

## *Enkratēs Phronimos*<sup>1</sup>

Experience teaches that few, if any, human beings are entirely free from affective or emotional imperfections such as being too readily angered, overly fond of sensual pleasure, socially awkward, prone to procrastination, or insufficiently bold. This fact about humanity does not trouble us too much, because we allow that someone who feels something she shouldn't feel, or fails to feel what she should, can nonetheless be an excellent, wise and happy human being. We tend to think that it is possible for someone with such a defect not only to have, but even to be an exemplar of, ethical virtue. On one popular interpretation, Aristotle disagrees. "Purists," as I will call them, read Aristotle as saying that any such affective imperfection takes one out of the running for any of the virtues.<sup>2</sup>

Purists arrive at this picture from some claims Aristotle makes about the virtue of *phronēsis* (wisdom). *Phronēsis* is the practical excellence of the part of the soul that reasons (*to logistikon*), or, as I will call it, the *intellectual* part; whereas moderation, courage, justice and the rest are excellences of the part of the soul that feels, or, as I will call it, the *affective* part.<sup>3</sup> In *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.12,<sup>4</sup> Aristotle says that one cannot have *phronēsis* unless one's affective part is in an excellent condition (1144a29-b1); in the next chapter, he says that the person who lacks *phronēsis* cannot have any of the genuine virtues of the affective part (1144b31-2). Purists conclude from those chapters that Aristotle takes any taint by bad affect to disqualify a person from ethical virtue as well as *phronēsis*.

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Susan Sauvé Meyer, Gabriel Lear, Sarah Broadie and Victor Caston for comments on previous drafts of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Irwin 1988 articulates this as a thesis about the "reciprocity of the virtues—the view that you have one of the virtues of character if and only if you have them all." (p.60)

<sup>3</sup> I avoid the labels "irrational" or "non-rational" for the affective part, and likewise the label "rational" for the *logistikon*. "Non-rational" suggests the bottom-most, nutritive part of the soul (I.13, 1102b11), whereas "irrational" encourages us to forget that the affective part can have a share in reason, by being responsive to reason (I.13, 1102b25-6). Calling the intellectual part "rational" has the same problem. Hence I adopt the terms "intellectual" and "affective" to characterize the contrast between the two upper parts of the soul.

<sup>4</sup> Henceforth, references not preceded by the name of a work are to the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I refer to the common books by their *Nicomachean* rather than *Eudemian* location.

This stringent conception of the requirements on Aristotelian virtue typically finds expression in one of its more striking consequences, which is the claim that the *enkratēs* (strong-willed person) cannot have *phronēsis*.<sup>5</sup> This paper is aimed at disputing that claim: I offer an argument that Aristotle's *enkratēs* not only can, but must, have *phronēsis*.

The *enkratēs*, like the *akratēs* (weak-willed person), is tempted to act against his reasoned choice, but unlike the *akratēs*, he overcomes that temptation. Purists take the similarity between these two character types to be more significant than the difference. Thus they hold that the contrast between the *akratēs* and the *enkratēs* matters less than the one between the *enkratēs* and the *akratēs*, on the one hand, and the moderate (*sōphrōn*) person, on the other. The moderate person is one whose affective condition is rightly ordered, inclining in the direction of his<sup>6</sup> better judgment. If something is not to be eaten, he does not feel a strong desire to eat it. His character facilitates right action, instead of presenting an obstacle to it; unlike the *enkratēs*, he does not need to fight his own nature in order to do the right thing.

Purists believe that Aristotle takes both *akrasia* and *enkrateia* to represent varieties of badness, with *akrasia* worse than *enkrateia* and the vice of self-indulgence (*akolasia*) worse than *akrasia*. The line dividing choice-worthy character types from those to be avoided should be drawn between the moderate person and the *enkratēs*, so that Aristotle's hierarchy takes the following shape: moderation (good), *enkrateia* (bad), *akrasia* (worse), vice (worst). And the most important ground of this classification is the view that the virtue of *phronēsis* is reserved for the moderate person alone.

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<sup>5</sup> Ursula Coope's 2012 paper, "Why does Aristotle Think that Ethical Virtue is Required for Practical Wisdom?" offers a good presentation of the prevailing view; see also Woods 1986 p.152, Drefcinski 2000 *passim*, Irwin 1988 p.69, whose discussion of the point is very close to that of McDowell 1996 and 1998. Cooper 1998 affirms some version of the same view when he says that the *phronimos* "relies upon the continued harmonious and supportive functioning of his nonrational desires, thumos as well as epithumia, in order to hold firmly to the correct overall view of the good." (p.279) Broadie 1991 cautions the reader against assuming that the *enkratēs* can have *phronēsis* (ch. 4, fn. 81). Kraut 1988 and Telfer 1989-90 also take Aristotle to deny *phronēsis* to the *enkratēs*, but are critical of him on this point: Kraut takes the thesis to be questionable, Telfer takes it to be unargued-for (see fn.9).

<sup>6</sup>Here and elsewhere, I restrict myself to the pronoun "he" in order to keep my text consistent with quotations from Aristotle.

The purist's denial that the *enkratēs* can have *phronēsis* is a hallmark of Neo-Aristotelianism. So, for instance, John McDowell takes himself to be channeling Aristotle when he spells out the requirement that the man of "full-fledged" practical wisdom be "unmoved by competing attractions," and that the *enkratēs* has only "a flawed approximation to practical wisdom," (1998, 48-49; we find a similar description in McDowell 1996, 105).<sup>7</sup> He gives this point an important place in his own ethical theory when he insists that, for the virtuous man, reasons to perform non-virtuous actions are not outweighed but rather 'silenced.' He denies that someone tempted to act wrongly can have the same understanding of right action as the one whose motivational dispositions lack such a flaw. Non-Aristotelians, too, are apt to pick out purism as a defining feature of the Aristotelian approach to ethics. So Elijah Millgram refers, in passing, to Aristotle's *phronimos* (wise person) as an "unattainable ideal of practical intelligence, unified agency and virtue". (1997, 53)

As I mentioned above, the textual ground for the denial of *phronēsis* to the *akratēs* and *enkratēs* is NE VI.12-13.<sup>8</sup> Aristotle himself, however, does not mention *akrasia* and *enkrateia* in NE VI.12-13, and he does not invoke the claims he makes in those passages as the reason for denying *phronēsis* to the *akratēs* in VII. Given the absence from the seminal texts of the reasons interpreters invoke in support of the standard view,<sup>9</sup> we should alert ourselves to the following methodological worry. If Aristotle says P in some text, and we take P to entail Q, then as charitable interpreters we are inclined to ascribe Q to Aristotle on the basis of that text. But there is a danger that, once we do so, we fail to profit from the (other) texts that speak directly to Q. We are less likely to allow these texts to inform our answer to the question as to what Aristotle

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<sup>7</sup> See also part II of Foot 2002 (e.g., the quote in my fn.17, below).

<sup>8</sup> Coope 2012, 146-7, Irwin 1988, 61, Drefcinski 2000, 109, Telfer 1989-90, 35.

<sup>9</sup> Telfer 1989-90, 47 and Coope 2012, 146-7 explicitly acknowledge that VI.12-13 do not offer reasons for denying *phronēsis* to the *enkratēs*. Telfer concludes that there is no argument for the conclusion in Aristotle, and supplements with an argument taken from Ackrill. Coope constructs an argument based primarily on Aristotle's discussion of friendship in NE IX and rational pleasure in NE X. I will address Coope's argument in part I, but I note here that it would be surprising if Aristotle didn't provide the relevant argument in the substantial portions of text he devotes to explicating *phronēsis* and *enkrateia* (VI.5-VII.10). Coope's reliance on extraneous materials and Telfer's willingness to supplement what Aristotle actually said indicate both how deeply purism is entrenched in Aristotle scholarship, and to how comfortable we have become with ascribing views to Aristotle on the basis of ambitious extrapolation.

thinks about Q, because we think we already know the answer to that question. And thus we are liable, as I think has happened in the case of *enkrateia*, to base our conception of Aristotle's views on indirect evidence even when direct evidence is available.<sup>10</sup> To that end, I propose a new method for investigating the question of whether the *enkratēs* has *phronēsis*. Instead of allowing the puristic reading of VI.12-13 to control our understanding of Aristotle's *enkratēs*, I propose that we examine what conclusions we can draw about Aristotle's views of the *enkratēs* and *akratēs* from his direct discussions of those characters. For NE VII, in particular, is rich with material that addresses both the general ethical status of the *akratēs* and *enkratēs*, and their intellectual condition in particular.

I will argue that on the most natural reading of the material outside NE VI.12-13, first: Aristotle draws the line dividing avoidance-worthy from choice-worthy lives not between the *enkratēs* and the moderate person, but between the *akratēs* and *enkratēs*; second, that *enkrateia* is a good and admirable state of character; third, that the *enkratēs*' *phronēsis* is what explains his success in resisting temptation; and fourth, that while it is true that the *akratēs* cannot have *phronēsis*, this is not explained on puristic grounds.

How to square these conclusions with the final chapters of book VI? In VI.12, Aristotle says that *phronēsis* belongs only to the good person, i.e. the person with the right affects. In VI.13, he says that if one has *phronēsis*, one will have all the virtues of the affective part. Since the *enkratēs* lacks the affective virtue of moderation, it might seem to follow that he lacks *phronēsis*. One option, at this point, would be to simply conclude that there is an inconsistency between books VI and VII. Aristotle is famously attentive to the problem of doing justice to conventional ethical intuitions: VII.1-2 is the locus classicus for Aristotle's commitment to saving the phenomena. Aristotle may not have seen that the theory of *phronēsis* in books VI required him to adopt a more revisionist approach to popular morality, one that rejected the conventional high estimation of *enkrateia*. But interpretive charity would recommend exploring whether purism is, after all, the best reading of VI.12-13.

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<sup>10</sup> Thanks to Susan Sauvé Meyer for suggesting this framework for understanding the dialectic.

There is no doubt that in those chapters Aristotle places an affective condition on the possession of *phronēsis*, a “requirement of right affect,” as I will call it. But it is far from clear that purism is the right way to interpret that requirement. The purist takes *phronēsis* to call for freedom from affective imperfection of any kind. I will suggest, instead, that what Aristotle requires of the *phronimos* is a single, particularly important affective perfection: the love of the noble (*kalon*). In the final section of this paper, I will argue for this alternative interpretation of the requirement of right affect, and show that it squares VI.12-13 with the thesis of *enkratēs phronimos*. I begin, as promised, by looking directly at how Aristotle characterizes the ethical status of the *enkratēs* and the *akratēs*.<sup>11</sup>

## I. Assessing the *enkratēs* and the *akratēs*

Since one cannot attain the human good (happiness) without *phronēsis*<sup>12</sup>, purists are committed to understanding *enkrateia* as a bad ethical condition. They grant that the *enkratēs* is better off than the vicious person or the *akratēs*, but must deny that his condition is one that we would praise or seek to put ourselves in. Hence McDowell’s assessment: “continence is distinct from virtue, and just as problematic as incontinence.” (1979, 334) Likewise Woods situates the *enkratēs* among those who have “been corrupted by pleasure and pain” (1986, 151) and therefore “failed to acquire an adequate conception of the good for human beings.” (1986, 152).

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<sup>11</sup> The argument I make below is agnostic as to the location of the common books, from which most of my textual evidence is drawn. Rowe 1971 has argued that the word *phronēsis* picks out a broader concept in the EE than in the NE. In the NE, Aristotle separates out the theoretical and the practical virtues of the rational part, whereas in the non-common books of the EE, claims Rowe, Aristotle uses *phronēsis* more Platonically, to cover both kinds of virtue. Rowe therefore suggests that NE VI, saturated as it is by the theoretical/practical distinction, does not have a place in the EE. However Natali (fn. 32 to ch. 1) notes that Rowe fails to discuss EE VIII.1, which Natali takes to call for precisely the distinction to which Rowe wants to deny a place in the EE. In any case, the question of whether *phronēsis* in the EE is broad or narrow in Rowe’s sense—as inclusive or exclusive of theoretical rationality—is tangential to the question of whether, on the practical front, it is compatible with strong, contrary appetites.

<sup>12</sup> *Phronēsis* is necessary for good decision and, a fortiori, the good action (*eupraxia*) that constitutes the goal of the practical life. But even those who lead the theoretical life will need it, since it is the excellence of its soul-part (1145a2-5). See also the opening of VI.12, where Aristotle makes it clear that he is attacking the view that happiness is possible without *phronēsis*.

Drefcinski says that they are “at war with themselves. They vacillate. They are ambivalent....They are riven.”<sup>13</sup> (2000, 115); and that they “find it painful to act appropriately” and “find it difficult to keep their flawed behavior to a minimum.” (2000, 116) Coope criticizes the *enkratēs* on the grounds that he “does not enjoy the fineness of good action as he should, nor is he pained as he should be by the shamefulness of bad action.” (2012,157) Broadie explains why Aristotle’s condition on goodness is so “stringent” as to exclude *enkrateia*: “there is something base and hence not virtuous in caring at all about a physical pleasure when it conflicts with the right action.” (1991, 270)

Consider, by contrast, the following sample of Aristotle’s own remarks about *enkrateia*:<sup>14</sup> he describes it, at *EE* II.11 1227b18-19 and VII.2 1145b8-9, as one of the things we praise (τῶν ἐπαινετῶν); he calls *akrasia*, its proper opposite, a form of vice (VII.4, 1148a3 κακία τις, *EE* II.7 1223b31 μοχθηρία τις). He describes *enkrateia* as excellent (using forms of ‘σπουδαῖος’ at VII.2 1145b8, VII.1 1146a15 (by implication), VII.7 1151a27, and VII.9 1151b28) in comparison with *akrasia*, which he describes as a bad condition leading one to do bad things (using forms of ‘φάυλος’ at VII.2 1145b10, 12, VII.8 1151a28, 1151b29). He explicitly denies that *enkrateia* is to be avoided, when he distinguishes it from those conditions of soul that are ‘φευκτῶν’ (VII.1 1145a16-18).

He goes to some trouble to present *enkrateia* as a mean. At VII.9 he identifies a variant of *akrasia* involving insufficient appetite—we might call it ‘insensate *akrasia*,’ – so as to be able to call *enkrateia* a mean between two extremes (ὁ [τοιούτος] τούτου καὶ τοῦ ἄκρατοῦς μέσος ὁ ἐγκρατής, 1151b24-25). And *enkrateia* does, indeed, seem to fit Aristotle’s definition of virtue: it is an excellent (σπουδαῖα) and prohairesis mean state which leads to right action (VII.8, 1151a34-5). More generally, Aristotle deploys the goodness of *enkrateia* as a touchstone in much the way that he does with the ethical virtues. At VII.2, 1146a14-16 he treats the fact that

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<sup>13</sup> He is quoting Stocker, whose words Drefcinski takes to be an apt description of Aristotle’s views on *enkrateia*.

<sup>14</sup> Translations of the *Nicomachean Ethics* are from Broadie 2001. Translations of the non-common books of the *Eudemian Ethics* (EE) are from Inwood and Woolf 2013. I have made a few minor changes in these translations, including the Greek in parentheses in all (but not only) those places. Other translations of Aristotle are from Barnes 1984.

an assumption would result in the conclusion that *enkrateia* is not always good (οὐ πάντα σπουδαία), or that it is not something lofty (οὐθὲν σεμνόν), or that it is not a great thing (οὐδὲν μέγα) as a reduction to absurdity of the assumption. Likewise at VII.9, 1151b28, he argues from the premise that *enkrateia* is good (σπουδαῖον).<sup>15</sup>

Like the ethical virtues of NE II-IV, *enkrateia* is marked off in VII as difficult and extraordinary: Aristotle distinguishes it from mere resistance to pain (καρτερία) on the grounds that *enkrateia* is not mere endurance but something akin to victory (τοῦ νικᾶν, VII.7 1150a36). He describes the requirements of *enkrateia* as “going beyond the dispositions of the majority of people”, since the *enkratēs* “has more capacity than most for sticking to things”. (VII.10, 1152a25-28).<sup>16</sup> At one point, in passing, Aristotle goes so far as to call *enkrateia* a virtue (ἡ γὰρ ἐγκράτεια ἀρετή, EE II.7, 1223b11-12). To sum up these remarks, it seems safe to say that Aristotle’s basic attitude towards the *enkratēs* is a positive one. He does not lump the *enkratēs* together with the *akratēs*, but instead tends to draw sharp contrasts between the two characters.

Perhaps even more striking than the fact that praise for the *enkratēs* fills Aristotle’s discussion of him in VII.1-10 is the fact that such praise is untempered by blame. Commentators are quick to interpret *enkrateia* as (at the very least) worse than moderation (*sōphrosunē*),<sup>17</sup> but Aristotle himself does not describe it as such. Broadie, for instance, remarks that while we might have expected Aristotle, in his focused discussion of the *enkratēs* at VII.9, to explain “through a contrast with virtue proper that *enkrateia* is good only in a qualified way”, “this is not what Aristotle does”. (2010, 158) Broadie is surprised not to find, in VII.9, Aristotle qualifying the goodness of *enkrateia*. Her phrasing suggests that she assumes he does so elsewhere, for she

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<sup>15</sup> Aristotle’s account of the voluntary in EE II.7 makes similar use of the assumption that *akrasia* is vice and *enkrateia* is virtue (See Meyer 2011, 68-9)

<sup>16</sup> Whereas the *akratēs* has less. This conflicts with the prevailing assumption in the literature, which is that (given the difficulty of ‘pure virtue’) *enkrateia* and *akrasia* are where ordinary people lie (see, e.g. Pakaluk 2005, 235). Aristotle is clear that the *enkratēs* rises above the ordinary man and the *akratēs* falls below him. For further discussion of this passage, see IIIa below.

<sup>17</sup> Philippa Foot: “according to Aristotle, to take pleasure in virtuous action is the mark of true virtue, with the self-mastery of the one who finds virtue difficult only a second best.” (2002, 10)

speaks of a contrast between “*enkrateia*” and “virtue proper”.<sup>18</sup> But Aristotle himself never demotes *enkrateia* by comparison with moderation, despite the fact that he both creates occasions for and seems to be rather given to making just such hierarchical ethical assessments. In VII.1, for instance, Aristotle makes a number of comparative demotions/promotions among the four types under discussion: he demotes vice relative to brutishness (1150a1-2); *akrasia* relative to *enkrateia* (1150a9-14); moderation relative to divine virtue (1145a26), and self-indulgence (ἀκολασία) relative to *akrasia* (1150b29-32; 1152a4-6). The last comparison is especially interesting, since one might have thought that *akrasia* stands to self-indulgence as *enkrateia* stands to moderation. But even in passages where he explicitly compares *enkrateia* and moderation, Aristotle never says that *enkrateia* is the worse of the two states.

There are only two comments in Aristotle’s description of *enkrateia* in VII that might be taken as critical of the *enkratēs*, and they make much the same point.<sup>19</sup> In VII.2, 1146a9-15 and VII.9, 1151b34-1152a3, Aristotle points out that the *enkratēs*, by contrast with the moderate man, is distinguished by having strong and bad desires (ἐν τῷ ἐπιθυμίας ἔχειν ἰσχυρὰς καὶ φαύλας 1146a9-10), and a tendency to feel pleasure contrary to the prescription (ἡδεσθαι παρὰ τὸν λόγον 1152a2-3). But even here, as an examination of context shows, his aim is to praise the *enkratēs*; and to praise him not in spite of, but because of his excessively strong desires. Aristotle is impressed by the *enkratēs* because the appetitive inclination that he overcomes is such an intense one. Other things being equal, it is better not to feel bad pleasures, but Aristotle makes clear in the VII.2 passage that other things are not equal: it is impressive to overcome strong and bad pleasures (1146a9), whereas there is nothing great about overcoming weak ones.<sup>20</sup> The reason why he makes reference to strong, bad desires in these passages is to pick out the characteristic

<sup>18</sup> Likewise, Reeve observes (1992, n. 39, 92) that Aristotle addresses the curability of the *akratēs* and the self-indulgent man, but fails to address the curability of the *enkratēs*.

<sup>19</sup> Outside of book VII, I have found only one quasi-critical remark: at the end of book IV, concluding his discussion of shame, Aristotle says of *enkrateia*: οὐκ ἔστι δ’ οὐδ’ ἡ ἐγκράτεια ἀρετή, ἀλλὰ τις μικτή (1128b33-34). Broadie and Rowe (2001, 158) translate: “*enkrateia* is not an excellence either, but a sort of excellence that is mixed with something else.” Broadie and Rowe are right, I think, to understand the final clause as including an implied reference to virtue. On my reading, this line anticipates Aristotle’s ultimate portrayal of *enkrateia* as constituted by a mixture of virtue (in the rational part) and excessive appetites.

<sup>20</sup> cf. MM 2.6.7 1.5-6: οὐ γὰρ ἂν εἴποις ἐγκρατῆ, ὅστις μετρίων ἐπιθυμιῶν κρατεῖ.



strength of the *enkratēs*.<sup>21</sup> It is his strong, bad desires that give the *enkratēs* a unique occasion to achieve what Aristotle goes so far as to call *victory* over his desires (τοῦ νικᾶν, VII.7 1150a36).

The passages collected above cast doubt on the general picture of the *enkratēs* as no more than a slightly better behaved variant of the *akratēs*. Aristotle seems very far from understanding continence (*enkrateia*) as “just as problematic as incontinence.” (McDowell 1979, 334) More work needs to be done, of course, to show that Aristotle’s positive assessment of the *enkratēs* involves attributing *phronēsis* to him. In (II) I examine what kind of case can be made against *enkratēs phronimos* if we refrain from viewing the issue through the lens of a puristic reading of NE VI.12-13, and in (III) I offer reasons for ascribing *phronēsis* to the *enkratēs*. In (IV) I return to VI.12-13.

## II. The case against *enkratēs phronimos*

### (a) Why the *Akratēs* lacks *Phronēsis*

Aristotle does not raise the question of whether the *enkratēs* can have *phronēsis*, but he does, in NE VII, discuss the question of why it is that the *akratēs* cannot. The purist might suppose that those same arguments will cover the *enkratēs* as well. For he understands both characters to be disqualified from *phronēsis* by the excessive desires that, on a puristic reading of VI.12, violate the requirement of right affect. However, as we will see in this section, Aristotle’s argumentation in NE VII indicates that that he does not think we can read off from VI.12-13 an explanation of why the *akratēs* lacks *phronēsis*. Moreover, the explanation he does give of why we must deny *phronēsis* to the *akratēs* is very different from what the purist would lead us to expect, and it fails to generalize to the case of the *enkratēs*.

The first thing to point out is that, unlike his modern commentators, Aristotle did not take it for granted that the *akratēs* lacks *phronēsis*. In his presentation of *endoxa* in NE VII.1, he points out

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<sup>21</sup> See fn. 37 below

that people are divided over that question (1145b17-19), and he does not settle the dispute himself until the end of his discussion of *akrasia*, in chapter 10 (1152a6-7).<sup>22</sup> The theory of *akrasia* and *enkrateia* that Aristotle develops in response to the puzzles of VII.1-2 has, as one of its aims, rebutting the thesis of *akratēs phronimos*.

Book VII suggests, then, that Aristotle did not take the right affect requirement as he stated it in VI.12 to settle the question of whether the *akratēs* (let alone the *enkrateēs*) could have *phronēsis*.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, we can say something stronger than this. In VII.8, Aristotle presents the *akratēs* as *satisfying* the right affect requirement. For he says there that the *akratēs* has the grasp of the *archē* (starting point) of practical reason, and this is the very item that VI.12 presents right affect as securing. Recall that in VI.12, Aristotle expresses the right affect requirement in terms of the need for ‘the end’ (τὸ τέλος, 1144a32), which “is not evident except to the good person (τῷ ἀγαθῷ), since badness (ἡ μοχθηρία) distorts a person and causes him to be deceived about the starting points of action (περὶ τὰς πρακτικὰς ἀρχάς). So it is evident that it is impossible to be wise without being good (μὴ ὄντα ἀγαθόν)”. (VI.12,1144a34-b1) Aristotle grounds the right affect requirement on the observation that badness prevents one from having the starting point of practical reasoning. But he is very clear in VII.8 that the *akratēs* meets this condition: he picks out the *akratēs* as one with a grasp of that starting point (τὸ οὗ ἕνεκα ἀρχή 1151a16), one who is “not bad without qualification, since the best in him, the fundamental starting point (ἡ ἀρχή), remains healthy”. (1151a25-26)<sup>24</sup> This observation is of great importance as regards the thesis of

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<sup>22</sup> Hardie 1968, 271 is wrong to understand the VII.2 passage as containing in 6 lines Aristotle’s whole argument against the puzzle of whether the *akratēs* can be *phronimos*. Aristotle does state the conclusion that the *akratēs* cannot be *phronimos* (1145b17) already in VII.2. But such rhetoric is consonant with his procedure in VII.2, where he often suggests the answer he will argue for while stating the aporia. (See 1146a10-11: is there a difference between *enkrateia* and moderation? Yes; and the problem is reprised at 1151b34-1152a3. See also 1145b31ff.: is the distinction between belief and knowledge relevant to the problem of *akrasia*? No; and the problem is reprised at 1146b24ff.) Moreover, in dismissing *akratēs phronimos* in VII.2, Aristotle gives multiple grounds, two of which (that the *phronimos* is ‘πρακτικός’ (1146a8), that he possesses the other excellences (1146a9)) correspond to reasons he will eventually land on, and one of which (that the *phronimos* cannot do the worst things (τὰ φαυλότατα, 1146a7)), does not, since it entails conflating the *akratēs* with the self-indulgent person. VII.2 cannot, then, represent Aristotle’s last word on the question of *akratēs phronimos*.

<sup>23</sup> A few back-references (1146a8, 1152a7-8, and 1152a12-13) fix the position of VII relative to VI.12-13.

<sup>24</sup> cf. Reeve “that is why the vicious person does not notice that he is vicious while the akratic does notice that he is akratic (1150b36). The latter knows what the good or eudaimonia is and knows that he does not do what promotes

*enkratēs phronimos*, since it suggests, by itself, that the puristic conception of the right affect requirement needs to be revised. If one can only grasp the end with right affect, and the *akratēs* grasps the end, then “right affect” cannot amount to perfection of affective response. I will suggest a new understanding of the right affect requirement in IV below; for now I return to the question of why the *akratēs* must lack *phronēsis*. Once we observe that the *akratēs* does not violate the right affect requirement, it is easier to see why Aristotle would take the question of whether he can have *phronēsis* to be a pressing matter for discussion in NE VII.

Aristotle does not draw the conclusion that the *akratēs* cannot have *phronēsis* until VII.10, the final chapter of his discussion of *akrasia* and *enkrateia*. A detailed examination of his argument in that chapter will reveal that his characterization of the *akratēs* is not what the puristic reading of VI.12-13 would predict. I have divided the passage into four sections for easier reference:

- (a) Nor is it possible for the same person at the same time to be wise and akratic (οὐδ’ ἅμα φρόνιμον καὶ ἀκρατῆ ἐνδέχεται εἶναι τὸν αὐτόν) for (γὰρ) one has been shown to be excellent in character (σπουδαῖος τὸ ἦθος) at the same time as one is wise.
- (b) Again, one is not wise merely by virtue of having knowledge, but also by being the sort of person to act on one's knowledge (οὐ τῷ εἰδέναι μόνον φρόνιμος ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ πρακτικός); and the *akratēs* is not of that sort. (ὁ δ’ ἀκρατῆς οὐ πρακτικός)
- (c) (But there is nothing to stop the clever person from being an *akratēs*—and this is why some people are sometimes thought to be wise yet akratic, because cleverness differs from wisdom in the way we described in our original discussion, and while being close to it in terms of reasoning, differs from it in terms of the decisions made.)<sup>25</sup>
- (d) Neither, then, does the *akratēs* behave like someone knowing something and having regard to his knowledge (οὐδὲ δὴ ὡς ὁ εἰδὼς καὶ θεωρῶν), but like someone asleep or drunk. And he acts voluntarily (since he acts knowing in a way (τρόπον γὰρ τινα εἰδὼς) both what he is doing and what he is doing it for), but is not a bad person, since what he decides on is decent; so he is half-bad. (1152a6-17)

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it,” (1992, 89), Telfer “In other words, what is required for having the right end is that the person should at least not be wicked.” (1989-90, 43)

<sup>25</sup> This reference to cleverness further supports the suggestion that he is here filling out the account of VI.12, where he also invokes the distinction between cleverness and *phronēsis*.

There is a reading of (a) that might seem to speak directly against the thesis of *enkratēs phronimos*: “Given that the *akratēs* and the *enkratēs* don’t have excellent characters (neither is moderate), they are disqualified from *phronēsis* on grounds already given in VI.12-13.” But context speaks against such a reading. Regarding the *enkratēs*, consider that Aristotle described him, a few lines above, as having an excellent character: he observed that ἡ ἐγκράτεια is σπουδαῖον, by contrast with *akrasia* and insensateness, which he calls ἕξις φαύλας (VII.9 1151b29). ‘Character’ (ἦθος/ἕξις) here doesn’t refer to the affective part of one’s soul, but rather to one’s character as a whole. Recall that in the opening of VII.1 Aristotle spoke of three good and three bad character-types (τὰ ἦθη 1145a16), referring not to parts of souls but to kinds of people. (“Character-type” might be a better translation of both ἦθος and ἕξις in this context, so as to disambiguate from the sense of “character” where it refers to a part of one’s soul.) Once again, given that the *enkratēs* was there classified among the good character-types, he meets the requirement spelled out here.

Regarding the *akratēs*, if (a) refers specifically to the right affect requirement on *phronēsis* from VI.12, we have seen that he meets that requirement. The fact that the *akratēs* turns out to be not bad but only half bad (ὅσθ’ ἡμιπόνηρος 1152a17) complicates his status with respect to *phronēsis*. Aristotle is called upon to add some conceptual refinement to his VI.12 dichotomy between good men who can have *phronēsis* and evil men who cannot (1144a34-b1). (a) is introductory; rather than sealing off the discussion, it presents the thesis to be established. In (b) and (d), Aristotle goes on to supply the additional argumentation needed to make up the gap between the position argued for in book VI and the one he still takes himself to need to establish.

Drawing on what he has established in VII.3, Aristotle is in a position to claim, in (b)-(d), that the *akratēs* is bad *enough* to be excluded from *phronēsis*, on the grounds that:

- (1) He *voluntarily* does something he takes to be bad, which, in turn, means he does ‘have knowledge’ (εἰδὼς) in some sense (τρόπον τινα) of the badness of his action.
- (2) He does not activate or make use of this knowledge (θεωρῶν/πρακτικός); he is not ‘practical’ and does not act on his knowledge.

(3) His status, as regards this knowledge, is akin to a drunken person or a sleeping person.

Notice that none of these conditions directly invokes the types or strengths of desires to which he is subject. The bad overall character condition of the *akratēs* is traced to facts about his intellectual condition; facts established in the course of discussing the *akratēs*' ignorance in VII.3. It is there that Aristotle (1) shows that akratic action is voluntary because there is a kind of reasoning backing it (1147a25-28); (2) says that the *akratēs* does not fully have knowledge—he 'has and doesn't have' it (1147b10-12); (3) describes the *akratēs* as not fully activating his knowledge in the manner of someone who is asleep or drunk (1147a10-14, b12). Moreover, it is in VII.3 that Aristotle describes the *akratēs* as being in a condition of *ignorance* (*agnoia* 1147b6), where this charge plausibly picks out the absence of the kind of knowledge at stake in *akrasia*, namely practical knowledge or *phronēsis*.

The shared feature of the *enkratēs* and the *akratēs*, as Aristotle repeatedly insists (VII.2 1146a9-15, VII.4 1148a4-10, VII.9 1151b34-1152a3), is being subject to strong, bad appetitive desires. If such desires were enough to preclude someone from *phronēsis*, we'd expect Aristotle not to identify the *phronēsis*-excluding features as ones specific to the *akratēs*. Instead, Aristotle articulates the *akratēs*' lack of wisdom in terms of his failure to act on his choice: the *phronimos* is "πρακτικός" (1146a8, 1152a9), whereas the *akratēs* is not (ὁ δ' ἀκρατῆς οὐ πρακτικός, 1152a9). But the *enkratēs* is, of course, one to act on his reasoned choice. Like the *phronimos*, he is practical.

### (b) Alleged Defects of the *Enkratēs*

Even if Aristotle's own explanation of why the *akratēs* lacks *phronēsis* cannot be generalized to show that the *enkratēs* lacks it as well, he might have other reasons for denying *phronēsis* to the *enkratēs*. A number of philosophers have claimed that the *enkratēs*' bad affective condition gives rise to some kind of intellectual defect. Halper says that the *enkratēs* has "inappropriate emotions that impede his judgment. He achieves the right end not by choosing it with practical

wisdom but by avoiding what he knows to be improper. (cf. 2.9, 1109b1-7, b18-23) And in the process he misses the pleasure that is proper to virtue”. (1999, 132) Woods says that since alternatives to virtuous action “hold some attraction,” “the continent person acts as he does only because what is virtuous appears to him as, on balance, the best alternative in the circumstances,” not “as an unqualified good”. (1986, 151-152) Coope, making a similar point, accuses the *enkratēs* of “a failure to take a specifically rational kind of pleasure in fine action”. (2012, 142)

Perhaps the most influential treatment of this point is McDowell’s, who says that

An incontinent or continent person has a flawed approximation to practical wisdom. He has, in a way, a correct conception of doing well, and applies that conception to particular predicaments; but he reveals that his resemblance to a possessor of full-fledged practical wisdom is only partial, by the fact that he is swayed by the attractions of alternatives to what he (in a way) knows to be doing well. It helps to make this idea of a flawed approximation to practical wisdom intelligible if we take continence and incontinence to characterize people who are on their way to acquiring virtue. (1998, 48-49)

Woods and McDowell offer no textual support for their claims, and Halper refers us only to II.9, a chapter that is not about *akrasia* or *enkrateia*, but describes the struggles of one aiming to acquire virtue. Halper may be thinking, as McDowell does, that *enkrateia* is not a stable condition of character but the transitional condition of the learner.<sup>26</sup> But this characterization of *enkrateia* is not supported by the text. As Coope presses,<sup>27</sup> “Aristotle himself never suggests that self-control is radically unstable [...]. To be self-controlled is to be someone who is *such as* to have bad desires and *such as* not to be led by them (1152a1ff). The self-controlled character

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<sup>26</sup> This line is also pushed by Woods 1986 (p.152), Drefcinski (2000, pp.115-116) and Broadie (1991, p.308 n. 11)—though, as Coope points out (fn. 21) Broadie’s argument for instability really only applies to the *akratēs*.

<sup>27</sup> Following Cooper 2010, who makes the same point in his survey of VII 1-2 (pp.12-13). The *akratēs* and *enkratēs* are “a pair of special kinds of person, with settled dispositions of their own that amount to traits of their characters, and whose uncontrolled or self-controlled actions recur as characteristically for them as do the virtuous or the vicious actions of any type of virtuous or vicious person. They are people with more or less permanently, or at least well-settled, divided minds and feelings about the matters that they are self-controlled or uncontrolled about.” Likewise Pakaluk p. 234 “...although commentators frequently speak of *akrasia*...as a particular psychological process or event, Aristotle is apparently even more interested in *akrasia* and *enkrateia* as persistent states of the soul, just as vice and virtue are persistent states.”

is prone to bad appetites, and yet reliably makes, and acts upon, the right decision.” (2012, 151-152, italics original)<sup>28</sup>

Coope herself proposes that the *enkratēs*' problem is a failure to take a specifically rational pleasure in right action. To indicate the sort of pleasure she finds lacking in the *enkratēs*, she points us to Aristotle's discussion of friendship NE IX.8. Coope quotes only excerpts from the passage, but I want to look at the passage as a whole. For one sentence that she doesn't quote (italicized below) contains a reference to *enkrateia* that supports quite the opposite conclusion about the *enkratēs*:<sup>29</sup>

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

Coope takes this passage as evidence for the claim that taking pleasure can be a rational activity:

Aristotle argues that the self-lover, properly speaking, is the person who 'indulges' and 'gratifies' the 'most authoritative element of himself,' namely intellect (*nous*) (1168b33-4). And it is by acting finely that one cherishes this part of oneself: 'in doing fine things, he [the good man] will himself be benefited and will

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<sup>28</sup>Coope largely avoids giving the instability answer. But she does cite I.10.1100b12-17, as asserting that "no other kind of disposition is as stable as a virtue". (2012, fn. 24) But in that passage Aristotle is contrasting virtue with non-affective dispositions (i.e., knowledge), not with other ethical dispositions (vice, *akrasia*, *enkrateia*).

<sup>29</sup>She does paraphrase the relevant sentence (2012, fn. 31) in a footnote, but thereby underrepresents its importance relative to her thesis.

benefit others' (1169a11-13). The excellent person (who appreciates the pleasure of fine action) will be happy to forgo money and honours, 'and all the goods people fight over, while keeping the fine for himself' (1169a20-22)...In sum, Aristotle says here that the excellent person takes a certain special pleasure in acting finely (and in the prospect of so acting), and that this gratifies the rational part of him. This confirms that this kind of pleasure is a pleasure of the rational part. (2012, 156-7)

If Coope's passage in IX.8 is evidence for the claim that there is rational pleasure, it must also be evidence for the claim that the *enkratēs* takes such pleasure. For he is Aristotle's example, here, of what it is to have one's mind in charge. The moral we may draw from the passage is that "living according to reason" rather than "living as passion dictates," the *enkratēs* "gratifies the most authoritative element in himself and in all things obeys this".<sup>30</sup>

It is remarkable that in discussing a topic—friendship—far afield from *enkrateia*, Aristotle feels called upon to invoke the *enkratēs* to illustrate the very possibility of the kind of love, gratification, and pleasure that is of a distinctively rational kind. The natural explanation of this fact would be that the *enkratēs*' defects with respect to passion and appetite make it clear that any pleasure he *does* take in self-restraint is a *rational* pleasure. IX.8 seems incompatible with Halper's claim that the *enkratēs* "misses the pleasure that is proper to virtue". (1999, 132)

I conclude that the textual evidence does not support the conclusion that the *enkratēs* lacks *phronēsis* in virtue of failing to take intellectual pleasure in right action. More generally, it seems that if Aristotle had an independent argument disqualifying the *enkratēs* from *phronēsis*, he would have presented it. Given the work he puts into arguing against *akratēs phronimos*, it is hard to see why Aristotle would omit the more general argument from which both the impossibility of *enkratēs phronimos* and the impossibility of *akratēs phronimos* would follow.

### **III. The Case for ascribing *phronēsis* to the *enkratēs***

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<sup>30</sup> cf. DA III.9 433a7-8, where Aristotle describes enkratic agents in much the same way, as following intellect.



I turn, now, to my positive case for ascribing *phronēsis* to the *enkratēs*. I will argue that attributing *phronēsis* to the *enkratēs* is the best way to explain the fact that the *enkratēs* acts in accordance with his choice. My argument will proceed in three stages. First, I will argue that given the similarity between the *akratēs*' and the *enkratēs*' affective parts, the fact that the *enkratēs* resists temptation attests to excellence in his intellectual part. Second, I will point to some direct textual evidence in the EE that support this conception of the *enkratēs*' intellectual excellence. Finally, I will argue that some little remarked-on passages in Aristotle's characterization of *phronēsis* support conceiving of *enkrateia* as a manifestation of *phronēsis*.

### (a) The Intellectual Strengths of the *Enkratēs*

In the opening of book VII, Aristotle lists three conditions (ἡθῆ) to be avoided—bestial vice, self-indulgence, and *akrasia*—and the three conditions opposed to them—divine virtue, moderation, and *enkrateia* (1145a16-20). The *akratēs* lands, then, among the bad conditions, and the *enkratēs* among the good ones. What is the source of the ethical gulf between akratics and enkratics? They both have excessive appetitive desires. Does the difference perhaps lie in the fact that the *enkratēs*' desires are weaker? Aristotle denies this:

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

(1150a9-16)

For it is not surprising if someone gives in to strong or excessive pleasures or pains, but rather something one tends to feel sympathy for, if he is overcome despite struggling against them, like Theodectes' Philoctetes, stricken by snake-bite, or Cercyon in Carcinus' Alope, or like people trying to hold back their laughter but letting it all out in a splutter, as happened to Xenophantus; but it is surprising if someone is

overcome by pleasures or pains that most people can withstand, and is unable to struggle against these...  
(1150b6-13)

The *enkratēs* will be such as to triumph even over strong appetitive desires; and the *akratēs* such as to yield even to weak ones.<sup>31</sup> The explanation for why the *akratēs* yields to what the *enkratēs* masters is not, therefore, that the latter had a weaker desire.<sup>32</sup> These passages suggest that, strictly speaking, it is a requirement on *enkrateia* but not on *akrasia* that one be subject to strong, bad desires. Aristotle's point is not, of course, that akratics are typically unafflicted by strong appetites; his point is that the *akratēs* and *enkratēs* are not to be distinguished with reference to the kinds or strengths of desires to which they are subject. Since they do indeed differ, the natural conclusion is that they differ in respect of the intellectual part of their souls. The *enkratēs*' goodness in his intellectual part must be strong enough to overcome his affective badness.

Given that the *enkratēs* is the *akratēs*' proper opposite, and that the *akratēs* is characterized by ignorance, it would stand to reason that the *enkratēs* should be distinguished by having his intellectual part in an especially good condition. And this is indeed how Aristotle characterizes the *enkratēs*. He specifies in VII.9 that *enkrateia* is not merely the capacity to overcome one's affective dispositions, but rather, the capacity to overcome them in the service of what one knows to be the right course of action; which is to say, it presupposes at least some measure of

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<sup>31</sup>'Strength' of desire is always relative, but there is a question, relative to what? Is the desire which the *enkratēs* overcomes strong in his soul—that is, relative to *his* other desires, or is it the kind of desire that is (typically) strong, strong in the soul of the ordinary man? I think Aristotle would answer, 'both.' If it were not strong *in* the soul of the *enkratēs*, the language of victory, triumph and conquest that is central to Aristotle's descriptions of *enkrateia* would make no sense. But desires that are, in a given individual, outside the norm Aristotle points to by reference to the 'ordinary man' also obviate praise or blame for the (un)successful struggle against them. Thus people who have abnormal kinds or strengths of desires (desires for eating human flesh or having sex with men, VII.5, the congenital 'softness' of women or Scythian kings, VII.8) do not count as akratic/enkratic ἀπλῶς. There is also a question as to whether these desires afflict him constantly, or only under circumstances of temptation. Aristotle's description of the *akratēs*' badness as intermittent (see IV(a) below) suggests that these desires only emerge as a problematic psychological reality when they are triggered by some stimulus. The same should hold for the *enkratēs*: he has a standing disposition to have an intense desiderative *response* to appetitive stimuli. Thus his experience of psychic strife is not constant but, like the *akratēs*' badness, intermittent.

<sup>32</sup> Contra Lorenz, who asserts without textual citation that enkratics have "somewhat less intense appetites" than akratics, (2006, 188). Against this, see also VII.2, 1146a9-15, VII.9, 1151b34-1152a3, and *Magna Moralia* 2.6.7 1.5-6.

rectitude in the intellectual part of the soul. Aristotle points out that not only does the *enkratēs* have the right reason (*orthos logos* VII.9 1151a29-35), but he is characterized by rational susceptibility more generally: he is, for instance, easily persuadable (1151b10, εὔπειστος) by good arguments.

It is not an accident that when Aristotle wishes to attest to the fact that the soul is indeed divided into an intellectual part and an affective one, he refers us to the phenomena of *enkrateia* and *akrasia* (I.13, 1102b14). And when he wants to illustrate the possibility of cooperation in spite of that division, he invokes *enkrateia* again (1102b26-7).<sup>33</sup> Aristotle makes clear in that passage that his interest in *enkrateia* and *akrasia* is at least in part an interest in the ways these phenomena reveal the otherwise invisible articulation of the soul, its parts and joints (1102b21-3). Aristotle could have argued for the soul's division by reference to the *akratēs* alone; what the *enkratēs* adds to that story is an account of the efficacy of the intellectual part. Because he must struggle against his appetitive imperfections, the *enkratēs*' right actions make visible the work that *phronēsis* can do.

At this point the reader might be inclined to object that the *enkratēs* cannot have *phronēsis*, given his bad appetitive desires. I postpone discussion of this objection until (IV) below, once again urging the reader, on methodological grounds, to resist viewing the issue through the lens of a puristic interpretation of VI.12-13. Instead, I want to direct the reader's attention to some texts that directly attribute *phronēsis* to the *enkratēs*.

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<sup>33</sup> Aristotle says that the affective part of *enkratēs*' soul "is obedient to (πειθαρχεῖ) reason, and in the moderate and courageous person it is presumably still readier (εὐηκοώτερόν) to listen; for in him it always chimes in with (ὁμοφωνεῖ) reason". I think this comment should not be read as a negative assessment of the *enkratēs* (contra Coope fn. 36). The comparison is strictly between the irrational part of the *enkratēs*' soul and the irrational part of the moderate or brave man's soul, not the men as wholes. And even that comparison is couched not in directly evaluative language, but in terms of tractability or cooperativeness—for Aristotle's point, here, is to use the *akratēs* and *enkratēs* as illustrations of the difference between the two parts of the soul. That difference is invisible in the courageous or moderate man, because his two parts are as one (ὁμοφωνεῖ). I do not deny that Aristotle could have used language of cooperativeness (εὐηκοώτερόν), or harmoniousness (ὁμοφωνεῖ) as a way of elevating the *enkratēs* above the moderate person, but such an assessment is tangential to the argument about psychic division in I.13. It would have easily fit the argumentative context of book VII, since there he is engaged in comparative assessments of these types—but, as noted above, he makes no such comparison there.

### (b) The *Enkratēs* as *Phronimos* in the EE

The first passage is part of a dense and rarely discussed argument at *EE* VIII.1.5-6 (1246b12-36). The passage suffers from a number of textual difficulties, and it is difficult to integrate all of what Aristotle says into a single line of argument, but this much seems clear: (1) Aristotle is (among other things) engaged in refuting an opponent who claims that the *akratēs* has *phronēsis*. (2) He argues by reducing to absurdity the claim that the affective part of the soul can ‘twist’ or ‘pervert’ virtue in the intellectual part.

Aristotle is imagining an interlocutor who invokes the phenomenon of *akrasia* as counterexample to the claim that *phronēsis* is a ruler in the soul. The objector claims that in the *akratēs*, *phronēsis* shows itself to be weak, since it can be ‘turned’ by the affective part of the soul in the direction of wrong action. The argument as whole makes heavy use of this concept of ‘turning’ (στρέφειν /στροφή). ‘Turning’ picks out a species of the more general concept of ‘use’ (χρῆσθαι), namely the species in which the user directs the used away from the end to which the used would otherwise tend (see the opening of VIII.1, 1246a28-30). στρέφειν connotes misdirection, perversion or twisting, though such ‘twisting’ can be a good thing overall when what is ‘twisted’ is something bad. This is what happens in the case of *enkrateia*, which Aristotle goes on to describe as a familiar phenomenon in which the intellectual part turns a bad condition in the affective part of the soul away from intemperate actions towards temperate ones:

And conversely, wisdom in the rational element (ἡ φρόνησις ἢ ἐν τῷ λογιστικῷ) will use the indiscipline in the irrational element to act temperately — that is what *enkrateia* seems to be (ὅπερ δοκεῖ ἡ ἐγκράτεια).  
(1246b23-4)

Aristotle concludes the chapter by agreeing with Socrates that nothing is stronger than wisdom, suggesting here that it is part of the ‘strength’ of *phronēsis* that it can redirect a bad appetitive condition towards good ends. Given the difficulty of the passage overall, however, there may be some question as to the dialectical status of this comment on *enkrateia*. For the reader is apt to

wonder whether the view described in the comment should be ascribed to Aristotle, or only to his interlocutor.

Aristotle's language (ὅπερ δοκεῖ ἡ ἐγκράτεια) suggests that he is expressing agreement with the picture of self-control that he here presents. Moreover, we would expect that *if* Aristotle were expressing dissent from some commonly held picture of *enkrateia*, that picture would have appeared elsewhere—for instance, among the set of *endoxa* at NE VII.1-2. For we do find there the thesis about *akrasia* that Aristotle is here engaged in refuting. The best way to settle the issue would be to integrate the comment on *enkrateia* within a reading of the passage as a whole; but, though there are no textual problems in the remark itself, the argument as a whole is riddled with them.<sup>34</sup> I despair of arguing decisively enough for any given reading of this difficult passage to convince the reader that she *must* take the comment on its face. I propose, instead, to look elsewhere for confirmation of the straightforward reading.

Consider the following introductory discussion from *EE* II.11:

Now that we have made these determinations, we may say whether virtue (ἡ ἀρετὴ) makes decision error-free, and the end correct, such that one decides for the sake of what one ought; or whether, as some believe, it makes one's reasoning correct. The latter, however, is what *enkrateia* does, since on its own it keeps reasoning uncorrupted (οὐ διαφθείρει τὸν λόγον). But virtue is different from *enkrateia*. We must discuss these issues later, since the explanation given by those who believe that virtue provides correct reasoning (τὸν λόγον ὀρθόν) is that *enkrateia* is that sort of thing, and is in the realm of what is praiseworthy. (1227b12-19)

Compare this passage with the better known 'division of labor' discussion from NE VI.12. There, Aristotle assigns ethical virtue the job of making the end correct (which he refers to variously as τὸν σκοπὸν (1144a8), τὸ τέλος (1144a32), and τὰς πρακτικὰς ἀρχὰς 1144a35-36), and gives *phronēsis* responsibility for ensuring the presence of the right reason (ὀρθὸς λόγος

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<sup>34</sup> See Jackson 1913 for a survey of the various textual problems and an attempted reconstruction of both the text and the argument.

1144b28-29). The argument begun in VI.12 and completed in VI.13 seeks to establish the choiceworthiness of intellectual virtue, both theoretical and practical. In NE VI.12-13, then, as in *EE*.II.11, Aristotle wants to limit the role of virtue so as to leave room for a distinctively intellectual contribution to right action. In both places he distinguishes an affective component from an intellectual component, and asserts that the affective component is responsible for the end and the intellectual component for right reason (ὁ ὀρθὸς λόγος). The difference between the NE VI passages and the *EE* II.11 passage is, then, just this: in the first, the intellectual work is done by *phronēsis*, in the second, by *enkrateia*. Thus when Aristotle says, in the *EE* passage, that “virtue is different from *enkrateia*” he is not drawing a distinction between *enkrateia* and the virtue of moderation (σωφροσύνη) but a distinction between *enkrateia* and ethical virtue, parallel to the one he makes between *phronēsis* and ethical virtue (ἀρετῆς 1145a5) in VI.12.

It is, of course, important to acknowledge that *EE* II.11 presents a picture of *enkrateia* and *akrasia* that is merely provisional.<sup>35</sup> Aristotle has not yet made the distinction between *akrasia* and vice, or between *enkrateia* and moderation, that he anticipates here. But notice that he does not seem to be anticipating a clarification that will disabuse one from ascribing *phronēsis* to the *enkratēs*. For no such clarification ever appears.<sup>36</sup> I submit that the clarification he *is* anticipating is the argument that *enkrateia* is not identical to *phronēsis*, but represents the condition in which *phronēsis* induces good behavior in the presence of bad appetitive desires. It is noteworthy that, while the existence and goodness of *enkrateia* seems to go without saying for Aristotle, he takes himself to need to argue that there is such a thing as a distinct virtue of moderation.<sup>37</sup> Aristotle’s settled view will be that the fight against bad desire is merely one way

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<sup>35</sup> Aristotle’s etymological analysis of moderation in VI.5 should be read as similarly provisional. He says “that is why we give sophrosunē [moderation] its name, as something that *sōzei tēn phronēsin*”. He cannot mean that moderation is *the only* thing that can save *phronēsis* from destruction, since says in *EE*.II that *enkrateia* does this. He even uses the same word—διαφθείρει—to describe the corrupting influence of pleasure and pain that sophrosunē (in VI.5) and *enkrateia* (in II.11) allow us to resist (1140b12). Just as he does not consider the distinct possibility of moderation in *EE* II.11, he does not consider the distinct possibility of *enkrateia* in VI.5.

<sup>36</sup> Even someone who reads NE VI.12-13 as saying that *phronēsis* requires moderation cannot take that passage as providing the relevant clarification—for, as a number of commentators have noted, Aristotle seems not to have the *akratēs* or the *enkratēs* in mind in that discussion. (See fns. 9, 50 below)

<sup>37</sup> He uses the *enkratēs*’ strong, bad desires not to rank the *enkratēs* as inferior to the moderate man, but to contend, against those who would assimilate them (VII.2 1145b15), that they do indeed differ. He might be imagining an

in which *phronēsis* may be manifest, but not the only one. *EE* II.11 does, then, despite its provisionality, suggest what the resolute reading of *EE* VIII.1 says: that imperfection in respect of appetitive desire is not incompatible with wisdom, since one especially clear manifestation of wisdom occurs in the restraint of excessive appetites.

### (c) The Link Between *Phronēsis* and *Enkrateia*

I have argued, first, that as we cannot explain the *enkratēs*' success by reference to his affective condition, it makes sense to chalk it up to intellectual excellence; and second, that there is textual support for doing so in the *EE*. Now I want to show that taking the *enkratēs* to manifest *phronēsis* fits well with an element of Aristotle's conception of *phronēsis*, albeit an element that does not usually receive much attention.

Consider the following observation: "each kind of creature asserts that what is wise is what successfully contemplates (θεωροῦν) the things relating to itself, and will hand over decisions to that. Hence the fact that people say some kinds of animal are wise, i.e. those that clearly have a capacity for forethought about their own lives." (1141a25-28). An animal who prepares a nest for its young or spins a web or stores away nuts for winter seems to reveal an understanding of itself, a capacity for a form of agency that is not a mere response to anything happening *now*. Such an animal seems to<sup>38</sup> have a kind of contemplative (θεωροῦν) access to features of itself that are not currently manifest to its sensibility: the fact that it will need a home for its young, or can use a web to catch a bug, or is bound to have trouble finding food in winter.

Likewise, the *enkratēs* acts in accordance with a general—and future oriented—understanding of the kind of thing he is. Hence at *EE* II.8, 1224b15-21 Aristotle describes the distinctive

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opponent such as Xenophon's Socrates, who overlooks the possibility of a separate virtue of moderation when he identifies *enkrateia*, as the opposite of *akrasia*, with virtue. (*Memorabilia* IV.v, see esp. 1.12: τοῖς ἐγκρατέσι μόνοις ἔξεστι σκοπεῖν τὰ κράτιστα τῶν πραγμάτων, καὶ λόγῳ καὶ ἔργῳ διαλέγοντας κατὰ γένη τὰ μὲν ἀγαθὰ προαιρεῖσθαι, τῶν δὲ κακῶν ἀπέχεσθαι.)

<sup>38</sup> 'φαίνεται' at 1141a28 should be read in the sense of 'mere appearance': animals cannot do more than appear *phronima* or resemble *phronimoi* because animals do not have a grasp of universals. (VII.3, 1147b3-5)

pleasures and pains of the *akratēs* and *enkratēs* as temporally indexed: the *enkratēs* has pain now, but the pleasure of hope (τὴν ἀπ’ ἐλπίδος ἡδονήν) that he will be benefitted, and the *akratēs* has pleasure now but the pain of expectation (τὴν ἀπ’ ἐλπίδος λύπην). Choosing the present pleasure is reacting—in just the way that an animal who leaps out of dangers, or falls upon its prey, is reacting; whereas enduring pain for the sake of a future good is ‘phronetic,’ in that it requires an understanding of the kind of thing one is.<sup>39</sup>

The claim that attention to non-immediate circumstances characterizes *phronēsis*, and links it to *enkrateia*, has textual support outside the NE. In the *Rhetoric*, *phronimoi* and enkratics are jointly described as future-oriented: “You may get your pleasure on the spot and the pain later, or the gain on the spot and the loss later. That is what appeals to incontinent persons—and incontinence may be shown with regard to all the objects of desire. Conversely—what appeals to self controlled and sensible people (οἱ γὰρ ἐγκρατεῖς καὶ φρονιμώτεροι)—the pain and loss may be immediate, while the pleasure and profit come later and last longer.” (I.12,1372b14-16). In *Politics* I.2 (1252a31-34), Aristotle says that the naturally ruling element is the one that has foresight; if we put this together with the description of the naturally ruling element as identical to *phronēsis* from III.4 (see esp. 1277a5-a16, 28, b25-29), we can conclude that Aristotle understands *phronēsis* as intimately connected to a power of foresight. Likewise, in *De Anima* 433b8-10, Aristotle describes thought (*nous*) as connecting us with the future, and desire (*epithumia*) as seeking what is present. *Phronēsis* is, then, the kind of entity to invoke in explaining how someone might resist seizing what appears immediately good in favor of pursuing his overall good. The *enkratēs*’ capacity to resist temptation can, therefore, intelligibly be seen as the work of his *phronēsis*. Aristotle’s overall conceptions of *phronēsis*, *enkrateia* and *akrasia* support contrasting the *akratēs* and the *enkratēs* on the basis of the presence or absence of *phronēsis*: the *akratēs* acts badly because he is ignorant (*agnoia* 1147b6), whereas the *enkratēs* acts well because he is *phronimos*.

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<sup>39</sup> This conception of *phronēsis* is supported by Aristotle’s repeated descriptions of the *phronimos* as someone who knows the good for himself by knowing the good for human beings in general: 1140a25-29, 1140b7-9, 1141a24-5, 1141b3-6, 1141b12-15, 1142a1-2.



#### IV. NE VI.12-13, Reconsidered.

I have been relying, thus far, on the following methodological departure from the standard approach to questions about *enkrateia*, *akrasia* and *phronēsis*: I have not allowed the puristic reading of NE VI.12-13 to control my interpretation of passages that speak directly to the intellectual condition of the *enkratēs* and *akratēs*. Let us take stock of where this approach has taken us. We began by noticing that Aristotle characterizes *enkrateia* not, as purists would expect, as a bad condition alongside *akrasia* and self-indulgence, but rather as a good, admirable, choiceworthy condition. This prompted a closer scrutiny of reasons for supposing Aristotle must think the *enkratēs* lacks *phronēsis*. First we saw that his arguments denying *phronēsis* to the *akratēs* do not apply to the *enkratēs*. Next we considered the charge that the *enkratēs* cannot take rational pleasure—but we found that Aristotle offered him as the exemplar of taking such pleasure, in IX.8. We then turned to the positive case for *enkratēs phronimos*. There I argued that the best explanation for the *enkratēs*' good behavior attributes *phronēsis* to the *enkratēs*. Without a commitment to purism from EN VI 12-13, there is nothing odd about this conclusion, which gets some corroboration from texts in the EE that actually attribute *phronēsis* to the *enkratēs*, and from Aristotle's broader picture of *phronēsis*. So, now is the time to turn to those passages in EN VI 12-13 that have usually been taken to speak decisively against the view I have been putting forward.

T1: The eye of the soul does not come to be in its proper condition without excellence (ἀρετῆς), as has been said and is clear in any case; for chains of practical reasoning have a starting point [...] and this [i.e., the starting point] is not evident except to the good person (τῷ ἀγαθῷ), since badness distorts a person and causes him to be deceived about the starting points of action. So it is evidence that it is impossible to be wise without being good (μὴ ὄντα ἀγαθόν). (VI.12, 1144a29-b1)

T2: It is clear, then, from what has been said that it is not possible to be unqualifiedly good (ἀγαθὸν εἶναι κυρίως) without wisdom, nor to be wise without excellence of character (τῆς ἠθικῆς ἀρετῆς). But this conclusion also offers a means of resolving the argument one can employ, in a dialectical context, to show that the excellences can be possessed independently of one another—i.e. that the same person is not best

adapted by nature to all of them, so that at a given moment he will have acquired one, but not another; for this is possible in relation to the natural excellences (τὰς φυσικὰς ἀρετὰς), but in relation to those that make a person good without qualification (ἀπλῶς λέγεται ἀγαθός), it is not possible, since if wisdom, which is one, is present, they will all be present along with it. (ἅμα γὰρ τῇ φρονήσει μιᾷ ὑπαρχούση πᾶσαι ὑπάρξουσιν) (VI.13,1144b30-1145a2)

In T1, Aristotle presents what I have called the “requirement of right affect,” to the effect that one cannot have *phronēsis* without being in a good affective condition. He explains this requirement by saying that one’s affective condition is responsible for providing the end or the goal at which our practical reasoning aims.<sup>40</sup> One cannot be cognitively excellent and conatively disordered, because conative disorder will deprive one’s reasoning of the proper target. It would seem to follow—even if Aristotle never comes out and says it—that the *enkratēs* and *akratēs*’ excessive appetites prevents either from having the end in the service of which his intellectual part would reason.

In T2, Aristotle expresses the view that the virtues are unified—if you have one, you have them all. More specifically, though you can have one *natural* virtue without another, you cannot have any of the ethical virtues without *phronēsis*—or without the other ethical virtues. If *phronēsis* entails the presence of all the ethical virtues, then the *enkratēs*’ lack of the ethical virtue of moderation would seem to entail that he lacks *phronēsis*.

In the remainder of this paper, I will make suggestions as to how we might bring Aristotle’s views on *enkrateia* into line with both the requirement of right affect and the unity of the virtues.

### **(a) The requirement of right affect**

The purist views the requirement of right affect in a perfectionist light, as demanding that the

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<sup>40</sup> One way of alleviating (some of) the tension between VI and VII might be to resist this literal reading of T1. Many interpreters have indeed been drawn to this tactic for independent reasons, arguing that if we saddle Aristotle with the claim that the end is not given by the intellectual part, we make him a Humean. I have been dissuaded from exploring this route by Moss 2011, who argues persuasively that Aristotle is indeed allocating to the affective part of the soul the job of setting the goal in the service of which the intellectual part reasons.

*phronimos*' affective condition be unsullied by even a single wrong type of affective response. I think we should take seriously the possibility that Aristotle is insisting on the presence of some, specific good affect, rather than the absence of every kind of bad affect<sup>41</sup>.

Let us recall that we have already found reason to doubt the puristic reading of the requirement of right affect. In VI.12, Aristotle says that *phronēsis* requires a grasp of the end; a grasp that *phronēsis* cannot itself supply but which is instead vouchsafed by the good condition of the affective part of the soul. But as noted in II(a) above, Aristotle is quite clear in allowing that someone whose affective part is as badly disposed as the *akratēs*' nonetheless possesses the end. For he says explicitly that the *akratēs* has a grasp of that starting point (τὸ οὐ ἔνεκα ἀρχή 1151a16), and therefore is “not bad without qualification, since the best in him, the fundamental starting point (ἡ ἀρχή), remains healthy”. (1151a24-25)

The *akratēs*' grasp of the starting point is integral to Aristotle's analysis of *akrasia*, for it manifests in his possession of the relevant universal: unlike the self-indulgent person, who thinks that every pleasure is to be pursued, the *akratēs* grasps the principle against which he acts (VII.8, 1151a22-24). This is why his reason is to be praised (I.13, 1102b15),<sup>42</sup> and why he is only half-bad. The problem is that the part of his reason which is to be praised is precisely the part that Aristotle has said depends on the good condition of his affective part—for Aristotle says that the *akratēs* grasps the end or the starting point. In this way, Aristotle's analysis of the *akratēs* is in as much tension with the puristic reading of the requirement of right affect as (my reading of) his analysis of the *enkratēs*. For though Aristotle denies *phronēsis* to the *akratēs*, he does so for what must—on the standard view—seem like the wrong reason. He does not cite the *akratēs*' bad affective condition but rather the *ignorance* that belongs properly to the intellectual part of his

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<sup>41</sup> Some might worry that VI.5, in which Aristotle presents *sophrosunē* as the savior of *phronēsis*, necessitates the standard reading. For a response, see fn. 35 above.

<sup>42</sup> Aristotle's claim that “we praise” the rational condition of the *akratēs* presumably represents the common view—with which he will, eventually, express qualified agreement. For he will divide the *akratēs*' reasoning into two premises, and argue that while the *akratēs*' grasp of the universal (the starting point) is indeed praiseworthy, he is nonetheless cognitively defective in respect of another part of his reasoning (the minor premise or the conclusion—depending on how one reads VII.3).

soul. This suggests that the affective part of the *akratēs*' soul is *good enough* to afford him a grasp of the end.

We have reason, then, to seek an alternative conception of the requirement of right affect. I propose that the affect mandated by *phronēsis* is love of the noble (*kalon*). Since the noble is the goal of virtuous action, it makes sense that love of the noble is the affect that would enable one to grasp the goal in the service of which one reasons.<sup>43</sup> Possession of the end or target of reasoning is what Aristotle picks out as a requirement on *phronēsis* in VI.12; and he specifies there that the property that such an end must have is precisely that of being noble (*kalos*, 1144a26). There is also textual evidence outside VI.12 for understanding the requirement in this way. There are a number of passages that complement the argument of VI.12 by articulating the nature of the dependence of the intellectual part of the soul on the affective part. The view that argument—reasoning—cannot substitute for having well-ordered passions finds expression in Aristotle's insistence on well-brought up students in book I, his description of virtue acquisition in II.4, and his extended discussion of the role of politics in habituation in X.9. In all these passages, we find confirmation of the idea that one cannot grasp the end of action without an affective orientation towards the *kalon*.

In I.3, 1095a2-13, Aristotle famously insists that his listeners should have life-experience for which reason cannot substitute. Only those whose desires have been cultivated so as to accord with a rational principle are in the position to benefit from rational discourse. At I.4, 1095b4 he once again requires that his audience have been nobly raised (διὸ δεῖ τοῖς ἔθεσιν ἦχθαι καλῶς), for it is one's upbringing that gives one the starting point (*archē*, 1095b6). In II.4 Aristotle accuses people of "taking refuge in talk," because they think that there is an intellectual route to virtue. Such people fail to acknowledge that one becomes virtuous through a process of habituation in which one repeatedly performs virtuous actions (1105b9-18).

These passages imply that habituation shapes the affective part of the soul—one's loves and

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<sup>43</sup> Thanks to Susan Sauvé Meyer for this argument.

passions—in the direction of the noble.<sup>44</sup> The point comes through quite explicitly in X.9:

...talk and teaching may well not have force under all circumstances, and the soul of the hearer has to have been prepared beforehand through its habits in order to delight in and loath the right things (*kalōs*), just as one has to prepare soil if it is going to nourish the seed. For the person who lives according to emotion (*pathos*) will not listen to talk that tries to turn him away from it, nor again will he comprehend such talk; how will it be possible to persuade someone like this to change? And in general it is not talk (*λογῶν*) that makes emotion yield but force. Before he acquires excellence, then, a person must in a way already possess a character akin to it, one that is attracted by the noble (*to kalon*) and repulsed by the shameful (*to aischron*). (1179b23-31)<sup>45</sup>

Aristotle here describes the habituated condition as being “attracted by the noble and repulsed by the shameful”. He contrasts those who have developed this condition with those who love only appetitive pleasure, and can therefore only be redirected from what they are attracted to by force and fear. Aristotle’s point here is not that these people’s passions are in disarray; he is not saying that they are overly fearful, or even overly pleasure-loving, though that may well be the case. His point is that there is a passion they are *missing*. They lack “a conception of what is noble and truly pleasant,” and they also lack a love of what is noble and truly pleasant. For Aristotle wants to insist that in this case the conception is predicated on the love; reason, argument, philosophy, etc. cannot, absent the corresponding affective response, produce in someone a conception of the noble.

I propose, then, that we distinguish two different ways in which the affective part of someone’s soul might be in a good condition. The first is a matter of whether the person feels the right amount of fear, boldness, pleasure, pain, anger etc. The “right amount” is the amount that would produce a right response, were he to respond on the basis of that feeling. If someone has

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<sup>44</sup> cf. also EE I.3.1-2, 1214b28-1215a3: “It would be useless to scrutinize every view that anyone holds about it [happiness]. Many ideas occur to young children and the sick and the mad that no sensible person would bother to challenge. What they need is not argument but either the maturity that comes with age, or medical or civic correctives [...] it would be strange to bring argument to bear on people who have no need of argument but rather need to suffer.” (τοις λόγου μηδὲν δεομένοις ἀλλὰ πάθους)

<sup>45</sup> Aristotle makes this point forcefully and repeatedly in the extended opening to X.9, 1179b4-1180a20.

insufficient boldness, excessive anger, or takes too much appetitive pleasure in food or sex, he is likely to be moved towards the wrong actions by the relevant kinds of external stimuli. The *akratēs* for instance, is affectively disposed to overreact to the promise of appetitive pleasure. In circumstances in which appetitive pleasure is at stake, he displays affective badness.

The second way in which the affective part of someone's soul might be in a good condition is by way of their grasping the *kalon*. This is the respect in which the *akratēs* continuously displays a form of affective *goodness*. He has 'the end' or 'the first principle,' as evidenced in his grasp, even at the moment of akratic action, of the universal premise that urges him to act otherwise.<sup>46</sup> Consider Aristotle's contrast between *akrasia* and self-indulgence:

The self-indulgent type, as has been said, is not the sort to have regrets, since he sticks to his decision; the *akratēs*, on the other hand, always has regrets. Hence it is not as we suggested when we listed the problems: it is the former that is incurable, and the latter that is curable; for badness of character resembles diseases like dropsy or consumption, while *akrasia* resembles the sort involving seizures; for the one is a continuous, the other a non-continuous, way of being as one shouldn't be. (VII.8, 1150b29-35)

Aristotle presents the *akratēs*' regret as the source of his (relative) goodness, in comparison with the self-indulgent person. Regret is an affective condition, which indicates that one cares about doing what is right. Since the *akratēs* regrets his appetitive indulgence, he must *care* about whether or not he yields to appetite. His feeling of regret is keyed in to virtue; and it is *this* form of caring that I take Aristotle to be describing, in VI.12, as essential to *phronēsis*. The *akratēs* loves the nobility of eating moderately, and recoils from indulgence in appetitive pleasure as slavish<sup>47</sup> and shameful. The self-indulgent person, by contrast, is (fully) bad because he *is* persuaded to pursue such pleasures. His failure to see the importance of acting moderately is not

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<sup>46</sup>Whiting and Pickavé 2008 have recently argued to the contrary, that the *akratēs* is in fact missing *the universal*. I cannot engage with their heterodox and carefully argued analysis of VII.3 here. I note only that their thesis appears to conflict not only with the claims in VII.3 that (are usually taken to) say that the akratic errs with respect to the final proposition, but also with the VII.10 description contrasting the akratic with the self-indulgent person exactly on the basis of the former's possession of the universal (1151a23-4).

<sup>47</sup>At III.10, 1118a23-5 Aristotle explains the unattractiveness of immoderate action in terms of slavishness and animality. (ἀνδραποδώδεις καὶ θηριώδεις, 25)

a matter of having the wrong amount of some passions of which a good person has the right amount. The bad person is simply missing something, which is why he is bad all the time, continuously, irrespective of environmental conditions.

Someone might, however, object that one's affective condition in respect of fear, boldness, anger, appetite, etc. cannot be separated from one's affective condition in relation to the noble. The objector would point out, for instance, that Aristotle takes habituation to be the mode of improvement in either domain. One comes to fear, desire, be angered, etc. in the right way by acting virtuously (II.1, 1103b14-22, II.2, 1104a33-b3), and one develops a conception of the noble in the same way (X.9, 1179b34-80a5).<sup>48</sup> The courageous actions of the trainee engender both an appreciation of the nobility of courageous action and the tendency to have one's fear and boldness come into correct alignment with the performance of such actions. And it would stand to reason that as one's passions become ordered in such a way as to facilitate courageous and moderate action, one becomes increasingly able to perform the actions in such a way that one appreciates their nobility. This is all quite correct. There is a strong and important tie between the two kinds of affective condition, and it lies outside the scope of this paper to enter into any detailed examination of the relationship between them. Nonetheless I want to offer some reasons for thinking that *some* amount of separation is consistent with Aristotle's overall picture of the two forms of affective condition as in many respects intertwined.

The first lies in the very possibility of shame. In order to feel ashamed of, e.g., one's excessive fears or insufficient boldness, a person must have a sense of the noble that outstrips the rectitude of her responses of fear or boldness. The second reason for positing a separation is that the two domains of affect differ with respect to the possibility of excess. Unlike fear, and appetitive pleasure, and love of honor, and anger, there is no such thing as a 'right amount' of love of the noble. Aristotle says, in the lines following the discussion of self-love and friendship I quoted in II(b) above, that "those who are exceptionally eager (διαφερόντως σπουδάζοντα) for noble

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<sup>48</sup> cf. II.4 1105a32, where it is by habituation that we learn to do virtuous actions for their own sakes, and I.7 1098b3-4, where Aristotle says that habituation gives one the ethical starting point.

actions (τὰς καλὰς πράξεις) are welcomed and praised by everyone; and if everyone vied for what is noble (τὸ καλὸν), and strained to do the noblest things (τὰ κάλλιστα πράττειν), not only would everything be as it should on the communal level but as individuals too each person would be possessed of the greatest goods, given that excellence is such a thing.” (IX.8, 1169a6-11) The more one loves the noble, the better. Unlike in the case of fear or anger or honors or money, no danger of excess presents itself.

My third and final reason for positing the affective separation on which my interpretation of the requirement of right affect depends is based in Aristotle’s discussion of natural virtue. Passions such as fear, anger etc. are arranged in some way or other by nature: “everyone thinks each of the various sorts character traits belongs to us in some sense by nature—because we are just, moderate in our appetites, courageous, and the rest from the moment we are born.” (VI.13, 1144b4-6) Thus, with respect to fear or anger it is possible to find unhabituated—“natural”—virtue children or nonhuman animals. What we will not find “naturally” is love of the kalon. He contrasts the natural courage of wild beasts who are “driven by distress and temper” (διὰ τὸ ὑπ’ ἀλγηδόνοσ καὶ θυμοῦ ἐξελαυνόμενα, III.8, 1116b34) with the true courage of people who “act for the sake of the noble” (διὰ τὸ καλὸν πράττουσιν, 1116b30-31) :

But the ‘courage’ that comes about through temper (διὰ τὸν θυμὸν) does seem to be the most natural (φυσικωτάτη) form, and to *be* courage once the factors of decision (προαίρεσιν) and the end for the sake of which (τὸ οὗ ἔνεκα)<sup>49</sup> have been added. Human beings too, then, are distressed when angry, and take pleasure in retaliating; but people who fight from these motives are effective in fighting, not courageous, since they do not fight because of the noble (διὰ τὸ καλὸν), or as the correct prescription directs (ὡς ὁ λόγος), but because of affection (διὰ πάθος). But they do have something that resembles courage. (1117a4-9)

Aristotle contrasts natural courage, which is simply a matter of having feelings such as thumos in the right amount, with genuine courage which is done with a sense of the proper end of such

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<sup>49</sup> cf. EE III.1, 1230a27-29, where Aristotle explains what it means for virtue to be prohairesis by saying that it makes one choose all things for the sake of the *kalon*.



action (τὸ οὐ ἔνεκα), namely, the noble (διὰ τὸ καλὸν). I am suggesting that we exploit the distinction on which contrast rests in our reading of the requirement of right affect in VI.12: *phronēsis* calls for the presence of the love of the noble rather than the absence of any errant response of appetite, fear, anger etc.

### (b) The Unity of the virtues

Let me end by considering whether the thesis of *enkratēs phronimos* conflicts with Aristotle's claim, in T2, that the virtues are unified. Aristotle says that if wisdom is present, all the ethical virtues (πᾶσαι) will be present with it; in addition, he goes on to say that a decision (*prohairesis*) will not be correct without virtue (*aretē*) (1145a4-5).<sup>50</sup> The proponent of the puristic interpretation of the requirement of right affect will point out that even if the *enkratēs* loves the noble, he doesn't have *all* the virtues, since he lacks moderation. Moreover his condition (*enkrateia*) does not qualify, strictly speaking, as one of virtue (*aretē*), and so his decisions cannot be correct. For both reasons, he cannot have *phronēsis*.

If T2 represented the totality of our evidence about whether the *enkratēs* can have *phronēsis*, the interpretation sketched above would be hard to resist. However, as we have seen, that is very far from the case. Given that the remainder of the evidence speaks not only to the general conclusion that the *enkratēs* is a good person, but specifically in favor of his having *phronēsis*, we have reason to try to read Aristotle's use of the word *aretē* at 1444b32 and 1145a5 (as well as 1145a1, where it is present by implication) in a looser and less technical sense. When Aristotle says if *phronēsis* is present, they will all be present (πᾶσαι ὑπάρξουσιν), he might well mean that the person in question will be in a good ethical condition in each affective domain. In the case of

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<sup>50</sup> One might wonder how this is consistent with his description of even the *akratēs*' *prohairesis* as correct (1151a22,34). I propose that Aristotle means here to be referring to the *prohairesis* on which someone acts. *Phronēsis* ensures that, when one acts from *prohairesis*, one acts from a good one. (It also, independently, ensures that one *does* act from *prohairesis*.) Nonetheless, it is worth noting that this is yet another indication (see fn.9) that Aristotle doesn't seem to have the *akratēs* or the *enkratēs* in mind in VI.12-13. For this helps explain why he does not draw the 'fine distinction' I refer to below, and thereby supports my contention that we are licensed to take Aristotle's references to ethical virtue in this context more loosely than usual.

the domain of appetitive pleasure, it turns out that there are two ways of being in a good ethical condition: that of the moderate person, and that of the *enkratēs*.<sup>51</sup>

When we speak of “Aristotelian virtues,” we refer, quite efficiently and precisely, to the list culled from NE II-V: moderation, courage, generosity, gentleness, wit, friendliness, great-souledness, justice etc. For us, “virtue” is a technical term. But there is reason to think it did not play this role for Aristotle. Aristotle was happy to speak of virtues of the body (*EE* VIII.3, 1248b28-9); of craft virtue (VI.7, 1141a12); of a natural virtue possible for animals (1144b3-9). In two places he demotes courage and moderation as being merely *parts* of virtue, reserving the name of virtue for justice at NE V.2 (1130a13) and to gentlemanliness (*kalokagathia*) at *EE* VIII.3, 1248b8-11. Even when Aristotle specifies that he is speaking of virtue in a ἀπλῶς or κυρίως sense, he cannot reliably be translated as speaking of what we would call “virtue proper.”<sup>52</sup> Words like ἀπλῶς and κυρίως rely on context to help fill out the relevant contrast: for instance, at V.1, 1129b26-7 he distinguishes virtue ἀπλῶς from virtue in relation to another. If *aretē* is, as Dover (1974, 67) describes it, the “corresponding abstract noun” to *agathos*,<sup>53</sup> it will be important to keep in mind that neither of our standard translations (‘excellence’ or ‘virtue’) can match it in terms of what Saussure (1959, 115-116) called semantic value. For we have access to an independent noun: “goodness.”

It sounds strange *to us* to say that *enkrateia* is a virtue, but there is no reason to think that claim would have sounded so strange to *Aristotle*. Recall our introductory discussion of *enkrateia*, in

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<sup>51</sup> Aristotle’s failure to draw this distinction here may well be a product of the focus of this particular discussion. He is more interested in emphasizing the distinction between natural and ethical virtue of the affective part than on taking care to differentiate ways in which a good ethical condition can exist in the affective part.

<sup>52</sup> Thus Coope (2012, 147) is wrong to take Aristotle’s claims that *phronēsis* requires someone to be good or to have virtue in a ‘strict’ sense (κυρίως/ ἀπλῶς) as evidence that the *enkratēs* cannot have *phronēsis*. ‘κυρίως’ and ‘ἀπλῶς,’ like the English ‘in the strict sense,’ are contrastive. When the word they qualify is ‘said in many ways,’ as NE I.6 reveals ‘good’ to be, the particular contrast must be specified. In this case, the specific contrast case is that of merely natural goodness (1144b3,5,16,17,30-2).

<sup>53</sup> In VI.12-13 (as in many other places) Aristotle uses *aretē* and *agathos* interchangeably, the former when he needs a noun, the latter when he needs an adjective. Consider, for instance, the fact that both τὸ κυρίως ἀγαθὸν 1144b7 and κυρίως ἀρετὴ 1144b14, pick out ethical (as opposed to natural) virtue. Likewise consider 1144b31-2: ὅτι οὐχ οἷόν τε ἀγαθὸν εἶναι κυρίως ἄνευ φρονήσεως, οὐδὲ φρόνιμον ἄνευ τῆς ἠθικῆς ἀρετῆς. Notice that ἀγαθὸν in the first clause does the same work as ἀρετῆς in the second.

which I noted the lengths to which Aristotle goes to fit *enkrateia* into the mold of his discussion of virtue. And he does succeed in characterizing *enkrateia* as an excellent (σπουδαῖον 1151b28) mean state (μέσος ὁ ἐγκρατής, 1151b25) which leads to correct choice (1151a34).<sup>54</sup> In the face of the fact that Aristotle, at one point, comes out and says that *enkrateia* is a virtue (ἡ γὰρ ἐγκράτεια ἀρετή, *EE* II.7, 1223b11-12), the purist cannot himself avoid invoking a nontechnical sense of *aretē*. Given the variety of ways Aristotle uses *aretē*, it is hard to see a principled objection to the claim that some instance of the word—such as at VI.13—is used nontechnically.

More broadly, our intuitions about the scope of the phrase “Aristotelian virtue” may not be as theoretically innocent as we take them to be. We seem to have infused the very phrase with the puristic backdrop against which the *enkratēs* must emerge as an unwise, and generally bad, kind of person. I do not believe that Aristotle has earned his reputation of having presented us with a picture of either virtue or wisdom that is an “unattainable ideal”. Aristotle thought virtue and wisdom were difficult, but possible to attain. If Aristotle had wanted to claim that no one, not even, e.g., Hector or Achilles, met his standards of virtue, he would have flagged this radical departure from common sense.<sup>55</sup> Instead, he tends to affirm and draw on conventional morality in his characterization of virtues. For instance, in VI.5 he endorses the conventional conception of “Pericles and men like him” (1140b8) as having *phronēsis*. Does Aristotle thereby imply that none of these men experienced temptations to overeat, or to overindulge in sexual pleasure? He needn’t be read as doing so. Perhaps they achieved greatness because their appetites cooperated, or perhaps they succeeded in spite of appetitive recalcitrance. When Aristotle describes examples of *enkrateia*, he doesn’t do so in order to make the purist’s judgment that the *enkratēs*’ character is tainted by the very presence of appetitive excess. His attention is, rather, on such a person’s “victory” (νικᾶν, 1150a36) over appetite. The *enkratēs*’ affective condition—comprising both his appetitive desires and his love of the noble—is one he shares with the *akratēs*. The victorious combatant must, therefore, be located in the intellectual part of the

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<sup>54</sup> Aristotle does, at *EE* III.7, discuss mean states that are not virtues (see esp. 1234a24-25). He explains that the states in question (friendliness, shame, righteous indignation, dignity, etc.) are not virtues because they are merely states of feelings and not dispositions to *choose*. Since *enkrateia* is a disposition to choose (*VII.8*, 1151a29-b4), it cannot be disqualified from virtue on these grounds.

<sup>55</sup> As, e.g., Plato does at *Phaedo* 68c-69c.

*enkratēs*' soul (*logistikon*). This is what interests Aristotle about the *enkratēs*: his struggles with himself make the work of *phronēsis* visible.

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