

## *Enkratēs Phronimos: On NE VI.5-VII.10*

In book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE), Aristotle catalogues the virtues proper to the rational part of the soul (τὸ λογιστικόν). In the subsequent book, he discusses a character, the weak-willed individual (*akratēs*), who cannot have one of those virtues, namely, practical wisdom (*phronēsis*). The imperfect intellectual condition claimed for the *akratēs* is one of the great puzzles in Aristotle scholarship, commentators being divided both on why Aristotle concedes, to Socrates, the claim that the *akratēs* must be in some way ignorant, and also on the question of what the *akratēs*' ignorance (ἡ ἄγνοια 1147b6<sup>1</sup>) consists in. The question of the intellectual condition of the *akratēs*' counterpart, the strong-willed individual (*enkratēs*), is, by contrast, relatively unexplored.

In a recent paper in this journal, Ursula Coope works to remedy that deficit by exploring the answer to her title question, 'Why does Aristotle Think that Ethical Virtue is Required for Practical Wisdom?' Coope seeks an explanation for a fact which she, her interlocutors, and, I suspect, most Aristotle interpreters<sup>2</sup> take for granted—that Aristotle's *enkratēs* cannot have the virtue of *phronēsis*. I will call this position 'purism'<sup>3</sup>, since its advocates attribute to Aristotle the view that the taint of bad desire disqualifies one from *phronēsis*, and, therefore, happiness. Purism has broad philosophical significance both for the interpretation of Aristotle, and for neo-Aristotelian ethics more generally. McDowell, for instance, takes himself to follow Aristotle in spelling out the requirement that the man of "full-fledged" practical wisdom be "unmoved by competing attractions," and that the *enkratēs* has only "a flawed approximation to practical wisdom." (pp.48-49) Purism does not, however, have the firm textual grounding its widespread acceptance might lead one to expect. As a preliminary, I want to take a brief look at two passages from the *Eudemian Ethics* (EE) that, at least on their face, directly contradict it.

In the context of an argument in EE VIII.1 to the effect that *phronēsis* cannot be misused, Aristotle says: "wisdom in the rational element (ἡ φρόνησις ἢ ἐν τῷ λογιστικῷ) will cause the indiscipline in the irrational element to act temperately—that is what self-control seems to be (ὅπερ δοκεῖ ἢ ἐγκράτεια)." (EE1246b23). I will discuss the passage together with its context in more detail below, but for now I just want to note that

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<sup>1</sup> References not preceded by the name of a work are to the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I adopt the usual practice of referring to the common books by their Nicomachean rather than Eudemian location. Translations of the *Nicomachean Ethics* are from Broadie (2001). Translations of the non-common books of the *Eudemian Ethics* are from Inwood and Woolf. Other translations of Aristotle are from Barnes. Note that authors with one entry in the bibliography are cited by last name only; those with more than one are cited by name and year.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Telfer is a lone voice on the other side, but even she understands Aristotle as an *inadvertent* opponent of purity. She assumes Aristotle is reluctant to admit (p.40) *enkratēs phronimos*, since she thinks that that thesis is in tension with Aristotle's claim that *phronēsis* requires (all) the moral virtues. But she thinks Aristotle's argument for the unity of the virtues in VI.12-13 is too weak to rule out *enkratēs phronimos*. Hence she considers how Aristotle's actual argument might be supplemented (p.47) to achieve his (presumed) goal of excluding the *enkratēs* from virtue. I will argue, to the contrary, that the *phronimos enkratēs* is at the center of Aristotle's conception of *phronēsis*, *enkrateia*, and the unity of the virtues, and the argument of VI.13 works exactly as it should. For more discussion of her paper, see n.49.

<sup>3</sup> "Virtue and vice are...ideal conditions of which there will be very few *pure* instances" (Pakaluk p.234, italics mine)

it puts forward *enkrateia* as an example of how excellence in the rational part of the soul (*phronēsis*) transcends or rectifies a defect in the irrational part. In EE VIII.1, then, Aristotle associates *enkrateia* with a combination of *phronēsis* and the bad appetites it vanquishes.

In another place—EE II.11—Aristotle seems to specifically identify *enkrateia* with the *phronēsis* component of that pair:

Now that we have made these determinations, we may say whether virtue (ἡ ἀρετὴ) makes decision error-free, and the end correct, such that one decides for the sake of what one ought; or whether, as some believe, it makes one's reasoning correct. The latter, however, is what self-control does, since on its own it keeps reasoning uncorrupted (οὐ διαφθείρει διαφθείρει τὸν λόγον). But virtue is different from self-control. We must discuss these issues later, since the explanation given by those who believe that virtue provides correct reasoning (τὸν λόγον ὀρθόν) is that self-control is that sort of thing, and is in the realm of what is praiseworthy. (1227b12-20)

Compare this passage with the better known ‘division of labor’ discussion at the end of NE VI. There, Aristotle assigns ethical virtue the job of correctly discerning the end (which he refers to variously as τὸν σκοπὸν (1144a8), τὸ τέλος (1144a32), and τὰς πρακτικὰς ἀρχὰς 1144a35-36), and gives *phronēsis* responsibility for ensuring the presence of the right reason (ὀρθὸς λόγος 1144b28-29). The argument begun in VI.12 and completed in VI.13 seeks to establish the worthiness of intellectual virtue, both theoretical and practical. In NE VI.12-13, then, as in EE.II.11, Aristotle wants to limit the role of virtue so as to leave room for a distinctively intellectual contribution to right action. In both places he distinguishes an ethical component from an intellectual component, asserts that the ethical component is responsible for the end, and the intellectual component for right reason (ὁ ὀρθὸς λόγος). The difference between the NE VI passages and the EE II.11 passage is, then, just this: in NE the intellectual work is done by *phronēsis*, in EE by *enkrateia*. (Thus when Aristotle says, in the EE passage, that “virtue is different from self-control” he is not drawing a distinction between *enkrateia* and the virtue of moderation (σωφροσύνη) but a distinction between *enkrateia* and ethical virtue, parallel to the one he makes between *phronēsis* and ethical virtue (ἀρετῆς 1145a5) in VI.12). The natural conclusion, from these passages alone, would be that there is some sense in which *enkrateia* can be understood as being synonymous with *phronēsis*.

We may think, however, that we have independent reason to resist this conclusion. The tight connection Aristotle draws in these two passages between *enkrateia* and *phronēsis* might seem to contradict the thesis of the unity of the virtues. It is a hallmark of Aristotelian ethics to insist that the good condition not only of the irrational-but-reasons-responsive (henceforth, “irrational”) part of the soul, but also of the properly rational part (τὸ λογιστικόν) depends on the agent’s success in having the right kinds of feelings. I propose that we defer examination of the unity of the virtues until we take a look at how Aristotle actually describes *enkrateia* and the *enkratēs*; for what I want to show first is that the two passages I cited above are not outliers. What Aristotle has to say throughout NE VII about the condition of the *enkratēs*’ rational part, the state of his non-rational part, and the relation between the two is consonant with these two EE passages. The passages of immediate relevance to the question of *enkratēs phronimos* are those in

which Aristotle characterizes of *enkrateia*, both directly and by contrast with *akrasia*, and those in which he discusses the nature of *phronēsis*. If we limit our attention to those texts, we will see that they give us good reason to think that Aristotle's *enkratēs* can—nay, *must*—possess *phronēsis*. And that is, in turn, reason enough to re-examine the question of whether the suggestion that the presence of bad desires fails to close off the possibility for *phronēsis*—the thesis I will call ‘impurity’—really does contradict either the letter or the spirit of Aristotle's conception of the unity of the virtues.

I will present three argumentative routes to impurity; first, and most directly, I argue that the attribution of *phronēsis* to the *enkratēs* is needed to make sense of Aristotle's praise of both the rational and the irrational part of the *enkratēs*' soul. Next, I will argue that impurity is implied by Aristotle's conception of what goes wrong in *akrasia*; and thirdly I contend that impurity comports with Aristotle's conception of *phronēsis* in book VI.5-9. Though these three routes are not fully independent of one another—my readings of the various passages do, of course, mutually inform one another—they nonetheless should show that impurity has a wide base of support in NE VI and VII<sup>4</sup>. I will end by considering the case for my opponents' view: in my final section (IV), I address the textual evidence for purism (NE VI.12 and VI.13) and the question of how the unity of the virtues might or might not be threatened by the admission of the *enkratēs* to the ranks of the *phronimoi*.

## 1. The argument from *Enkrateia*

### a. The goodness of *enkrateia*

I want to begin by surveying both the scope and the content of Aristotle's praise of the *enkratēs*. Aristotle specifies that *enkrateia* is not merely the capacity to strong-arm one's affective dispositions, but rather, the capacity to do so in the service of what one knows to be the right course of action; which is to say, it presupposes at least some measure of rectitude in the rational part of the soul (1146a18, VII.9). Aristotle points out that not only does the *enkratēs* have the right reason (ὀρθὸς λόγος 1151a29-35), but he is characterized by rational susceptibility more generally: he is, for instance, easily persuadable (1151b10, εὔπειστος). In IX.8 (1164b34-35, a passage I shall discuss and quote at greater length in IV, below) Aristotle gives the *enkratēs* as the example of someone who would *rightly* love himself, because he is ruled by that part of himself that

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<sup>4</sup> My argument is based primarily on text within the common books, but I do support it with reference to passages outside the common books from the NE, the EE and, sparsely, the *Magna Moralia* (MM). Rowe has argued that the word ‘φρόνησις’ *phronēsis* picks out a broader concept in the EE than in the NE. In the NE Aristotle separates out the theoretical and the practical virtues of the rational part, whereas in the non-common books of the EE, claims Rowe, Aristotle uses ‘φρόνησις’ more Platonically, to cover both kinds of virtue. Rowe therefore suggests that NE VI, saturated as it is by the theoretical/practical distinction, does not have a place in the EE. His argument is, however, flawed by his failure to discuss EE VIII.1, which seems (as Natali points out, fn. 32 to ch. 1) to call for precisely the distinction to which Rowe wants to deny a place in the EE. Even if Rowe's case had been conclusive, I would still avail myself of evidence outside the common books from the EE, since Aristotle's ethical works do not (as I will argue) differ on the question of purity. This paper does not rely on any assumptions about the location of the common books, but, given the strong ties it exposes between books VI and VII, it does suggest that those two books, at least, ought to share a location.

the good man loves most, namely, his reason. All this would suggest that *enkrateia* is some form of rational excellence.

Aristotle's many descriptions of *enkrateia* support characterizing it as an excellence. In EE1223b12, he straightforwardly says that *enkrateia* is a virtue: ἡ γὰρ ἐγκράτεια ἀρετὴ. In many other places, he strongly associates *enkrateia* with virtue or goodness: he describes *enkrateia*, at EE 1227b19 and NE1145b9, as one of the things we praise (τῶν ἐπαινετῶν); he calls its proper opposite, *akrasia*, a form of vice (NE1148a3, EE1223b31, κακία τις). He describes *enkrateia* as excellent, using forms of 'σπουδαῖος' at 1145b8, 1146a15 (by implication), 1151a27, 1151b28) in comparison with *akrasia*, which he describes as a bad condition leading one to do bad things (using forms of 'φάυλος' at 1145b10, 12, 1151a28, 1151b29). At NE VII.9 he identifies an insensate variant of *akrasia* so as to be able to call *enkrateia* a mean between two extremes (ὁ [τοιούτος] τούτου καὶ τοῦ ἀκρατοῦς μέσος ὁ ἐγκρατῆς, 1151b24-25), evidently desiring to model *enkrateia* after his definition of virtue as a mean. And *enkrateia* does, indeed, seem to fit Aristotle's definition of virtue: it is an excellent (σπουδαῖα) and prohairesis<sup>5</sup> mean state which leads to right action (1151a35-1152a1).

He deploys the goodness of *enkrateia* as a starting point in much the way that he does with the other virtues, arguing at 1146a14-16 treating the fact that an assumption would result in the conclusion that *enkrateia* is not always good (οὐ πᾶσα σπουδαία), or the conclusion that it is not something lofty (οὐθὲν σεμνόν), or the conclusion that it is not great thing (οὐδὲν μέγα) as a reduction to absurdity of the assumptions in question. Likewise at 1151b28, he argues from the premise that *enkrateia* is good (σπουδαῖον). Like the ethical virtues of NE II-IV, *enkrateia* is marked off as difficult and extraordinary: he distinguishes it from mere resistance to pain (καρτερία) on the grounds that *enkrateia* is not mere endurance but something akin to *victory* (τοῦ νικᾶν, 1150a36). He describes the requirements of *enkrateia* as "going beyond the dispositions of the majority of people," since the *enkratēs* "has more capacity than most for sticking to things." (1152a25-28)<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps even more striking than the fact that praise for the *enkratēs* fills Aristotle's discussion of him in VII.1-10, is that such praise is untempered by blame. Commentators are quick to interpret *enkrateia* as a second best, but Aristotle himself says nothing to that effect. Broadie, for instance, remarks that while we might have expected Aristotle, in his focused discussion of the *enkratēs* at VII.9, to explain "through a contrast with virtue proper that *enkrateia* is good only in a qualified way," "this is not what Aristotle does." (2010, p.158) Broadie is surprised not to find, in VII.9, Aristotle qualifying the goodness of *enkrateia*. Her phrasing suggests that she assumes he does so elsewhere, for she

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<sup>5</sup> Aristotle does, at EE III.7, discuss mean states that are not virtues (see esp. 1234a24-25). He explains that the states in question (friendliness, shame, righteous indignation, dignity, etc.) are not virtues because they are merely states of feelings and not dispositions to *choose*. Since *enkrateia* is a disposition to choose (1151a29-b4), it cannot be disqualified from virtue on these grounds.

<sup>6</sup> Whereas the *akratēs* has less. This conflicts with the prevailing assumption in the literature which is that (given the difficulty of 'pure virtue') *enkrateia* and *akrasia* are where ordinary people lie (see, e.g. Pakaluk p.235). Aristotle is clear that *enkrateia* rises above the ordinary man and the *enkratēs* falls below him. For further discussion of this passage, see 2b.

speaks of a contrast between “*enkrateia*” and “virtue proper.” But Aristotle never demotes *enkrateia* by comparison with moderation (σωφροσύνη), despite the fact that he both creates occasions for and seems to be rather given to making just such hierarchical ethical assessments. In VII.1, for instance, Aristotle makes a number of comparative demotions/promotions among the four men under discussion: he demotes vice relative to brutishness (1150a1-2); *akrasia* relative to *enkrateia* (1150a9-14); moderation relative to divine virtue (1145a26), and self-indulgence (ἀκολασία) relative to *akrasia* (1150b29-32; 1152a4-6). The last comparison is especially interesting since one might have thought that *akrasia* stands to self-indulgence as *enkrateia* stands to moderation. But even in passages where he explicitly compares *enkrateia* and moderation, Aristotle never says that *enkrateia* is the worse of the two states. Reeve observes (n. 39), that Aristotle addresses the curability of the *akratēs* and the self-indulgent man, but never that of the *enkratēs*. If I am right, the reason is that there is nothing for him to be cured of; his condition is a *good* (σπουδαία) one.

Before closing this section, I want to discuss two passages which might be taken to conflict with my claim that Aristotle does not criticize the *enkratēs*. In VII.2, 1146a9-15 and VII.9, 1151b34-1152a3, Aristotle points out that the *enkratēs*, by contrast with the moderate man, is distinguished by having of strong and bad desires (ἐν τῷ ἐπιθυμίας ἔχειν ἰσχυρὰς καὶ φαύλας 1146a9-10), and a tendency to feel pleasure contrary to the prescription (ἡδεσθαι παρὰ τὸν λόγον 1152a2-3). Other things being equal, of course, it is better not to feel bad pleasures, but Aristotle makes clear in the VII.2 passage that other things are not equal: it is *impressive* to overcome strong and bad pleasures (1146a9), whereas there is nothing great about overcoming weak ones<sup>7</sup>. The reason why he makes reference to strong and bad desires in these passages is to pick out the characteristic ‘strength’ of the *enkratēs*. Strong, bad desires cut both ways, since they are intrinsically bad, but also give the *enkratēs* a unique occasion to achieve what Aristotle goes so far as to call *victory* over his desires (τοῦ νικᾶν, 1150a36)<sup>8</sup>. Aristotle doesn’t tell us which cut is deeper. (Compare the fact that war, while intrinsically inferior to peace as a political state, also creates unique opportunities for courage.) He uses the *enkratēs*’ strong, bad desires not to rank the *enkratēs* and the moderate man, but to contend, against those who would identify them (1145b14), that they do indeed differ.

<sup>7</sup> cf. MM 2.6.7 1.5-6: οὐ γὰρ ἂν εἴποις ἐγκρατῆ, ὅστις μετρίων ἐπιθυμιῶν κρατεῖ.

<sup>8</sup> My reading of this passage dictates how I would respond to those who would raise I.13, 1102b26-28, as evidence of Aristotle blaming the *enkratēs*. Aristotle says of the irrational but reasons-responsive part of this soul, “this part too seems to participate in reason, as we have said: at any rate, in the self-controlled person it is obedient to (πειθαρχεῖ) reason, and in the moderate and courageous person it is presumably still readier (εὐηκοώτερόν) to listen; for in him it always chimes in with (ὁμοφωνεῖ) reason.” Note that (a) the comparison is strictly between the irrational part of the *enkratēs*’ soul and the irrational part of the moderate or brave man’s soul, not the men as wholes. (b) Even that comparison is couched not in directly evaluative language, but in terms of tractability or cooperativeness—for Aristotle’s point, here, is merely to use the *akratēs* and *enkratēs* as illustrations of the difference between the two parts of the soul. That difference is invisible in the courageous or moderate man, because his two parts are as one (ὁμοφωνεῖ). We should expect that Aristotle, who thinks that the rational part not only guides but also is substantively guided by the irrational part, will have more to say about what it is for the irrational part of the soul to be in a good condition than the fact of its obedience to the dictates of the other part. In the next section, I will examine in more detail why the *irrational part* of the *enkratēs*’ soul can be described as being in a good condition.

The fact that Aristotle always praises and never blames the *enkratēs* constitutes my initial evidence for impurity. For it is hard to see how Aristotle could describe a character-state incompatible with happiness as an excellent one. I will now sharpen this point by focusing on a particularly surprising feature of Aristotle’s praise of the *enkratēs*: he directs some of it specifically at the *irrational* part of the *enkratēs*’ soul.

### b. *Enkrateia* as Top-Down Moderation

Aristotle praises not only the reason but also, independently, the *affective condition* (ἡθικὴ ἔξις<sup>9</sup>)—which is to say the condition of the irrational part of the soul—of the *enkratēs*. Aristotle defines the *enkratēs* and the *akratēs* with reference to the class of ordinary (i.e. non bestial) appetitive desires: of those desires, the *enkratēs* resists ones the *akratēs* yields to. It follows that they must both *have* the desires in question. And yet Aristotle posits a substantial difference between the affective condition of the *akratēs* and that of the *enkratēs*, calling the one bad and the other good (1145b8-10, 1151a27-28, 1151b28-30). Given that they desire the same kinds of things, why is the *enkratēs* in a better position, affectively speaking, than the *akratēs*? Is it, perhaps, that the *enkratēs*’ desires are *weaker*? Aristotle denies this:

“As for pleasures and pains through touch and taste, and appetite and avoidance in relation to these (all of which we have marked off before as the sphere of self-indulgence and moderation), one can be in a condition such as to give in to those that most people are able to overcome; and one can also overcome even those that most people are too weak not to give in to. Of these types, the ones relating to pleasures are un-self-controlled and self-controlled respectively, while those relating to pains are soft and resistant; the disposition belonging to most people is in between these, even if most people do incline towards the worse ones.” (1150a10-17)

“For it is not surprising if someone gives in to strong or excessive pleasures or pains, but rather something one tends to feel sympathy for, if he is overcome despite struggling against them, like Theodectes’ Philoctetes, stricken by snake-bite, or Cercyon in Carcinus’ *Alope*, or like people trying to hold back their laughter but letting it all out in a splutter, as happened to Xenophantus; but it *is* surprising if someone is overcome by pleasures or pains that most people can withstand, and is unable to struggle against *these*...” (1150b7-14)

These passages show that the *enkratēs* will be such as to triumph even over *strong* appetitive desires; and the *akratēs* such as to yield even to weak ones<sup>10</sup>. The explanation for why the *akratēs* yields to what the *enkratēs* masters is not, therefore, that the latter

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<sup>9</sup> Aristotle never uses exactly this phrase in this context, but he does the equivalent by pairing ‘ἔξις’ with an evaluative adjective (σπουδαῖος, φαύλος), see passages cited in previous section, as well as those cited immediately below. For instance, at 1150a15-16 “ἔξις ...χείρους” describes the ordinary man, but also supplies a reference frame for understanding the *akratēs* below him, and the *enkratēs* above him.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Strength’ of desire is always relative, but there is a question, relative to what? Is the desire which the *enkratēs* overcomes strong in his soul—that is, relative to *his* other desires, or is it the kind of desire that is (typically) strong, strong in the soul of the ordinary man? I think Aristotle would answer, ‘both.’ If it were not strong *in* the soul of the *enkratēs*, the language of victory, triumph and conquest that is central to Aristotle’s descriptions of *enkrateia* would make no sense. But desires that are, in a given individual, outside the norm Aristotle points to by reference to the ‘ordinary man’ also obviate praise or blame for the (un)successful struggle against them. Thus people who have abnormal kinds or strengths of desires (desires for eating human flesh or having sex with men, VII.5, the congenital ‘softness’ of women or Scythian kings, VII.8) do not count as akratic/enkratic ἀπλῶς.

had a weaker desire<sup>11</sup>. These passages suggest that, strictly speaking, it is a requirement on *enkrateia* that one be subject to *strong* bad desires, and a requirement on ordinariness that one be subject to desires of (at least) an average strength. *Akrasia* is the only condition of the three that someone could still qualify for with weak appetitive desires. But Aristotle's point here is not that *akraties* are typically unafflicted by strong appetites, though technically one could be; he is, rather, denying that the mere presence of (weak or strong) bad desire in someone can tell us whether the person is ordinary, akratic or enkratic. The *akratēs*, *enkratēs* and ordinary man are not to be distinguished with reference to the kinds or strengths of desires to which they are subject.

John Cooper expresses the standard view of ethical virtue when he describes it as 'a condition belonging exclusively to the desires themselves' (Cooper 1975, p.62). This characterization may work for the virtues detailed in NE II-IV<sup>12</sup>, but it cannot capture all of what Aristotle wants to fit under the topic of 'ἡθικὴ εἴξις' ('affective condition'). For the *akratēs* and the *enkratēs* differ in the goodness of their affective condition without differing in the kinds or strengths of desires to which they are subject. How can the same set of desires count as good in the *enkratēs*, bad in the *akratēs*?

Consider an analogy. We sometimes ascribe 'hospitality' to the environment of a living creature. The hospitality of some region of space supervenes entirely on the physical features of it such as climate, terrain, presence of flora and fauna, etc. On the other hand, cactuses and sea lions will find different environments hospitable. In this way, hospitality is also *relational*, and is more properly ascribed to an animal-environment pair than to an environment alone: we say, X is a hospitable environment *for* Y. Likewise, some excellent states of soul are excellences of the whole, rather than a part.

The possession of desires strong enough to drive an ordinary person to act badly nonetheless counts as 'being in a good condition' when present in the enkratic who is in a position to master them. Desires weak enough to be easily resisted by most of us count as a bad condition for the *akratēs*, who yields to them. In describing someone as ethically virtuous, Aristotle is indeed pointing to that person's desires. But the question of what makes a person's desires good, is, at least in part, a relational one: a set of desires

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<sup>11</sup> Contra Lorenz, who asserts without textual citation that enkratics have "stronger rational desires and somewhat less intense appetites" than akratics, p.188. The second half of this statement cannot be squared with the passages I quote here, or with VII.2, 1146a9-15 and VII.9, 1151b34-1152a3, MM 2.6.7 l.5-6, quoted above. As for rational desires, Aristotle praises the *prohairesis* of the *akratēs*, his grasp of the end, thereby praising him in respect of rational desire. Even Lorenz does not think that such a difference in rational desire would *suffice* to explain the difference between *enkratēs* and *akratēs*—he points to "an additional point of difference between self-control and its lack," namely "that the self-controlled person affects and influences the non-rational part of his or her soul in a way that the uncontrolled character does not." I will argue in support of this line of thought in Lorenz, by specifying the *enkratēs*' strength as a *phronetic* one. Since we have no textual evidence for the presence of stronger rational desires in the enkratic, but there *is* evidence for the difference in phronetic desire-management, explanatory parsimony calls for us to rest the difference on those grounds.

<sup>12</sup> I do not include NE V because the particular virtue of justice, as embodied in the judge (1132a7), legislator (1137b21), or distributor of goods (1134a2, 1136b25-26), seems to me to involve an intellectual contribution. It does, after all, require one to apply knowledge of proportion (V.4-5).

can be a good affective condition *for* A, but a bad one for B. What difference between A and B could explain why desires good for the one are bad for the other? In asking this question, we seek the differentia that is to explain the ‘strength’ of the *akratēs* or the ‘weakness’ of the *enkratēs*. I believe the answer to is to be found in the pair of passages from the EE that I cited at the opening of this paper:

The first was from EE VIII.1, ‘wisdom (*phronēsis*) in the rational part (ἐν τῷ λογιστικῷ) makes the intemperance in the irrational part act temperately. And this is *enkrateia*. EE1246b23’. Let us look at it in context; I have divided the long argument into four sections:

- “(1) And it [i.e., wisdom] is certainly not virtue either, since it is using virtue; the virtue of the ruling element makes use of the virtue of the ruled element. So what is it?  
(2) Or is it the way that lack of self-control is said to be a vice of the irrational element in the soul, and also the uncontrolled man is said to be a kind of undisciplined man who retains his insight? But assuming that if his appetite is powerful (ἂν ισχυρὰ ἢ ἡ ἐπιθυμία) it will produce distortion and the uncontrolled man's wisdom will reason perversely, then it is clear that if there is actually virtue in this element and ignorance in his reason, in this case they will reverse their functions — so that it will be possible to use justice unjustly and badly and to use wisdom unwisely, so that the opposite results will also occur. (ἕτεροι μεταποιῦνται. ὥστε ἔσται δικαιοσύνη τὸ δικαίως χρῆσθαι καὶ κακῶς καὶ φρονήσει ἀφρόνως· ὥστε καὶ τάναντία)  
(3) For it would be strange if on the one hand, when wickedness gets into the irrational element it should pervert the virtue in the calculative element and make it ignorant, but on the other hand when there is ignorance in it, the virtue in the irrational element should not pervert this ignorance and cause it to make wise and appropriate judgments. (And conversely, wisdom in the rational element will use the indiscipline in the irrational element to act temperately — that is what self-control seems to be.) So it will be possible to act wisely on the basis of ignorance. These results are strange, especially the notion that one can behave with wisdom the basis of ignorance;  
(4) for we do not see this in any of the other forms of knowledge—just as indiscipline perverts medical or grammatical knowledge but if it is the opposite it does not pervert ignorance, because there is no excess present in it (τὸ μὴ ἐνεῖναι τὴν ὑπεροχὴν). (1246b12-30)<sup>13</sup>

In (1), Aristotle inquires as to the nature of *phronēsis*, which he wishes to understand as the ruling part of the soul and the one that “makes use” of the virtue of the irrational part.

In (2) He imagines an objector who rejects this characterization of *phronēsis*. This objector thinks that it is possible (a) for *phronēsis* to be (mis-)used or ‘turned’<sup>14</sup> by vice

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<sup>13</sup> A number of textual uncertainties plague this passage, but, as Woods observes (p.161), they are not directly relevant to the argument—nor are they relevant to my disagreement with him as to how we ought to construe the argument, see fn. 16. The largest problem is at 1246b15-16, where the manuscript is missing some letters. I follow Inwood and Woolf, Woods, and the OCT text (ἢ τοῦ ἀκρατοῦς φρόνησις) over Jackson's simpler emendation (ἢ ἔστι). Inwood and Woolf, whose translation I offer here, follow the OCT closely, other than at b18 and b21, where they reject emendations accepted by the editors of the OCT and translate, instead, the manuscript text. The sentence crucial for my interpretation, 1246b23-25, is free of textual problems.

<sup>14</sup>Forms of the verb στρέφειν and its noun στροφή run through the passage, picking out a species of the more general concept of ‘use’ (χρηῖσθαι), namely the species in which the user directs the used away from the end to which the used would otherwise tend (see the opening of VIII.1, 1246a28-30). στρέφειν connotes misdirection, perversion or twisting, though such ‘twisting’ can be a good thing overall, as in the case of *enkrateia*, where the rational part ‘twists’ intemperance away from intemperate actions towards temperate ones.



in the irrational part—for this is how the objector understands the phenomenon of *akrasia*—and (b) for ethical virtue to be used by something other than *phronēsis*, namely ignorance. Thus the objector thinks that it is possible to ‘use wisdom foolishly’, as in (a), and ‘justice badly’, as in (b). This objector denies both that *phronēsis* must rule, and that ethical virtue must be ruled by it.

In (3) Aristotle argues against this position as follows: if the objector is right that the irrational can ‘turn’ the rational (as in (a)), and given the evident fact that virtue can turn vice—for we see this in *enkrateia*—we would get the ridiculous conclusion of wise action arising out of ignorance. That is, since *enkrateia* shows that virtue can turn vice, if we also accepted, as the objector wishes us to, that the irrational can turn the rational, we would have to allow that virtue in the irrational can turn vice in the rational.

But this is absurd, for a reason Aristotle gives in (4): you cannot get wise action out of ignorance, because you cannot get anything out of ignorance. Virtue and vice can ‘turn’ knowledge but they cannot turn *ignorance*, because “there is no excess present in it” (τὸ μὴ ἐνεῖναι τὴν ὑπεροχὴν, 19). Ignorance is an absence, rather than a presence, and therefore does not lend itself to instrumentalization. Thus<sup>15</sup> the conception of *akrasia* on

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<sup>15</sup> My interpretation of what I have labeled (2) and (3) differs in its details from that offered by Woods in his commentary (p.162), who is himself following Jackson. We agree on the only point important for my argument against purism, namely, that Aristotle is asserting in his own name (and not merely dialectically) the characterization of *enkrateia* offered here. There are four states under discussion (In my parenthetical schematizations of each state, I’ve abbreviated rational as R, irrational as I, virtue as + and vice as -):  
 (A) *akrasia*, as understood by the objector—which is to say, *akrasia* understood as a condition in which vice in the irrational turns virtue in the rational (I- turns R+).  
 (E) *enkrateia*, as the condition in which virtue in the rational turns vice in the irrational (R+ turns I-)  
 (C') the unnamed condition in which ignorance in the rational turns virtue in the irrational, described by Aristotle as “using justice unjustly.” (R- turns I+)  
 (C) the unnamed (and ‘absurd’) condition in which virtue in the irrational turns ignorance in the rational. (I+ turns R-)  
 Aristotle is, on all accounts, arguing that (C) follows from (A), and that (C) is absurd and so (A) is wrong. Jackson and Woods understand Aristotle to argue, starting only from (A), for the necessity of accepting all three other states. They rest Aristotle’s argument on what one might call a principle of opposition—if a state is possible, then its opposite is also possible. Three senses of ‘opposite’ are in play here: one state is the opposite of another if (opp-1) “I” and “R” reverse positions in respect of turning/being turned; or if (opp-2) “+” and “-” reverse positions in respect of being attached to the irrational/rational; or if (opp-3) both of the previous forms of opposition obtain. So (C') follows from (A), because it is an opp-3 of (A), and (E) follows from (A), because it is an opp-1 of (A), and (C) follows from (C'), because it is an opp-1 of (A). The problem with this interpretation is that it is not clear why the same line of argument could not be applied to Aristotle’s position: beginning from his own acceptance of (E), one could move to its opp-1, (A), and thereby to its opp-3, (C') and from there to its opp-1, (C). An interpretation of this argument must find some disanalogy between where Aristotle stands in accepting (E) and where the interlocutor stands in accepting (A). The answer, as I understand it, is that the two *share* an acceptance of (E). Both Aristotle and his interlocutor are committed to allowing that virtue can turn vice, and that the rational can turn the irrational—for this happens in (E), but Aristotle is in a position to insist that only those turnings are possible, whereas the interlocutor’s conception of *akrasia* forces him to also allow that the irrational can turn the rational and that vice can turn virtue. (A) and (C')—unlike Jackson and Woods, I understand (C') as simply an independent state claimed possible by the objector as part of his rejection of the Aristotelian picture—alone wouldn’t be enough to establish that virtue could ever turn vice. Aristotle needs to secure his interlocutor’s agreement to (E) in order to force that interlocutor to the absurd conclusion of (C). The central difference between my interpretation and that of Jackson/Woods is that I understand Aristotle’s

the basis of which the objector resisted Aristotle's conception of *phronēsis* is mistaken: the *akratēs* cannot have *phronēsis*<sup>16</sup>

Aristotle's argument relies on holding fixed as a shared assumption between himself and his interlocutor that *enkrateia* does in fact consist in the rational 'turning' the irrational. *Phronēsis*, concludes Aristotle, really is, as Socrates thinks, the strongest thing in the soul. He has argued for that conclusion by demonstrating that it can 'turn' but it cannot 'be turned.' Why does Aristotle follow up this discussion of the strength of wisdom by drawing, as its conclusion, the unity of the virtues: "So it is clear that human wisdom is accompanied by having the irrational element in a good condition (ἀμα φρόνιμοι καὶ ἀγαθαὶ ἐκεῖναι αἱ ἄλλου ἕξεις)"? Aristotle has not argued that one cannot have wisdom without antecedently having the irrational element in a good condition—in fact, allowing wisdom to be combined with bad desires was crucial to his argument against the objector. What that argument would suggest is not that wisdom presupposes a good ethical condition, but rather that wisdom can *produce* one, by 'turning' the bad irrational.

The idea that *phronēsis* can serve a rectificatory function and thereby *secure* unity of virtue receives support from the second EE passage (II.11) I cited in my introduction. There, Aristotle gives to *enkrateia* the job he elsewhere offers to wisdom, that of providing the right reason (ὀρθὸς λόγος):

"Now that we have made these determinations, we may say whether virtue (ἡ ἀρετὴ) makes decision error-free, and the end correct, such that one decides for the sake of what one ought; or whether, as some believe, it makes one's reasoning correct. The latter, however, is what self-control does, since on its own it keeps reasoning uncorrupted (οὐ διαφθείρει διαφθείρει τὸν λόγον)." (1227b12-16)

We noted, upon first considering this passage, that comparison with a similar discussion in VI.13 reveals that Aristotle is giving to *enkrateia* the job of *phronēsis*. Comparison with VI.5 (1140b11-13) reveals that he is also identifying *enkrateia* with another virtue, that of moderation. In VI.5, Aristotle says that moderation preserves *phronēsis* from destruction, in EE II. 11, *enkrateia* is what preserves the right reason (ὀρθὸς λόγος, which, recall, he identifies with *phronēsis* at VI.13, 1144b25-26).

How can Aristotle identify of *enkrateia* with *both* moderation and *phronēsis*? *Enkrateia* represents a kind of rationally produced moderation. It represents another way, besides moderation, in which one can be in a good condition with respect to appetitive pleasure. *Enkrateia* would then be a variant—what we might call a 'top-down' variant—of moderation. 'Bottom-up' moderation, as Aristotle described it in III.12, involves having one's appetites take a measured form of their own accord. The phrase he uses for the 'rationality' of the moderate man's appetites is *κατὰ τὸν λόγον* (1119b14-15), which is

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language of opposition (e.g. ὥστε καὶ τάναντία) to pick out not premises but conclusions: that is, I understand Aristotle not to be assuming that the interlocutor is committed to allowing for opposites, but to show him that he must allow for certain (absurd) opposites, because they represent combinations he has already allowed.

<sup>16</sup> Presumably, the reason for Aristotle's claim in NE VI.12 (cf. VII.10, 1152a10) that the *akratēs* can have cleverness (δεινότητα, 1144b2), is that cleverness contrasts with wisdom in this respect. It is a condition that can be, if not turned, then straightforwardly used to bad ends.

also the phrase he uses in VI.13 to pick out natural virtue. The moderate person does not need to use the rational principle in order to regulate his desires, because they already accord with it. *Enkrateia* and moderation are, then, two different ways—one top-down, one bottom-up—of arriving at a good ethical condition with respect to appetitive desire and its attendant pleasure and pains. The *akratēs*, despite desiring the same sorts of things as the *enkratēs*, has a bad ἠθικὴ ἕξις because his desires are *not* subject to phronetic regulation. *Enkrateia* is not then, strictly speaking, an ethical virtue—for Cooper is right that these belong to the irrational part of the soul proper. *Enkrateia* is a good condition of the soul as *whole*, with reference to which the ethical part, too, can be called good.

### c. Response to an objection

Without opening a discussion of the case for purity—I have postponed that until section IV—I want to raise an important objection<sup>17</sup> to the account I have just presented. Responding to this objection will help me clarify the scope of the account of rectificatory *phronēsis* I have just presented. Aristotle seems, in books II-V, to offer us a picture of human happiness which allots a central place to the well-functioning of the affective, passionate part of the soul. Being in the right with respect to one’s feelings is, he tells us, part of what it is to live well. In book VI, he sums up the points made in the earlier books by offering to virtue the job of providing the end or the goal at which our reasoning aims. The worry is that if *phronēsis* can do the job allocated to ethical virtue, the force of Aristotle’s insistence on right-feeling seems to dissipate. One can as well feel wrongly and make up the difference by reasoning well. If *reason* can give you the end, good character—understood now in Cooper’s sense as the goodness proper to the irrational part of the soul—is unnecessary, ethical virtue is superfluous, and much of the first half of the NE is rendered otiose.

My answer to this objection is to insist that we carefully restrict the point about rectification to moderation, with the recognition that it is not like the other virtues. That much should already be evident from the existence of a “middle ground”—as purists would describe both *enkrateia* and *akrasia*—unparalleled among the other virtues. If someone lacking moderation can have the end, what follows is not that reason provides the end—the objector is right to insist that it cannot—but rather that moderation doesn’t. Moderation is not the part of virtue that furnishes us with the end or the target with reference to which we reason. Rather, its function is, as Aristotle says in VI.5 (1140b12-20), *preservative*: he tells us that moderation ‘saves’ *phronēsis* by preserving both starting point (ἀρχή, 18) from which we reason and the judgments with which we reason (τὰς περὶ τὸ πρακτὸν [ὑπολήψεις], 15-16). This is not an unintuitive picture of moderation: instead of giving you goals or principles of reasoning, it insulates your goals and reasoning from the distractions provided by physical pleasures or pains (14,17). Let me adduce two more passages in support of this interpretation.

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<sup>17</sup> Thanks to Gabriel Lear for pressing this point.

In VII.8, Aristotle has occasion to return to the point made in VI.5. In the service of clarifying his picture of *akrasia* and *enkrateia*, he distinguishes between *the virtue* that preserves, namely moderation, and *virtue as a whole* that provides the content of the end:

For excellence and badness respectively keep healthy, and corrupt, the fundamental starting point, (ἡ γὰρ ἀρετὴ καὶ μοχθηρία τὴν ἀρχὴν ἢ μὲν φθείρει ἢ δὲ σώζει) and in action this is that for the sake of which, just as in mathematical arguments the initial posits are starting points. Neither in that case, then, does reasoning teach us the starting points, nor does it in the present one; instead, it is excellence, innate or resulting from habit-training, that gives us correct judgment about the starting point. (ἀλλ' ἀρετὴ ἢ φυσικὴ ἢ ἐθιστὴ τοῦ ὀρθοδοξεῖν περὶ τὴν ἀρχήν). Such a person, then, is moderate, and his contrary is self-indulgent. (1151a15-20)

“ἡ γὰρ ἀρετὴ,” *the virtue*, refers to moderation specifically. This is clear both from the fact that he has earlier spoken of moderation as preserving the end, and from the final line of this passage, in which Aristotle picks out the person with that virtue as the moderate man. Moderation preserves the first principle, whereas ethical or natural virtue considered as a whole—here written without the article, ἀρετὴ ἢ φυσικὴ ἢ ἐθιστὴ—gives the end the correct content (τοῦ ὀρθοδοξεῖν περὶ τὴν ἀρχήν) that it is the job of moderation to preserve<sup>18</sup>.

For more evidence that Aristotle understands *enkrateia* as evidence of the possibility of a separation between one's appetites and the rest of one's character, consider III.2, 1111b13-16: “Again, the incontinent man acts with appetite, but not with choice; while the continent man on the contrary acts with choice, but not with appetite. Again, appetite is contrary to choice, but not appetite to appetite.” Given that, as Aristotle has just observed, choice reflects character (1111b5-6, see also 1112a1-2) the fact that choice can be *opposed to appetite* indicates that character can be opposed to appetite.

The objector I am imagining is right to insist upon the importance of right-feeling to ethical and intellectual virtue. But such right feeling need not be a matter of our lowest passions, appetitive pleasures, but could refer specifically to our higher ones, emotions such as anger, fear, respect, pride, love. Even wittiness is a phenomenon of considerable psychological depth in comparison with the ability to be well disposed with respect to physical pleasure. I cannot enter, here, into the deep exegetical and philosophical question of how being rightly disposed in respect of anger, etc. could constitute a grasp of the end<sup>19</sup>; but, supposing that it does, we needn't insist that such a grasp is also informed

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<sup>18</sup> Sorabji (p.212) notes this preservative function as a function of virtue in general. But the passages he cites as evidence for the preservative function (1140b11-20, 1151a15-16, EE 1227b12-19) attach the job of preservation either to moderation or to *enkrateia*, which, as I argue, is a phronetic form of moderation. He also cites 1144a34-b1, which does refer to virtue generally, but doesn't mention preservation.

<sup>19</sup> More specifically, I aim to steer clear of two debates about how intellect is involved in possession of the end. The first concerns what 'having the end' means. Is it, as the standard view would have it, a matter of having a global vision of what a good human life entails? Brodie, who calls this suggestion the 'grand-end view,' demurs, arguing instead that the 'end' should be understood as relativized to some specific project or other. (For a recent defense of the 'grand-end' view in connection with *phronēsis* in particular, see Inglis 2103.) The second controversy I aim to sidestep is that over whether Aristotle has a more Humean or a more Kantian understanding of the relative priority, for right action, of character-virtue and *phronēsis*. For a recent forays into these issues, see Moss and Grönroos. I will, eventually (in part III), give a more substantive characterization of *phronēsis* as that faculty by which we resist living moment-to-

by a weakness for sweets, or even for one's neighbor's spouse. Aristotle takes a lot of care in limiting the sphere of *akrasia* and *enkrateia*, throughout book VII, to that of physical pleasure alone. If I am right, that is because he is alive to the need to restrict the scope of top-down rectification.

In sum, moderation represents a kind of self-preservation of the rectitude of one's affective condition (ἠθικὴ ἔξις); in *enkrateia*, it is guarded from without, by reason. This is why moderation is a virtue of the irrational part, whereas *enkrateia* is a virtue of the whole. In neither case, however, would there be anything worth preserving if the person were not affectively well-disposed in all the ways that really count. For those forms of affective habituation, there is no substitute.

This concludes my argument that Aristotle's conception of *enkrateia* presupposes attributing *phronēsis* to the *enkratēs*. I will now argue to the same conclusion on the basis of Aristotle's conception of *akrasia*.

## 2. The Argument From *Akrasia*

### a. The need to argue against *akratēs phronimos*

Aristotle did not take it as obvious that the *akratēs* lacks *phronēsis*. This much is clear from the EE VIII.1 argument, which, as we saw, presents that position as a live danger to the conception of *phronēsis* Aristotle wishes to advance. In his presentation of *endoxa* in NE VII.1, he points out that people are divided over whether *akratēs* can be *phronimoi* (1145b18-19), and he does not settle the dispute himself until the end of his discussion of *akrasia*, in chapter 10 (1152a6-7). It is not widely appreciated<sup>20</sup> that a refutation of the possibility of *akratēs phronimos* forms the motivational backdrop for some of the argumentation within NE VII. This may be because, when Aristotle, in VII.2, presents the *aporia* associated with the *endoxa* he had described at 1145b18-19, he clearly states his own conclusion that the *akratēs* cannot be *phronimos* (1145b17). But such rhetoric is consonant with his procedure in VII.2, where he often<sup>21</sup> suggests the answer he will argue for while stating the *aporia*. Moreover, in dismissing *akratēs phronimos* in VII.2, Aristotle gives multiple grounds, two of which (that the *phronimos* is 'πρακτικός', that he possesses the other excellences) correspond to reasons he will eventually land on, and one of which (that the *phronimos* cannot do the worst things (τὰ φαυλότατα), does not, since it entails conflating the *akratēs* with the self-indulgent man. Thus VII.2 cannot

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moment. While I might seem to be playing in to the hands of the Humean by offering *phronēsis* work that is *not* the work of divining the end, I do not take myself to foreclose the possibility that some rational faculty (nous?), or practical rationality considered generally, bears this responsibility. My topic in III is the contribution proper to *phronēsis*, as distinct from the other practically-rational virtues (εὐβουλία, νοῦς, γνώμη, εὐσυνεσία), rather than the role of intellect in human life generally.

<sup>20</sup> Hardie (p.271), who understands the VII.2 passage as containing in 6 lines Aristotle's whole argument against the puzzle of whether the *akratēs* can be *phronimos*.

<sup>21</sup> See 1146a10-11: is there a difference between self-control and moderation? Yes; and the problem is reprised at 1151b34-1152a3. See also 1145b31ff.: is the distinction between belief and knowledge to the problem of *akrasia*? No; and the problem is reprised at 1146b24ff.

represent Aristotle's last word on the question of *akratēs phronimos*; instead, it represents the place where he presents it as an *aporia* to be solved in his upcoming discussion.

Aristotle must not, therefore, understand VI.12 and VI.13—the position of which, relative to book VII, is fixed by backwards references at 1146a8 and 1152a78—as already establishing a form of the unity of the virtues thesis strong enough to rule out *akratēs phronimos*. We will be in a better position to see why VI.12-13 fail to rule out *akratēs phronimos* after we have examined those chapters (4a, below); as a first pass, let us note that the *akratēs* belongs to neither of the groups of people they explicitly excluded from *phronēsis*. In VI.12 Aristotle expresses the virtue-requirement in terms of the need for 'the end', which "is not evident except to the person who possesses excellence (τῷ ἀγαθῷ), since badness (ἡ μοχθηρία) distorts a person and causes him to be deceived about the starting points of action (περὶ τὰς πρακτικὰς ἀρχάς). So it is evident that it is impossible to be wise without possessing excellence (μὴ ὄντα ἀγαθόν)." 121144a29-b1 The grounds Aristotle gives for the goodness-requirement is that *badness* prevents one from having the starting point of reason<sup>22</sup>. The only group of people this argument can straightforwardly exclude from *phronēsis* are vicious ones<sup>23</sup>. In VI.13 he adds to the ranks of the un-phronetic those whose souls are not shaped by moral education; he gives as examples children and wild animals (1144b9). Such creatures cannot display *phronēsis* even though they can have a kind of simulacrum of virtue he calls 'natural virtue'. The *akratēs* does not belong to either of these excluded groups, as VII.1 makes clear. The opening of VII.1 points to a category distinct both from full-blown viciousness, on the one hand, and animalistic state of radical uneducatedness (brutishness), on the other. It makes sense that Aristotle would not take himself to have given a full account of whether people in this intermediate condition can or cannot be *phronimoi*.

#### b. The argument against *akratēs phronimos*

By the end of his discussion of *akrasia*, Aristotle *does* take himself to have given that account; in the concluding chapter, he says:

Nor is it possible for the same person at the same time to be wise and un-self-controlled (οὐδ' ἅμα φρόνιμον καὶ ἀκρατῆ ἐνδέχεται εἶναι τὸν αὐτόν) (1152a6-7)—

I break off the citation mid-sentence to observe that this conclusion is firm indeed: the language of 'οὐδ' ἅμα ... ἐνδέχεται .. τὸν αὐτόν,' has the starkness and severity of Aristotle's assertions of the principle of non-contradiction (Meta. 1005b19-20). To see what licenses this certitude, we must examine the grounds Aristotle goes on to give:

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<sup>22</sup> In VII. 8, Aristotle picks out the *akratēs* as one with a grasp of that starting point (τὸ οὗ ἕνεκα ἀρχή 1151a16), one who is "not bad without qualification, since the best in him, the fundamental stating point (ἡ ἀρχή), remains healthy." (a24-25) If the VI.12 criterion rules out *akratēs phronimos*, it does not do so independently of the further commentary on the question provided by, I will argue, VII.3 and VII.9

<sup>23</sup> For the claim that the *akratēs* has a grasp of the end, see Reeve, p.89: "that is why the vicious person does not notice that he is vicious while the akratic does notice that he is akratic (1150b36). The latter knows what the good or eudaimonia is and knows that he does not do what promotes it." Telfer concurs with the interpretation of the VI.12 criterion on *phronēsis*: "In other words, what is required for having the right end is that the person should at least not be wicked." p.43

—for one has been shown to be excellent in character (σπουδαῖος τὸ ἦθος) at the same time as one is wise. Again, one is not wise merely by virtue of having knowledge, but also by being the sort of person to act on one's knowledge (οὐ τῷ εἰδέναι μόνον φρόνιμος ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ πρακτικός); and the un-self-controlled is not that sort. (But there is nothing to stop the clever person from being un-self-controlled—and this is why some people are sometimes thought to be wise yet un-self-controlled, because cleverness differs from wisdom in the way we described in our original discussion, and while being close to it in terms of reasoning, differs from it in terms of the decisions made.) Neither, then, does the un-self-controlled person behave like someone knowing something and having regard to his knowledge (οὐδὲ δὴ ὡς ὁ εἰδὼς καὶ θεωρῶν), but like someone asleep or drunk. And he acts voluntarily (since he acts knowing in a way τρόπον γὰρ τινα εἰδὼς) both what he is doing and what he is doing it for), but is not a bad person, since what he decides on is decent; so he is half-bad.” (1152a7-17)

Aristotle excludes the *akratēs* from *phronēsis* here for reasons that refer, immediately, to his ethical character, but ultimately, to his cognitive condition. As with the *enkratēs*, Aristotle seems to understand the quality of the *akratēs*' character as intertwined with the quality of his intellect. He describes the *akratēs* as not having a good (enough) character for wisdom: he is 'half-bad.' The grounds for this classification, however, do not derive straightforwardly from the types and strengths of desires to which he is subject, but rather, from his cognitive condition—he counts as half-bad because:

- (1) He voluntarily does bad things, which, in turn, means he does 'have knowledge' (εἰδὼς) in some sense (τρόπον τινα).
- (2) He does not activate or make use of knowledge (θεωρῶν/πρακτικός) that he has.
- (3) His status, as regards knowledge, is akin to a drunken person or a sleeping person.

VII.10 summarizes and concludes Aristotle's discussion of *akrasia*. The place where the *akratēs*' knowledge is discussed, where (1) - (3) are introduced and defended—and, therefore, the place to which VII.10 offers us an extended backwards reference—is: VII.3. It is in VII.3 that Aristotle tries to square the circle of combining the *knowledge* needed for securing the blameworthiness of the *akratēs* with the *ignorance* required for withholding *phronēsis* from him. In VII.3, Aristotle shows that akratic action is voluntary because there is a *kind* of reasoning backing the akratic action. He says that the *akratēs* does not fully have knowledge—he 'has and doesn't have' it—because he is missing some (part of) the particular premise. He is not like someone who knows but like someone who 'has' knowledge while asleep or drunk. Thus VII.10 indicates that the place where Aristotle argues against *akratēs phronimos* is VII.3. This is a point of great interpretative significance. Despite the massive attention which VII.3 has received, the fact that it fits in this way into the larger project of book VII has not been appreciated. The manifold difficulties raised by the text of VII.3 have understandably served to divorce it from its context; correlatively, my project of contextualizing VII.3 calls for me to pass over many important textual and philosophical details. What I hope to show is that such a treatment, albeit superficial, offers us an important clue as to the motivation behind some of the strange argumentative moves of VII.3.

Aristotle seems to enter into VII.3 assuming that there is *some* sense in which the *akratēs* will have to come out as ignorant or lacking some piece of knowledge. Many have puzzled over this seemingly Socratic approach, given that Aristotle could have described the *akratēs* as moved by passion instead of reason. Why not identify the *akratēs*'

problem as one of wrong-desiring, a defect in ethical character?<sup>24</sup> Aristotle does acknowledge a difference in passion between the *akratēs* and his enkritic counterpart (“the desire is active” 1147a33), but he seems to also think that there *must* be a correlated cognitive difference as well. Why? If I am right, a simple and immediate answer is provided by the argumentative context: Aristotle is endeavoring to show that the *akratēs* does not—cannot—have practical knowledge (*phronēsis*), while wishing to grant that he in some sense knows (εἰδὼς) the right reason. (He needs to grant the latter in order to distinguish the *akratēs* from the vicious person as being merely ‘half-bad.’)

Aristotle wants to preserve some place for right reason<sup>25</sup> in the *akratēs*’ soul, so he points out that what is opposed to the right reason is appetite (ἐπιθυμία) and not belief (δόξα) (1147b3). This allows him to assert the presence of the right reason without positing a logical contradiction in the *akratēs*. Aristotle is not only trying to make room, in VII.3, for the *akratēs* to have the right reason; he is also trying show that his possession of it is marked by defect. The place where he has located the defect—the particular premise—has occasioned as much mystification as his insistence that there is a cognitive defect in the first place<sup>26</sup>. This is, once again, a point at which consideration of the larger argumentative context stretching from VII.1-VII.10 can help clarify Aristotle’s motivation.

Here are the relevant passages, or paraphrases of them:

(1) “there is nothing to prevent someone from acting contrary to his knowledge when he has both premises but is using only the universal one, not the particular one; for it is particulars that are acted on (1147a2-3).”

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<sup>24</sup> Many commentators have been mystified as to how the ‘Socratism’ of VII.3 fits into Aristotle’s larger project. Cook Wilson deemed this puzzle not only insoluble, but grounds for denying that VII.3 was by the author of the rest of the NE. One can distinguish two questions here. The first is a question of consistency: How is the intellectualism of VII.3 consistent with Aristotle’s evident admission, outside VII.3, of occurrent, psychologically real, conflict in the akratic (What Cook Wilson and Hardie call “the active struggle”)? For this problem, see especially Ross, *Aristotle* p.244. The second is a more basic question of motivation that Wiggins expresses by asking, “Why did Aristotle give such a Socratic account of the phenomenon of weakness?” (p. 250) One can hear the same worry in Bostock’s observation: “One might remark here that both in these initial skirmishes, and in his subsequent treatment of the issue, Aristotle is accepting that ‘ignorance’ is somehow involved; he does not seem to contemplate the possibility that Socrates has got it entirely wrong. And this despite the fact that he has not actually given us any argument at all in favor of Socrates’ position.” I address the first question in another paper. The answer I provide to the second should, even in the absence of an answer to the first, go some distance to assuaging the worries of textual coherence that vexed Cook Wilson. If I am right, VII.3 is indeed tightly argumentatively connected to its local context, stretching backwards to at least VI.13 (eventually, I will extend the reach of this line of thought to VI.5), and forwards as far as VII.10.

<sup>25</sup> I follow Hardie in reading the first sentence of VII.2 as raising the question of the nature of the *akratēs* grasp of the ὀρθὸς λόγος: “Aristotle’s question at the beginning of chapter 2 is not how a man can go wrong when he understands correctly what is right, but in what sense such a man *does* have a correct understanding.” Hardie makes a compelling case against his predecessors that the other reading begs the question against Socrates. (pp.266-268), and his interpretation seems to have become standard (adopted without comment by Cooper NEVII.1-2 pp.29-30)

<sup>26</sup>So much so that a recent commentator has sought to marshal evidence for the view that, really, the defect is in the universal.



(2) “Whether *this* is such-and-such (εἰ τόδε τοιόνδε)—this is what the agent either does not ‘have’ or does not activate.” 1147a7

(3) The *akratēs* lacks not the universal but the ‘τελευταία πρότασις’ (the particular premise) which is a “judgment about the perceptible.”<sup>27</sup> (1147b9-11).

(4) His problem is with the ‘final term’ of the syllogism (τὸν ἔσχατον ὄρον) 1147b14

(5) The *akratēs* lacks the kind of knowledge that is sovereign over actions (κυρία τῶν πράξεων 1147b10).

(6) *Akrasia* doesn’t ‘drag around’ ‘true knowledge’ (τῆς κυρίως ἐπιστήμης 1147b15), which is to say, knowledge of the universal, but only perceptual knowledge.

There is, as Whiting and Pickavé note (p.325), a strong antecedent pressure on Aristotle *not* to identify the *akratēs*’ error as concerning particulars, given his own insistence that ignorance of the particular renders an action involuntary<sup>28</sup>. What is the source of the pressure *to* identify the missing knowledge as particular<sup>29</sup>? Aristotle’s discussion of *phronēsis* in NE VI.5-9 makes the same distinction that he invokes in VII.3, between the universal and the particular premises. He makes the distinction, there, in order to specify that the *phronimos* is someone who is most of all concerned with *the particular premises*. (1141b15 τὰ καθ’ ἕκαστα γνωρίζειν, 1143b3 τοῦ ἐσχάτου καὶ .. τῆς ἐτέρας προτάσεως). In addition, he often describes the *phronimos* as some concerned with the ‘final things’, the *phronimos* is ‘τῶν γὰρ ἐσχάτων τις’ (1146a8-9). He points out that it is wisdom at the level of the political *particulars* that is given the name, ‘πολιτική’ because it is concerned with the particulars (τὰ καθ’ ἕκαστα 1141b26) and what comes last (τὸ ἔσχατον 1141b28)<sup>30</sup>. In addition to connecting the particular and the final, he links both of these with what is *perceptible* (1142a23-27 and 1143a29-b5).

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<sup>27</sup> These are very controversial sentences: some read *τελευταία πρότασις* as meaning proposition (and thus, as referring to the conclusion of the syllogism) rather than ‘final premise’; and some exclude (1) and (2) as not referring to the akratic; Pickave and Whiting argue that the *akratēs* is actually ignorant of the *universal*; Broadie claims the *akratēs* is not ignorant of any premise but just fails to *use* the minor premise. It should be admitted by all, however, that Aristotle certainly *appears* to think that the *akratēs*’ is ignorant of a particular; and he *appears* to be discussing the *akratēs* throughout VII.3. Elsewhere, [Reference removed] I argue that these appearances are veridical.

<sup>28</sup> One common way to resolve the issue is to insist that the two syllogisms have different particular premises; see Hardie (pp.283ff.) for a discussion of this point.

<sup>29</sup> Hardie is mystified by this point: (p.278) “Why does Aristotle not consider, or even mention, the possibility of a failure to know effectively the universal premiss?”

<sup>30</sup> *Phronēsis* or deliberation is in numerous places connected with what is last (ἔσχατον). I discuss some of these passages in IV, below. Cooper (1975, 22-58) understands ἔσχατον as referring to an action type, since he wants to separate the work of deliberation and that of the practical syllogism. On his view, the practical syllogism, picking up where deliberation leaves off, is responsible for the transition from action-type to actual acting. Reeve’s position is (fn. 5) that while deliberation may end with the discovery of an action-type, *phronēsis* must extend all the way to the action token. My argument here does not commit me to a particular reading of ἔσχατον, but I agree with Reeve that *phronēsis*, being connected with perception, must extend all the way to the *doing* of whatever is judged needing done. If *phronēsis* were to end with the action-type, there would be no reason why the *akratēs* couldn’t be *phronimos*, since he does know what kind of action he ought to pursue. Cooper’s arguments insulating the book VI discussions of *phronēsis* and deliberation from the practical syllogism cannot carry over into VII.3, where we have an unquestionable reference to the practical syllogism. If the *akratēs*’ lack of the minor premise is to have bearing on his phronetic status by grounding Aristotle’s criticism of him as not being ‘*praktikos*,’ then *phronēsis* must concern itself with knowledge of ‘this’ and ‘I’. For this reason, I follow Sorabji (p.215) in understanding

The hallmarks of Aristotle’s description of *phronēsis*—as concerned with what is final, perceptible, particular, ‘closest to’ and ‘in charge of’ action—cannot be unrelated to Aristotle’s description of the *akratēs* as defective along *exactly* those lines<sup>31</sup>. The knowledge the having of which marks someone as *phronimos* is precisely the knowledge the *akratēs* is said to lack. The *akratēs* is not missing one of a number of requirements on *phronēsis*. He lacks *phronēsis per se*, as a thirsty man lacks water. We can now see that the assonance we initially observed between the terms of Aristotle’s final exclusion of *akratēs phronimos* and the language of the principle of non-contradiction is not an accident: for Aristotle ‘*akratēs phronimos*,’ is, in fact, a contradiction in terms.

Reading the argument against *akratēs phronimos* as an<sup>32</sup> animating concern of VII.3 reveals the pressure on Aristotle to locate a defect in the rational or intellectual part of the *akratēs*’ soul, and specifically a defect with respect to the particular (final/ perceptible/ action-related) premise. I do not want to claim that by understanding the motivations behind Aristotle’s argument in VII.3, we have understood his argument. All the textual and argumentative difficulties of VII.3 remain, and it is outside the work of this paper to show that Aristotle does indeed develop a coherent picture of the *akratēs* as one who acts voluntarily, but with the kind of ignorance that precludes *phronēsis*. My point is only that his desire to do so is evident, and is indirect evidence for impurity. For if the *akratēs* is characterized by per se lack of *phronēsis*, then his opposite, the *enkratēs*, should be characterizable by the *presence of phronēsis*.

The simplest argument for the conclusion that Aristotle considers the *enkratēs* capable of *phronēsis* is the concerted effort he makes to show that the *akratēs* is not. Though they *act* differently, Aristotle repeatedly insists (1146a9-15, 1148a4-9, 1151b34-1152a3) that they are subject to the same kinds of desires and pleasures, namely ones that are strong,

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the ἔσχατον as that which can be acted on, for instance a judgment such as “*this* is what courage requires of us, now.”

<sup>31</sup> I am not the first to notice this connection between NE VII.3 and the discussion of *phronēsis* in NE VI. Halper, who observes that this point has not been widely appreciated, notes that “some of Aristotle’s explanations of *akrasia* in 7.3 even mirror discussions of deficient practical wisdom in the preceding book.” Though he discusses VII.3 only in passing, he thinks, as I do, that “the implication in all [of Aristotle’s arguments in VII.3] is that, despite appearances, the akratic lacks practical wisdom.” (p.130) What I do not understand is why Halper then jumps, without transition, to the conclusion that “the *enkratic*’s claim to practical wisdom is no better.” The argument of VII.3 does not purport to speak to the *enkratēs*’ flaws, if he has any. Nor can it be made to apply to the *enkratēs*, since it makes essential reference to the person’s actually being moved by the bad desire (ἄγει, 1147a34, κινεῖν 1147a35). Later on (p.132) Halper does give what he takes to be reasons why strong-willed people cannot be wise, but that discussion proceeds without reference to VII.3.

<sup>32</sup> I do not think this is **all** Aristotle is doing in VII.3. He is trying to answer the question about *phronēsis* within the confines of two other issues: showing how akratic action is voluntary—where voluntariness requires knowledge of particulars—and showing how it is not evil—where that requires knowledge of the universal. It might look as though there is no space left for anything the akratic is ignorant of, but, as we see, A. thinks there *must* be, since *akrasia* is a cognitive (rational) defect. The solution I argue for elsewhere is that the *akratēs* is ignorant of a very special *kind* of particular, namely, the minor premise *about the agent*. (That is: “I am a human being.”) This is a premise that, because it is particular, ignorance of it doesn’t render the action vicious, but because it is a kind of particular that is always in principle accessible to the agent, ignorance of it does not render the action involuntary.

bad, and concerned with appetitive pleasures specifically. If such desires were enough to preclude someone from *phronēsis*, we'd expect Aristotle *not* to that identify the *phronēsis*-excluding features as ones specific to the *akratēs*. But this is what Aristotle does. He denies the *akratēs phronēsis* on the grounds that he is not *praktikos* (1146a7-8, 1152a8-9<sup>33</sup>). Given that the *akratēs* does act, the latter criticism can only refer to the fact that the *akratēs* does not act from *prohairesis* (1148a9 et passim)<sup>34</sup>. It is the *akratēs* knowledge, not the *akratēs*, that fails to be 'practical'. Since the *enkratēs* does act from *prohairesis* and *doesn't* do τα φαυλότατα, Aristotle's explanation picks out the *akratēs* exclusively. As Aristotle, indeed, claims that it does. For he only purports to explain why the *akratēs*, and never why the *enkratēs*, cannot be *phronimos*.

Could the *akratēs* be precluded from *phronēsis* on *two* grounds, namely ones particular to him and, in addition, ones he shares with the *enkratēs*? We would have expected Aristotle to point out such overdetermination, as well as to offer us the independent argument that the *enkratēs* could not be *phronimos*. Given the work he puts into arguing against *akratēs phronimos*, it makes no sense that Aristotle would omit the more general argument against *enkratēs phronimos*—from which the conclusion about the *akratēs* would, independently, follow.

Moreover, Aristotle really does seem committed to understanding the *enkratēs* as the proper opposite (τὰ δ' ἐναντία 1145a17) of the *akratēs*, which would mean that they share every property outside their specific differentia. In the passage in which he establishes *akratēs* and *enkratēs* as opposites, he invents 'god-like virtue' so as to have a proper opposite for beastliness (even though he will not discuss it). *Akolasia* and moderation, by contrast, he refers to as 'virtue' and 'vice,' presumably because moderation, being a mean, has *two* opposed states. He evidently thinks that *akrasia* and *enkrateia* already conform to the paradigm of opposition into which he must shoehorn the other pairs he wishes to discuss. He is often telling us that just where we say something bad about the *akratēs*, exactly there we say something good about the *enkratēs*: 1145b8-11, 1150a10-14, 1150a32-36, 1151a20-28. 1151b10-17 is an especially striking illustration of Aristotle's willingness to stretch the meanings of the terms '*akratēs*' and *enkratēs* in order to produce opposition. Having concluded that enkratics are easy to persuade, 'εὐπειστοί,' he reasons that people who are stubborn (ἰσχυρογνώμονας, 1151b5) must be more like *akratics*!

While recognizing that arguments from silence do not carry much weight, there is one to be adduced here. Aristotle's failure to speak to the question of purism, at least in the

<sup>33</sup> Aristotle does, in connection with both of these claims, point out that the *phronimos* has been shown to have a σπουδαῖα ἔξις (passages quoted above); but I note that this does not exclude the *enkratēs* (especially since he himself describes the ἔξις that way) and rather seems to correspond to the division into 'good' and 'bad' ἔξεις made at the opening of VII.1 (quoted above), a division which locates the *enkratēs* and *akratēs* on opposite sides.

<sup>34</sup> [Maybe Ref here to VII.10 1152a15-16 (καὶ ἐκὼν μὲν (τρόπον γὰρ τινα εἰδὼς καὶ ὁ ποιεῖ καὶ οὐ ἔνεκα)), where Aristotle qualifies the sense in which the *akratēs*' action is voluntary by saying that he knows what he's doing *in a way*, and IX.9 1168b34-1169a2 (καὶ ἐγκρατῆς δὲ καὶ ἀκρατῆς λέγεται τῷ κρατεῖν τὸν νοῦν ἢ μὴ, ὡς τούτου ἐκάστου ὄντος· καὶ πεπραγένοι δοκοῦσιν αὐτοὶ καὶ ἐκουσίως τὰ μετὰ λόγου μάλιστα.) that enkratics act *fully* voluntarily, because their rational part is in control.]

NE—for I do take him to assert impurity in the two EE passages with which I began—is not equivocal, but actually counts as evidence for impurity. Given how firmly he has set up the *akratēs* and the *enkratēs* as opposites, it is strong evidence against purism that Aristotle

(a) Observes that the *enkratēs* has a σπουδαῖα ἔξις (1151b28-9) and

(b) Gives the *akratēs*' failure to have a σπουδαῖα ἔξις as *the reason why* he cannot be *phronimos* (1152a7-8) and

(c) Fails to point out why or even that the *enkratēs* cannot be *phronimos*.

It would, on the other hand, make sense if, having identified the *akratēs*' defect as lack-of-*phronēsis*, he would take it to go without saying that that this is the *enkratēs*' peculiar forte. But does such an understanding of *enkrateia* comport with Aristotle's treatment of *phronēsis* in NE VI.5-8? Let us look.

### 3. The Argument from *Phronēsis*:

NE VI.5-8 present a consistent conception of *phronēsis* as a form of *knowledge*<sup>35</sup>, namely, knowledge of the good:

“It is thought characteristic of a wise person to be able to deliberate well about the things that are good and advantageous to himself, not in specific contexts, e.g. what sorts of things conduce to health, or to physical strength, but what sorts of things conduce to the good life in general.” (1140a25-29)

“It is for this reason that we think Pericles and people of this sort wise—because they are capable of forming a clear view of what is good for themselves and what is good for human beings in general.” (1140b7-9)

“each kind of creature asserts that what is wise is what successfully considers the things relating to itself” (1141a24-5)

we call people accomplished but not wise if we “see them lacking a grasp of what is to their own advantage.” (1141b3-6);

“the person who without qualification is the good deliberator [i.e., the one who is also wise] is the one whose calculations make him good at hitting upon what is best for a human being among practicable goods.” (1141b12-15)

“the person who knows about what concerns him, and occupies himself with that, is thought wise” (1142a1-2)

In these passages, Aristotle identifies *phronēsis* with two kinds of practical knowledge: knowledge of the human good, and knowledge of the good for oneself. He does not, however, suggest that *phronēsis* entails knowing two independent things. I submit that this is because he understands *phronēsis* as the combination of these two forms of knowledge. If you are a *phronimos*, you know with a single act of knowledge both what is good for yourself and what is good for a thing of the kind you are. Aristotle says that we can even call nonhuman animals ‘φρόνιμα’ when they seem to have a capacity for forethought about their lives (ὅσα περὶ τὸν αὐτῶν βίον ἔχοντα φαίνεται δύναμιν προνοητικὴν 1141a27-28). An animal who prepares a nest for young or spins a web or stores away nuts for winter seems to reveal an understanding of itself as a certain kind of

<sup>35</sup> See Coope's arguments against McDowell pp.143-144, in which she effectively establishes *phronēsis* as a virtue of the λογιστικόν, and not of the irrational (but reasons-responsive) part of the soul. However, see also Pearson for a discussion of the possibility of understanding *phronēsis* as an ethical virtue in the EE.

thing. Whenever an animal responds immediately to some stimulus, it reacts *as* the kind of thing it is: rabbits hop away from danger, whereas snakes slither away from it. The animal who ‘plans for the future’ seems to be operating not only *as* the kind of thing it is, but with knowledge *that* it is that kind of thing. Such an animal looks to be<sup>36</sup> responding to facts about itself that are not currently actual: the fact that it will need a home for its young, or can use a web to catch a bug, or is bound to have trouble finding food in winter. In our own case, the way we know our future is by knowing ourselves as things of a certain kind, for whom such futures are typical.

The *akratēs* does not fail to have general or universal knowledge of what is good for human beings, but he nonetheless fails phronetically because he fails to know that good as good *for* himself. He fails at the project of bringing what is good for human beings to bear on himself or his circumstances. Under pressure from desire, he behaves reactively and not thoughtfully, as though he did not know what was good for the kind of thing he is. The enkratic, by contrast, is someone who holds on to a conception of both himself and his circumstances as instances of something more general—and he does this in the face of strong internal counterpressure. Hence at EE II.8, 1224b15-21 Aristotle describes the distinctive pleasures and pains of the *akratēs* and enkratic as temporally indexed: the enkratic has pain now, but the pleasure of *hope* (τὴν ἄπ’ ἐλπίδος ἡδονήν) that he will be benefitted, and the *akratēs* has pleasure now but the pain of *expectation* (τὴν ἄπ’ ἐλπίδος λύπην). The choice of the present pleasure is reactive in the way that the rabbit’s hop and the snake’s slither is reactive; the enduring of pain for the sake of a future good is ‘phronetic’ in the way that the spider’s web-spinning and the squirrel’s nut-collecting is<sup>37</sup>.

It is because *phronēsis* includes knowledge of what is good for human beings that *phronēsis* is in a way the same thing as the political art in VI.8. The one with political knowledge is someone who knows what is good for this *kind* of creature, the human being. But, just as the general knowledge is insufficient for wisdom, it is insufficient for political *phronēsis*. Hence Aristotle describes the *akratēs* as akin to a city with good laws that are unenforced: such a city is seriously lacking in respect of political knowledge (ἡ πολιτικῇ). For true political knowledge extends beyond the content of legislation to the application thereof: (T16)

Political expertise and wisdom are the same disposition, but their being is not the same. Of the disposition as it relates to the city, the architectonic form of wisdom is legislative expertise, while the form of wisdom at the level of particulars is given the generic name ‘political expertise’, and this is concerned with action and deliberation, since a decree is something to be acted upon, as what comes last in the process. This is why only people at this level are said to take part in politics, because only they *do* things, like the various kinds of manual workers. With wisdom too, what is thought to be wisdom most of all is the sort that relates to oneself as an individual, and it is

<sup>36</sup> ‘φαίνεται’ at 1141a28 should be read in the sense of ‘mere appearance’: animals cannot do more than appear *phronima* or resemble *phronimoi* because animals do not have a grasp of universals (VII.3, 1147b3-5). That is, they cannot *strictly speaking* be *phronima* for the same reason they cannot be akratic: which is further support for the thesis of this paper, that the question of *phronēsis* and the question of strength and weakness of will are the same question.

<sup>37</sup> See also *De Anima* 433b8-10, where Aristotle described thought as connecting us with the future, and desire as seeking what is present.

this that is given the general name, ‘wisdom’....the person who knows about what concerns him, and occupies himself with that, is thought wise.” (1141b23-1142a2)

Themistocles was great not only in coming up with the idea of using the money from an unexpected discovery of a vein of silver at Laurium to build a navy, but in *selling* this plan to the Athenians in lieu of the immediate payback that would have accrued to them had they followed the normal procedure of dividing the windfall equally among the citizenry. He got them to see that the good he was proposing was good for *themselves*, by getting them to see themselves as of such a kind to be a great sea power.

*Phronēsis*, like political expertise, is concerned with action, and for this reason is especially associated with the particular premise (this is an X, I am a Y). But it does entail universal knowledge (Xs are good for Ys), and we can see why Aristotle classifies it as cognitive: phronetically motivated actions presuppose subsumption. The *phronimos* is moved by a conception of himself as something of a certain kind—his actions have something general about them. Appetite, by contrast, does not move us in this way. One does not need to see X as a good thing for something of the kind that oneself is in order to feel appetitively moved to it. This is why Aristotle describes appetite as, in various ways irrational: it does not move by persuading (οὐ πείσασσα ἄγει); it does not have a share of reason (οὐ γὰρ μετέχει λόγου) EE 1224b2; it does not follow reason (οὐ [ἀκολουθεῖ τῷ λόγῳ] NE 1149b1-2)<sup>38</sup>. The *akratēs* is someone who will, at only mild prompting from appetite, give up thinking of himself in general terms. The enkratic is someone who manages a rational pursuit of the good in the face of strong resistance from appetite. Even more than the spider’s web or the squirrel’s cache of nuts, enkratic actions are infused with the generality of thought. One might go so far as to describe *the actions themselves* as forms of knowledge. It is, in any case, this enacted knowledge that Aristotle specifically means to pick out with the word ‘*phronēsis*.’

On this interpretation of what *phronēsis* is, it makes sense that the *akratēs* will be characterized by lacking it, the *enkratēs* by having it<sup>39</sup>. For *enkrateia* does indeed showcase the ability of reason to make itself present, even ‘turning’ the irrational. I have now argued for impurity on the grounds that it makes sense of Aristotle’s discussion of *enkrateia*, *akrasia*, and *phronēsis*. But does impurity contradict Aristotle’s claim, in NE VI.12-13, that the virtues are unified? I want now to turn to examining the case for purity.

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<sup>38</sup> See Smith, p.66 for many more such passages. As Smith nicely observes, “Aristotle writes almost as with regret when he says that it is hard to rub out (apotripsasthai) this passion, the passion that ‘grasps at what is shameful (aischron)’...Aristotle speaks..of .. pleasure as the principal moral snare and the root of all wickedness.”

<sup>39</sup> The vicious person, of course, also lacks *phronēsis*, and in virtue of lacking knowledge of the universal. But he does not lack *phronēsis* per se; he lacks one of the conditions on *phronēsis*. Someone is *phronimos* in virtue of his knowledge of the particular, though *phronēsis* also requires knowledge of the universal. This distinction is important in order to understand why Aristotle describes the *prohairesis* of the *akratēs* as good (ἐπιεικής), and the rational part of his soul (τὸ λογιστικόν) as praiseworthy (I.13, 1102b13ff).

## 4. The Case for Purity, Reconsidered

### a. VI.12-13

In NE VI.12, Aristotle is clear that *phronēsis* requires good character, asserting that “it is impossible to be wise without possessing excellence (μη̄ ὄντα ἀγαθόν).” (1144a46-b1). By ‘being good,’ (ἀγαθόν) Aristotle must be referring to the ethical virtues discussed in books II-V. But we have seen that one of those virtues, moderation, is less directly tied to the *grasp* of that end than the others. The *enkratēs* could, then, lacking moderation, nonetheless have that part of virtue responsible for a sense of what kinds of goals he should pursue; and he could *preserve* that goal not by moderation, but by *phronēsis*. Recall that Aristotle is not committed to calling everyone who squelches his appetites ‘*enkratēs*’—he reserves that term, as an honorific, for someone who does so against *strong* appetites for the *right* reasons. Thus the *enkratēs* must have a correspondingly powerful sense of the goals worth fighting for. Such a sense of the importance of the end entails, by Aristotle’s own argument, that the agent possess ethical virtue.

If I am right that the *enkratēs* falls on the right side of the character requirement from VI.12, this would not be obvious to the reader approaching book VI from books II-V. For those books do not discuss the *enkratēs*. One would expect, therefore, that after introducing the complication of *enkrateia*, Aristotle would refer backwards to the VI.12 requirement and specify that the *enkratēs* meets it. He does just this in VII.10, “one has been shown to be (δέδεικται) excellent in character (σπουδαῖος τὸ ἦθος) at the same time as one is wise. (1152a7-8). With ‘δέδεικται,’ he refers to the character-requirement on *phronēsis*<sup>40</sup>; this backwards reference comes close on the heels of the observation that ἡ ἐγκράτεια ἐστὶ σπουδαῖον, by contrast with *akrasia* and insensateness, which he calls ἐξεις φάυλας. (1151b28-29)

What of VI.13? The fact that Aristotle says, therein, that *phronēsis* requires someone to be good or to have virtue in a ‘strict’ sense (κυρίως/ ἀπλῶς)<sup>41</sup> or to be ἀπλῶς ἀγαθός, ‘strictly’ good, has been taken as evidence for purism<sup>42</sup>. But ‘κυρίως’ and ‘ἀπλῶς,’ like the English ‘in the strict sense,’ are contrastive. When the word they qualify is ‘said in many ways,’ as NE I.6 reveals ‘good’ to be, the particular contrast must be specified. Aristotle is quite clear (1144b4,7,14,16,17,31) that in *this* case, the specific contrast case is that of merely natural goodness. The *phrase* ‘κυρίως ἀρετή’ alone cannot not serve as

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<sup>40</sup> Commentators agree on this, at least roughly speaking; both Dirlmeier and Gauthier-Jolif refer to book VI ch.12, though not exclusively. Dirlmeier (p.493) points us to a large chunk of text spanning much of VI.12 and much of VI.13 (1144a11-b32), Gauthier-Jolif (p.651) to the relevant line from VI.12 1144a36 as well as a comment in VI.13 1145a1-2. (Gauthier and Jolif also refer us, in what must be a typographical error, to two unrelated passages in VI.5 and VI.9, 1140b5 and 1142a23-24)

<sup>41</sup> The relevant phrases are: τὸ κυρίως ἀγαθόν 1144b7, κυρίως ἀρετή 1144b14, ἀγαθὸν εἶναι κυρίως 1144b31, ἀπλῶς λέγεται ἀγαθός 1145a1.

<sup>42</sup> Coope; she notes does have a footnote (fn. 10) remarking that the contrast is between natural and ethical, but she does not appreciate that this undermines *also* hearing the contrast as one between *enkrateia* and moderation.

evidence for purism<sup>43</sup>. In order to see whether Aristotle rules out *enkratēs phronimos* in VI.13, we will have to look more closely at the argument of that passage.

Both VI.12 and VI.13 connect *phronēsis* to ethical virtue, and both chapters, therefore, assert some version of the unity of the virtues thesis. But they are making importantly different points about how virtue is unified. We saw that VI.12 sought to show us what we need in order to have *phronēsis*. VI.13 works in the other direction, telling us what we will have if we get *phronēsis*. We can see the directionality of the argument clearly in the future tense of the main verb of its concluding sentence, which states that if you have just the one virtue of *phronēsis*, it will ensure the rest: “ἅμα γὰρ τῇ φρονήσει μιᾷ ὑπαρχούση πᾶσαι ὑπάρξουσιν.” (1145a1-2) On one level of abstraction, what the argument of VI.13 identifies as issuing forth from *phronēsis* is exactly what the argument of VI.12 identified as necessary for *phronēsis*, namely, goodness or virtue. But Aristotle must, on pain of circularity, pick out virtue in different ways in the two chapters—as indeed he does. In VI.12 he opposes goodness to badness (μοχθηρία 1144a35), in VI.13, he opposes it, as ethical goodness, to natural goodness—for ethical as opposed to merely natural goodness is Aristotle’s answer to the question of what we will have if we get *phronēsis*.

Thus VI.13 is concerned to distinguish between virtue in the absence of *phronēsis*, what Aristotle calls the blind, ‘natural’ virtue of children and animals, and the kind of true virtue that is the result of habituation (ἠθικὴ ἀρετή), and the product of *phronēsis*. Habituated virtue is marked by actions distinguishable from the naturally ‘virtuous’ ones in that the former are done *from* and not merely *in accordance with* right reason. (οὐ μόνον ἢ κατὰ τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον, ἀλλ’ ἢ μετὰ τοῦ ὀρθοῦ λόγου ἕξις ἀρετῆς ἐστίν, 1144b26-27). Right reason, then, is what differentiates merely natural from ethical virtue, and *phronēsis* produces or supplies virtue by being the source of the right reason: “it is wisdom that ‘correctly prescribes’ in contexts of this sort.” (ὀρθὸς δὲ λόγος περὶ τῶν τοιούτων ἢ φρόνησις ἐστίν.) (1144b26-28) Aristotle thus offers, as the basis for the VI.13 claim to the unity of virtue, the ‘right reason’ which it is the job of *phronēsis* to secure. If *phronēsis* is what ensures the presence of the right reason, the argument of VI.13 is *prima facie* evidence for impurity. For the *enkratēs* does choose correctly, and with the knowledge that he is doing so: in VII.9, Aristotle describes the *enkratēs* as the one who stands by the true reason and the right choice (τῷ ἀληθεῖ λόγῳ καὶ τῇ ὀρθῇ προαιρέσει ὃ μὲν ἐμμένει, 1151a34-35). If the *enkratēs* acts from ‘right reason’<sup>44</sup>, and

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<sup>43</sup> We should remind ourselves of just how many similar contrasts surface in the NE. For instance, at V.1, 1152b4 and VII.11, 1129b2≈ Aristotle distinguishes what is ἀπλῶς good or bad from what is good or bad for some particular person (cf. 1141b10-15); at 1129b26 he distinguishes virtue ἀπλῶς from virtue in relation to another; we saw that at VII.1 he distinguishes, within virtue, between human and divine or heroic virtue; throughout book VI he distinguishes between ethical and intellectual virtue; he draws a distinction between ethical and technical (craft) virtue (1141a12); he speaks of virtues of the body (EE1248b29 σώματος ἀρεταί) as opposed to those of the soul; in two places he demotes virtues such as courage and moderation as being merely parts of virtue, giving the name of complete virtue to justice at NE V.2 (1130a13) and to gentlemanliness (καλοκάγαθία) at EE1248b8-12. Given how clearly Aristotle specifies that ‘κυρίως’ and ἀπλῶς in VI.13 refer to ‘not natural’, it would be a mistake to import any of these distinctions, including that between moderation and *enkrateia*, into that passage.

<sup>44</sup> A point Coope grants, see her fn. 9.



*phronēsis* is the *only* source of right reason, then the *enkratēs* not only can but must have *phronēsis*.

But is *phronēsis* the *only* source of right reason? This is the natural way to read 1144b26-28 (quoted in previous paragraph) which, literally translated, says that *phronēsis* is right reason<sup>45</sup>. The problem is that the case of the *akratēs* offers us some reason to doubt this identification. Aristotle praises the *prohairesis* of the *akratēs* as ἐπιεικής (1152a17) and says that *akraties* contravene the correct prescription *that is in them* (παρὰ τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον ... τὸν ἐν αὐτοῖς, 1147b32). He specifies that the true *akratēs* departs from the very same kind of reason that the true *enkratēs* sticks to, namely the true account and the right choice (1151a35). If the right reason is, or is produced only by, *phronēsis*, this suggests what we know Aristotle denies: that the *akratēs* has *phronēsis*. The fact that the *akratēs* seems to have the right reason stands, then, in the way of reading VI.13 as a straightforward argument for impurity. More generally, however, there is a puzzle about where VI.13 leaves both the *akratēs* and the *enkratēs*, if Aristotle affirms:

- (P1) Only the one with *phronēsis* has the right reason.
- (P2) The *enkratēs* and the *akratēs* have the right reason.
- (P3) The *akratēs* does not have *phronēsis*.

Coope suggests an argumentative lapse (“Aristotle does not seem to have the possibility of self-control in mind”<sup>46</sup>) in the face of the contradiction between (P1)-(P3). She is primarily interested in explaining away the appearance of an argument for *enkratēs phronimos*, and is happy to couple it to the problem of *akratēs phronimos*. Coope’s thought must be that we should give up (P1), because if Aristotle had the *akratēs* and the *enkratēs* in mind he would have made it clear that it is not *only phronēsis* which can supply the right reason. This move would, however, undermine Aristotle’s project in VI.13, which is to argue for the value of *phronēsis* on the basis of its providing us with the right reason that, in turn, distinguishes natural from ethical virtue. Right reason could not ground his argument that *phronēsis* is needed for true virtue, if right reason could be attained by other means. If (P1) expresses the necessity of *phronēsis* (for ethically virtuous action), (P3) secures sufficiency: for Aristotle, no less than Socrates, believes that if *phronēsis* is present in someone it cannot get ‘dragged around like a slave’ to the service of bad ends. And yet Aristotle is no better position to give up the *akratēs*’ claim to knowledge in (P2), since it forms the basis for his distinction between vice and

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<sup>45</sup> Rowe’s translation, cited above (“it is wisdom that ‘correctly prescribes’ in contexts of this sort”), softens this claim to that of a causal link and thereby, I think, undertranslates it. I agree with Greenwood [REF] that this sentence *identifies phronēsis* with the ὀρθὸς λόγος. (Likewise A.D. Smith, “wisdom *is* such right reason,” italics original p.56) Nonetheless, my argument requires only Rowe’s weaker variant, that *phronēsis* is responsible for right reason. I will make the case, below, that we must understand

<sup>46</sup> p.147, see also fn. 9. This observation sits ill with the fact that she citing VI.13 as her primary evidence for purity. If Aristotle seems to have forgotten about the existence of the *enkratēs* in VI.13, what he says therein cannot serve as evidence against *enkratēs phronimos*. Likewise, Telfer (p.45, see also p.43) accuses Aristotle of ‘tending to ignore’ *akrasia* and *enkrateia* in discussions such as VI.12; on her reading of his argument, he unwittingly fails to exclude the *enkratēs* from *phronēsis*, since his argument is simply not strong enough to do so.

*akrasia*. Aristotle must, then, hold on to some version of all three premises—and there is textual evidence that he believes he can. I want to suggest an alternative approach to (P1)-(P3), one that will explain away the appearance of an argument for the *akratēs phronimos* but leave the argument for *enkratēs phronimos* standing.

The first point to make is that the very fact that (P1), as presented in VI.13, gives rise to an argument for *akratēs phronimos* is indirect evidence for the view for which I have argued in 2a: Aristotle doesn't take himself to have settled that question before book VII. As I understand it, Aristotle's solution to the contradiction of (P1)-(P3) is the set of moves outlined in 2b, where Aristotle distinguished senses of 'having.' We observed that this was the task of VII.3: to work out a sense in which such an *akratēs*, while in *some* sense 'having' the right reason, either doesn't really have it or doesn't activate it or doesn't have *all* (the premises) of it. In *one* sense, the *akratēs* has the right reason, whereas the one with *phronēsis* has it in *another*, fuller sense (τῆς κυρίως ἐπιστήμης, 1147b15).

The *akratēs* 'has knowledge' in the sense that he does not get everything wrong—he deliberates correctly from the right conception of the good (wish) to the right conclusion (*prohairesis*). He manifests a lack of corruption with respect to the universal, and can even, in a sense, be said to have 'deliberated correctly' 1142b20<sup>47</sup>. Since he has a good *prohairesis*, the *akratēs* 'has' the right reason 'in him'—it is what he acts against. But he is 'ignorant' in that he does not *use* or *activate* or act *from* the right reason. *Phronēsis* must, then, specifically refer to the presence of the right reason not only in the agent, but *also in the action he performs*. In order to 'have' the right reason in the sense of premise 1, one must act with right reason (μετὰ τοῦ ὀρθοῦ λόγου). Thus understood, (P1)-(P3) do not present a contradiction, but rather an argument that rules the *enkratēs* in and the *akratēs* out. For the *akratēs*, as Aristotle repeatedly points out, acts *against* (παρά) it (1147b31, 1148a9, 28-29, 1151a7,12, 21,1151b35). The *akratēs* represents a kind of inverse of the one with natural virtue: the latter acts in accordance with the reason while lacking it<sup>48</sup>, the former acts against the reason while (in a sense!) having it. The *enkratēs*

<sup>47</sup> Anscombe 1965, and others following her (e.g. Bostock p.80) interpret this line as meaning that the akratic deliberates to the *akratic* action well—but, elsewhere, Aristotle denies (1152a18) that akratics ever do this. It is better to hear the phrase 'deliberated correctly' as praising the deliberation that Aristotle praises throughout NE VII, namely, the deliberation that got him to his (non-enacted) good *prohairesis*. Aristotle denies that either the vicious man or the *akratēs* can have euboulia, though both can be said to have 'deliberated correctly.' We need not, as Anscombe and Bostock do, think that the qualified sense in which the *akratēs* 'deliberated correctly' is the same as that in which the vicious man can be said to do so. Instead, we should allow that the *akratēs* succeeds with respect to the upper reaches of deliberation (wish→ decision), whereas the vicious man may succeed with respect to the lower ones (decision→ action). Why, then, does Aristotle say (VII.10, 1152a10) that the *akratēs* can be *deinos*? I take it that he can be *deinos* in *other actions*, not the akratic one, because 'cleverness' does not have the unity that characterizes the practical intellectual excellence of *phronēsis* alone.

<sup>48</sup> Smith worries that such a conception of natural virtue, namely, one on which the naturally virtuous person can behave in the same manner as the one with ethical virtue, renders wisdom "wholly otiose" (p.64). He thus suggests that the one with natural virtue acts only *roughly* in accordance with ethical virtue. But this is not what Aristotle says. Also, it raises the same problem in a lesser form: if one acts *roughly* correctly without wisdom, wisdom is not *very* useful. Aristotle's answer must be that the thought with which you act matters greatly to the moral status of your action. And we see him make such claims elsewhere, when he insists on the importance of the action's being done for its own sake, from choice, and

alone will ‘have’ the right reason in the sense required by (P1). Since I have not engaged in a detailed analysis of VII.3, I cannot speak here to the question of whether Aristotle succeeds in making intelligible these two senses of having. I cannot, therefore, assert that he has fully resolved the paradox presented by (P1)-(P3). My only claim is that the intricacies of his argument in VII.3 indicate that his approach to the paradox was to disambiguate ‘having’ in (P1) and (P2). He could have, but didn’t, select the comparatively simple measure of getting rid of (P1).

What Aristotle *tries*, then, to do in book VII is develop an account of the *akratēs*’ knowledge that gives him principled grounds for depriving the *akratēs* of *phronēsis* while holding on to the claim that anyone who acts both in accordance with and from the right reason—such as the *enkratēs*—must be *phronimos*. In the MM (1202a9, II 6 43) Aristotle explains the impossibility of the *akratēs* being *phronimos* in just this way: “the wise man will not be incontinent. For we said that the wise man was not merely he in whom right reason *exists*, (ἔφαμεν γὰρ τὸν φρόνιμον εἶναι οὐχ ὃ ὀρθὸς λόγος μόνον ὑπάρχει) but he who also does (ὃ καὶ τὸ πράττειν) what appears in accordance with right reason to be best.” By invoking the restricted sense in which the *akratēs* can be said to know, we rehabilitate the VI.13 argument with respect to the *enkratēs*.

Aristotle refers to himself as in some sense preserving a Socratic view in both NE VI.13 as well as NE VII.3. On the interpretation offered here, these passages fit together into a single defense of a version of Socratic intellectualism: in VI.13 Aristotle told us that *phronēsis* is responsible for the right reason, making right reason central to acting well. VII.3, he completes the argument of VI.13 by showing us how akratics can be understood to fall short of the right reason condition. VI.13 thus upholds right reason as a sufficient condition on good action. We had occasion to refer, above, to the ‘unity of the virtues thesis’ as asserted in the conclusion of EE VIII.1. I want now to cite the whole of that sentence, since it ends with yet another reference to preserving the Socratic view:

“So it is clear that human wisdom is accompanied by having the irrational element in a good condition; and that the Socratic point is correct, that nothing is stronger than wisdom.”

On the traditional understanding of the ‘unity of virtues’<sup>49</sup> it is unclear why Aristotle would take the claim that the virtues are unified to constitute a defense of the strength of

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from a fixed character (II.4, V.8); or when he draws a serious ethical distinction between the akratic and the vicious, although they act in the same way (akratics are not unjust, despite the fact that they do what unjust people do, 1151a10).

<sup>49</sup> Had Aristotle given a different kind of argument for the unity of the virtues, one not unifying them through cognition but rather through the need for a kind of affective harmony, he could have easily ruled out *enkratēs phronimos*. Telfer notes this, and points out that Ackrill offers just such an argument on Aristotle’s behalf when he writes “a defect in one area would always be liable to interfere with the proper operation of a virtue elsewhere. A greedy man cannot be reliably and completely honest, since his greed is bound in certain circumstances to be in conflict with his honesty. A coward cannot be 100 per cent generous or kind, since in certain circumstances cowardly fear will be bound to inhibit his generous or kind impulses. Thus at the level of theoretical analysis, if one is talking about ideal moral virtues, the thesis that they necessarily go together can be defended.” Telfer concludes: “The idea that the exercise of the moral virtues requires this harmony of emotional dispositions yields a better argument from Aristotle’s point of view for the unity of the virtues than those based on moral knowledge.” I suggest that, instead, we

wisdom. If all Aristotle were saying were that wisdom requires an independently perfect irrational state, and vice versa, why would he conclude that *wisdom* is especially strong? Or, indeed, that any of the virtues is *strong*? Something can be ‘strong’ as opposed to ‘weak’ only if it faces some kind of opponent. It is this oppositional element that the standard, puristic conception of the unity of the virtues does not allow for. On my interpretation, it is clear why the unity of virtue, the strength of *phronēsis*, and the Socratic position are all connected in Aristotle’s mind. Aristotle satisfies Socrates by showing that *phronēsis* cannot be diverted (‘dragged around like a slave’) by bad appetite, rather it can *divert* bad appetite. The ‘strength’ of *phronēsis* allows it to direct or turn the irrational part of the soul so as to *secure* unity among the virtues.

### b. the pleasures and pains of *enkrateia*

I will end by explicitly addressing some arguments for purity, beginning by quoting at greater length the passage of McDowell from which I excerpted a few phrases in my introduction:

In full-fledged practical wisdom the correct conception of doing well, with the understanding that the worthwhileness that it embraces is preeminent, is so ingrained into one's motivational make-up that when an action is singled out as doing well, any attractions that alternatives might have are seen as having no bearing on the question what to do. An incontinent or continent person has a flawed approximation to practical wisdom. He has, in a way, a correct conception of doing well, and applies that conception to particular predicaments; but he reveals that his resemblance to a possessor of full-fledged practical wisdom is only partial, by the fact that he is swayed by the attractions of alternatives to what he (in a way) knows to be doing well. It helps to make this idea of a flawed approximation to practical wisdom intelligible if we take continence and incontinence to characterize people who are on their way to acquiring virtue. (Some Issues, p.48-49)

McDowell describes *enkrateia* as thrice flawed:

- (1) *Enkrateia* is unstable or unreliable, being a transitional rather than a fixed state of character.<sup>50</sup>
- (2) The enkritic is affectively impaired, since he is attracted (“swayed”) by what he knows is bad.
- (3) The enkritic has a cognitive defect, a ‘flawed approximation to practical wisdom.’

The third is, of course, simply a statement of purism. Since the only direct textual evidence purists invoke is Aristotle’s statement of the unity of the virtues in VI.12-13, I take myself to have already shown that (3) cannot be reached by direct textual argument. What I would like to do is to see whether (3) follows from (1) or (2). My contention will be that (3) does not follow from (2), and it would follow from (1), but (1) is not the case.

I will begin with (1). McDowell’s understanding of *akrasia* and *enkrateia* as vicissitudes of a single transitional character conflicts with Aristotle’s description of them as

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conclude from the argument that Aristotle in fact gave that his conception of the unity of virtues was not affectively but cognitively grounded; that it does not seek to rule out but to rule in *enkratēs phronimos*; that his interest in VI.13 is not in asserting the ‘purity’ of the soul *phronēsis* would deign to enter but rather the amount of psychic order that *phronēsis* itself has the power to introduce.

<sup>50</sup> A line pushed by Woods (1986, p.152), Drefcinski (2000, pp.115-116) and Broadie (1991, p.308 n. 11)—though, as Coope points out (fn. 21) Broadie’s argument for instability really only applies to the *akratēs*.

opposites (ἐναντία 1145a17). *Akrasia* and *enkrateia* are no more compatible with one another than the other pairs of opposites (heroism and brutishness, moderation and self-indulgence) alongside which he places them in VII.1. However, if the interpretation given above is right, we can see what would lead someone to see the *enkratēs* and the *akratēs* as, in some way, identical: they do indeed have the same set of affective dispositions. But the presence or absence of *phronēsis* makes all the difference in the world to the ethical quality of the condition that those affects partly constitute. The same sets of affective states (πάθη) can make up an excellent character (σπουδαῖα ἕξις) and a terrible (φάυλη) one. In the same way, the sea is hospitable for fish and not for human beings.

But collapse into *akrasia* is not the only potential source of enkratic instability. If *enkrateia* lent itself to becoming moderation, that would also be a strike against its yielding truly good actions. If *enkrateia* exhibits any form of instability, enkratics cannot satisfy the third of three conditions Aristotle places on action that is to be fully virtuous: ‘in the first place he must have knowledge, secondly he must choose the acts, and choose them for their own sakes, and thirdly his action must proceed from a firm and unchangeable character’ (NE II.4, cf. also V.8) These three conditions do not, however, seem to be fully independent of each other. Choice and character are closely tied: Aristotle defines virtue as a ‘prohairesis’ and remarks that choice reveals character even more than action does (1111b5-6); and that choice of good or ill is in some way constitutive of character (τῷ γὰρ προαιρεῖσθαι τὰγαθὰ καὶ τὰ κακὰ ποιοῖ τινές ἐσμεν, 1112a1-2). One indication, then, that an *enkratēs* has a fixed character is simply the fact that he does choose.

Other indications of stability are to be found in the passages we have already looked at, especially VII.1. Aristotle does not hesitate to describe *enkrateia* as both an ‘ἦθος’ and a ‘ἕξις’ and nowhere qualifies it as unstable or transitional. Coope<sup>51</sup> presses this point:

Aristotle himself never suggests that self-control is radically unstable. He describes self-control as an ethical disposition (hexis): a kind of character trait (Nicomachean Ethics VII.8.1151a27-8; 10.1152a34-6). He even, at one point, tries to show that it is a kind of good disposition in a mean between two bad ones. To be self-controlled is to be someone who is such as to have bad desires and such as not to be led by them (1152a1ff).<sup>23</sup> The self-controlled character is prone to bad appetites, and yet reliably makes, and acts upon, the right decision (*prohairesis*).

The impossibility of *enkratēs phronimos* would have followed from the instability, unreliability or developmental immaturity of the *enkratēs*<sup>52</sup>, we do not have reason to think that Aristotle in fact saw *enkrateia* in any of those ways.

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<sup>51</sup> Following Cooper, who makes the same point in his survey of NE VII 1-2 (pp.12-13). The *akratēs* and *enkratēs* are “a pair of special kinds of person, with settled dispositions of their own that amount to traits of their characters, and whose uncontrolled or self-controlled actions recur as characteristically for them as do the virtuous or the vicious actions of any type of virtuous or vicious person. They are people with more or less permanently, or at least well-settled, divided minds and feelings about the matters that they are self-controlled or uncontrolled about.” Likewise Pakaluk p. 234 “..although commentators frequently speak of *akrasia*...as a particular psychological process or event, Aristotle is apparently even more interested in *akrasia* and *enkrateia* as persistent states of the soul, just as vice and virtue are persistent states.”

I now turn to (2), the claim that the shameful pleasures or desires of the *enkratēs* get in the way of his judging correctly. It is certainly true that the *enkratēs* and his actions must be accompanied, as the moderate man's must not, by the pain of self-deprivation. Furthermore, he experiences the bad action as attractive in the way the moderate man does not. Do these forbidden pains/pleasures prevent him from having *phronēsis*?

Many have thought that they do. Halper says that the *enkratēs*' 'inappropriate emotions...impede his judgment' He achieves the right end not by choosing it with practical wisdom but by avoiding what he knows to be improper. And in the process he misses the pleasure that is proper to virtue.' (p.132) Woods, says that since alternatives to virtuous action "hold some attraction," "the continent person acts as he does only because what is virtuous appears to him as, on balance, the best alternative in the circumstances," not "as an unqualified good." (p.151-152) Coope, making a similar point, accuses the *enkratēs* of a failure to take a specifically rational kind of pleasure in fine action." (p.142)

I will focus here on responding to Coope's case for (2), since her discussion is most comprehensive<sup>53</sup>. I will divide her argument into three parts, which I will refer to as (A), (B), and (C). Coope cites NE IX.8 as illustrating the fact that failure to take pleasure in the fine is a rational failing (A). She offers evidence from the EE for a claim along the lines of that made by Woods: the *enkratēs* is not moved by the fine (καλόν) but by the expedient (B). Finally, she cites passages illustrating the fact that the *enkratēs* experiences pleasures that he shouldn't (C). Her account is, therefore, that the *enkratēs* cannot be *phronimos* because his affective pains prevent him from taking rational pleasure in his action.

I begin with (A), Coope's claim that "it is on account of one's rational part that one is pleased by the fineness of fine action" (p.156). The passage she refers to in support of this claim comes from Aristotle's discussion of friendship in IX.8. Coope cites only excerpts from the passage, but I want to look at the passage as a whole, for one of the sentences she doesn't cite contains a reference to *enkrateia*:

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<sup>52</sup> Coope (fn. 24) largely avoids giving the instability answer. But she does cite NE I.10.1100b12-17, as asserting that "no other kind of disposition is as stable as a virtue." There are three problems with taking this passage to demote the stability of *enkrateia*:

(1) Aristotle is contrasting virtue with non-affective dispositions (i.e., knowledge), not with other ethical dispositions (vice, *akrasia*, *enkrateia*).

(2) Even if Aristotle does mean here to suggest that virtue is more stable than any other ethical disposition, my points about 'virtue' in part II above carry over here as well: there is no reason to think that the term excludes *enkrateia*.

(3) The contrast in that passage is not between dispositions, but between exercises (ἐνέργειαι) of dispositions. I deny the puristic thesis that there is any ethical difference at all between the *enkratēs* and the moderate person's exercise of their dispositions, namely their actions.

<sup>53</sup> Woods offers no textual support for his claim, and Halper cites only II.9. That chapter is not about *akrasia* or *enkrateia*, but describes the struggles of one aiming to acquire virtue. Which suggests that Halper is conflating what I have called (1) and (2). If we do not think the *enkratēs* is in a transitional state, II.9 is not relevant.

But such a man would seem more than the other a lover of self; at all events he assigns to himself the things that are noblest and best, and gratifies the most authoritative element in himself and in all things obeys this; and just as a city or any other systematic whole is most properly identified with the most authoritative element in it, so is a man; and therefore the man who loves this and gratifies it is most of all a lover of self. Besides, a man is said to have or not to have self-control (*ἐγκρατής*) according as his intellect has or has not the control (*τῷ κρατεῖν τὸν νοῦν ἢ μὴ*), on the assumption that this is the man himself; and the things men have done from reason are thought most properly their own acts and voluntary acts. That this is the man himself, then, or is so more than anything else, is plain, and also that the good man loves most this part of him. Whence it follows that he is most truly a lover of self, of another type than that which is a matter of reproach, and as different from that as living according to reason is from living as passion dictates, and desiring what is noble from desiring what seems advantageous. Those, then, who busy themselves in an exceptional degree with noble actions all men approve and praise.” (IX.8, 1168b28-1169a8)

If this passage is evidence for the claim that taking pleasure can be a rational activity, it is by the same stroke evidence for the claim that the *enkratēs* takes such pleasure. For he is Aristotle’s *example*, here, of what it is to have one’s mind in charge. “Living according to reason” rather than “living as passion dictates,” the *enkratēs* “gratifies the most authoritative element in himself and in all things obeys this.”<sup>54</sup> The implication of the analogy Aristotle makes at the end is that the *enkratēs* desires what is noble rather than merely what seems advantageous. I do not, therefore, need to dispute Coope’s observations about rational pleasure, only her claim that the *enkratēs* lacks it. The question, then, is whether the inability to take rational pleasure somehow follows from the susceptibility to competing attractions or the pain of self-deprivation.

Let us look at (B), which is based on EE 1224b16-19. In that passage Aristotle describes enkratics as pained (by present desire) and pleased (by hope for the future, or knowledge that they are making themselves healthy). Coope comments:

“What is interesting about this passage of *Eudemian Ethics* is the kind of pleasure that the self-controlled person is said to get from acting in a self-controlled way. The pleasure comes from the anticipation of some benefit that the action is expected to produce: the benefit of good health. It is not said to come from any awareness that, in acting that way, one is acting finely (or at least, as finely as is possible, given the presence of bad appetites). (p.153)

Failure to mention motivation by the fine is not, I think, so remarkable as the assonance between passages such as these, and passages (quoted in III, above) in which *phronēsis* is, likewise, unpoetically associated with prudential or long-term benefits<sup>55</sup>. Consider, in addition to the passages quoted above, this one from the *Rhetoric* in which *phronimoi* and enkratics are jointly described as future-oriented:

“You may get your pleasure on the spot and the pain later, or the gain on the spot and the loss later. That is what appeals to incontinent persons—and incontinence may be shown with regard to all the objects of desire. Conversely—what appeals to self controlled and sensible people (*οἱ γὰρ ἐγκρατεῖς καὶ*

<sup>54</sup> cf. DA III.9 433a7-8, where Aristotle describes enkratic agents in much the same way, as *following intellect*.

<sup>55</sup> In addition to the passages mentioned there, consider two from the *Politics*. In I.2 (1252a31-34), Aristotle says that the naturally ruling element is the one that has foresight; if we put this together with the description of the naturally ruling element as identical to *phronēsis* from III.4 (see esp. 1277a5-a12, 28, b25-29), we can conclude that Aristotle understands *phronēsis* as intimately connected to a power of foresight.

φρονιμώτεροι)—the pain and loss may be immediate, while the pleasure and profit come later and last longer.” (I.12,1372b14-15)<sup>56</sup>

Coope is right to note that the *enkratēs* is marked by future-orientation, but so, according to Aristotle, is the *phronimos*. And we have seen why: thinking about the future means thinking about oneself as a thing of a kind.

Let us, then, turn away from rational pleasure to affective pleasure and pain. In the part of her argument that I have labeled, (A), Coope cites places where Aristotle describes the *akratēs* as experiencing inappropriate pleasures or pains. At EE II.8 Aristotle says that the self-controlled person is pained at acting against his appetites (1224a33-6), and at NE VII.9 Aristotle describes him as such as to be pleased against right reason (ὁ δ’ οἶος ἦδεσθαι [παρὰ τὸν λόγον] 1152a3).

Coope concludes “not simply that the self-controlled person has an appetite for some pleasure that reason forbids him to pursue” but that “the self-controlled person’s appetitive desire is so strong that *he would enjoy acting on it*, even though he was aware that this was not the right thing to do.” (p.154, italics mine)

In supposing that the *enkratēs* would enjoy *acting* on appetites he recognizes as shameful, Coope seems to understand his illicit pleasures (ἦδεσθαι παρὰ τὸν λόγον) as pleasures taken in (actual, performed) bad actions. In accusing the *enkratēs* in this way, Coope betrays a picture of *enkrateia* on which it is *akrasia* in disguise. Along the same lines, McDowell describes the *enkratēs* as “swayed by the attractions of alternatives.” Both of these accusations confuse the disposition of the *enkratēs* with that of the *akratēs*, who does tend to perform the bad actions, and enjoy them<sup>57</sup>. Those pleasures, are, however, ones the *enkratēs* will never taste, for the *enkratēs* is such as to feel but *not* to do: οἶος ἦδεσθαι ἀλλὰ μὴ ἄγεσθαι (1152a3). It is, I think, very tempting for us to foist onto Aristotle the modern view that *akrasia* and *enkrateia* are vicissitudes of the same underlying, unstable disposition. If we deny that the ‘illicit pleasure’ to which Aristotle understands the *enkratēs* as being disposed can be a matter of pleasure secured via bad action, then Coope cannot cite VII.9 (and the phrase, ἦδεσθαι παρὰ τὸν λόγον) as evidence for the claim that the *enkratēs* would enjoy yielding to his bad desire. But we can still pose Coope’s accusation as a question: *would the enkratēs enjoy yielding?*

In trying to answer this question, we are confounded by the fact that the *enkratēs* never would yield. The *enkratēs* is marked out by his extraordinary ability to resist just such desires. The feeling of inappropriate pleasures and the pain associated with depriving oneself of them are internal to both the struggle and the triumph of *enkrateia*. The person in question wouldn’t be an *enkratēs* if he didn’t *excel* at resisting his own, strong, desires. The kind of excellence he has is, by its very nature, one inextricable from a certain kind of pain. Racers in the Iditarod, stepping from the blizzard into a warm checkpoint, are

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<sup>57</sup> Note the care with which Aristotle characterizes the *enkratēs*’ relation to his bad desires as *merely* one of ‘having’: ἐν τῷ ἐπιθυμίας ἔχειν ἰσχυρὰς καὶ φαύλας ὁ ἐγκρατής 1146a9-10. The *akratēs*, by contrast, is one in whom the desire is *active* (ἐνεργεῖ 1147a33, ἄγει 1147a34).



undoubtedly assailed by the temptations of dropping out. If they forge onwards, perhaps they take a kind of pleasure in their own unyieldingness. Such a pleasure is conditional upon pain; so too are the pleasures of the courageous man, and those of the spectator of tragedy (as Aristotle understands tragedy). Both courage and tragedy presuppose a painful experience, namely fear (φοβερὸν, φρίττειν, φόβου, *Poetics* 1453b1, 5, 12). Tragic pleasure or courageous pleasure are pleasures of those who feel such fears, not of those who are immune to them<sup>58</sup>.

Likewise, the *enkratēs*' desires and attractions are ones the painful denial of which is part of what he would enjoy in enjoying his own *enkrateia*. It is this pleasure, the pleasure of *enkrateia*, not the pleasure of satisfied shameful desire, that is proper to the *enkratēs*. The *enkratēs* cannot be said to be inclined or disposed in the direction of shameful appetite. Dispositions pick out tendencies or patterns of action, and his tendency is *not* to give in (ὁ δ' οἶος ... μὴ ἄγεσθαι 1152a3). I think we cannot say how the *enkratēs* would feel if he acted on his appetites, since, if he so acted, he wouldn't be himself.

Commentators on Aristotle tend to assume that the shameful pleasures and inappropriate pains of the enkratic detract from any virtue he might exhibit. Aristotle, however, does not mention them for this reason, but rather in order to point out the way in which they *constitute* his peculiar virtue. The *enkratēs* is the one who defeats the most challenging of inner enemies. If Aristotle does believe that there are distinctively rational pleasures, and is arguing for this position in IX.8, we can see why he would illustrate the point with the *enkratēs*. The *enkratēs*' affective pains force us to locate any pleasures he might take in the rational part of his soul. In the figure of the *enkratēs*, the practical excellence of the intellectual part of the soul shines forth in the clash with strong, contrary, appetitive desires. He not only has *phronēsis*, he brilliantly manifests it.

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<sup>58</sup> In NE X.5, Aristotle says there that pleasures are alien to an activity detract from the pleasure of that activity in much the way that *that activity's own pains do* (αἱ οἰκεῖαι λῦπαι, 1175b16-17). With the latter phrase he must be referring to, e.g., how my dislike of practicing piano detracts from my enjoyment of piano playing. In such a case, the pain is not required for the performance of the activity, unlike the case in which, e.g., my pleasure in acting bravely is *conditional* on the fear I felt while doing so.

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