*, or turns out to be, for the sake of something. That for the sake of which it is has not governed the process of its coming about (what has governed the process of its coming about is rather that for the sake of which it has come about *qua event*) and hence it is not its *aition*.<sup>30</sup> Its *aition* is, in a sense, luck. Strictly speaking, luck is not a

<sup>27</sup> See e.g. JUDSON: *Chance and “Always or For the Most Part” in Aristotle*, 77; LENNOX: *Aristotle on Chance*.

<sup>28</sup> TORSTRIK: *Περὶ τύχης καὶ τοῦ αὐτομάτου*, 445.

<sup>29</sup> JUDSON: *Chance and “Always or For the Most Part” in Aristotle*, 77.

<sup>30</sup> Thus I agree with LENNOX: *Aristotle on Chance*, 254–258, that we should distinguish between a causal and a non-causal sense of “for the sake of”. However, while Lennox, following Simplicius, argues that the causal “for the sake of” is a characteristic of normal goal-directed processes, while the non-causal “for the sake of” is a characteristic of chance pro-

cause because it is not a determinate thing. On the other hand, it is a kind of cause because, as we have seen, it can be cited as an answer to a "Why?"-question.<sup>31</sup> A lucky event is not uncaused, of course; it is as much caused as any other. Yet – being a purposeful type of event – it is not caused by that thing which turned out to be its goal, and that is the whole point of saying that it is caused by luck.<sup>32</sup>

### *Abstract*

*In this paper I discuss some problems with Aristotle's characterization of lucky events as events which are "for the sake of something". I argue that there is no special sense of the phrase "for the sake of something" when applied to lucky events. Qua event, a lucky event has come about for the sake of something and thus unqualifiedly belongs among things that come about for the sake of something. But qua lucky event, it has not come about for the sake of that thing it has come about qua event, but it nevertheless is, or turns out to be, for the sake of something.*

cesses which might have been due to thought or nature, I would say that a process is for the sake of something in the causal sense of this phrase if it has come about for the sake of its achieved goal, while it is for the sake of something in the non-causal sense if it is for the sake of its achieved goal, even though it has not come about for the sake of it.

<sup>31</sup> See 2.5, 197a13-17. See also FREELAND, Cynthia: *Accidental Causes and Real Explanations*, in: JUDSON (ed.): *Aristotle's Physics*, 66.

<sup>32</sup> This work has been fully supported by Croatian Science Foundation under the project 5343.