

Comments on R. Kraut, “Agathon and Sumpheron: *NE* 1094^a1—2”

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1. What are Richard’s main claims?

There is, to begin with, a local claim. This is a claim about the opening sentence of the *NE*: when Aristotle says “every art and every inquiry, and likewise every action and decision, seems to aim at some good”, the expression “some good” is shorthand for the idea of something that is advantageous to someone or some group of people. More precisely, the expression agathon ti in that sentence should be interpreted as elliptical, to be completed by adding something like “for someone or other”. Thus the idea Aristotle is meaning to express, and to commit himself to, is that every art, inquiry, action, and decision aims at something that is good for someone or other.

Secondly, there is a more far-reaching claim. This is a claim about Aristotle’s concept of the good, meant to apply to Aristotle’s practical philosophy, or at least to the *NE*. In speaking of something as an agathon, the claim is, what Aristotle means to say of the thing in question is always that it is advantageous to someone (or perhaps to something),¹ or to some group of people (or perhaps some set of things). (In what follows I will for the most part drop references to non-human potential beneficiaries.) “Aristotle’s theory of the agathon”, Richard claims on p. 27, “is really a theory about the sumpheron.” It will follow that Aristotle has no use for the notion of something that is good apart from being advantageous to someone or some group. On page 23, Richard claims that Aristotle has “no use for one half of the modern distinction between good absolutely and good for”: “when the good absolutely / good for someone distinction is drawn [...] in order to designate some things as good without necessarily being advantageous, and others as good for individuals by being to their advantage, then the distinction is not consonant with Aristotle’s approach to practical philosophy. For when he talks about choosing what is good, he is always talking about choosing what is good for someone.”

¹ The beneficiary might on occasion be things like “some growing genetic material” (p. 26).

2. Preliminary questions and objections

With regard to both claims, it seems that there are at least two rival views, not just one.

I begin with the first claim, the one about the opening sentence of the *NE*. According to what I will call the Ellipsis View, which is the view Richard is defending, Aristotle uses the word agathon to convey the idea that something is “choiceworthy and desirable because it is sumpheron—that is, because it is advantageous, good for someone” (p. 1).

According to another view, which Richard means to oppose, Aristotle means by agathon, roughly, “desirable in some way or other”—for instance, by being pleasant, or noble or fine (kalon). To aim at some agathon, on this second interpretation, is to aim at a thing that, one thinks, has something significant to be said for it, which might be that it is advantageous, but it might also be simply that it is pleasant. As Richard notes, that interpretation makes Aristotle begin the *NE* with a rather mild statement, especially so if one assumes, as Richard does, that in this opening sentence he has in mind only cases of rationally motivated action.

Here is a further view, which is different both from the Ellipsis View and from the view Richard opposes, and which seems to me to deserve consideration. (In fact, I myself subscribe to this further view.) This is that the first sentence of the *NE* by itself is meant to express a complete thought, by which I mean a thought that is by itself evaluable as true or false. The thought it is meant to express, however, is not that every art and so on aims at something that is, or seems, desirable in some way or other. The thought is rather that, to be brief, every human endeavor seems to aim at something that is, or is taken to be, desirable or valuable *in a certain distinctive way*, namely by being or seeming to be good. There may be a variety of ways in which things can be good, or can be conceived of as being good. The goodness of a good thing may consist in, and may be taken to consist in, how advantageous it is to someone or other. Or it may be that the thing in question is good, and is thought of as good, independently of being advantageous to anyone. More could be said, and no doubt should be said about what is involved in something being good, or a good, and perhaps about the various ways in which things can be said to be good. But on the view that I am proposing, Aristotle thinks that the opening sentence of the *NE* expresses a thought that can be evaluated as true or false as it stands and without

adding anything, for instance without adding any specification of or reference to some beneficiary or beneficiaries to whose advantage the good in question is supposed to be. There might at least conceivably be cases in which someone, in acting or in deciding, aims at some good without any regard for ways in which the good in question may be of advantage to anyone.

It is worth noting that on this proposed interpretation, as also on the interpretation favored by Richard, the sentence articulates a view which, I take it, Aristotle rejects. Aristotle does not think that every action aims at something good, or at something advantageous. Acratic action, for one thing, does not aim at good or advantageous things.² It aims at pleasures of certain kinds which the agent in some sense knows to be objectionable and which he or she thinks of neither as good nor as advantageous. It seems best, then, to interpret Aristotle not as making an outright commitment, but rather as appealing to a reputable view, to a view that will seem to his audience attractive and plausible, though it turns out on closer inspection to stand in need of significant qualification.

I now turn to Richard's general claim that when Aristotle attributes goodness to something, what he has in mind is *always* that the thing in question is advantageous to someone or to some group of people. In defending that claim, Richard thinks of himself as opposing the view that Aristotle at least on occasion uses the word agathon to convey the idea that something is "choiceworthy for some reason or other, and not necessarily because of the thing's advantageousness" (p. 22). This formulation of the view that is being opposed is bound to put one in mind of the view Richard was meaning to oppose in defending his Ellipsis Interpretation of the Ethics' opening sentence. For according to that view, Aristotle uses the word agathon in that sentence "to convey the idea that something is choiceworthy or desirable (haireton)" (p. 1), for instance in that it is pleasant or exhibits fineness. Now, it is clear that Aristotle does not think that the mere fact that something is, or promises to be, pleasant all by itself renders the thing in question genuinely *worthy* of choice.³ (This is not to say, of course, that no one will or can choose something or other simply because it seems pleasant.) It is also clear that Aristotle does not think that the mere fact that something is or promises to be pleasant all by itself

² I agree here with M. Burnyeat, "Aristotle on learning to be good", p. 91, n. 25.

³ See *NE* 10.3, 1174^a8—9: "It seems to be clear that pleasure is not the good and that not every pleasure is choiceworthy..." Note also *NE* 10.5, 1175^b24—8.

renders that thing agathon, or an agathon. He takes it to be obvious that there are things that are thoroughly bad and disgraceful, which nevertheless are genuinely pleasant to people with a suitably corrupt sensibility. Thus, if the view which Richard is meaning to oppose in defending his global claim is that Aristotle uses the word agathon simply to denote things that have something to be said for them—say, that they are pleasant, or pleasant at least to some people—then that view deserves to be opposed and in fact to be firmly rejected. However, this objectionable view is not the only view that Richard must resist in order to establish his own view.

This is because there also seems to be room for the view that Aristotle at least on occasion uses the term agathon to say of something that it is good apart from being advantageous to someone or to some group of people, and good apart from being advantageous in any way at all.⁴ If so, one might well think that so far as something's being agathon or an agathon goes, this, on Aristotle's view, is *neutral* as to whether or not the goodness of the thing in question derives from, or consists in, its being advantageous to someone or to some group of people.

Now, one might think that when Aristotle speaks of *human* goods, or of the *human* good, he must have in mind that the things in question are good for people, that they are of advantage at least to someone or other, or to some group of people. It is clear, I think, that Aristotle does take the view that human goods, prominently the chief human good, are good for people, and it is certainly clear that he thinks that a person who manages to secure the chief human good is better off, much better off, for having secured this good. However, to say this is not necessarily to agree that even goods specifically characterized by him as human goods, including the chief human good, are, on his view, good *simply in that* they are advantageous to people. In other words, it is not yet to concede that, according to Aristotle, the goodness even of human goods *consists in* their being good for, or advantageous, to someone or other, or to some group of people.

This is because in speaking of certain good things as human goods, or as goods for us (ta hêmin agatha), he may not have in mind the notion of things that are good *for* humans, in the sense that they are advantageous to humans, but rather the notion of

⁴ I am meaning to echo W. D. Ross' formulation that something may be good, bad, or indifferent "considered apart from its accompaniments" (*The Right and the Good*, pp. 102—3). The idea is of evaluating things in a way that involves "taking the most commanding point of view that can be taken with regard to the value of the things in the universe" (102).

goods that pertain specifically to us, in that they are, perhaps among other things, achievable by means of our agency.⁵ Such goods may well be good for humans without it being the case that their goodness simply consists in their being good for humans.

3. An alternative proposal

Aristotle does, I submit, have some use for a notion of goodness pure and simple—that is to say, for a notion of something’s being good apart from, and independently of, being advantageous to any particular individual or group of individuals. For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to this as an *impersonal* notion of good. Now, I think that it is clear, and rather easy to show, that Aristotle must operate with an impersonal notion of good in at least one context, though that context is part of Aristotle’s theology, not of his ethics, at least not primarily. It still seems to me worth calling attention to the relevant aspects of his theology, because doing so will bring to light the evident presence in Aristotle’s philosophy of a wholly impersonal notion of good. Moreover, there are of course significant connections between Aristotle’s theology and his ethics, and if what I am about to say is along the right lines, then one such connection is the application of an impersonal notion of good.

In saying, in *Metaphysics* Lambda 7, that the activity of god is a life that is best (*aristê*) and eternal (1072^b27—8),⁶ Aristotle must have in mind that god’s life is superlatively good in a way that does not derive from or depend on any way in which god’s life is advantageous to anyone at all. It could plainly not be the case that the superlative goodness of god’s life-constituting intellectual activity in some way consists in being advantageous to things or beings other than god.⁷ Nor could it be that the goodness of this life consists in being advantageous to god himself. After all, this life-constituting activity just *is* god (1072^b26—7), and so there is in god’s case no room for a distinction between his form of life and his characteristic activity on the one hand and the being

⁵ Cf. Kraut, pp. 5—7, “what we want is not the good ‘itself by itself’ but what is good for us, the good that is appropriate for the kinds of beings we are”. I am urging that we should distinguish between the notion of a good that is appropriate to humans and the notion of what is good for humans.

⁶ ἐνέργεια δὲ ἡ καθ’ αὐτὴν ἐκείνου ζωὴ ἀρίστη καὶ αἰδίου. Note also 1072^b24: καὶ ἡ θεωρία τὸ ἥδιστον καὶ ἄριστον.

⁷ Cf. *Metaphysics* Lambda 10, 1075^a11—5.

which engages in that activity on the other. It makes no sense, then, to say that the activity that constitutes god's life is advantageous to god, or that god is better off for engaging in this activity. We must conclude, I think, that in speaking of god's life as best, Aristotle cannot have in mind the idea that this life is superlatively good for god, or for anyone else. He must have in mind the idea of something that is good, and superlatively good, apart from being advantageous to anyone or any group of people. Aristotle locates the goodness of god's life and activity precisely in the superlative value of that very activity itself. That value may stem in important part from the fact that this activity is a case of pure actuality unaffected by potentiality. But the value of this activity is no doubt also bound up with the superlative clarity and definiteness of the intelligible objects which are being actively understood in this contemplative activity.

The question then is to what extent, if any, such an impersonal notion of goodness is in play in Aristotle's ethics. The first place to look is, of course, *Nicomachean Ethics* book 10, chapters 7 and 8. Especially when read together with the book 10 discussion of pleasure, these chapters suggest that Aristotle thinks of excellent theoretical thinking as best among human activities in such a way that the superlative goodness of this activity is quite independent of ways in which it may be advantageous to anyone, or to any group of people. "This activity is best (*kratistê*)", Aristotle says at *NE* 10.7, 1177^a19—21, "for the intellect is the best thing in us, and the things with which the intellect is concerned are the best among knowable things."⁸ This remark does—and, I think, should—call to mind Aristotle's view, expressed in *NE* 10.4, of what accounts for differences in goodness between different activities, or anyhow among different cognitive activities:

Every perceptual capacity is active in relation to its perceptible object, and completely active when it is in good condition in relation to the finest of its perceptible objects. [...] Hence for each capacity the best (*beltistê*) activity is the activity of the subject in the best condition in relation to the best object of the capacity. (1174^b14—9)

As one would expect, in what follows Aristotle extends this view to activities of the intellect (1174^b20—3).

⁸ Cf. *NE* 10.8, 1179^a24—7, where the intellect is spoken of as the thing that is best (*ariston*) and most akin to the gods.

Now, Aristotle does think that the goodness of a good human activity such as properly accomplished theoretical thinking depends in part on the condition of the relevant cognitive capacity. For human theoretical thinking to be as good as it can be, it must not only be *of* the best or finest cognizable objects. It must also express wisdom, the optimal condition of the theoretical intellect. It is clear, therefore, that on Aristotle's view the superlative goodness of excellent theoretical thinking, in the human case at least, depends in part on the possession by the person in question of something that Aristotle presumably accepts is enormously good for him or her, namely wisdom (*sophia*), the perfection of our best faculty. But I hope it is clear that this is not to say that the superlative goodness of excellent theoretical thinking, when it actually occurs, depends in any way at all on ways in which such thinking—the activity itself—may be good for, or advantageous to, the person in question, or to anyone at all.

Aristotle may well think that exercising wisdom in excellent theoretical thinking is good for, or advantageous to, the person in question. After all, he takes it that such thinking sustains the perfection of the wise person's best and most god-like capacity. Aristotle might have said that excellent theoretical thinking is superlatively good in part because it sustains and reinforces wisdom. But of course he says no such thing.

As we have seen, the reasons he offers for thinking that contemplative activity is best are, first, that it is the activity of the best thing in us, the theoretical intellect, and, secondly, that it concerns the best among knowable things. Now, since Aristotle thinks that good activities are better than the corresponding capacities,⁹ he is not likely to think that the superlative goodness of contemplative activity derives from the goodness of the potentiality that is the human theoretical intellect. Thus the consideration that contemplative activity is the activity of what is best in us is presumably meant to serve as an indication simply of the fact that it is the best of our activities, rather than as an indication of where the superlative goodness of this activity derives from. Aristotle's second consideration for thinking that contemplative activity is best is that it concerns the best among knowable objects. If he is offering any indication of where he takes the superlative goodness of contemplative activity to derive from, this, I think, must be it. It is, I think, a perfectly satisfactory indication. If one thinks, as Aristotle evidently does, that

⁹ *Metaphysics* Theta 9, 1051^a4–17.

one can account for something's being good by calling attention to its definiteness,¹⁰ then there hardly seems a better way of explaining why contemplative activity is superlatively good: it is the most definite of human activities, and it is made definite by the intelligible objects with which it is concerned.

Much more could be said about, among other things, how Aristotle conceives of the nature of thinking, and about the connections between goodness and definiteness not only in Aristotle but also in Plato, most prominently in the *Philebus*. I hope that it is clear from what I have said that there is fairly good reason for thinking that Aristotle takes the superlative goodness of excellent human contemplation to derive from the superlative definiteness of the intelligible objects that are being actively understood in this contemplative activity. If this is Aristotle's conception, as I think it is, then it is clear that he thinks of excellent theoretical thinking as superlatively good in a way that is quite independent of ways in which such thinking may be advantageous to people. And so it seems to me that Aristotle's discussion of human contemplation in *NE* 10.7—8 employs an impersonal notion of good.

Moreover, the so-called function argument in *NE* 1.7 seems to me at least to suggest an impersonal notion of the human good, a notion of something that is a human good, and indeed the chief human good, in that it is a good of a certain kind that specifically pertains to humans in so far as they are human, rather than a notion of something that is good *in that* it is advantageous to people. As is of course extremely well known, the *ergon* argument relies on a connection between having a characteristic activity and having a chief good, a connection that is supposed to be applicable to various sorts of things, including organs and artisans. That connection is that for things which have a characteristic activity, their good lies in, or depends on, that activity. More precisely, it lies in, or depends on, the excellent performance of that activity. Earlier on in *NE* 1.7, Aristotle told us that the good, or the chief good, of medicine is health (1097^a18—9). So the idea will be that, in favorable circumstances, the expert doctor achieves the medical good, which is health, by attending to the patient in accord with the art of medicine. However, by pursuing the medical good in an excellent way, in a way that is fully under the control and guidance of the art of medicine, the doctor is benefiting not himself, at any rate not primarily, but the patient. Nevertheless, in bringing about

¹⁰ *NE* 9.9, 1170^a19—21: τὸ δὲ ζῆν τῶν καθ' αὐτὸ ἀγαθῶν καὶ ἡδέων· ὠρισμένον γάρ, τὸ δ' ὠρισμένον τῆς τἀγαθοῦ φύσεως.

health in the patient, the doctor is, in the circumstances, achieving the good that pertains to him in so far as he is a doctor. This is the good that medicine aims at *as its good*, for the sake of and with a view to which it does whatever it does. It is the good that pertains to the doctor in so far as he is a doctor not because it is most advantageous to the doctor, or for that matter to doctors in general, but because it is the highest good achievable by the art of medicine.

If the case of the human good is to be relevantly parallel, it must be the case that Aristotle conceives of the human good *not* simply and directly in terms of what is most advantageous to human beings, but at least in important part in terms of the idea of the highest good achievable by human beings. It would seem then that Aristotle should conceive of the human good as something that is good apart from, and independently of, any ways in which it might be advantageous to humans to secure this good, much as the medical good is good apart from, and independently of, any ways in which it might be advantageous to doctors to secure that good. But the notion of a good that is good apart from being advantageous to humans is what I have been calling an impersonal notion of good, and so it seems to me that the ergon argument at least suggests such a notion. If this is right, then it would seem that Aristotle not only needs an impersonal notion of good in spelling out his conception of god. He also seems to make significant use of such a notion of good in his ethics, most conspicuously and prominently in *NE* 10.7–8 in characterizing the life that is happiest without qualification, but perhaps already in the ergon argument in *NE* 1.7.

4. Conclusion

I want to close by briefly addressing a number considerations that may seem to militate in favor both of Richard's local claim about the opening sentence of the *NE*, and of his general claim about Aristotle's conception of the good.

The first of these is that it is of course true that in *NE* 1.2, Aristotle does move from the idea of aiming at some good to the notion of the human good, which, he holds, belongs to political science as its goal (*NE* 1094^b6–7). Elsewhere, moreover, Aristotle thinks of the political community as aiming at what is advantageous with a view to the whole of life (*NE* 8.9, 1160^a11–23). It is also true that he clearly associates good things (agatha) with advantages rather than harms, evidently considering it worth calling

attention to the fact that it does occur that good things bring harm rather than advantage (*NE* 1.3, 1094^b16—9).

But I think that these considerations do not rule out the view that the opening sentence of the *NE* should be heard as expressing the thought that every art and so on aims at some good, where the goodness of the good thing being aimed at may, but need not, be taken to *consist in* some advantage to someone, or to some group of people. One can maintain that view in light of the considerations Richard has offered without having to say that Aristotle is culpable of a careless and illegitimate slide from one idea to an altogether different one. The move from the idea simply of some good (agathon ti) to the idea of the thing in question normally being advantageous rather than harmful is, I think, a natural and legitimate one. It is underwritten by the fact that it is natural to think that if something is good (is an agathon ti) then securing it will be advantageous to one, that one is going to be better off for having secured it, even though it may not be the case that the goodness of the thing in question is exhausted by the ways in which it is, or may be, advantageous.

Furthermore, Aristotle can, I think, consistently hold that the goal of political science is the human good, and that the political community aims at what is advantageous with a view to the whole of life,¹¹ even if his conception of the human good is *not* simply a conception of what is advantageous to people. These two claims may express not exactly the same thought, but two closely related and in fact complementary thoughts. For even if the human good is free-standing in the sense that its goodness does not depend on ways in which it is advantageous to people, it is still going to be the case, one might think (and I do think), that a well-informed and effective practical concern with the human good is going to be of a piece with the co-ordinated pursuit of things which are advantageous to people with a view to the whole of life. In speaking of things that are advantageous with a view to the whole of life, I suggest, Aristotle may well have in mind such things as conduce to the implementation and maintenance of the human good. If so, it will be clear that a properly guided and motivated pursuit of those things that are advantageous with a view to the whole of life is not only compatible with, but in fact requires, and is of a piece with, a proper conception of, and an ongoing commitment to, the human good.

¹¹ *NE* 8.9, 1160^a21—3: οὐ γὰρ τοῦ παρόντος συμφέροντος ἡ πολιτικὴ ἐφίεται, ἀλλ' εἰς ἅπαντα τὸν βίον.

That Aristotle conceives of the relation between the human good and what is sumpheron along those lines is in fact strongly suggested by remarks he makes in book 6 about practical wisdom. He says about the practically wise person that he seems to be able to deliberate well about the things that are good and advantageous for him, not in some partial way, but with a view to good living in general.¹² Being good at deliberation, moreover, is correctness with regard to what is advantageous in relation to the goal, of which practical wisdom is the correct supposition.¹³ In those texts at least, Aristotle seems to use the word sumpheron to convey specifically the idea of conducing to some suitable goal. And so one might well think, on the basis of these texts at any rate,¹⁴ that Aristotle *cannot* reasonably take it that all human goods are good in that they are sumpheron, since that would lead to an infinite regress of goals. In this connection it seems worth pointing out that Aristotle *never* says of happiness, or (for that matter) of good living, that it is sumpheron,¹⁵ although he evidently takes it to be a commonplace that happiness is the chief human good.

Finally, I want to comment briefly on the fact that in his classification, in *NE* 2.3, of factors that pertain to choice and avoidance, Aristotle may seem to use the word

¹² *NE* 6.5, 1140^a25—8: δοκεῖ δὲ φρονίμου εἶναι τὸ δύνασθαι καλῶς βουλευσασθαι περὶ τὰ αὐτῷ ἀγαθὰ καὶ συμφέροντα, οὐ κατὰ μέρος, οἷον ποῖα πρὸς ὑγίειαν, πρὸς ἰσχύν, ἀλλὰ ποῖα πρὸς τὸ εὖ ζῆν ὅλως.

¹³ *NE* 6.9, 1142^b31—3: εἰ δὲ τῶν φρονίμων τὸ εὖ βεβουλευθῆναι, ἡ εὐβουλία εἴη ἂν ὀρθότης ἡ κατὰ τὸ συμφέρον πρὸς τὸ τέλος, οὗ ἡ φρόνησις ἀληθὴς ὑπόληψις ἐστίν.

¹⁴ Note also *EE* 2.10, 1227^a5—13: ἐπεὶ δὲ βουλεύεται ἀεὶ ὁ βουλευόμενος ἕνεκα τινός, καὶ ἐστὶ σκοπὸς τις ἀεὶ τῷ βουλευομένῳ πρὸς ὃν σκοπεῖ τὸ συμφέρον, περὶ μὲν τοῦ τέλους οὐθεὶς βουλεύεται, ἀλλὰ τοῦτ' ἐστὶν ἀρχὴ καὶ ὑπόθεσις, ὥσπερ ἐν ταῖς θεωρητικαῖς ἐπιστήμαις ὑποθέσεις (εἴρηται δὲ περὶ αὐτῶν ἐν μὲν τοῖς ἐν ἀρχῇ βραχέως, ἐν δὲ τοῖς ἀναλυτικοῖς δι' ἀκριβείας), περὶ δὲ τῶν πρὸς τὸ τέλος φερόντων ἡ σκέψις καὶ μετὰ τέχνης καὶ ἄνευ τέχνης πᾶσιν ἐστίν, οἷον εἰ πολεμῶσιν ἢ μὴ πολεμῶσιν τοῦτο βουλευομένοις.

¹⁵ It might be thought that this claim is proved wrong by *Politics* 3.12, 1282^b14—7, where Aristotle apparently says that the political good is justice, and that “justice is the common advantage”. So one might reason that since Aristotle holds that (i) the chief human good is happiness, that (ii) it belongs to political science as its goal, and that (iii) it is justice, which is the common benefit, he is therefore committed to the view that happiness is a certain kind of sumpheron. However, Aristotle does not, of course, think that justice (to *dikaion*) is the chief human good, as he would have to accept if he accepted claims (i) to (iii). Moreover, his standard view in the *Politics* is that the highest good of the city-state is living well and happiness. It seems best, then, to set aside *Politics* 1282^b14—7 as a puzzling anomaly.

sumpheron as a stand-in for the word agathon, and the word blaberon (“harmful”) to take the place of kakon. If Aristotle in general means by agathon simply that the thing in question is advantageous to someone or other, then it is obviously quite unproblematic for him to switch between the words agathon and sumpheron. But it would be a mistake to think that one can make sense of this particular classification only on Richard’s hypothesis, which is that Aristotle means by agathon precisely that the thing in question is advantageous. One thing that is worth noting about the classification is that it seems to have been current in discussions in the Academy, as is suggested by its presence in two passages of the *Topics*.¹⁶ Another thing to note is that Plato uses the word sumpheron in two rather prominent passages in which he specifies the proper task of reason in the framework of the tripartite soul. At *Republic* 4, 442c4—7, Socrates says that a person is wise in virtue of reason ruling in him and making suitable declarations, having knowledge of what is advantageous (sumpheron) to each part of the soul and to the composite of all the three parts together. At *Timaeus* 70e5—71a3, Timaeus says that the created gods placed the appetitive part of the soul as far away from the deliberating part as possible, so as to interfere as little as possible with the best part’s deliberation about what is advantageous (sumpheron) to all parts in common and to each one privately.

Taking these facts together, it seems attractive to think that Aristotle is appealing to a classification among objects of choice which has its roots in Plato’s moral psychology, with the three kinds of things that are taken or avoided corresponding to the three parts of the soul. We can then explain why to sumpheron corresponds to reason in terms of the idea that in the relevant kind of case, a person chooses or opts for something or other *on the basis of deliberation*, having arrived at the view that the thing in question is advantageous with a view to achieving some suitable goal. If this is along the right lines, then Aristotle is appealing to an Academic classification which is interestingly connected with his own moral psychology, perhaps in more ways than one. The sumpheron conceived of as one type of object of choice (haireton), namely as the object of *rational* choice, would seem to be an antecedent of what in Aristotle’s own theory of action shows up as the object of decision, the prohaireton. About this he says at *NE* 3.2 that

¹⁶ At *Topics* I.13, 105^a26—7, the division of what is αἰρετόν into the fine, the pleasant, and the advantageous is offered as an example of a distinction among different ways in which a term may be used. Cf. also *Topics* 3.3, 118^b26—7.

we wish for the end more [than for the things that conduce to it], but we decide on things that conduce to the end. We wish, for instance, to be healthy, but we decide to do things that will make us healthy; and we wish to be happy, and we say so, but we could not appropriately say we decide to be happy, since in general the things we decide on would seem to be things that are up to us. (1111^b26—30)

On the picture that I want to sketch, then, it may be Aristotle's view that the things we decide on, the prohaireseta, are advantageous things (sumpheronata), or things we take to be advantageous, by which I mean that they are, or are taken to be, things that are advantageous to the person in question with a view to the achievement of some suitable goal—for instance, happiness or living well. But this is not of course to say that all human goods can appropriately be referred to as sumpheronata, let alone that all human goods are good in that they are sumpheronata. There may well be human goods which are not objects of decision (prohaireseta), and to which Aristotle would not want to refer as sumpheronata, because he uses, or at any rate tends to use, the term sumpheron to denote things that are advantageous with a view to some suitable goal.

Similarly, and perhaps relatedly, the view that the object of rational choosing or taking is what is sumpheron does not rule out that there are goods, even goods that are humanly achievable, which it would be wrong to refer to as sumpheronata. For the view might be that the objects of rational choosing or taking are things that reason opts for *on the basis of deliberation*, and this may cover neither the whole range of humanly achievable goods nor the whole range of things to which reason is, or can come to be, attached. Thus it seems to me that Aristotle's use of the term sumpheron where one might have expected agathon in his threefold distinction among factors pertaining to choosing or taking can be explained in a plausible and in fact interesting way without assuming that Aristotle thinks that all human goods are sumpheronata, let alone that he thinks that all human goods are good in that they are sumpheronata.

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