Acting against one's best judgement
Peijnenburg, Adriana Johanna Maria

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
1996

Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database

Citation for published version (APA):

Copyright
Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Take-down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): http://www.rug.nl/research/portal. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.
PART ONE

THE HISTORY OF THE AKRASIA PROBLEM
CHAPTER I
FROM SOCRATES TO STOICISM

0. Introduction

The present chapter coincides with Part One. It contains an overview of what early philosophers have had to say on the existence of akratic actions. The chapter is divided into four sections, dealing with the views of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics respectively. Later chapters are about the way in which contemporary philosophers handle the subject. At the end I give my own view.

1. Socrates

The question whether or not akratic actions can exist was brought into philosophy by Socrates, who conceived an answer to it as well. As we know from Plato’s early dialogues, Socrates’ answer is remarkably short and plain: akratic actions are plainly impossible. A dialogue in which this stands out very clearly is the Protagoras. There Socrates states that oudeis hekon hamartanei (345d-e). In ancient Greek, the verb hamartanein occurs not only in moral contexts (where it means ‘doing wrong or evil’), but also in non-moral settings (in which it signifies ‘failing an objective’ or ‘missing a mark’). Therefore, oudeis hekon hamartanei might be translated as ‘no one intentionally makes mistakes’ or ‘no one intentionally acts counter to what he knows to be the best’, where ‘best’ does not necessarily mean ‘morally best’.

It looks as though Socrates goes further still in the Meno. Had he maintained in the Protagoras that no one can do what he believes to be bad, at Meno 78a-b Socrates argues with Meno that no one can even desire what he thinks to be evil:

S: Well, does anybody want to be unhappy and unfortunate?
M: I suppose not.

S: Then if not, nobody desires what is evil, for what else is unhappiness but desiring evil things and getting them?

M: It looks as if you are right, Socrates, and nobody desires what is evil.

Similar statements on the impossibility of desiring allegedly evil things can be found in the *Gorgias* 467-468.

Socrates’ claim that akratic actions cannot exist because no one intentionally goes against his own best judgement gives rise to the so-called Socratic Paradox. For notwithstanding its logical and even intuitive appeal, Socrates’ claim is at odds with what we daily experience. Not only novelists and playwriters, not only saints and Church Fathers, not only professional psychologists and famous philosophers, but we too observe that people often act counter to what they know to be their best interest.

The common sense idea that akratic actions do occur was prevalent in Socrates’ time too. Socrates was well aware of that, for he explicitly opposes the idea at several places. But what does he further do? That is, how does he explain what he opposes? Again the answer is short and plain. According to Socrates, the commonalty does not comprehend the real nature of knowledge (*epistêmè*). Real knowledge is something very solid and persistent. It cannot fade away, nor break down, nor be overruled, nor become affected otherwise. Whenever knowledge is present in a man’s mind, it will be the leading and ruling element; nothing else in that mind is strong enough to overcome it. More particularly, no affection, emotion, or passion can force knowledge under its sway. Or, as Socrates phrases it at *Protagoras* 352b-c, knowledge cannot be "pushed around or dragged about like a slave" by any affection whatever, be it pleasure or pain, love or fear. Consequently, a man who possesses knowledge must act in accordance with his knowledge, for nothing has the power to make him act otherwise. Most people, however, miss that point. They wrongly believe that knowledge about what it is best to do can be overcome by desire, pleasure, lust or whatever. Thus, Socrates concludes, the common sense view that akratic actions do occur is a superficial and misleading one; it is the result of deception by what appears to be the case. Whenever we seem to see a man intentionally doing what he knows not to be the best, in truth he does not know that his act is not the
Socrates

best one; he is in error about the better and the worse. "No one who either knows or believes there is another possible course of action, better than the one he is following, will ever continue on his present course when he might choose the better", Socrates declares at Protagoras 358b-c. And he proceeds: "To ‘act beneath yourself’ is the result of pure ignorance." The conclusion will be clear: according to Socrates, what people call akrasia is in fact an instance of ignorance.

The view that akratic actions stem from ignorance may sound convincing in one respect: it is rather unsatisfactory in another. For instance, it makes it impossible to distinguish between actions which clearly differ in kind. Suppose that you and I both are on a diet which forbids us to have pork. Suppose that you, being totally disinterested in gastronomic matters, wrongly think the côte de cassel rôtie on the menu is mutton, whereas I, culinarily qualified and very partial to pig meat, rightly believe it to be pork. Suppose we both eat it. Then my consuming the côte clearly is another kind of act than your eating it is: my act is akratic whereas yours is not. But in Socrates’s view both acts are in a sense of the same kind, for both acts follow from ignorance: you are ignorant of the fact that the meat you are having consists of pork, and I am ignorant of the fact that pork is bad for my health. But the latter is somehow hard to believe.6

6 An interesting analysis of Socrates’ argument on akrasia in the Protagoras is offered by Martha Nussbaum. Like many interpreters, Nussbaum believes that Socrates sees akrasia as "a case where ordinary deliberative rationality breaks down" (Nussbaum 1986, 114). And again like many interpreters, Nussbaum believes that what Socrates has done "is not so much to prove that there can never be such breakdowns as to clarify the relationship between a certain picture of deliberative rationality and the akrasia problem" (ibid.). Contrary to most scholars, however, Nussbaum is convinced that "something more is going on" (ibid., 115). Via his account of akrasia, Socrates offers us "a radical proposal for the transformation of our lives." (ibid., 117). If I understand Nussbaum correctly, the transformation is supposed to proceed in the following way.

Akrasia springs from the fact that we regard the goods surrounding us as having heterogeneous qualities: we attach to them plural values that often cannot be compared. It is this heterogeneity that causes the development of irrational behaviour. Without it, conflicts would be absent, and the ground on which irrational actions flourish would be missing. A way to get rid of this heterogeneity is to adopt the viewpoint of science, especially the science of ethics. Ethics teaches us that "the acceptance of the qualitative singleness and homogeneity of the values actually modifies the passions, removing the motivations we now have for certain sorts of irrational behavior" (ibid., 115). What Socrates told us, Nussbaum tells us, "is that only an ethical science of
Plato seems to disagree with Socrates’ view that akratic actions cannot occur. ‘Seems’, for scholars are still disputing the question. Within this dispute, one mostly refers to the *Laws* and *The Republic*. At 689a of the *Laws* Plato maintains that someone can despise what he believes to be good and can pine for what he knows to be evil, and in *The Republic* 440b Socrates asks Glaucon:

"... don’t we often see ... instances of a man whose desires are trying to force him to do something his reason disapproves of, cursing himself and getting indignant at their violence?"

The question addressed to Glaucon is a purely rhetorical one. It should be answered by ‘yes’, and it merely serves as a step to the claim, central to book IV, that the lower parts of someone’s soul can desire what the reflective part thinks is bad.

Although Plato in the *Laws* and *The Republic* writes as if the number of akratic actions is huge (cf. the quotation above), neither the *Laws* nor *The Republic* abound in examples. The most frequently discussed example involves a macabre tale that Plato tells in the *The Republic* 439e-440a. It is about Leontion, a passionate lover of boys looking as pallid as death, who has great difficulties controlling his necrophiliac proclivities:

"I rely on a story I once heard ... It’s about Leontion, son of Aglaion, who was on his way up from the Peiraeus, under the outer side of the north wall, when he noticed some corpses lying on the ground with the executioner standing by them. He wanted to go and look at them, and measurement will save our lives" (ibid.).

Under Nussbaum’s interpretation, Socrates’ views resemble those of Hare, whose position is briefly sketched in Chapter VI. For a discussion of the idea that akratic actions arise from conflicts, see the present Chapter, Sections 3-4, and Chapter V.

7 Cf. Price: "We might expect [Plato’s] writings to be rich in case-studies of hard acrasia. In fact, they contain few." (Price 1995, 97).
yet at the same time held himself back in disgust. For a time he struggled with himself and covered his eyes, but at last his desire got the better of him and he ran up to the corpses, opening his eyes wide and saying to them, "There you are, curse you - a lovely sight! Have a real good look!"

The story is primarily meant to show that indignation or anger (thumos) is different from desire or appetite (439d), but it also indicates that appetite might prevail, even if thumos has taken up arms for reason. In that sense the Leontion tale can, and in fact has frequently been taken as the description of a real akratic action.

However, scholars disagree about how exactly the tale should be interpreted. Price distinguishes as many as four different interpretations of Leontion’s capitulation to his morbid penchants, and concludes that according to the most likely one it is merely "ironic and idle" (Price 1995, 98). Thumos and reason, Price argues, "recognize that appetite is carrying the day in disregard of their judgement" (ibid.). The harsh words that Leontion addresses to his own eyes therefore express nothing more than "impotent disgust", and the entire story exemplifies a case of hard or clear-eyed akrasia (ibid.). William Charlton seems to share Price’s interpretation in this respect. He argues that the older Plato takes akrasia very seriously. Especially the Laws "presents a completely different picture from the Protagoras. No longer is wrong-doing attributed solely to ignorance; no longer is action against one’s better judgement an impossibility." (Charlton 1988, 26). Both Charlton and Price conclude that the mature Plato revitalises the view that Socrates rejected in the Protagoras, namely that akratic actions are impossible since they imply the supposedly preposterous idea that real knowledge could be dragged around like a slave.

Alfred R. Mele, on the other hand, takes a quite different view. He believes that the older Plato treats akrasia in much the same way as did Socrates:

"Plato’s own (or later) position is not, for present purposes, significantly different from the Socratic one. Although he explicitly admits the possibility of action against one’s better judgement (Republic IV, 439e-440b; Laws III 689a-b, IX 863a-e), he retains the Socratic view that no one
Mele’s view appears to be partly supported by Justin Gosling. Like Mele, Gosling thinks that the Plato of the *Laws* and *The Republic* has much in common with the Socrates of the *Protagoras*: "[Plato] still holds, in the *Republic*, that no-one can knowingly do wrong; and in the *Timaeus* (86d-e), and again in the *Laws* (731c, 733b), we are told that no-one is willingly ... evil, injust or intemperate. These retain the wording or apparent intent of the *Protagoras* ...” (Gosling 1990, 23). Unlike Mele, however, Gosling underscores that in Plato’s later works the *Protagoras* theses have changed. With reference to the Leontion example he comments:

"Plato has abandoned the streamlined picture of human beings so far as motivation is concerned, and with it the rejection of the possibility of acting contrary to what we think best.” (Gosling 1990, 21).

This difference of opinion about Plato’s ideas on *akrasia* should not come as a surprise, for Plato saddled his readers with seemingly inconsistent texts. On the one hand there are lines which entail that Plato complies with the old Socratarian claim that no one acts willingly and knowingly against his best judgement. On the other hand it is equally clear that Plato, at least his elder *avatar*, believes that akratic actions do exist, and that Leontion’s dash to the corpses exemplifies them. Apparently, some scholars focus on the first passages, whilst others have concentrated on the latter ones.

An astute attempt to reconcile both kinds of statement has been undertaken by C.D.C. Reeve (Reeve 1988). Reeve is convinced that the Plato of *The Republic* believes in the existence of *akrasia*. More than that, he deems this belief to play a central rôle in Plato’s ripened philosophy; according to Reeve, it gave the impetus to Plato’s famous doctrine that the soul (*psyche*) has three parts or faculties:

"... the theory of the divided psyche was developed in response to Socrates’ paradoxical views on akrasia, and completely undermines them. If I am right, Plato ... abandons that most Socratic of all doctrines, that akrasia is impossible.” (Reeve 1988, 135).
Plato’s tripartite psychology is put forward in the *Phaedrus*, in the *Timaeus* and most suggestively in Book II (Part II) and Book IV (Part V) of *The Republic*. From these passages we learn that the first faculty in our soul is Reason, engaged in thinking, deciding and calculating. The second is Passion, in the sense of unthinking impulse and bare instinctive yearning. The third is denoted by the Greek word *thumos*, which covers properties like bravery, endurance, vitality, and verve; *thumos*’ main task, we are told, is to serve Reason in the battle against Passion.

In order to understand Reeve’s claim that this tripartition is Plato’s reply to the Socratic paradox, we must first realise that in Plato’s philosophy the three faculties can be reconstructed as *relational forms*. Relational forms are a particular kind of property. They are called *relational* because they pertain to properties that a thing can do, or suffer, or be in relation to something else, or to a part of itself (436e; Reeve 1988, 118). They are dubbed *forms* because they should be distinguished from three other relational properties that according to Reeve occur in Plato’s work, namely qualities, modes and figures. As opposed to the latter three, forms are "universals or properties of some sort that are unique (507b2-7), that ‘remain always the same in all respects’ (479a2-3), and that are ‘objects of thought, not of sight’ (507b9-10)" (Reeve 1988, 52).

The next thing we must keep in mind when we want to understand Reeve’s claim is that each relational form has a *natural object*, i.e. the thing to which it is in its nature related. Thus thirst is a relational form or faculty (in this case a bare instinctive impulse) which has drink as its natural object, for thirst is in its nature related to drink. Other examples that Reeve mentions are:

"Food is the natural object of hunger, for only food can be hungered for. What can be learned is the natural object of knowing, for only what can be learned can be known. ... the list can be continued: the natural object of cleaning is what is dirty; of killing, what is alive; of divorcing, one’s spouse; of burning, what is combustible; of stealing, what belongs to another" (Reeve 1988, 120-121).

Generally speaking, the natural object of a relation, $R$, is the property, $F$, that $y$ must have if it is possible for $x$ to stand in relation $R$ to $y$. Thus "the smaller is the natural object of the relation of bigger than, for $x$ cannot be
I: From Socrates to Stoicism

bigger that \( y \) unless \( y \) has the property of being smaller than \( x \)" (Reeve 1988, 120).

The natural object is a formal rather than a material object. If a person, \( P \), is thirsty and there is a glass of wine, \( w \), in front of him, then \( w \) is a material object of \( P \)'s thirst. \( P \)'s thirst is not related to this particular \( w \), nor to those drinks that are wine, but to drinks as such (dipsos auto). Since drinks as such do not exist, the natural object of \( P \)'s thirst is not a material but a formal object. The argument still holds good when the thirst is directed toward a special kind of drink. If \( P \) is an alcoholic whose thirst is only for distilled drinks, then the natural object of \( P \)'s yearning is a distilled drink as such. But of course, no more than drinks as such do distilled drinks as such exist. Hence, in this case too the natural object is formal rather than material, even if the drink in question is qualified as a particular (namely distilled) drink.

The crucial assumption in Reeve’s reconstruction of Plato’s argument is that relational forms can conflict. For example, a person may be thirsty but nevertheless be reluctant to drink. This means that a person may have two formal objects, in this case ‘drink’ and ‘not-drink’, which are each others’ opposites. On the basis of a very sophisticated argument (which I will not reproduce here) Reeve maintains that, according to Plato, there are two possibilities here. Either the opposites are genuine or they are not genuine. In the first case the conflict between the forms is real, in the second it is merely apparent.

An example of the second case is the following. Suppose that \( P \) wants a drink which takes him away from the grey and gloomy reality and brings him into a pleasant flush. Since he believes that \( w \), the glass of wine in front of him, is such a drink, it is only natural that he wants \( w \). Thus the natural object of \( P \)'s desire for \( w \) is giving-flush-drink. However, \( P \) also realises that \( w \) will make him sick, and of course he wants to avoid such a condition. Hence he has also an aversion to \( w \), of which the natural object is making-sick-drink. Now suppose that \( w \) is the only drink available. Then \( P \) sees himself compelled to create a third attitude in which the two others are as it were synthesised. The natural object of this new attitude is giving-flush-and-making-sick-drink. It is towards this natural object that \( P \) has either a desire or an aversion. If \( P \)'s desire for giving-flush-drink is stronger than his aversion to making-sick-drink, then his new attitude will be a (proportionately weaker) desire for \( w \); but if his aversion is stronger, then his new attitude will be a (proportionately weaker) aversion to \( w \). The moral
will be clear: in this example the original conflict between the relational forms or faculties is only apparent, because the natural objects can be synthesised into a new natural object.

However, the interesting case is where the natural objects are such that a synthesis cannot be made. Here the objects are genuine opposites, and the conflict between the corresponding relational forms is real rather than apparent. At this juncture, two questions force themselves upon us. First, are there any natural objects which really oppose one another? Second, if there are, how can they exist, i.e. how can one and the same person at one and the same time have two genuinely opposing natural objects?

As far as the first question is concerned, Reeve argues that Plato’s answer to it is a whole-hearted ‘yes’: natural objects can be genuine opposites and relational forms can really conflict. There are several ways in which this might happen, each reflecting a manner in which the creation of a synthesis can be blocked. One of those ways is the following. Suppose that a rod, \( r_1 \), looks longer than another rod, \( r_2 \), although careful measurement has taught us that \( r_1 \) is not longer than \( r_2 \). Then we have two opposed natural objects, \( \text{what-is-longer-than-} r_2 \) and \( \text{what-is-not-longer-than-} r_2 \). However, these objects cannot be synthesised, for the synthesis, \( \text{what-is-both-longer-and-not-longer-than-} r_2 \), can never be the object of a possible belief. Hence, in this case, a synthesis is blocked by the logical incompatibility of the two natural objects involved.\(^8\) Another way in which a synthesis can be impeded is when one natural object is already part of the other, so that their conjunction results in nothing new. This situation typically occurs when one

\(^8\) One might argue that the two combined objects are not really incompatible. For the new natural object is not \( \text{what-is-both-longer-and-not-longer-than-} r_2 \), but rather \( \text{what-is-longer-on-the-basis-of-looking-and-not-longer-on-the-basis-of-measurement} \). Since the latter object, as opposed to the former, consists of two compatible parts, it can perfectly well be the object of a belief.

The above argument is correct to the extent that \( \text{what-is-longer-on-the-basis-of-looking} \) does not contradict \( \text{what-is-longer-on-the-basis-of-measurement} \). However, it is incorrect in so far as it suggests that the newly constructed object is a real synthesis. According to Plato-Reeve, it is not, since \( \text{what-is-longer-on-the-basis-of-looking-and-not-longer-on-the-basis-of-measurement} \) adds nothing to \( \text{what-is-longer-on-the-basis-of-looking} \). This is so because only measurement can inform us about the nature of a thing; our senses are not to be trusted. Thus what-is-longer-on-the-basis-of-measurement will always overrule what-is-longer-on-the-basis-of-looking. See the text, in particular the second way in which the creation of a synthesis can be blocked.
of the natural objects relates to the faculty Reason, since Reason contemplates what is good for the psyche as a whole. Hence it is assumed that the natural object of Reason already embraces the natural objects of other relational forms.⁹

How can a conflict between relational forms occur? It is with respect to this second question that the idea of a divided mind comes in. According to the Plato of Reeve, a conflict occurs if and only if the psyche of the agent is divided: only if his soul consists of n parts, can a person have n genuinely opposing natural objects. Plato’s argument for this claim is extremely simple. It appears to be nothing more than the principle of non-contradiction. "Clearly one and the same thing cannot act or be affected in opposite ways at the same time in the same part of it and in relation to the same object; so if we find these contradictions, we shall know we are dealing with more than one faculty", Plato argues through Socrates in The Republic, 436b. And he concludes: "We shan’t, then, be shaken by objections of this kind into believing that the same thing can never act or be affected in opposite ways, or bear opposite predicates, at the same time in the same part of itself and in relation to the same thing" (436e). Ergo, when someone has two natural objects which are genuine opposites, he must somehow be split into two.

This way of reasoning may well sound plausible. Apart from its metaphorical flavour, there seems to be nothing wrong with the idea that genuine opposites presuppose a divided soul or mind (I come back to the notion of a divided mind in Chapter V). However, as for the relation between a divided mind and an akratic action, we still are all at sea. Why should akratic actions presuppose divided minds? What does akrasia have to do with conflicting relational forms? The Plato-Reeve answer to this question, if I understand it correctly, goes as follows.

When relational forms really conflict, their natural objects cannot be synthesised into a new object. Therefore, the conflict cannot be resolved by creating a compromise between the natural objects involved. The only way to put an end to the clash is by letting one relational form override the other. In Plato’s view, not all relational forms are equally good, for some aim at better objects than others. What happens in the case of an akratic

⁹ See the previous footnote. That a conflict is nevertheless possible is explained in Reeve 1988, 126-129.
action is that the worse relational form overrides the better. In the Leontion case, for example, a lower form overrules a higher one, since Leontion’s desire to look at the dead bodies outweighs his thumos which makes a great effort to hold him back.

It is important to realise that what Leontion actually does is far from what he truly wants. In the reconstruction by Reeve, Leontion sincerely wants to combat his aberrant sexual inclinations, which he deems to be far beneath his station as a gentleman. His lust, however, is simply too strong to resist. Thus it gives rise to a voluntary action other than the action that Leontion knows to be the best. It is in this way that Reeve has attempted to reconcile the apparently irreconcilable statements in Plato’s text. For now he can account for Plato’s (Socratarian) claim that no one intentionally acts against his best judgment, as well as Plato’s (anti-Socratarian) declaration that akratic actions do exist.

Reeve’s reading of Plato contains many more interesting details, such as answers to the questions ‘Why does the psyche consist of precisely three parts?’ and ‘Why does the tripartition affect the psyche rather than the outer world?’ However, I will not deal with them here. For I am interested in another question, viz. ‘What does it mean that some faculties are too strong to resist?’, in other words ‘How is it possible that what someone does deviates from what he truly wants?’ If I am right, Reeve fails to answer this question. The only answer that can be extricated from his writings is: ‘it means that an akratic action occurs’ or ‘it is possible because an akratic action occurred’. But the occurrence of an akratic action is of course exactly what we want to explain.

In sum, then, Plato’s account of akrasia cannot satisfy me. In Part Three I construct an answer to the questions that Plato’s texts fail to resolve, even when they are interpreted by an ingenious scholar like Reeve. In the present Part One I discuss other ancient philosophers who tried very hard to account for the existence of akratic actions. Aristotle is a classic case in point. Aristotle’s attempt to save akrasia has become very famous, and it has laid the foundations for mediaeval and modern discussions on the subject. In the next section I take a closer look at his celebrated analysis.
Aristotle wrote nearly a whole book on *akrasia* (Nicomachean Ethics VIII), and he deals with the subject at several places in the Eudemian Ethics II-III and in On the Soul III. Characteristically, he treats the topic with meticulous care. He conscientiously distinguishes *akrasia* (doing something you know is wrong but pleasant) from another imperfection, which he calls *malakia* (omitting something you know is right but painful); he cautiously separates *akrasia* and *malakia* from their counterparts *enkrateia* (refraining from what you know is pleasant but wrong) and *karteria* (doing what is right though painful); he further distinguishes two varieties of *akrasia*, to wit *propeteia* (knowingly doing the wrong thing out of impetuosity) and *astheneia* (knowingly and calmly doing the wrong thing); moreover, he differentiates between *akrasia* due to *epithumia* or bodily pleasure and *akrasia* due to *thumos* or anger.

Surely, Aristotle would not have constructed this whole machinery had he not believed that such a thing as *akrasia* exists. Yet interpreters of Aristotle carry on debates about whether Aristotle thinks *akrasia* is possible. James J. Walsh, who wrote a study of two hundred pages on Aristotle’s notion of *akrasia*, concludes that he deems it to be impossible (Walsh 1963). Yet another expert on Aristotle’s ethical writings, Anthony Kenny, holds that Aristotle does believe that *akrasia* exists (Kenny 1979). Anscombe and Charlton seem to support Walsh (Anscombe 1965; Charlton 1988). Oksenberg Rorty, Pears and Mele seem to be on Kenny’s side (Oksenberg Rorty 1980; Pears 1984; Mele 1981, 1985, 1987).

The dispute concerning Aristotle’s opinion on *akrasia* centres on the second and the third chapter of the Nicomachean Ethics VII, in particular on 1145b21-31 and 1147a24-1147b18. Some have maintained that, at those two places, Aristotle describes *akrasia* as a case of ignorance, thus, like Socrates, denying its existence. But others consider both passages to be a justification of the common-sense view that akratic actions do exist. This is what Aristotle says in the first passage:

"Now we may ask what kind of right belief is possessed by the man who behaves incontinently. That he should behave so when he has knowledge, some say is impossible; for it would be strange - so Socrates thought - if when knowledge was in a man something else could
master it and drag it about like a slave. For Socrates was entirely opposed to the view in question, holding that there is no such thing as incontinence; no one, he said, acts against what he believes best - people act so only by reason of ignorance. Now this view contradicts the plain phenomena, and we must inquire what happens to such a man; if he acts by reason of ignorance, what is the manner of his ignorance? For that the man who behaves incontinently does not, before he gets into this state, think he ought to act so, is evident." (1145b21-31).

And this is what he writes in the second passage:

"[Therefore], the position that Socrates sought to establish seems to result; for it is not what is thought to be knowledge proper that the passion overcomes (nor is it this that is dragged about as a result of the passion)." (1147b13-17).

What do these quotations mean? Do they mean that Socrates is wrong because ‘the plain phenomena’ show that people can act in an akratic way (as Kenny c.s. will maintain)? Or do they mean that Socrates is right because ‘knowledge proper’ cannot possibly be ignored (as Walsh c.s. will claim)? Or is there still another meaning possible?

In order to gain some idea what the answers to these questions may be, and thus what Aristotle had in mind, I examine in Section 3.1 three distinctions extracted from the Nicomachean Ethics. The first (A) is a distinction between acting and mere moving. The second distinction (B) differentiates between two meanings of ‘to know’. The third distinction (C) is a subdivision: it splits one of the meanings of ‘to know’ into two. On the basis of (A), (B) and (C) I raise and also answer two questions in Section 3.2 and Section 3.3. As we will see, the answers to both questions enable us to reconstruct what Aristotle might have had in mind when he wrote down the two quotations above. In 3.4 I offer an evaluation of Aristotle’s view.
3.1 Three distinctions from the *Nicomachean Ethics*

(A) The first distinction sets apart actions from mere movements (1139b ff.). Aristotle regards actions as constituting, so to say, a proper set of movements. Actions, then, are those movements that are governed by certain patterns of reasoning. These patterns are valid by definition, and Aristotle calls them *syllogismoi toon praktoon*, practical syllogisms.

In fact Aristotle is talking about two sorts of practical syllogisms: technical syllogisms and ethical syllogisms. Technical syllogisms govern those actions which Aristotle calls ‘makings’ (*poièsis*); ethical syllogisms rule actions which are labeled ‘doings’ (*praxis*). The difference between doings and makings is explained by Aristotle at several places, for instance at the *Nicomachean Ethics I*, 1094a5 ff. Makings are productions; they refer to those human activities that have an end separate from the activity itself. Doings are human activities that have no such separate ends; they are performed for their own sake. A making expresses a certain skill (*technè*), a doing expresses a certain state of character (*èthikè hexis*). An example of the former is the healing of a patient by a medical doctor; this activity has an end, viz. health, which is separate from the activity itself. An example of the latter is any action with which ethics is concerned; for example, a honourable or generous action is done because it is honourable or generous, not because it produces something. Aristotle’s way of contrasting doings and makings has been often criticised (cf. Robinson 1977, 80; Kenny 1979, 113, note 1; Ackrill 1981, 143-143 and 153). Also, Aristotle is not very clear about the way (or ways) doings and makings are related to practical syllogisms: the difference between technical practical syllogisms and ethical syllogisms is not particularly transparant (Kenny 1979, 125-147). Here I will ignore the contrast between doings and makings as well as that between technical and ethical syllogisms. I simply use the term ‘actions’ (which I take to cover doings as well as makings), and the term ‘practical syllogism’ (which I take to cover ‘technical syllogism’ as well as ‘ethical syllogism’).

Aristotle, then, introduces his doctrine of the practical syllogism in Chapter 3 of book VII. At that point he also gives the first example of a practical syllogism; I will label this example (E1PS):
Aristotle

premises
(I.1): Dry food is good for all men
(I.2): I am a man
(E_1 PS)
(I.3): P food is dry
(I.4): This food is P

(E_1 PS)
(I.3): P food is dry
(I.4): This food is P

conclusion
(I.5): This food is good for me

in which ‘P’ is a predicate letter (Aristotle has ‘such-and-such’ instead of ‘P’; cf. 1147a4-6).\(^{10}\) (E_1 PS) is not much like the - assertoric - syllogisms we know from the Prior and Posterior Analytics: (E_1 PS) has more than two premises, it has more than three terms, not every premise is of subject-predicate form, and neither is the conclusion. Even if we were to stretch the meaning of ‘syllogism’ so that this word were to cover not only assertoric syllogisms, but hypothetical, disjunctive and modal syllogisms as well, then (E_1 PS) would still not look like a syllogism. Nor does (E_1 PS) resemble an inference in propositional logic (as Kenny seems to think - cf. Kenny 1979, 112). It is only by using predicate logic that we can uncover the logical form of (E_1 PS):

\[
\begin{align*}
(I.1\text{pred}): & \quad \forall x \forall y ((Dx \land My) \rightarrow G(x,y)) \\
(I.2\text{pred}): & \quad M(a) \\
(E_1 PS\text{pred}) \quad (I.3\text{pred}): & \quad \forall x (Px \rightarrow Dx) \\
(I.4\text{pred}): & \quad P(b) \\
(I.4^*\text{pred}): & \quad D(b) \quad (I.3\text{pred}),(I.4\text{pred}) \\
(I.5\text{pred}): & \quad G(b,a) \quad (I.1\text{pred}),(I.2\text{pred}), \quad (I.4^*\text{pred})^{11}.
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{10}\) I shall number most of the formulae and sentences I shall number consecutively in each chapter. Thus (I.4) refers to formula or sentence number four in Chapter I, and (VIII.2) denotes formula or sentence number two in Chapter VIII. Some formulae and sentences are referred to differently. Thus in Chapter III (D) denotes a formula which is an explicit definition à la Carnap, whereas (RP) denotes two formulae which together make up a so-called reduction pair. Furthermore, I shall use the terms ‘sentence’, ‘proposition’, ‘statement’ and the like interchangeably. At places where I deviate from this usage, the context will make clear what is meant. Finally, if I refer to a certain section without mentioning the number of a chapter, the section is in the same chapter.

\(^{11}\) D(x): x is dry, M(x): x is a man, P(x): x is P food, G(x,y): x is good for y. Statement (I.4^*pred) is a missing step, or if we want to put it more safely: an intermediate conclusion, which elucidates the reasoning.
In general, an Aristotelian practical syllogism appears to be a valid inference in predicate logic, the conclusion of which describes an action, prescribes an action, or is itself an action: Aristotle does not distinguish between the three, and neither will I (at least not in this chapter). Thus, in our example, (I.5\text{pred}) can be interpreted as ‘b is good for a’ (descriptive), as ‘a should consume b’ (prescriptive), or even as a real action (the eating of this food).

The premises of a practical syllogism always encompass two kinds: universal premises and particular premises. In post-Aristotelian philosophy, the universal is often called the major premise while the particular is labeled the minor premise, but Aristotle himself never uses the expressions ‘major’ and ‘minor’ when he talks about practical syllogisms.

The universal premise is a statement on a general practical principle; it often contains two general terms of which, as Aristotle tells us, "one is predicable of the agent, the other of the object" (1147a 4-5). Thus, in our examples, (I.1) or (I.1\text{pred}) is the universal premise which contains two general terms: ‘men’ or ‘M’ and ‘dry’ or ‘D’. The former term is predicatable of me, the latter can be spelled out of P food. As in the case of the conclusion, Aristotle is somewhat ambiguous on the question of whether the universal premise has a descriptive or a prescriptive nature: the consequens $G(x,y)$ can be read as ‘x is good for y’ (descriptive) but also as ‘y should consume x’ (prescriptive). Like Aristotle, I abstain from making a choice between the interpretations.

In contrast to the universal premise, the particular premise is a statement about a specific fact. In (E1\text{PS}) the particular premise is embodied in (I.4). It is not quite clear how we have to assess (I.2) and (I.3). Aristotle describes them as statements that particularise the general terms of (I.1): (I.2) particularises ‘men’, and (I.3) particularises ‘dry’. I shall therefore consider (I.2) and (I.3) to be particular premises, and put up with the quirk that this is somewhat odd in relation to (I.3) and (I.3\text{pred}).

(B) The second distinction that we need, in order to find out what Aristotle has in mind, touches upon the word ‘to know’ (1146b31-35; cf. On the Soul 417a26ff). According to Aristotle we use this word in two senses. We can say of a man that he knows $p$, meaning that this man possesses $p$ and uses $p$. But we can also say of a man that he knows $p^*$, meaning that he possesses $p^*$ although he is not using $p^*$ now. Aristotle does not give an example of what he is after, but perhaps the following will do. When you were reading the preceding sentence, you knew that Aristotle tried to distinguish two meanings of ‘to know’, in the sense that you possessed this
knowledge and were making use of it too. On the other hand, while reading that very sentence, you possessed the knowledge that 259 is the product of 7 times 37 although you were not using it at that time.\textsuperscript{12}

(C) The third distinction is a subdivision; it differentiates between two senses of ‘possessing but not using’ (1147a10-1147a24). A sleeper, a drunk or a madman all possess but do not use the knowledge that 7 times 37 equals 259. However, their ‘possessing but not using’ is different from the ‘possessing but not using’ by a person who is awake, sober and sane. To account for this difference, Aristotle subsequently distinguishes two meanings of ‘to possess’ (1147a12). When they are sober, sane and awake people \textit{fully possess} pieces of knowledge (even if they don’t use them). But drunk, mad or sleeping people only \textit{partly possess} pieces of knowledge (and, moreover, they are not using them). The latter people are in a state of "having knowledge in a sense and yet not having it", as Aristotle puts it at 1147a12-14.

3.2 Two questions and the last protasis

Meanwhile we have prepared ourselves to unravel what Aristotle thinks about \textit{akrasia}. According to Aristotle the \textit{akratès} both knows and does not know that his act is not the best. He knows it, in the sense that he possesses the relevant knowledge; yet he does not know it, in the sense that he fails to use or exercise what he possesses - cf. the second distinction. Besides, the \textit{akratès} is like the drunk, the sleeper, or the madman: he possesses his unused piece of knowledge only in a fragmentary way - cf. the third distinction. The fact that an akratic agent may utter words like "I know that my act is not the best" does not prove anything. For, as Aristotle points out, even drunk and mad people can

\textsuperscript{12} The distinction here referred to should not be confused with the distinction between \textit{knowing} and \textit{believing}. Aristotle discusses an argument from which it follows that the akrates does not \textit{know} that his act is not the best but only \textit{believes} that it is not. Aristotle takes this to mean that akratic actions result from beliefs, c.q. convictions that are less strong and sure than are pieces of knowledge. According to Aristotle this argument is unsound. As far as strength of conviction is concerned, there is no difference between knowledge and belief: beliefs can be as strong and convincing as pieces of knowledge - "as is shown by the case of Heraclitus", Aristotle subtly adds (1146b 31).
"utter scientific proofs and verses of Empedocles, and those who have just begun to learn can string together words, but do not yet know; for it has to become part of themselves, and that takes time." (1147a19-21).

The utterances of men in an akratic state should not be taken seriously, Aristotle assures us; "it means no more than its utterance by actors on the stage" (1147a22-23).

Now all this sounds fairly sensible. Apparently, Aristotle is easy on common-sense thoughts about akrasia. On the other hand, however, one may doubt whether Aristotle’s distinguished concepts really have empirical import, that is, whether they actually can explain the occurrence of akratic actions. More particularly, two questions might be raised. First, what is it that the akratès only partly possesses? Certainly, it is an unused piece of knowledge. But does this piece have a special property, apart from the property that the agent possesses it only in a partial way? In other words, can any piece of unused knowledge be partly grasped, or is there something peculiar about such a piece, which makes it, so to say, a candidate for being not fully grasped? Second, why is it that in some cases an unused piece of knowledge is only partially grasped, while in other cases the agent fully possesses it? In other words, what causes the fact that an agent does not fully grasp something?

In answering these questions, our first distinction can help us. According to (A), actions are those movements that are governed by a practical syllogism. Now consider the following example of a practical syllogism, (E₂PS):

\[
\text{(E₂PS)}
\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>premises</th>
<th>conclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(I.6): Sweet food is pleasant for all men</td>
<td>(I.10): This food is pleasant for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(I.7): I am a man</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(I.8): Chocolate is sweet food</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(I.9): This food is chocolate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(E₂PS) is a slightly different version of the practical syllogism that Aristotle describes at the Nicomachean Ethics VII, 1147a29-31. Imagine a person P who does not take this food, although he knows that (E₂PS) is valid and that
its premises are true. Then, clearly, \( P \) acts akratically. By the second and the third distinction we know that there exists a piece of knowledge which \( P \) does not use, and does not fully possess either. But by the first distinction we gain an idea about what this piece of knowledge is: it is an element of \((E,PS)\). Which element? In a very tightly written and much discussed passage, Aristotle calls the thing an \( akratès \) does not fully grasp "the last protasis" of the practical syllogism (Nicomachean Ethics, VII,1147b9). So the element we are looking for is the last protasis of \((E,PS)\), literally: the last thing that \((E,PS)\) puts forward.

Unfortunately, scholars strongly disagree about what the last protasis of \((E,PS)\) is. Some think it is the conclusion of \((E,PS)\) (Charles 1984; cf. Kenny 1966). Others believe it is the last premise, i.e. (I.9) (Charlton 1988). Still others assume that it is one of the particular premises (I.7), (I.8), or (I.9) (Robinson 1977). Again, different interpretations have been proposed. Urmson, for example, seems to suggest that the last protasis is something in between the premises and the conclusion. Urmson first rephrases \((E,PS)\) roughly as \((E,PS,Urm)\):

\[
(E,PS,Urm)
\]

premises
(I.6): Sweet food is pleasant for all men
(I.7): I am a man
(I.8): Chocolate is sweet food
(I.9): This food is chocolate
(I.11): So this food will be pleasant

conclusion
(I.12): And I should taste it.

Urmson then claims that the last protasis of \((E,PS,Urm)\) is (I.11) (Urmson 1988, 94). But by the very terms in which \((E,PS,Urm)\) is couched, it is unclear how we should interpret (I.11). Should we look upon (I.11) as a (particular) premise? That would be strange, since the first word of (I.11) - 'so' - seems to mark a conclusion. Then do we have to regard (I.11) as a part of the conclusion, which, in that case, consists of (I.11) and (I.12)? But that renders unclear why Urmson translates protasis as 'premise' (Urmson 1988, 94). Or must we consider (I.11) as a sort of link between the premises (I.6)-(I.9) on the one hand, and the conclusion (I.12) on the other? This option appears to be implied by Urmson's statement that (I.11) leads "directly to the conclusion that [I] should ... taste it" (Urmson 1988, 94).
Still another interpretation has been put forward by Anthony Kenny. According to Kenny the last protasis means ‘the last proposition’, and its reference, Kenny argues, depends on what the context is:

"what [the last proposition] refers to differs from case to case: it refers to the point at which the reasoning of the incontinent man breaks down. In some cases this is a premise; in other cases it is a conclusion; in each case it is the proposition whose absence, or whose effectiveness, is the cause of the incontinence." (Kenny 1979, 164).

Despite the many differences in their opinions on what the last protasis of (E₂PS) is, all interpreters unite on what it is not. It is not the universal premise, c.q. (I.6). Aristotle appears to exclude the possibility that the universal premise is not fully known; indeed, he does not even entertain the prospect.

That at once gives us Aristotle’s answer to the first of our two questions, viz., the question of what it is that the akratès only partly possesses. What the akratès does not fully possess, and, moreover, does not use at all, is a statement concerning a particular fact. Whether that statement serves as a premise or as a conclusion is something Aristotle does not tell us. But what he does tell us is that this very statement cannot possibly set forth a general practical principle. That is to say, if a man possesses a general principle like ‘Dry food is good for all men’ or ‘Killing is evil’, then he fully possesses it. Does he also use it? Aristotle’s answer to this question might have been as follows. To use or apply a general practical principle means to act upon it. But one can only act upon a general principle if one knows particular facts. For example, one can only act upon ‘Killing is evil’ if one knows that this-here-and-now is an instance of killing, and knowing that involves knowledge of a fact. From this it follows that the question whether a general principle is used or not, hinges on the way in which statements on particular facts are known. If the latter statements are not fully known, then the general principle cannot be applied. But if they are, then not only is the general principle applied, but the conclusion is also necessarily drawn. In sum, if a man possesses a universal premise then he fully possesses it, yet full-blown knowledge of particular premises is needed to put the universal premise into action.

Still this does not solve our problem. In the case of an akratic
Aristotle

action, the agent does not fully know every particular statement of his practical syllogism; he is missing at least one of them, viz. the last protasis - whatever exactly this may be. Hence his practical syllogism might be invalid, and in that case it is not a practical syllogism at all - cf. distinction (A). But then, on Aristotle’s definition, there cannot be an action. On the other hand, however, an action is performed; an akratic action indeed, yet an action. So, by definition, there is a practical syllogism which governs this action, and, again by definition, this syllogism is valid. But if there is an action governed by a valid practical syllogism, it does not make sense to call that action ‘akratic’. What went wrong?

Again, Aristotle does not tell us. That is, he fails to formulate one definite answer. Instead, he writes a rather puzzling passage, which, given its importance, I quote at length:

"... we may also view the cause [of akrasia] as follows with reference to the facts of nature. The one opinion is universal, the other is concerned with the particular facts, and here we come to something within the sphere of perception; when a single opinion results from the two, the soul must in one type of case affirm the conclusion, while in the case of opinions concerned with production it must immediately act (e.g. if everything sweet ought to be tasted, and this is sweet, in the sense of being one of the particular sweet things, the man who can act and is not restrained must at the same time act accordingly). When, then, the universal opinion is present in restraining us from tasting, and there is also the opinion that everything sweet is pleasant, and that this is sweet, (now this is the opinion that is active), and when appetite happens to be present in us, the one opinion bids us to avoid the object, but appetite leads us towards it ...; so that it turns out that a man behaves incontinently under the influence (in a sense) of reason and opinion, and of opinion not contrary to itself, but only incidentally ... to right reason (Nicomachean Ethics VII, 1147a24 - 1147b3).

J.L. Ackrill has noticed that scholars have read this passage in two different ways (Ackrill 1981, 148). In Section 3.3 I examine both readings somewhat
further. It will be shown that, despite their differences, both interpretations enable us to reconstruct Aristotle’s answer to our second question, viz. the question of what *causes* the fact that a particular statement is not fully grasped.

### 3.3 Two readings

The first reading is advocated by, among others, Santas (Santas 1969). On this reading, Aristotle appears to argue approximately as follows. Consider a man who fully knows (that is, wholly possesses and uses) the particular premises (I.7), (I.8), and (I.9) of (E₂PS). Further, suppose this man also possesses the premise that sweet food is pleasant for all men, i.e., (I.6). Since (I.6) is a universal premise, the man fully possesses (I.6). Now it would not be very realistic to assume that (I.6) is the only universal premise this man has; everyone possesses, at any moment, hundreds of universal premises. Among these premises supposedly is the statement that sweet food is bad for a man’s health. This statement might somewhat elliptically be phrased as (I.13):

(I.13): Sweet food is bad for all men.

If we connect the particular premises (I.7), (I.8) and (I.9) to the universal premise (I.13), we obtain a new practical syllogism, (E₃PS):

(E₃PS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>premises</th>
<th>(I.13): Sweet food is bad for all men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(I.7):</td>
<td>I am a man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(I.8):</td>
<td>Chocolate is sweet food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(I.9):</td>
<td>This food is chocolate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evidently, our man is in a peculiar position: his particular premises (I.7), (I.8), and (I.9) set in action two seemingly incompatible universal premises, (I.6) and (I.13), thus producing two mutually exclusive conclusions. To gain a clearer view of the situation, I shall simplify (E₂PS) and (E₃PS). That is to say, I prune (E₂PS) and (E₃PS) to syllogisms with two premises; (E₃PS)
Aristotle

becomes (E₄PS), and (E₃PS) becomes (E₃PS):

$$\begin{align*}
(E₄PS) & \quad (E₃PS) \\
(I.15): \text{Sweet food is to be tasted} & \quad (I.18): \text{Sweet food is not to be tasted} \\
(I.16): \text{This food is sweet} & \quad (I.16): \text{This food is sweet} \\
(I.17): \text{This food is to be tasted} & \quad (I.19): \text{This food is not to be tasted.}
\end{align*}$$

Statements (I.15) and (I.18) are universal premises; they replace (I.6) and (I.13). Statement (I.16) is a particular premise; it is a substitution for (I.7), (I.8), and (I.9). Furthermore, (I.17) and (I.19) take the place of (I.10) and (I.14). Since an akratic action has been performed there must be a statement - the last protasis - which the agent does not use, and does not fully possess either. That statement cannot be (I.16), for by assumption our man uses and wholly possesses his particular premise. Nor can that statement be (I.15) or (I.18), since (I.15) and (I.18) are universal premises, and those the agent fully possesses. So the last protasis has to be (I.17) or (I.19). For our present purposes, it is entirely unimportant whether it is in fact (I.17) or (I.19). To make things easy, let us suppose it is (I.19). Then (I.19) is the statement of which our man is "having knowledge in a sense and yet not having it". His knowledge of (I.19) is unstable, "pushed around or dragged about like a slave". What pushes or drags it? This time Aristotle does tell us: it is "appetite". Under the sway of appetite, the agent uses (I.16) to apply (I.15), not (I.18). Thus he draws conclusion (I.17), and fails to draw conclusion (I.19), although he fully possesses (I.18) and (I.16). The thing the agent does do, viz. tasting, is a full-blown action, for a practical syllogism rules it. Yet this action is an akratic action, for another syllogism has been suppressed by a strong passion which "happens to be present" in the agent.

This interpretation of Aristotle’s text, closely reasoned though it may be, seems to be incompatible with the following fragment of the quotation above:

"... when a single opinion results from the two, the soul must ... immediately act (e.g. if ‘everything sweet ought to be tasted’, and ‘this is sweet’, in the sense of being one of the particular sweet things, the man who can act and is not restrained must at the same time act accordingly)."
"a single opinion" refers to the conclusion of a practical syllogism whereas "the two" denotes the universal premise and the particular premise. Since a single opinion can only "result from the two" if the two are fully known, it follows that the conclusion of the syllogism is realised if and only if the agent fully knows the universal and the particular premises. On the first interpretation the agent fully knows (I.18) and (I.16). Therefore, he must perform the action which results from (I.18) and (I.16), that is, he must realise (I.19). However, the crux of the first interpretation is that the agent does not realise (I.19).

The second interpretation of Aristotle’s text, championed by Richard Robinson a.o., circumvents this difficulty (Robinson 1977). Like the previous one, this interpretation implies that akratic behaviour involves the presence of two competing practical syllogisms. However, now the syllogisms compete in a different way. This difference is most easily explained by presenting the four syllogisms in predicate logic. The form in predicate logic of (E_4 PS) and (E_5 PS) is of course (E_4 PS. pred) and (E_5 PS. pred) respectively:

\[(E_4 \text{ PS. pred}) \land (E_5 \text{ PS. pred})\]

\[(\forall x (S(x) \rightarrow T(x))) \land (\forall x (S(x) \rightarrow \sim T(x)))\]

\[\text{(I.15): } (E_4 \text{ PS. pred}) \land (E_5 \text{ PS. pred})\]

\[\text{(I.17): } T(a) \land (I.19): \sim T(a),\]

where ‘S(x)’ means ‘x is sweet’ and ‘T(x)’ means ‘x is to be tasted’. On the second reading, however, the form in predicate logic of the rivals becomes (E_4 PS. pred) and (E_5 PS. pred):

\[(E_4 \text{ PS. pred}) \land (E_5 \text{ PS. pred})\]

\[(\forall x (S(x) \rightarrow T(x))) \land (\forall x (L(x) \rightarrow \sim T(x)))\]

\[\text{(I.15): } (E_4 \text{ PS. pred}) \land (E_5 \text{ PS. pred})\]

\[\text{(I.17): } T(a) \land (I.19): \sim T(a),\]

where ‘L(x)’ means ‘x produces lactid acid’. An example of (E_4 PS. pred) I
Aristotle

have already given: (E₄PS). An example of (E₆PS,pred) is (E₆PS):

\[(E₆PS)\]

premises

(I.20): Food which produces lactic acid is not to be tasted
(I.21): This food produces lactic acid

conclusion

(I.19): This food is not to be tasted.

According to the second interpretation, the *akratès* thoroughly knows (i.e. fully possesses, and uses) all the premises of the syllogism that tells him to taste. Besides, he fully possesses (I.20), the universal premise of the syllogism that forbids him to taste, and he partly possesses (I.21), the particular premise of that very syllogism. Consequently, he fails to apply premise (I.20), and he does not draw conclusion (I.19). From this it follows that the last *protasis* consists in a conjunction, to wit (I.19) and (I.21); on the second reading, it is the knowledge of this conjunction that is "dragged about like a slave" by passions.

The difference between the two interpretations can be summarised in the following representation, where the square brackets enclose the last *protasis*:

First Reading

\[(E₄PS,pred)\]

(I.15): ∀x \(S(x) \rightarrow T(x)\)
(I.16): \(S(a)\)
(I.17): \(T(a)\)

\[(E₆PS,pred)\]

(I.18): ∀x \(S(x) \rightarrow \sim T(x)\)
(I.16): \(S(a)\)

[(I.19): \(\sim T(a)\)]
The difference between the first and the second reading no doubt arises from Aristotle’s failure to make explicit the syllogism that tells the man not to taste. Since of the latter syllogism neither the universal nor the particular premise is spelled out in detail, we do not know what exactly it looks like: Aristotle’s text seems to allow \((E_5 \text{PS} \text{.pred})\) as well as \((E_6 \text{PS} \text{.pred})\). Hence the last protasis is either (I.19) or (I.19) and (I.21).

However, more important than the differences is the fact that both interpretations are alike in pointing to a passion as the cause of akratic actions. For this means that we now can reconstruct Aristotle’s answer to our second question, viz. the question of what causes the fact that a particular statement is not fully grasped. According to Aristotle, the cause is a passion which prevents the agent from realising what he actually knows. Under the influence of a passion the agent fails to perceive what he knows to be true, but what he does not want to be true. Indeed, the concept of wishful thinking appears to have its roots much earlier than the Vienna at the turn of the century.

3.4 Conclusion and evaluation

At the beginning of Section 3 I referred to the continuing dispute about Aristotle’s analysis of akrasia. Does Aristotle believe that akratic actions exist, as Kenny c.s. will claim? Or is he taking the Socratarian stance that akratic actions are impossible, as Walsh c.s. will say? In order to find out what Aristotle might have meant, I discussed three distinctions, obtained from the Nicomachean Ethics (3.1). These distinctions yielded two questions, which I tried to answer in an Aristotelian vein (3.2 - 3.3). On the basis of these answers, the following can be garnered concerning Aristotle’s view of akrasia.
Aristotle does not, like Socrates, completely deny the existence of akritic actions; in that sense, James J. Walsh et al. are wrong. Nor is Aristotle proving himself a radical anti-Socratarian; to that extent Anthony Kenny et al. are mistaken. In fact, Aristotle occupies an intermediate position. As we have seen, Socrates argued that akrasia in reality is an instance of ignorance, since real knowledge "cannot be dragged about like a slave"; ergo, a man who really knows what to do must act accordingly. With this argument Aristotle agrees to some extent. First, Aristotle holds that realisation of the conclusion is implied by the complete knowledge of the premises. If an agent fully possesses and uses all the premises of a practical syllogism, then he cannot but perform the action which results from them. Second, Aristotle takes a Socratarian stance as far as the knowledge of general principles is concerned. Knowledge of general principles (which, as we have seen, is embedded in universal premises) does not allow gradations: either one has it completely, or one does not have it at all. Aristotle labels this kind of knowledge "knowledge proper"; it is knowledge proper which "cannot be dragged about like a slave". However, Aristotle distances himself from Socrates in holding that not all knowledge is knowledge proper. Knowledge of particular statements (which Aristotle calls 'perceptual knowledge') indeed can be slave-like, pushed around hither and thither by passions and desires. It is this defective knowledge which is the source of akrasia.

Is Aristotle’s inquiry into akrasia satisfying? The best, though clearly not the most exciting answer is: not quite. For Aristotle leaves us with several unsolved problems. Five of them I mentioned before:

1. Aristotle’s way of distinguishing a doing (praxis) and a making (poièsis) is vague. I did not go into this point, but it might have some bearing on Aristotle’s view of akrasia.

2. Aristotle fails to distinguish between drawing a conclusion on the one hand, and performing a real act on the other. Hence it remains unclear whether an akratès fails to draw a conclusion, or misfires in executing a conclusion he has in fact drawn.

3. Aristotle is ambiguous on the question whether the universal premise be descriptive or prescriptive in nature. For example, the expressions which mean the same as the descriptive statement ‘Sweet food is pleasant’ also mean the same as the prescriptive ‘Sweet food should be tasted’.

4. Aristotle does not unambiguously answer the question to what
‘the last protasis’ refers. Thus we do not know what exactly it is that the
akratès does not use and only partly possesses.

5. Although it is clear that akrasia has something to do with
rivalling practical syllogisms, it is unclear in what way the syllogisms rival.
Moreover, Aristotle does not explain what a man will do if he has full
knowledge of both syllogisms, nor whether such a state of mind is possible.
Four more problems might be raised:

6. Why is the knowledge of universal premises (knowledge proper)
untouchable? Why can only the knowledge of particular statements
(perceptual knowledge) be dragged about and pushed around? If passion has
the power to pull knowledge under its sway, we should expect this power
to stretch out over either sort of knowledge. Indeed, as Hardie notes, the
facts seem to confirm this expectation:

"The man taking a drink too many may persuade himself
that the extra one will not be harmful to his digestion. But
he may also lapse into thinking that it is not wrong to
incur a hangover once a year. ... Aristotle ought perhaps to
recognize that the akrates may fail to ‘use’, actively to
contemplate, either the particular premiss or the universal
principle.” (Hardie 1968, 279).

7. Akratic actions are explained with reference to the fact that an
agent does not use, and only partly possesses a piece of knowledge. But how
do we know that such a fact has taken place? Aristotle suggests that we can
know this only by the occurrence of akratic actions. Thus he foists upon us
a case of circularity: akratic actions are explained by an appeal to partial
knowledge, and the occurrence of partial knowledge is justified by pointing
to akratic actions. Moreover, given the lack of empirical content in the
concept ‘partial knowledge’, the case of circularity might be considered an
instance of obscurum per obscurius as well.

8. How do we know whether someone was guided by a passion, or
whether it was a piece of knowledge that has led him? What exactly is the
difference between a passion and a piece of knowledge? At least, the former
can be described in terms of the latter, and vice versa. My passion for sweet
food, for example, might be described as my belief in the truth of ‘Sweet
food is pleasant’. Conversely, my belief in the truth of the general practical
principle ‘Sweet food is bad’, may considered to be a neatly sublimated fear
of the dentist. The point may place Aristotle in an unpleasant predicament. For if passions are described as beliefs, they themselves become parts of a practical syllogism. Hence what Aristotle wants us to do becomes impossible: we can no longer depict passions as alien forces which attack pieces of the syllogism. Moreover, even if we were to succeed in describing passions as alien powers, thus denying that they form a part of the syllogism, then they would escape the agent’s control. Consequently, the agent is no longer responsible for what his passions in fact cause, to wit defective knowledge. This casts doubt on Aristotle’s otherwise right suggestion that the akratēs is indeed responsible for his irrational action. At the end of this book I shall give an account of akratic actions in which passions and beliefs are treated in the same way; as a result, the problem just described does not affect my approach.

9. It might be objected that Aristotle has left clear-eyed akrasia unexplained. As said before, clear-eyed akrasia occurs when a man intentionally does A although he is well aware, at the moment of doing A, that, everything considered, a better course of action is open to him. However, within Aristotle’s analysis the agent is not aware of an alternative action, for passion prevents him from such awareness.

In the next chapters I examine to what extent philosophers in the twentieth century avoid all these problems. But first I take a glance at what the Stoics have to say on the subject at hand.

4. The Stoics

Of no other ancient philosopher do we have writings on akrasia at our disposal as comprehensive as those of Aristotle. One might guess that the Stoics, too, wrote a lot on the subject, since they were primarily concerned with the question of how one should act. Especially writings by the early Stoics might have been of interest for us, since the early Stoic preoccupation with questions on right conduct and moral responsibility seems to have been not only practical but also theoretical in character. However, we will never be sure, for most of the early Stoic writings have been lost. For information on the early Stoics - Zeno of Citium, Cleanthes of Assos, Chrysippus of Soli - we depend on writings by later authors: the middle Stoic Poseidonius (although most of his work, too, we only know by hearsay) and the later Stoics Seneca and Epictetus. Other sources are writings by philosophers who
I: From Socrates to Stoicism

opposed the early Stoa: the neo-platonist Plutarch, the sceptic Sextus Empiricus, and the physician Galen. An other important source is of course Diogenes Laertius, although he wrote his noble gossip more than four centuries after Zeno lectured in the Painted Colonade at the Athenian central square. As far as *akrasia* is concerned, three fragments are of particular importance:

* book VII of Plutarch’s *On Moral Virtue* (MV),

In Section 4.1 I take a closer look at these fragments. In 4.2 I draw some conclusions about the early Stoic view of *akrasia*.

4.1 Diogenes, Plutarch and Galen

From Diogenes we learn that Zeno and his followers mention *akrasia* as one of the three "subordinate vices", the remaining two being stupidity and ill-advisedness (LO VII, 93). The antonym of *akrasia*, viz. *enkrateia* (strong will), is referred to as one of the "subordinate virtues" (ibid.). Furthermore, Diogenes reports that according to the early Stoics "the vices are forms of ignorance of those things whereof the corresponding virtues are the knowledge" (ibid.). Since Diogenes has already told us that *enkrateia* denotes the knowledge of how to act in accordance with "right reason" (*logos*), we can conclude that *akrasia* denotes the lack of such knowledge. This suggests that the early Stoic view on *akrasia* closely resembles Socrates’ ideas on the topic. Like Socrates, the early Stoics seem to explain away akratic actions by deeming them to be in fact cases of ignorance.

The claim that the early Stoics deny the existence of akratic actions is confirmed by what Plutarch tells us in MV. However, Plutarch’s approach to the subject somewhat differs from the way in which Diogenes handles it. According to Plutarch it is a fact that the human soul consists of several

---

13 The fragments can also be found in the basic collection of Stoic texts, the *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, edited by Hans von Arnim, 3 volumes, Leipzig 1902-1905. I refer to this collection as SVF.
segments among which conflicts may arise: "It is obvious, then, that there is in the soul an awareness of a distinction and difference of this type in connection with desires, as though there were something fighting against them and contradicting them" (MV VII, 446eff).\(^{14}\) Plutarch subsequently criticises the Stoics for denying the existence of several sections in the soul: "But some say that passion is not different from reason and that there is not a disagreement and strife between the two, but that the one reason changes into both, and we do not notice this because of the suddenness and speed of the change" (ibid.).\(^{15}\)

As has been argued by Long, the latter quotation indicates the Stoic attitude towards what Plutarch saw as a fact: it shows how the Stoics explained away the alleged conflict between different powers in the soul. As the Stoics would have it, a man is not simultaneously subject to the influence of two different forces in his soul: what may look like an internal conflict is in fact a sudden change and fluctuation in the man’s soul (Long 1974, 177). Inwood concludes from this that Diogenes is wrong. The early Stoics do not, as Diogenes suggests, follow Socrates in regarding akratic actions as cases of ignorance. Rather, they consider akratic actions as results of very quick changes of mind (Inwood 1985, 138). Citing the terminology I have introduced earlier (cf. Introduction), we might also say: the early Stoics reduce strict or clear-eyed \textit{akrasia} not to ignorance, as Socrates did, but to broad or apparent \textit{akrasia}. If a man decides to do A and subsequently does not A, then, in this view, the man has changed his mind.

There exists a fragment by Galen which likewise suggests that the first Stoics reduce strict or clear-eyed \textit{akrasia} to its broad or apparent variant. In VHP 4.6.41ff Galen describes the way in which Chrysippus, the ‘second founder of Stoicism’ as he is sometimes called, analyses the failure to control oneself. This passage seems to imply that Chrysippus regards akratic actions as deviations from previously made decisions, and thus as instances of broad \textit{akrasia}.

\(^{14}\) The translation is by Brad Inwood, who quotes this fragment in Inwood 1985, 138.

\(^{15}\) Translation again by Brad Inwood. The fragment is also quoted by Long in his 1974, 177. Long’s translation, however, differs considerably from Inwood’s: "[But some say that] passion is not other than \textit{logos} nor is there dissension between two things, but a turning of the \textit{logos} to both aspects; this escapes notice because of the suddenness and swiftness of the change."
There are some other passages in VHP which teach us something about Chrysippus’ view of akrasia. From VHP, 4.4.24ff we learn that Chrysippus uses the term akratès to denote an excessive impulse, i.e. an impulse which got out of control. In Stoic literature an impulse (hormê) is a power which motivates a man to act upon a proposition to which he has recently assented. Impulses become excessive (akrateis) when two conditions are fulfilled. First, the proposition in question states either that something is ‘extremely bad’ or that something is ‘extremely good’ (SVF III, 467, 480). Second, the proposition in question is false (SVF III, 459-461). Chrysippus, by the mouth of Galen, gives the following illustration of an excessive impulse. When a man is driven by an excessive impulse, his actions resemble those of a runner, whereas when his impulse is not excessive, the man acts like a walker. In walking, a man has every step that he is making under his control, but in running he is taken over by the very movements of his legs (VHP, 4.4.24ff). Perhaps Chrysippus’ talk of excessive impulses might be taken as a clarification of broad akrasia. Galen himself, on the other hand, is interested in strict akratic actions. According to Inwood, Galen believes that an account of such actions can only be given on the assumption that the human soul is prey to internal conflicts. Subsequently, Inwood argues, Galen does two things which clearly are at odds with one another: on one occasion he unjustly lays his own assumption at Chrysippus’ door, on another he criticises Chrysippus for not being able to give an account of familiar psychological phenomena like akratic actions (Inwood 1985, 33-34, 131-132, 140, 163, 172; for further remarks on the unreliability of Galen’s writings on Chrysippus, see Gould 1970, 192ff). However this may be, Chrysippus seems to have realised how difficult it is to explain certain actions without making an appeal to internal conflicts; yet he persevered in his attempt to do so (Inwood 1985, 132. Cf. VHP, 4.7.12-44).

4.2 Stoic psychology

Which conclusions can we draw from what Diogenes, Plutarch and Galen told us about the Stoic view concerning akrasia? At least one conclusion seems to be beyond doubt: the early Stoics deny the existence of akratic actions. This conclusion is borne out by contemporary interpretations of early Stoic writings. Rist, for instance, is convinced that clear-eyed akrasia has no place in Stoic philosophy. He writes:
"... if [a man] has assented to the fact that he ought to pull the wretch out of the water, he has assented not merely to the fact that someone ought to pull him out, but that he ought to pull him out. But, we might suggest, it is possible to say ‘I ought to pull Jones out’ without attempting to do so. For the Stoic, however, the moral question poses itself not in the form ‘Ought I to pull him out?’, but ‘Shall I pull him out or not?’ If in such circumstances he does not make the attempt, it is obvious that he does not want to pull Jones out, or that he has decided against pulling Jones out, or again that he does not intend to pull Jones out. The decision is: I will not pull Jones out." (Rist 1969, 220-221).

A clearer declaration of the impossibility of akratic actions is hardly conceivable.

As to the specific arguments the Stoics have had for their denial of akratic actions, we grope in the dark. But it seems quite natural to assume that those arguments stem from Stoic psychology. Much has been written on the subject, but scholars still strongly disagree on the question of how early Stoic psychology should be assessed. Some regard it as a radically pluralistic psychology according to which the human soul consists of different parts (Philippon 1937). Others consider it as a strictly monistic one according to which the soul does not have any lasting distinctions in it (Pohlenz 1948). According to the pluralistic view, each part has at least one power, and between the powers conflicts may arise. In the monistic view, however, conflicts between powers are impossible since all the soul’s activities are just passing states of an indivisible substance; they should not be seen as activations of different powers belonging to separate parts. Since both opinions have repercussions for the reconstruction of the Stoic view of akrasia, let us examine the arguments that have been raised in favour of each of them.

4.2.1 Pluralism

The opinion that Stoic psychology is radically pluralistic finds support in the orthodox Stoic doctrine on the structure of the human soul (psychê). This
I: From Socrates to Stoicism

doctrine has been explained by many authors, and can be summarised as follows. The human soul consists of eight parts or faculties (merè). These parts are the five senses, the faculty of speech, the generative faculty (i.e. the part which regulates reproduction), and the intellectual faculty. The latter part, Diogenes Laertius tells us, "is the mind itself" (LO VII, 110, 157). This part (which Diogenes calls dianoia but which most authors refer to as hègemonikon) is at the same time the most important faculty. As opposed to the other seven parts, each of which is said to have only one power, the mind possesses four powers: presentation or perception (phantasia), impulse (hormè), assent (synkatathesis) and reason (logos). Every one of those powers has both an active form (an energèia) and a latent form (a dynamis). When all of the mind’s powers are active, an action might come about. This roughly proceeds in the following way. First something becomes apparent to us either from the outer world or from dreams or hallucinations. As a result we form a representational image or a perception which, so to say, invites us to act upon it. However, we can only act upon a perception if we give prior assent to it. Giving assent to a perception in turn requires that the latter is couched as a meaningful entity (lekton). In particular the perceptions should be couched as those lekta that are called propositions (axiomata), for assent exclusively applies to lekta which are either true or false, and nothing but propositions possess that quality. (Other types of lekta are questions, imperatives, wishes, predicates, and syllogisms - LO VII, 7.63.) It belongs to the power of reason to couch perceptions as propositions. In addition, reason tells us whether or not a particular proposition should be assented to (LO VII, 48-50; cf. Epictetus, Discourses, 2.18-24-26.). Now imagine that we listen to reason and consequently assent to a certain proposition. Can that considered to be an act? The answer is in the negative since giving assent is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for an action. What we also need is something that sets us in motion, i.e. an impulse. This impulse is described by the early Stoics as the power which commands a man to act or as "a movement of the soul towards or away from something" (cf. Long 1974, 196).

The above story on the way in which actions emerge from a multifarious field of mental forces is generally acknowledged to be at the core of early Stoic action psychology. It has been keenly taken up by the middle Stoic Poseidonius. Under his guidance the story develops into a full-blown pluralistic action psychology according to which the parts of the soul are sharply separated and severe struggles can take place among their fellow
The Stoics

powers (Rist 1969, Chapter XI). Yet the view that the Stoics adhere to a strictly monistic psychology of action is widespread: see below.

4.2.2. Monism

According to the monistic view, the Stoics do not acknowledge the existence of separate parts nor of different powers, let alone of conflicts between them. The human soul is undivided and in possession of only one force, viz. reason. As may be expected, the monistic view is supported by what we know from opponents of the old Stoa. We have seen that one of their most important critics, to wit Plutarch, explicitly attacks the Stoics for denying the existence of more than one power in the soul (cf. Section 4.1). Similar attacks on the Stoics are launched by Galen throughout books IV and V of his VHP (cf. Inwood 1985, 292, endnote 18). The monistic view might have been fostered further by the famous Stoic doctrine on the all pervading breath (pneuma), which declares that parts are nothing but qualities of one underlying substance, the pneuma, and that powers are nothing but tensional states (tonoi) of those qualities.

What can the pluralistic and the monistic view teach us about the reasons behind the early Stoic denial of akratic actions? The pluralistic view seems to be of little help here. For this view implies that in the soul parts and powers as well as conflicts exist. Thus, assuming that akratic actions emerge from conflicts in the soul, the conditions on which akratic actions arise are fulfilled. However, that is something the early Stoics must contradict on pain of being inconsistent. If one denies the existence of akratic actions, one must likewise deny the conditions from which they arise. This means that the pluralistic view is at odds with one of the few things we can be sure of, viz. that there is no place for akratic actions in early Stoic theory.

At first sight, the monistic view seems to be in better shape. For according to this view there are neither parts nor powers nor conflicts in the soul. On the assumption that an internal conflict is necessary for akrasia to occur, the monistic view perfectly matches the Stoic denial of akratic actions. However, on further consideration difficulties arise. For the monistic view does not suit the Stoic story on the way in which actions emerge. This story, which has come down to us from many sources and which I have recounted above, cheerfully talks about parts and powers as if they were real
4.2.3 Moderate monism

Some commentators have tried to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds by developing a view of early Stoic psychology which might be called ‘moderate monism’ or ‘non-radical pluralism’. As opposed to strict monism, this view implies that the old Stoics do indeed acknowledge the existence of lasting distinctions in the soul. In the soul different parts and powers persist even if they are not exercised at any given time. But as opposed to radical pluralism, non-radical pluralism claims that there can be no conflict between parts or powers. Never does one part or power oppose another; what appears to be a synchronous conflict is in fact an extraordinarily quick succession of events. Moderate monism is defended in Rist 1969, Long 1974, Sandbach 1975, but most explicitly in Inwood 1985.

Evidently, moderate monism is free from the disadvantages which cling to the other positions: it fits the Stoic ideas on the way in which actions come about, and it matches the Stoic denial of akratic actions. However, it should be noted that there is an assumption on akrasia hidden away in moderate monism. Moderate monism assumes that akrasia exists if and only if the human soul is afflicted by conflicts between its parts or powers; it is only by denying the very idea of a mental conflict that moderate monism can also deny the existence of akratic actions. As we saw in Section 2 and Section 3, there are indications of this assumption in Plato’s and Aristotle’s theories on akrasia. In Chapter V I will come back to the necessity of this assumption for the understanding of akratic actions.

4.2.4 A note on free will

As far as questions on right conduct and moral responsibility are concerned, the Stoic period is a turning point in the history of philosophy. For questions of moral responsibility and right conduct are central to early and late Stoic thinking. This is not to say that those questions are not of immense importance to Plato and Aristotle as well, but it is only after Aristotle’s death that they gradually change and become central to Greek philosophical interest, first as theoretical issues (in the early, Greek Stoa) and then as
The Stoics

mainly practical problems (the later, Roman Stoa).

The main cause for this change might have been the increasing belief in determinism. The Stoics as well as the Epicureans believe in forms of determinism that are foreign to Plato and Aristotle. While the Epicureans modeled their determinism on Democritus’ atomism, the Stoics stick to a form of determinism that centres on the almighty power of fate, which is nothing less than Providence. When taken together with a belief in determinism, a belief in moral responsibility leads to the notorious difficulty of how to reconcile the latter with the former. How can we bring into agreement the fact that a man is responsible for his actions with the fact that those actions are produced by a power which works largely beyond his control? The Stoics made every effort to cope with this difficulty, which in this form is absent in writings of Plato and Aristotle.

By their attempts to reconcile moral responsibility with determinism, the early Stoics led the foundations for the famous problem of free will. For the belief that people are responsible for their actions implies that they do have free will, whereas the belief that their actions are part of a causal chain which constitutes fate presupposes that they are deprived of God’s greatest gift. Certainly, scholars still disagree on the question of whether or not the concept of an autonomous free will fits into the Stoic system (Pohlenz 1940; Huby 1967; Long 1971). Be that as it may, the Stoics have at least sown the seeds of the very concept, as well as of the problems connected to it.

The problem of free will develops step-by-step from post-Aristotelian philosophy, taking its origin in Stoicism, and gaining further shape in the hands and heads of neo-platonic and early Christian thinkers (Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard, John Duns Scotus). As times go by it becomes one of the key problems in Western philosophy. It occupies a major position in mediaeval philosophy, and it has racked the brains of many important philosophers in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. As a result, it has pushed interest in the possibility of akatic actions into the background. This is not to say, however, that studies on akasia are wholly absent in post-Stoic times. As has been argued by Risto Saarinen, "one does find sophisticated discussions on akasia or ‘incontinence’ ... both in medieval scholastic and in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century neo-scholasticism" (Saarinen 1993, 133-134). Of course this should not surprise us, given that many mediaeval authors "wrote lengthy commentaries on the Nicomachean Ethics" (ibid., 134). It would therefore be an exaggeration to
say that the rise of interest in free will meant the demise of interest in *akrasia*, although it is beyond doubt that the former diluted the latter.

Whatever its connection to *akrasia* may be, the problem of free will is not the problem with which I deal. The unification of determinism and moral responsibility will not concern me. My problem pertains to the possibility of akratic actions, and this problem is quite different from questions of free will, determinism or moral responsibility: akratic actions can be determined or indeterminate, moral or immoral, noble or wicked, diabolic or divine. The problem of *akrasia* thus is an action theoretical question, which differs from the ethical and metaphysical puzzles that make up the problem of free will. For some decennia, the *akrasia* problem has drawn renewed attention, and again became a matter of pressing concern to philosophers. In Part Two I will explain how exactly this came about. I argue that the problem entered contemporary philosophy via the philosophy of science, in particular via the debate on action explanation. However, I conclude that the problem cannot be solved within the confines of the debate as its stands. We need new approaches, and in Part Three I describe some of them.