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ARTICLE

Akrasia and conflict in the *Nicomachean Ethics*

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ABSTRACT

In *Nicomachean Ethics* VII, Aristotle offers an account of *akrasia* that purports to salvage the kernel of truth in the Socratic paradox that people act against what is best only through ignorance. Despite Aristotle's apparent confidence in having identified the sense in which Socrates was right about *akrasia*, we are left puzzling over Aristotle's own account, and the extent to which he agrees with Socrates. The most fundamental interpretive question concerns the sense in which Aristotle takes the akratic to be ignorant. The received view in the literature has been the *intellectualist* interpretation, which takes akratic agents to be so ignorant of the wrongness of what they do as to be unaware of it. In recent decades, many scholars have identified serious problems in this interpretation and have moved towards the *non-intellectualist* reading, the strong version of which takes clearheaded *akrasia* to be possible. There is, however, a glaring shortage of discussion of the difficulties facing the *strong non-intellectualist* reading. In this paper, I present what I take to be the most salient reasons for rejecting *strong non-intellectualism*, and argue that Aristotle's text supports a *moderate non-intellectualism*, according to which clearheaded *akrasia* is impossible.

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In the vast literature on Aristotle's account of *akrasia* in *Nicomachean Ethics* VII, there are many protracted controversies, but perhaps the most central question concerns the sense in which Aristotle takes the akratic to be ignorant. To be more specific, what is the akratic's cognitive relation to the wrongness of what he does?¹ The two competing interpretations that have dominated the

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¹Several important differences should be made clear at this point between the contemporary conception of incontinence/weakness of will and Aristotle's conception of *akrasia*, which is a narrower ethical category. In contemporary philosophy, weakness of will is generally supposed to occur when an agent chooses to do *x* rather than *y* despite believing/judging that *y* is, all things considered, the better option. An important difference between this and what Aristotle has in mind is that for an action to qualify as an instance of Aristotelian *akrasia*, the action needs to be committed contrary not only to one's judgment but also to the 'true principle and right choice' (1151a29-1151b4). Thus, a man who falsely believes that fish is bad for his health but cannot resist his desire to eat grilled salmon will not have acted akratically, strictly speaking: such actions are classified by Aristotle as akratic *with*

literature are what have been called the *intellectualist* and *non-intellectualist* interpretations. According to the first of these, Aristotle's akratic is so ignorant of the wrongness of what he does as to be unaware of it. By contrast, *non-intellectualism* denies this lack of awareness and, in its strong versions, takes Aristotle's akratic to be capable of fully grasping the wrongness of what he does. On this view, an akratic can be 'clearheaded' about his error and does not necessarily suffer from any cognitive deficiency with respect to it. Our assessment of these options, then, will also determine whether Aristotle's position – which he construes as neither in complete agreement with Socrates nor in complete disagreement – is actually closer to Socrates's view or the popular opinion that one can act wrongly in full knowledge of its wrongness.

The *intellectualist* interpretation has been the standard, traditionally endorsed one over the past centuries.² This interpretation faces numerous difficulties, both philosophical and textual, but it was seen as unavoidable since certain passages were regarded as incontrovertible evidence in favour of that interpretation. In recent decades, however, it has been argued that these passages can be understood differently, and that Aristotle's view of *akrasia* need not actually be understood in the *intellectualist* fashion.³ This made room to develop the *non-intellectualist* interpretation, the strong version of which takes clearheaded *akrasia* to be possible. Although I side with this approach in rejecting the *intellectualist* interpretation, I believe the problems with what we may call *strong non-intellectualism* have not been adequately appreciated. My aim in this paper is to expose these problems, which jointly render *strong non-intellectualism* an implausible interpretation of Aristotle on *akrasia*. I also address some widely accepted challenges to any view that denies the possibility of clearheaded *akrasia*. I argue that scholars who find clear evidence for *strong non-intellectualism* in Aristotle's text misunderstand the relevant passages. The understanding that emerges from my examination of the text will be that while *some* akratics have an awareness of the wrongness of what they do, *none* of them is clearheaded about this, suffering from some kind of cognitive deficiency with respect to the wrongness of their behaviour. We may call this view *moderate non-intellectualism*.

This paper is divided into three sections: In the first section, I provide an introduction and a sketch of the reasons for rejecting *intellectualism*, to clarify the framework of the debate. In the second section, I discuss a series of passages that are, I argue, inconsistent with *strong non-intellectualism*. In

qualification. Yet another distinctive feature of unqualified Aristotelian *akrasia* is that what pulls the agent away from the correct course of action is desire for bodily pleasure, all other cases, such as acting on anger, being classified as *akrasia* with qualification.

²Modern defenders of this interpretation include Bostock (*Aristotle's Ethics*), Hardie (*Aristotle's Ethical Theory*), Urmson (*Aristotle's Ethics*), and Wiggins ('Weakness of Will, Commensurability, and the Objects of Deliberation and Desire').

³See, especially Charles (*Aristotle's Philosophy of Action*, 'Nicomachean Ethics VII.3', 'ΠΡΟΤΑΣΙΣ' in Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*'). Charles ('Nicomachean Ethics VII.3', 42–3) provides a useful brief history.

the third and final section, I address a number of objections to any view that denies *strong non-intellectualism*. Most importantly, I show that, contrary to the scholarly consensus, the passages in the Aristotelian corpus that indicate mental conflict in the context of *akrasia* do not, in fact, constitute evidence for *strong non-intellectualism*.

I

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*NE*), as in several other works, Aristotle seeks to explain human action by means of what is called a practical syllogism. Practical syllogisms reconstruct agents's reasons for performing an action, and consist of at least one major premise, which concerns a universal (such as 'All sweet things are pleasant'), at least one minor premise, which concerns particulars (such as '*this* is sweet'), and a conclusion, which follows from these. In *NE* VII.3, Aristotle describes the akratic's condition as one involving two competing practical syllogisms, one representing practical reason (and rational wish), aiming to act in the best way, and the other aiming to satisfy the desire/appetite (*epithumia*) in question. I will refer to these as the 'good syllogism' and the 'bad syllogism', respectively. The premises and conclusion cited above constitute Aristotle's example of the bad syllogism, which seems opposed by the good syllogism consisting of a major premise preventing tasting sweet things (such as 'All sweet things are bad for health'), and the minor premise '*this* is sweet', followed by a conclusion (1147a30-35).⁴

Unfortunately, both the above examples, and an earlier one (at 1147a5-10) of practical syllogisms are rather simplistic, and do not seem to fully represent actual cases of practical reasoning (See also Bostock [*Aristotle's Ethics*, 140]). Scholars have attempted to shed light on the practical syllogism by turning to what Aristotle says on it elsewhere, such as the *De Motu Animalium* and *De Anima*, and to his discussion of syllogisms in general in the *Prior Analytics*. Yet our examination of the relevant texts raises a troubling and persistent question about the practical syllogism: what is the *conclusion* of a practical syllogism? The two options that have emerged in the literature are that the conclusion is (a) action and (b) a proposition expressing a decision to act. Option (a) has been a typical feature of *intellectualist* readings of Aristotle's account of *akrasia*, and takes the failure to act on the good syllogism to be proof that the akratic agent has not reached the good syllogism's conclusion, being aware of no more than its premises.

⁴The widely accepted understanding of this passage as presenting two competing syllogisms has in fact been disputed. Kenny ('The Practical Syllogism and Incontinence', 179–80) and Price ('Acrasia and Self-Control', 241) have argued that Aristotle is discussing only a single syllogism here (the bad one), the competing (good) syllogism being left for us to guess. For the present purposes, however, it does not matter which view is correct.

This view leads to numerous difficulties, as others have noted. Perhaps the most serious one is that it leaves 'no room for the struggle that Aristotle himself observes to be characteristic of incontinence'.⁵ The question of struggle, or inner conflict, in Aristotelian *akrasia* is complicated, and I will be offering an unorthodox interpretation of it in my final section (III). It is clear, however, that Aristotle takes some form of struggle to be involved in cases of *akrasia* and *enkrateia* (continence/self-control), as we can see at 1102b16-18, where we are told that something in the soul (i.e. appetite) fights against and resists (*machetai kai antiteinei*) reason in akratic and enkritic people. Taking the conclusion of a practical syllogism to be action removes all possibility of such struggle, and is thus inconsistent with Aristotle's text. Textual interpretation aside, it is plainly implausible to claim that we never experience any inner conflict and are never tempted to act in incompatible ways. What is more, I may deliberate about a practical matter and reach a conclusion at a time when it is not the occasion to act. And if the conclusion were really action or even an effort to act, it would mean that we cannot even wonder which of the two alternative courses of action to choose, for 'if grasping a conclusion must be, in each case, an actual incipient action, one could not consider, because one could not enact, more than one so-called option at a time' (Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, 299). Last but not least, this view contradicts the common phenomenon – which Aristotle thinks should be taken into account by an adequate treatment of *akrasia* (1145b28) – of people saying that they know what they are doing to be wrong, all things considered. For such a judgement, or even assertion, would be impossible if no conclusion follows from the premises of a practical syllogism that is not acted upon. Defenders of this reading tend to admit the gravity of its problems but instead of shying away from the reading, conclude that the problems belong to Aristotle.⁶

What, then, compels *intellectualist* interpreters to insist on such an unpalatable reading? They have been particularly impressed by two passages in *NE* VII.3:

(i) At 1147a29-31 Aristotle writes that 'if everything sweet should be tasted, and this (particular item) is sweet, one will necessarily at the same time also do this, provided that one can do it, and is not prevented'. These lines are taken to mean that once the premises are put together, the conclusion that follows is the action itself.⁷ Accordingly, in cases of *akrasia* the conclusion of the bad syllogism is reached, while that of the good syllogism is not, the agent

⁵Wiggins ('Weakness of Will, Commensurability, and the Objects of Deliberation and Desire', 249). The conclusion not being reached leaves the syllogism only with its premises, and on this view of *akrasia*, only the major premise, which does not by itself constitute a drive to act in any way, and thus cannot enter into a struggle about which way to act.

⁶See, especially, Wiggins ('Weakness of Will, Commensurability, and the Objects of Deliberation and Desire', 249) and Bostock (*Aristotle's Ethics*, 134–5).

⁷Defenders of this view include Wiggins ('Weakness of Will, Commensurability, and the Objects of Deliberation and Desire', 248) and Bostock (*Aristotle's Ethics*, 135, 140).

therefore failing to see the action's wrongness. We may, however, question whether these lines provide the purported evidence for saddling Aristotle with such an implausible view. We may ask, specifically, how to understand 'prevention' in the claim that someone reaching the conclusion must act accordingly if not prevented (*mē kōluomenon*): the reading generally favoured by *intellectualists* takes this to cover only cases of being prevented by something external to the agent, such as being physically restrained. On this reading, an agent who reaches the conclusion of a practical syllogism will either act on it or attempt to act on it but be prevented (externally) from completing the action. However, 'prevention' may also be understood broadly, to include such things as being prevented by one's own incompatible desires (compare Santas, 'Aristotle on Practical Inference, the Explanation of Action, and Akrasia', 175–7). On this alternative view, an agent may reach the syllogism's conclusion (such as 'I should not eat this sweet') but fail to act on it because his appetites compel him to act against this conclusion. In fact, we find evidence for such a broad conception of prevention in the very next sentence: at 1147a31–34 Aristotle uses the same verb (*kōluō*) to indicate the opposition to the bad syllogism presented by the major premise of the good syllogism, thus providing a clear example of a preventer that is internal to the agent. (Kenny [The Practical Syllogism and Incontinence', 178] too notes this.) It would be extremely strange if Aristotle were using this verb to refer exclusively to external forms of prevention at 1147a31 while using it to refer to an internal form of prevention in the very next line.

As Charles points out, moreover, elsewhere Aristotle employs this verb to refer to various kinds of prevention, such as by legal means (1113b26), and specifies by adding the term 'outside' when he wishes to focus on external forms of prevention (*Metaphysics* 1048a16 ff., *De Anima* 417a28). More importantly, *De Motu Animalium* provides evidence for a broad reading of prevention precisely in the context of practical syllogisms and what might prevent acting on one. (See Charles [*Aristotle's Philosophy of Action*, 128; '*Nicomachean Ethics* VII.3', 54].) Given also the interpretive and philosophical difficulties facing the narrow reading, it seems clearly preferable to reject the narrow reading and to endorse instead the view that the conclusion of a practical syllogism is propositional.

(ii) The second key passage for the *intellectualist* reading occurs within the final section of Chapter 3, 1147a24–b17, which Aristotle introduces as his physical (*phusikōs*) examination of akratic behaviour:⁸

But since the final premise/proposition (*teleutaia protasis*) is an opinion about something perceived, and it is what determines actions, this is what [the

⁸There has been some debate on whether the expression 'phusikōs' indicates that an altogether different analysis will follow. See, for instance, Bostock (*Aristotle's Ethics*, 127 n14); Charles ('*Nicomachean Ethics* VII.3', 52–3).

akratic], when under the influence of passion, either does not have, or has in the way in which we said does not qualify as knowing, but only talking, like the drunk with the verses of Empedocles.

(1147b9-12)

The crucial question here is whether to understand the term 'protasis' as 'premise' or 'proposition', both of which are possible translations. Given that the conclusion of a practical syllogism is propositional, the *final proposition* of a practical syllogism is its conclusion (e.g. 'I should not eat this sweet'), whereas the *final premise* of the syllogism is the minor premise. Thus, *intellectualist* interpreters read 'protasis' as 'premise' and reason that since it is the minor premise that the akratic either does not have or has in a muddleheaded way, the akratic does not succeed in reaching the conclusion, and is unaware, for instance, that he should not taste this sweet. By reading 'protasis' as 'proposition', on the other hand, we avoid the many problems that plague *intellectualism*. On this reading, while *some* akratics may lack awareness of the good syllogism's conclusion (not having the conclusion at all), others have an impoverished grasp of the conclusion (having it in a way that does not qualify as knowing).⁹

While the non-intellectualist reading has the clear advantage of avoiding the problems with the intellectualist reading discussed above, intellectualists question whether 'protasis' may be translated as 'proposition'. Aristotle does, in fact, use 'protasis' to mean 'proposition', consistently in relevant works: in the *Prior Analytics* 'protasis' is put forward as a term for any affirmative or negative *logos* (24a16), and in the *Posterior Analytics*, it refers to one of a pair of contradictory *logoi* (72a10). However, Bostock (*Aristotle's Ethics*, 132) objects, Aristotle could not use the term 'as applying to the conclusion of what is being considered as a piece of reasoning'.¹⁰ When we turn to the disputed syllogistic contexts, it is true that 'protasis' is generally used for referring to the syllogism's premises, but as Charles (*Nicomachean Ethics* VII.3', 68) argues, this is consistent with taking 'protasis' to mean 'proposition': while the meaning of the term remains constant across different contexts, in syllogistic contexts it may be used to contrast 'the propositions from which the inference is drawn and the inference drawn from them'. As Charles and Crivelli ('ΠΡΟΤΑΣΙΣ' in *Aristotle's Prior Analytics*, 193) demonstrate, moreover, there is precedent for Aristotle using 'protasis' for the conclusion of a syllogism, in

⁹This distinction between two kinds of *akrasia* is perfectly in line with Aristotle's claim in Chapter 7 that there are two kinds of *akrasia*, that of impetuosity (*propeteia*) and that of weakness (*astheneia*): the weak deliberate (*bouleusamenoi*) but fail to stand by what they have deliberated due to passion, whereas the impetuous are led by passion because they do not deliberate at all (1150b19-22). The weak, therefore, are those who have the conclusion only in the sense that does not qualify as knowledge, while the impetuous are those who do not have the conclusion at all.

¹⁰Those who take this view include Hardie (*Aristotle's Ethical Theory*, 276-7) and Destrée ('Aristotle on the Causes of *Akrasia*', 146-7). Urmson (*Aristotle's Ethics*, Chapter 7) too takes *teleutaia protasis* to be the minor premise.

Prior Analytics I.29 45b4-8. It turns out, then, that ‘teleutaia protasis’ can very well be understood as referring to the final proposition of the syllogism, and this passage too fails to constitute a reason for endorsing the problematic *intellectualist* reading.

II

I have argued against the *intellectualist* view that those who suffer from *akrasia* necessarily fail to reach the conclusion that they should not act in the way that they do. But how about the *strong non-intellectualist* interpretation of Aristotle’s account, as it has been defended in the literature? Is it actually possible to be a clearheaded akratic, having a full grasp of the wrongness of what one does?¹¹ I believe not, since I think such an interpretation faces insurmountable difficulties:

(i) Aristotle speaks of the akratic’s ignorance (*agnoia*) not only in Chapter 2, where he asks whether the akratic suffers from ignorance, and if so of what kind (1145b29); he refers to this ignorance also in the course of offering his account of *akrasia*, discussing ‘how the akratic’s ignorance is resolved and he returns to a condition of knowledge’ (1147b6-7). The conception of akratic ‘ignorance’ as not involving any cognitive impairment or failure to grasp is, on the face of it, a far-fetched one. It is true that the Greek word ‘agnoia’ can be used in a non-cognitive sense, to mean simply a mistake. But, first, the use of ‘agnoia’ in Aristotelian texts is consistently cognitive; this can be seen, for instance, at *Metaphysics* 982b, 1009a, 1052a, 1075b, *Rhetoric* 3.17, *Poetics* 1452a, and *Eudemian Ethics* 1246b. When we turn to the *Nicomachean Ethics* itself, a search reveals 23 instances of ‘agnoia’ in 12 different passages, *all* of which are meant to convey a kind of cognitive impairment, some emphatically so:¹² at 1110b15-35, Aristotle discusses the voluntariness of actions coming about because of ignorance, and distinguishes between ignorance of the universal and of particular things. Here it would be quite implausible to deny that ignorance is a matter of cognitive deficiency. Moreover, that akratic ignorance involves a form of cognitive impairment is confirmed, in the lines quoted above, by Aristotle’s identification of this ignorance as a form of lacking knowledge (*epistēmē*) (1147b6). Defending the possibility of clearheaded *akrasia*, then, would involve the untenable supposition that lack of *epistēmē* does not imply any cognitive lack whatsoever.¹³

¹¹To be more specific, the view is that one kind of akratic is clearheaded, while there are also akratics who are not so. The clearheaded kind is usually taken to be the weak kind of akratic, whereas the impetuous kind evidently lacks such clarity.

¹²The passages where ‘agnoia’ occurs are: 1095a, 1109b, 1110b, 1111a, 1113b, 1114b, 1135b, 1136a, 1144a, 1145b, 1147b, 1159a.

¹³For a defence of this view, see Broadie and Rowe (*Aristotle – Nicomachean Ethics*, 387). For those interpreters who take Aristotelian *akrasia* to involve having but not using a piece of knowledge, it

(ii) If akratic ignorance is diagnosed, in *strong non-intellectualist* fashion, as merely a matter of failing to act on the good syllogism, it becomes difficult to make sense of specifying the item in the syllogism of which the akratic is ignorant. It becomes difficult to make sense, for instance, of the remark at 1147b9-12 that it is the *teleutaia protasis* that the akratic agent either does not have or has in a way that falls short of knowledge, whether ‘teleutaia protasis’ refers to the minor premise or the conclusion. It seems that, with respect to implementation, the entire good syllogism is in the same boat, as there is no element of that syllogism which is put into action. This problem is especially acute as far as the major premise is concerned, since Aristotle is emphatic that akratic ignorance does not apply to the major premise and that the major premise does not suffer in the way that the *teleutaia protasis* does (1147b13-5).

(iii) Another problem with construing akratic ignorance as failing to act on the good syllogism arises due to Aristotle’s claim that after an episode of *akrasia*, the akratic’s ignorance is dissolved and knowledge is regained (1147b6-7). But as Kraut (‘Aristotle’s Ethics’) points out, the akratic has failed to act on the relevant occasion and ‘that is not the sort of thing that can be restored at a later time’: nothing can reverse the fact that you ate the chocolate cake which you ‘knew’ you should not have. By contrast, this comment would make good sense if we take akratic ignorance to be (or at least involve) a form of temporary cognitive deficiency, from which one may recover after the rationally disapproved action has already taken place. That akratic ignorance is a temporally specified condition is also confirmed by the lines 1145b30-31, where Aristotle objects to Socrates’s denial of the possibility of *akrasia* and his claim that people act against what is best only through ignorance. Aristotle argues that this is evidently inconsistent with what seems to be the case, since ‘it is clear that the man who behaves akratically does not, before he gets into the affected state (*prin en tōi pathei genesthai*), think so (*ouk oietai*)’ (my emphasis). The passage is unfortunately ambiguous regarding what state of mind Aristotle takes the akratic to be in before he gets into state in question.¹⁴ The Greek ‘ouk oietai’ does not determine, for instance, whether Aristotle takes the akratic agent’s condition at that stage to take the form of not believing that P, or believing that not-P.¹⁵ Yet this condition is presented as justifying the rejection of the Socratic attribution of ignorance,

may also be noted that *akrasia* seems to involve a cognitive deficiency given the apparent equivalence of using a piece of knowledge with considering (*theōreō*) it (1146b33-4). Denying this would require a non-cognitive construal of *theōreō*, which I find difficult to maintain, though it has been defended by Broadie (*Ethics with Aristotle*, 296), Broadie and Rowe (*Aristotle – Nicomachean Ethics*, 389), and Mele (‘Aristotle on Akrasia and Knowledge’). (See, for instance, the clearly cognitive use of *theoria* in *NE X*.)

¹⁴See, for instance, Kenny (‘The Practical Syllogism and Incontinence’, 165–6) on possible alternative readings of the sentence.

¹⁵The former formulation may be preferred on the grounds that the latter formulation excludes the impetuous akratic who does not deliberate and thus cannot form an opinion that not-P.

unqualified temporally or otherwise, to all who fail to do what is best. In the context, then, the sentence seems intended to explain that akratic behaviour cannot actually be a matter of mere ignorance, since the akratic does not think (or thinks it is not the case) that the akratic behaviour in question is the best *before passion takes over*. But this claim would be inappropriate and misleading if Aristotle thought that the akratic can be just as clear about the wrongness of his action during the action as he is before and afterwards.

(iv) After an introductory section on how to approach *akrasia* (1146b8-24), Aristotle offers his initial treatment of the subject, where he draws a distinction between two ways in which we say someone 'knows': one may *have* knowledge but not use/activate it (*ou chrōmenos/ouk energei*), or one may *use* the knowledge that he has (1146b31-33). It makes a difference, Aristotle argues, 'whether one is doing what they should not while they have the knowledge but do not consider (*theōrounta*) that they should not do it, or doing what they should not while considering that they should not do it' (1146b33-34).¹⁶ Here Aristotle also brings in the distinction between the major and minor premise in a practical syllogism, and explains that nothing prevents one from acting against knowledge 'when he *has* both premises but *uses* only the universal premise, not the particular one' (1146b35-1147a3). If we take the 'having but not using the minor premise' model as a diagnosis of what happens in *akrasia*, we encounter a difficulty for the *strong non-intellectualist* interpretation.¹⁷ For Aristotle proceeds to argue that it would be strange (*deinon*, 1146b35) if someone failed to do what they knew to be wrong while considering this knowledge.¹⁸ Again, at 1147a9, we are told that it would be amazing (*thaumaston*) if someone acted against the good syllogism while activating his knowledge of the minor premise. But these comments would be very strange themselves, if the *strong non-intellectualist* interpretation is right to read using/activating/considering a piece of knowledge as acting on it: doing what one knows one should not while using/activating/considering this knowledge would be, on this reading, neither strange nor amazing – it would be outright *impossible*. If using/activating/considering some knowledge (occurring within a practical syllogism) simply means acting on it, to use the knowledge and not act on it is a *contradiction*, and not merely something strange or amazing.

¹⁶Aristotle seems to employ 'using', 'activating', and 'considering' as synonyms in this passage.

¹⁷In fact, it is debatable whether Aristotle offers this model as a diagnosis of *akrasia* (or of a species of *akrasia*), or merely introduces some conceptual tools that he uses in his account of *akrasia* in the following passages. Indeed, Aristotle never says that akratics have but fail to use the minor premise of the good syllogism. The reference to those who behave akratically at 1146b25 (*akrateuontai*) is prior to the discussion of having but not using knowledge, in the passage where Aristotle has not yet begun his own treatment of *akrasia* but is rather briefly dismissing a view that he finds misguided, that akratics act against true opinion rather than knowledge. See also Kenny ('The Practical Syllogism and Incontinence', 173).

¹⁸Here Aristotle seems to respond with a more nuanced position to the Socratic view that it would be strange (*deinon*) if when knowledge is in us, something else conquered it and dragged it around like a slave (1145b23-24).

Broadie and Rowe (*Aristotle – Nicomachean Ethics*, 389–90) consider this objection and offer a solution based on Aristotle's *Protrepticus*: at B 84 Aristotle argues that one 'uses' something most truly when he uses it well and accurately for the natural end. Broadie and Rowe apparently reason that since using a piece of practical knowledge well and accurately is acting on it, using practical knowledge in the full sense must be acting on it too. The phenomenon in question, that someone may fail to do what they know to be wrong while using this knowledge is, on this view, strange because it 'amounts to the suggestion that proper use might consist in something other than acting according to the knowledge'. In other words, what is strange about this phenomenon is that its possibility assumes the falsity of Aristotle's view about proper 'use'. That Aristotle's view might be wrong, they argue, 'may not be self-contradictory, but it is certainly "astonishing"'. But this strikes me as a very forced and unconvincing reading of the text.

Leaving aside how odd and presumptuous it would be for Aristotle to write that disagreeing with him would be strange/amazing, this reading rests on a conflation of the strangeness of a phenomenon on the one hand, and the strangeness of Aristotle being wrong about a phenomenon on the other. Aristotle's text clearly refers to how it would be strange for a particular phenomenon (failing to act on a practical syllogism when one both has and uses all premises) to take place, and *not* to how it would be strange for Aristotle's view on proper 'use' to be wrong. Second, there is, in the present context, no reference to the *Protrepticus* passage or to this view about proper 'use'. Nor is the context apposite for such a reference, as the point here is to introduce the distinction between (a) merely having a piece of knowledge and (b) both having and using a piece of knowledge. It would be a confusing digression for Aristotle to argue, at this point, that it would be strange for someone to deny his view about 'using'.

(v) At 1147a10-24, Aristotle offers an explanation of the akratic's both having and not having knowledge (in a way), by arguing that his condition is similar to that of someone 'asleep, mad, or drunk' (1147a13-14):

But [having and not having knowledge, in a way] is the condition of people who are under the influence of passion: anger, sexual desire, and some other such things manifestly alter the body's state too, and they even cause madness in some people. Clearly, then, we should say that the condition of the akratics is like such people.

(1147a14-18)

The similarity between the akratic and those who are asleep, mad, or drunk suggests, on the face of it, that the akratic somehow loses his head, becomes muddleheaded, and is far from comprehending the wrongness of what he does.¹⁹ Broadie, a defender of the *strong non-intellectualist* reading, recognizes that the

¹⁹Aristotle is aware, of course, that the akratic and the three kinds of men are dissimilar in many ways; the akratic is likened to them only with respect to his knowledge of the wrongness of what he does.

comparison to those asleep, mad, or drunk points strongly towards an *akrasia* where the akratic lacks a clearheaded grasp of the good syllogism.²⁰ She argues, however, that this is only one kind of *akrasia*, and that there is another kind according to which the akratic is clearheaded. Broadie (*Ethics with Aristotle*, 296) takes the following lines to point out this other kind, the clearheaded akratic:

The fact that men say the things that flow from knowledge indicates nothing; for even men under the influence of these conditions can utter demonstrative proofs and the verses of Empedocles, and those who have just started learning something can string the words together, but do not yet know it; for they have to assimilate it, and that takes time. We must therefore suppose that those who behave akratically speak like actors on the stage.

(1147a18-24)

But Aristotle gives no sign whatsoever that here he is speaking of a different kind of *akrasia*; he moves straight from the comparison to those asleep, mad, or drunk to this passage. Moreover, 'these conditions' (*en tois pathesi*) is a clear reference to drunkenness and madness. One might be misled about this by the earlier use of 'en tois pathesin' at 1147a14-5, where *pathos* refers explicitly to anger (*thumoi*), sexual desire (*epithumiai aphrodisiōn*), and other such conditions, to think that here at 1147a19-20 too Aristotle is referring to those conditions. But the whole point of this passage is to draw an analogy between those conditions and the conditions of those who are mad, drunk, or asleep. It would be meaningless to bring up people who are suffering from anger or sexual desire and can recite Empedoclean verses, as there is nothing interesting or illuminating about that.

That Aristotle is here speaking of reciting Empedoclean verses under such conditions as drunkenness is confirmed at 1147b9-12, where Aristotle repeats the example explicitly as a drunk (*ho oinōmenos*) muttering the verses of Empedocles.²¹ This passage, then, seems to continue and elaborate on the comparison to those asleep, mad, or drunk, pointing out that the akratic's ability to speak as if they know is meaningless, since even those kinds of people can speak as if they know.²² Furthermore, the analogy is continued in the next section, where Aristotle maintains that the dissolution of ignorance

²⁰Charles ('*Nicomachean Ethics* VII.3', 50) emphasizes that the drunks Aristotle refers to are not drunk in just any way: in the *Problems* the drunks mentioned here (*oinōmenoi*) are contrasted with the people who are dead-drunk (*methuōn*), incapable of sex and subject to visual illusion. Accordingly, the *oinōmenoi* should be understood as people who are tipsy, slightly drunk, or 'silly'. (See also Reeve [*Aristotle – Nicomachean Ethics*, 291 n515].) This may be right, but even such drunkenness suggests a less than clearheaded state of mind, and Aristotle's meaning is clarified by the other two kinds, those who are asleep and mad.

²¹The drunk man reciting Empedocles could confuse the order of the verses, put words in the wrong places in such a way that the sentences become nonsensical, and not notice that he is doing these. It is not that his cognitive condition worsens intermittently during his recital – it is from one impoverished condition that he makes the mistakes and then happens to speak correctly.

²²Except, presumably, those who are asleep, unless Aristotle has in mind those who speak during their sleep.

and regaining of knowledge is explained in the same way for the akratic and those who are asleep or drunk, and there is no evidence that Aristotle is speaking of only one among several species of *akrasia* (1147b6-8). Again, he reiterates that the akratics are like those asleep or drunk at 1152a15, where it is clear that he is speaking of *akrasia* in general and not a particular kind. The analogy, then, appears intended for all cases of *akrasia* and not to make room for another, clearheaded species.

The passage quoted above (1147a18-24) also contains reference to two other kinds of agent, (a) the novice student and (b) the actor on the stage, to whose speech Aristotle compares the akratic's ability to speak as if he knows. But contrary to what *strong non-intellectualists* would have us believe, I do not believe these analogies provide evidence of clearheadedness either (compare Broadie [*Ethics with Aristotle*, 296]). For, starting with agent (a), the student in Aristotle's example is at the very beginning of his studies, just having learned how to put together such a sentence. Consider, for instance, a first-year undergraduate student who has heard her professor say 'Plato's theory of Forms leads to an infinite regress' and now repeats this claim with nothing to offer by way of explaining why this might be so. Such a student, it would seem, does not have a proper cognitive relation to the claim, and should not be regarded as knowing what she says, except perhaps on a particularly superficial conception of knowledge. If the akratic's manner of knowing is similar to that of this student, he must be far from being clearheaded about the wrongness of his act. The natural reading of the analogy, then, constitutes no evidence for clearheaded *akrasia* whatsoever.

Concerning agent (b), Broadie (*Ethics with Aristotle*, 296) argues that 'actors *feel* their lines; so the illustration is apt even for the case where the incontinent feels shame and guilt at the moment of action'. But it seems very unlikely that Aristotle expected us to think of actors 'feeling' their lines in a context where his point is to dismiss the significance of speaking as if one knows: 'the fact that men say the things that flow from knowledge indicates nothing' (1147a18-19). Indeed, this 'feeling' is irrelevant to Aristotle's point here, since the question is what mere speaking shows about one's knowledge (of what one speaks about). Consider, for instance, an actor who plays the role of a philosopher and says 'Plato's theory of Forms leads to an infinite regress' without the slightest idea what this means – it will mean no more about his knowledge if the actor playing the philosopher speaks passionately about the theory of Forms.²³ In the case of the actor analogy too, then, it would take a rather strained reading of the text to find in it evidence for clearheaded *akrasia*.

Even if we treat the student and actor analogies as inconclusive on the matter, we are left with the analogies of those asleep, mad, or drunk pointing

²³For an alternative reading of this example, see Price ('Acrasia and Self-Control', 238).

strongly towards a conception of *akrasia* according to which the akratic agents are far from being clearheaded about the wrongness of what they do. When passion takes over, the akratic's grasp will be as poor as that of those who are asleep, mad, or drunk, and their words will be evidence of as little knowledge as do the words of an actor or a novice student just learning to string words together.²⁴

Having initially rejected the *intellectualist* view that akratics have no awareness of the wrongness of what they do, we have now found similarly implausible the contrary view that an akratic – the weak kind – may have an undiminished grasp of this wrongness. The picture that emerges is that the weak kind of akratic is neither completely unaware of the wrongness of what he does nor fully cognizant of this, suffering from a form of ignorance that places him somewhere between those two extremes. A point that should be made here is that the cognitive status of the akratic's ignorance cannot be raised by appealing to the distinction between *epistasthai* and *eidenai*: Charles ('*Nicomachean Ethics* VII.3', 45–6) claims that Aristotle consistently uses *epistasthai* and *epistēmē* rather than *eidenai* when he refers to the akratic's lack of knowledge, and argues that Aristotle's claim that the akratic lacks knowledge in the full sense amounts to denying that the akratic can *epistasthai*, and not that he cannot *eidenai*, the item in question. On Charles's reading, this means that the akratic may have a proper grasp of 'some specific truth' but lacks knowledge of it 'as part of a relevant body of knowledge' (46). But the text does not show such a consistent difference in use between *epistasthai* and *eidenai*: despite Charles' rendering of 1146b35–1147a10 as the akratic knowing (*eidenai*) while acting against one's knowledge (*epistēmē*), these lines provide no evidence for the notion that the akratic is capable of *eidenai* but not of *epistasthai*. Indeed, Aristotle describes the condition of the akratic *not* as being capable of *eidenai* and not of *epistasthai*, but rather as both having and not having *epistēmē* in a way (*pōs*) (1147a12–3). The work of qualifying the akratic's knowledge, then, is done not by the *epistasthai/eidenai* distinction but rather by the expression 'pōs'.²⁵

²⁴It should be noted that the akratics who do not even have the conclusion know even less than these people.

²⁵Besides, it is doubtful that the akratic is capable of fully knowing (*eidenai*) the minor premise even as some specific truth, given Charles's understanding of *eidenai* as a kind of knowledge that one can act on (a child acting on her knowledge that 'this is a cake', for instance), which suggests that the agent may relate this specific truth to other propositions and employ it in a practical syllogism. For then the kind of knowledge that the akratic has – merely *eidenai* – fails to provide any explanation of why the akratic does not act on what he knows to be the best course of action, and the *epistasthai/eidenai* distinction does no work. In fact, Charles's reading of *eidenai* appears unclear, since he also claims ('*Nicomachean Ethics* VII.3', 61) that the akratic who can *eidenai* the minor premise belongs to the kind who fails to reach the conclusion (of the good syllogism). I thank Charles for explaining to me that, on his view, *eidenai* can generate action in animals and children but not in adult humans. But then it is unclear what kind of cognitive state this is, and why it can generate action in some but not others.

Another reason to resist this reading is that Aristotle actually warns us against explaining *akrasia* by downgrading the epistemic status of the akratic's relation to the good syllogism: he argues that it would be in vain to claim that the akratic acts not against knowledge but true opinion, since one can have as strong a conviction about what one judges as others do about what they know (1146b24-30). As long as the agent has a cognitive grasp of the wrongness of his action that can generate action, then, this grasp having a lower epistemic/scientific status is not relevant for the explanation of *akrasia*. If Aristotle thought that the distinction between *eidenai* and *epistasthai* plays a role in explaining *akrasia*, we would expect him to make it quite clear, especially after such a warning. I believe, therefore, that Aristotle's text resists the notion that the akratic has a full grasp of the minor premise (or the conclusion), albeit in a state that falls short of *epistēmē*.

III

On the *moderate non-intellectualist* interpretation that I have defended, Aristotle's view of *akrasia* is that *all* akratics suffer from an ignorance that amounts to a lack of anything beyond a very impoverished cognitive relation to the conclusion of the good syllogism, which fails to qualify as really knowing the conclusion; in the case of the weak, this agent has such an impoverished cognitive relation, while in the case of the impetuous there is no grasp of the conclusion at all. We should consider, at this point, whether the text contains evidence against such an interpretation.

One possible problem comes at 1147a31-4, where Aristotle refers to the case where, alongside the bad syllogism urging us to taste this sweet, there is a universal premise forbidding us to taste. Some scholars (e.g. Broadie [*Ethics with Aristotle*, 301]) take this to be evidence for the possibility that an akratic may draw the conclusion of the good syllogism and grasp it clearly enough to function as a motivational force against eating. But it is far from obvious that those lines need to be understood in this way: Aristotle shows little concern for the conclusion of the good syllogism in this passage, specifying neither the conclusion itself nor the minor premise leading to it. It is hard to see why Aristotle would write this way if he meant to indicate that the conclusion of the good syllogism is reached and is actively opposing that of the bad syllogism. The claim that the universal premise forbids us to taste is, in any case, cryptic and cannot be taken literally, since the universal premise lacks the particular information that is required for guiding action. Moreover, we may question whether forbidding us to taste necessarily presupposes any clarity regarding the wrongness of the action in question: we have already seen that Aristotle considers the ability to speak as if one knows to be consistent with lacking knowledge and having instead a grasp as impoverished as a drunk person. What an akratic agent says as if he knows concerns the

wrongness of what he is doing and would take forms such as 'doing X is wrong' or 'don't do X'. The latter form is, of course, what one would use in speaking to oneself, and is precisely the form of speech that forbids us to do something. Thus, the paradigmatic example of speech that forbids us to taste, 'don't taste this sweet', is exactly the kind of speech that Aristotle thinks an akratic can produce without knowing what he is saying, falling far short of clearheadedness. The passage appears, therefore, perfectly consistent with denying the possibility of clearheaded *akrasia*.

Another difficulty may emerge from 1149b14-8, where we are told that the akratic may plot access to the object of her desire. Broadie (*Ethics with Aristotle*, 282) argues that 'if the agent is right minded enough to plot effectively, he is collected enough to be aware that his cause is wrong'. But this assumes that there can be no selective impairment of one's cognitive apparatus, such that one's grasp of some things would be clouded, but not of other things. It assumes, in effect, that there can be no akratic ignorance of the sort I have argued we find in *NE* VII.3 – a condition in which the agent loses her grasp of the good syllogism's conclusion but not of anything else, specifically not of any part of the bad syllogism. This objection fails, in other words, because it is plainly a circular argument.

Finally, I would like to address a very common objection to any interpretation that, like mine, attributes to the akratic a very poor grasp of the wrongness of what she does. The objection is that this is inconsistent with the existence of moral struggle, a form of mental conflict within the akratic's soul, which presupposes clarity about the wrongness of what she does.²⁶ It is argued, moreover, that Aristotle clearly acknowledged the existence of struggle in cases of *akrasia* and *enkrateia* in many passages, in both the *NE* and other works. While *intellectualist* interpreters conclude that this reveals Aristotle's account of *akrasia* to be inconsistent with what he says elsewhere (Ross, *Aristotle*, 239; Bostock, *Aristotle's Ethics*, 134), *non-intellectualist* interpreters tend to argue that the inconsistency belongs only to the interpretations that deny the akratic's proper grasp of the wrongness of what she does (Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, 282; Charles, 'Nicomachean Ethics VII.3', 60–1; Price, 'Acrasia and Self-control', 244). The passages frequently cited as providing clear evidence of struggle are: *NE* 1102b14-25, 1111b13-16, 1136a31-b9, 1145b21-1146a4, 1150b19-28, 1166b6-10; *De Anima* 433a1-3, 433b5-8, 434a12-15.

Given such a wealth of evidence and such an overwhelming consensus on the matter, one might think that a reading such as mine is doomed. Surprisingly, however, a close examination of these passages reveals that they contain no evidence for moral struggle of *the relevant sort*. The relevant sort

²⁶The objection overlooks the possibility that there may be degrees of struggle that correspond to degrees of clarity, the struggle becoming weaker as the akratic becomes less clear about the wrongness of what she does. I will leave aside this way of tackling the objection in this paper.

of moral struggle is the sort that exists not merely in cases of *akrasia* in a general sense, but rather when the akratic is in the grip of *akrasia*, during the akratic action (and akratic ignorance). In the passage that makes the strongest case for struggle, 1102b14-25, Aristotle points out that there are, in the souls of both the enkratic and the akratic man (*tou enkratous kai akratous*), two elements that oppose each other, just like paralysed limbs that move in the opposite direction (*tounantion*) from where their owners choose to move them. These two elements, one being rational and the other non-rational (*alogos*), motivate the agent to act in ways that are incompatible with one another. The passage also suggests that these contrary elements may actually fight and resist each other (*machetai kai antiteinei*), acting on the agent simultaneously and engaging in a struggle.

Crucially, however, the passage does *not* say that the akratic agent experiences struggle while she is swept by passion into the condition of akratic ignorance. As Aristotle makes clear in *NE* VII.1 (1145b8-20), being an akratic man (*ho akratēs*) is a matter of the person's stable character traits, and does not refer only to behaving in particular ways. That Aristotle considers the akratic agent to be akratic not only during the akratic action but in general is confirmed at 1147b6-7, where we find that a man is considered akratic (*akratēs*) even after the cloud of akratic ignorance disperses and he regains knowledge (*palin ginetai epistēmōn ho akratēs*). Again, it is obvious at 1150b29-31 that being an *akratēs* is not confined to the episode of akratic behaviour, since we are told here that akratic people always have regrets (*metamelētikos pas*), which of course follow the episodes of akratic behaviour. When Aristotle acknowledges struggle within the akratic man, therefore, he need not be thinking of an experience that takes place *during akratic action*. The passage can be read as saying, instead, that the akratic man has in his soul two elements which may, and frequently do, enter into a struggle, but this struggle may last only until the agent's passions cloud his mind, at which point the struggle dissolves along with his grasp of the wrongness of the action in question. The struggle may resume after the akratic action has been committed, once the cloud of akratic ignorance lifts, in the same way as those who are drunk or asleep regain their knowledge (1147b6-9).²⁷

²⁷At 1102b14-25 Aristotle uses psychic struggle as proof that there must be a division within the soul, employing an argument that is strikingly similar to Plato's argument in *Republic* IV for his tripartition of the soul. We might wonder, then, whether Plato's argument involves struggle occurring *during* akratic action, which might be taken to support reading Aristotle's argument similarly. Leaving aside the heated debate on whether Plato comes to allow *akrasia* with his tripartite theory of the soul, we may indicate that *none* of the three cases of struggle Plato discusses occurs *while acting against reason*: those who are thirsty are prevented from drinking by reason, which masters (*kratoun*) that which urges them to drink, appetite (439c6-8). Similarly, Odysseus experiences struggle but his reason prevails over his spirit (441b-c). Finally, Leontius' appetite triumphs but against his spirit (not reason), and he is said to experience struggle but only *before* allowing himself to look at the corpses (439e-440a). It is left unclear whether the struggle continues as he looks, despite seeming to express anger at his eyes: this expression might amount to no more than the babbling of Aristotle's drunk.

A related challenge is posed by Aristotle's remark, at 1150b33-35, that akratics are like epileptics (*epilēptikois*) in that the bad state (*ponēria*) is discontinuous (*ou sunechēs*), whereas intemperance is continuous like dropsy or consumption. Since an epileptic's body disobeys her commands during the epileptic fit, it may be argued, the akratic's struggle too occurs during akratic behaviour, when the agent is in the grip of *akrasia*. But it is doubtful whether Aristotle construes *epilēpsis* similarly to the paralysis mentioned above, the body acting contrary to the agent's wishes: at 1149a9-12 Aristotle classifies epileptics as being senseless (*aphrōn*) and at *De Somno* 457a4-11 he likens *epilēpsis* to sleep, apparently regarding it as a loss of consciousness. Moreover, the point of the analogy with *epilēpsis* is that the bad state in *akrasia* is discontinuous and thus curable, and the exact timing of struggle seems irrelevant in the context. It should be clear that the bad state in question is not the state of struggle: the text is explicit that the badness that is continuous in the intemperate but discontinuous in the akratic is the decision (*prohairesis*) to act badly, which explains why the latter have regrets but not the former (1150b29-31).

The remaining passages in the *NE* provide even less evidence for struggle during episodes of akratic ignorance, since they indicate merely the presence of two elements which motivate the akratic agent in opposite directions, but not their coexistence. As far as these passages are concerned, there may be no struggle *at any point*, let alone during akratic action/ignorance. At 1111b13-6, for instance, we are informed that the akratic acts from appetite whereas the enkratic acts from rational choice, the two acting in opposite ways due to these opposite elements (*enantioutai*). Nothing follows from this, however, regarding the *coexistence* of these elements.

Hopes of finding evidence in *De Anima* for internal struggle during akratic action are similarly dashed. At 433a1-3 Aristotle points out that in such cases as the akratic agent's (*hoion ho akratēs*), we act in accordance with desire rather than with what the mind (*nous*) commands and thought (*dianoia*) urges us to pursue or avoid. It is evident in this passage that desire and the rational element push/motivate the akratic agent to act in opposite ways. It is also natural to read the passage as identifying a conflict, one element overpowering the other and having its way. But here too there is no indication that the two opposing elements engage in a conflict precisely *during akratic action*, as opposed to the akratic agent suffering from such a conflict at a time prior to the action in question. 433b5-8 fares no better, indicating only that *logos* and desire oppose each other when desire is influenced by a pleasant object that is present while *logos* holds us back due to what the future would bring. The most compelling passage in *De Anima* is 434a12-15, which indicates the presence of some form of mental conflict in cases of *akrasia*.²⁸ What I have

²⁸This passage is, in fact, quite puzzling because Aristotle seems to suggest that in cases of *akrasia*, one appetite overpowers another appetite (*hē orexis tēn orexin*), whereas the *NE* makes it clear that it is a

translated as ‘in cases of *akrasia*’ is ‘hotan *akrasia* genētai’ and may also be rendered as ‘when incontinence occurs’ (Hamlyn, *Aristotle: De Anima Books II and III (with Passages from Book I)*, 72), or as ‘when *akrasia* comes to be’. On such translations, the passage may seem to suggest that the struggle in question takes place during the akratic action.

This would be the correct way to read the passage if ‘*akrasia*’ were a condition occurring exclusively during akratic action and the *genesis* of *akrasia* were therefore the coming to be of akratic action. But the passages concerning *akrasia* leave no doubt that Aristotle takes *akrasia* to be the stable character state of akratic people, and not merely a temporary condition that strikes akratic people episodically. At the very beginning of Book VII, Aristotle introduces *akrasia* as an ethically significant concept by explaining that it is one of the three undesirable states of character, along with vice and brutishness (1145a15-17). The treatment of *akrasia* as a stable state of character is consistent throughout Book VII, and Aristotle refers to suffering from *akrasia* and being an akratic person interchangeably. At 1148a3, for instance, *akrasia* is claimed to be a kind of vice (*kakia tis*) whether it is *akrasia* with or without qualification, and at 1148a10 Aristotle slides without pause to speaking of being an akratic person with or without qualification. Both being an akratic person and *akrasia*, therefore, are stable states of character and do not apply exclusively to episodes of akratic behaviour. Indeed, Aristotle never uses ‘*akrasia*’ to refer specifically to akratic behaviour, which he distinguishes from the general state of *akrasia* by using the verb ‘*akrateuomai*’ (e.g. 1146b25, 1147a24, 1147b1, 1147b18). It follows that Aristotle’s claim that conflict exists ‘hotan *akrasia* genētai’ may *not* be taken as referring exclusively to akratic behaviour. The claim has to be understood, rather, as a general one regarding the presence of conflict in akratic souls, and nothing is said about the timing of the conflict vis-à-vis akratic behaviour and akratic ignorance.

Aristotle’s texts provide no evidence, it turns out, for the notion that moral struggle is experienced *during akratic behaviour*. Moreover, his unwavering refusal to endorse this notion across so many relevant passages where he had the opportunity to do so can hardly be explained away as carelessness. Given also his view – discussed in the previous section – that akratics have a poor grasp of the wrongness of their behaviour *while they are suffering from akratic ignorance*, his considered position appears to be that akratic agents may experience struggle before and/or after, but not during, akratic behaviour. On the picture that has emerged, as the (weak) akratic’s grasp of the wrongness his behaviour deteriorates, the opposition posed by the good syllogism melts away, leaving nothing to struggle against the bad syllogism.

conflict between rational wish and appetite/desire/passion that *akrasia* involves. But for the present purposes, we may leave this matter aside and focus on the timing of the conflict.

Importantly, Aristotle's account does not make the implausible claim that akratics do not experience struggle *at any point*, and allows perfect clarity about the wrongness of what one does both before one acts and afterwards. The retrospective clarity is a particularly salient feature of Aristotle's view, as he takes regret to be a standard feature of akratic lives (1150b30-1). The clarity of regret seems, moreover, common to both types of akratic – weak and impetuous – whereas the clarity prior to the action belongs only to the weak, since the impetuous does not deliberate and reach the conclusion of the good syllogism. On the *moderate non-intellectualism* defended in this paper, Aristotle's account has no difficulty accommodating the phenomenon of a man on a strict diet struggling with the decision to have a slice of chocolate cake, fully grasping that this would be wrong, eating the slice once his appetite takes over, and then regretting having done so. What distinguishes Aristotle's view from those who allow the possibility of clearheaded *akrasia* is that on Aristotle's view, the (weak) akratic's mind necessarily becomes clouded with respect to the wrongness of what she does *during akratic behaviour*, an episode when akratic ignorance sets in due to passion. This ignorance, however, does not amount to a complete lack of awareness, and the akratic may retain sufficient grasp to assert that what she does is wrong, though this level of grasp is as poor and ineffectual as the grasp of those who are asleep, mad, or drunk.²⁹

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²⁹ Aristotle's account thus turns out to provide a more plausible and appealing way to reject the possibility of clearheaded *akrasia* than modern versions of the Socratic denial of this possibility: Hare (*The Language of Morals*), for instance, reinterprets apparent cases of *akrasia* as either the agent not genuinely believing that the option they fail to act on is the best one, or as the agent being swept by irresistible forces, such that they psychologically could not have done otherwise. Aristotle's account allows cases of *really* believing that a course of action other than what we engage in is the best – just not *during* the action itself. Moreover, it construes *akrasia* as occurring under the influence of desires that are not irresistible (such that it is possible for the agent to act otherwise), as akratic action is voluntary and blameworthy. Aristotle's account is, therefore, consistent with Austin's ('A Plea for Excuses', 198) much-appreciated observation that 'we often succumb to temptation with calm and even with finesse', despite Austin's charge that Aristotle is at fault for denying this and supposing *akrasia* to involve losing control of ourselves.

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