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POSTERIOR ANALYTICS AND
THE ENDOXIC METHOD IN ARISTOTLE'S
NICOMACHEAN ETHICS, VII*

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Introduction

According to a traditional line of interpretation, Aristotle's employs a dialectical method, the so-called "endoxic method", in his *Ethics*.¹ The chief evidence for this interpretation stems from a methodological remark prefacing his discussion of *akrasia* in *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII,1. There Aristotle suggests that ethical research can be done by using *endoxa* as starting points. Since then, much has been written about the role of this "endoxic method" in Aristotle's philosophy.² In an influential article "Tithenai ta phainomena", Owen claims that the use of endoxic method is not limited to Aristotle's ethics, but makes its appearance in his scientific works (e.g., *Physics*) as well.³ Following Owen's lead, more and

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¹ Cf. BARNES 1980, 490-511; IRWIN 1981, 193-223; NUSSBAUM 1986, 240-263; DEVEREUS 1987, 1-16.

² For example, ROCHE 1988, 53, links the race course analogy of *NE* I,4 to the methodological remarks of *NE* VII,1, arguing that the procedure outlined in VII,1 is just another expression of the race analogy, viz. the starting and finishing points of the race course are the *endoxa* in *NE* VII 1145b2-7.

³ See OWEN 1986, 239-251.

more scholars claim to find such applications all over the Aristotelian corpus.⁴ The view that endoxic method is a general method for Aristotle has then become dominant.

Nevertheless, questions and doubts have been raised about this dominant reading of Aristotle's method. A few scholars questioned the asserted application of endoxic method in Aristotle's scientific works.⁵ Some scholars called into question the use of endoxic method in Aristotle's *Ethics* itself.⁶ The widespread doubts even lead some scholars to argue that the so-called endoxic method is only a *rara avis*, that is, a "rare bird" employed by Aristotle only for some specific topic.⁷

However, despite of those disagreements, there seems to be a general consensus that there is a dialectical method, namely endoxic method, in Aristotle's philosophy, and Aristotle uses such a dialectical method at least in his discussion of *akrasia* in *NE* VII,1-10. In this paper, I wish to challenge this standard view. I argue that the endoxic method we find in *NE* VII is essentially scientific.⁸ Aristotle actually follows some of the main guidelines of the *Posterior Analytics* (hereafter *APo.*) in his inquiry about the nature of *akrasia* in *NE* VII. The "endoxic method" displayed in *NE* VII,1, thus understood, is a practically adapted version of his scientific method as is depicted in *APo.* II,1-2 and II,8-10.⁹

⁴ Such as the dialectical arguments in *Generation of Animals* and *Metaphysics*. See BALME 2003, 127; KRAUT 2006, 81.

⁵ See, for example, BOLTON 1987, 120-166; BOLTON 1990, 185-206.

⁶ See NATALI 2007, 364-381; SALMIERI 2009, 311-335; KARBOWSKI 2019.

⁷ See FREDE 2012, 185-215; DAVIA 2017, 383-405. KARBOWSKI 2019, 102-104, claims that the methodology of *NE* VII is governed by a "topic-specific norm".

⁸ It is important to note that there is a difference between the claim that the endoxic method can be used for scientific purposes and the claim that the endoxic method is by itself scientific. Holders of the standard view can very well argue that the endoxic method, as a dialectical method, can be used for scientific purposes (e.g., for arriving at scientific principles). But this is not what I mean by calling the endoxic method "scientific". In my view, the endoxic method employed in *NE* VII does more than revealing principles. It aims to offer explanations about the phenomenon of *akrasia* (e.g., whether it exists and how it arises), and thus fall under the scope of ἐπιστήμη for Aristotle.

⁹ Though *Posterior Analytics* explains the nature of scientific knowledge and how to acquire such knowledge, the method it recommends is quite general. As Aristotle suggests at *APr.* I,30 that there can be different adapted versions of his scientific methods as the principles for each science differ: Most of the principles for each science are peculiar (ἴδιαι) to it. For this reason, it is for experience (ἐμπειρία) to provide the principles concerning each subject. I mean, for example, that it is for astronomical experience to provide the principles for the science of astronomy (for when the phenomena (φαινόμενων) had been sufficiently grasped, in this way astronomical demonstrations were found). Similarly, it is also the case with any other art or science whatsoever (46a17-22).

To support my arguments, I have structured the paper as follows: in the first section, I briefly present the methodological passages of *NE VII,1* to show that the traditional endoxic understanding of the passage does not fully match Aristotle's actual procedure and philosophical intention. This mismatch leads us to consider the possibility that the method Aristotle employs is essentially scientific. I show how *NE VII,1-2* can be read in accord with the ὄτι-stage of an Aristotelian scientific inquiry; in the second section, I examine *NE VII,3*. I argue that *NE VII,3* marks the beginning of the διότι-stage of a scientific inquiry, in which Aristotle gives us an account that explains the cause of *akrasia*; in the third section, I show how Aristotle is able to reach the real definition of *akrasia* by addressing the questions of *περὶ ποῖα* and *πῶς* in *NE VII,4-10*; and in the last section, I address a possible objection, and draw some conclusions.

1. The ὄτι-Stage of Aristotle's Endoxic Method in *NE VII,1-2*

Aristotle's discussion of *akrasia* is prefaced by a methodological remark that is now widely known:

(T1) But we must, just as in other cases, set down (τιθέντας) the phenomena (φαινόμενα) and, after first raising difficulties (διαπορήσαντας), prove (δεικνύναι), if possible, all the reputable opinions (ἔνδοξα) about these affections or, failing this, the greatest number and the most authoritative. For if the annoying difficulties are resolved and the reputable opinions (ἔνδοξα) remain standing, then the matter would have been sufficiently proved (*NE 1145b2-7*).¹⁰

According to the traditional reading of this passage, Aristotle sketches here a procedure that aims towards a dialectical method, viz. the endoxic method. The method consists of three steps: first, set down the *endoxa*; and then, examine the difficulties among them; third, resolve as much as possible those difficulties so as to prove the truth of the greatest number and the most authoritative of those *endoxa*. Aristotle's subsequent discussion of *akrasia* in *NE VII* is thought to follow these steps, and is therefore dialectical. Yet this conclusion is not without tensions. For Aristotle does not view dialectical reasoning as the foremost kind of philosophical reasoning. Indeed, dialectics can be useful for philosophy,

¹⁰ All citations are used with reference to the OCT texts. Unless noted, all the translations are mine.

yet as a method itself, it is not truth-oriented.¹¹ At the end of *NE* VII,2, Aristotle claims that by resolving difficulties, his endoxic method is “discovering [the truth]” (εὑρεσις, *NE* 1146b7–8).¹² Thus it seems that Aristotle himself is expecting more from his method, and does not view it as simply dialectical.¹³ Moreover, a closer look at *NE* VII,3–10 shows that Aristotle does not discuss the *aporiai* in the exact order in which he listed them, and does not return to them all explicitly.¹⁴ It seems that to resolve difficulties and to establish consistency among the *endoxa* are only of secondary importance to Aristotle.

An alternative way of looking at *NE* VII, I suggest, is to view it in light of the *Posterior Analytics* methodology. For Aristotle frequently describes his *Ethics* as a work of philosophy (*NE* 1096a14–17; 1096a30–b1; 1152b1–2; 1181b15) and a branch of politics (*NE* 1094b11; 1102a18).¹⁵ In *Eudemian Ethics*, I,6, Aristotle claims that we should not think the sort of the study that makes clear not only “the what” (τὸ τί) but also “the why” (τὸ διὰ τί) is superfluous in politics, for such is the philosophic method in every field of inquiry (1216b36–39).¹⁶ Thus

¹¹ It is still widely debated how dialectic is related to Aristotelian philosophy. My stance on this is dialectic, properly understood, is only supplemental to philosophy. It is not a major philosophical method in Aristotle. For a useful discussion on the supplemental and optional role of dialectic in a philosophical inquiry. See KARBOWSKI 2019, 21–51; DEVEREUS 2015, 130–147.

¹² By contrast, a substantial part of the *Posterior Analytics* II is also dedicated to the topic of searching or discovering the truth. In the most cases, Aristotle uses the word ζήτησις or the related verb, but sometimes he also uses equivalent terms such as σκέψις and εὑρεσις.

¹³ According to *Topics*, a dialectical argument is the argument whose premises come from *endoxa* (100a29–30). By this standard, the “endoxic method” in *NE* VII does involve dialectical arguments. But the fact that the method contains dialectical arguments does not make the method itself dialectical. In fact, dialectical arguments also play a role in scientific inquiry, e.g., for reaching starting points of science (*Top.* 101a34–b4).

¹⁴ As is noted, for example, by NATALI 2009, 3–4; COOPER 1999, 38–39. This is not to deny, however, that by the end of *NE* VII, Aristotle does in fact tell us which of the *endoxa* are true and which are false, and gives us the means to solve all the *aporiai* ourselves. But I doubt that this is the main purpose of what Aristotle actually does there.

¹⁵ See KARBOWSKI 2019, 136. Many scholars think that the remarks Aristotle makes about the imprecision of ethical inquiry in *NE* I,3 exclude the possibility that it involves any scientific knowledge (cf. *NE* 1094b24–27). Yet this view is quite untenable. For natural science, according to Aristotle, also lacks the precision of mathematics – “mathematical precision exists only in those subjects without matter” (*Metaph.* 995a14–16). Thus, while there may be other reasons why ethical inquiry cannot involve scientific knowledge, it is not the fact that it lacks the precision of mathematics. Also, as HENRY 2015, 189, convincingly argues, that the fact that ethics is “holding for the most part” does not mean it cannot be a demonstrated science. In fact, Aristotle says explicitly in *APo.* I,30 that things that hold for the most part can be demonstrated.

¹⁶ For Aristotle, our initial grasp of the phenomena is always confused. The process from what said confusingly to what said clearly is achieved through a scientific inquiry from “the

it seems that Aristotle himself does not rule out the possibility that his inquiry in *NE VII* is informed by the *Posterior Analytics*. In what follows, I would like to develop this possibility a bit further by showing how Aristotle's inquiry into the nature of *akrasia* can be possibly read into *APo.* II,1-2 and 8-10.¹⁷ I argue that Aristotle seeks four things in his discussion of *akrasia*: the fact [about *akrasia*] (τὸ ὄν), the reason why [*akrasia* arises] (τὸ διότι), if [*akrasia*] exists (εἰ ἔστι) and what [*akrasia*] is (τί ἐστίν) [*APo.* II,1 89b24-25]. In seeking answers to the four questions, he formulates definitions of *akrasia* in accord with the general procedure he sketches in *APo.* II,8-10:

The ὄν-stage: one first tries to confirm that the definiendum A exists. If A exists, one transforms the question of A's existence ("If A exists?") into a proper factual statement about A ("A is C") through a nominal definition.¹⁸

The διότι-stage: one then sets out to investigate whether there is a cause B about A, and what is that cause. When one discovers the ultimate cause of A ("Why A is C"), one formulates a real definition of A, which only differs in arrangement from a demonstration ("A is C due to B").

Let us now turn to the text itself. Aristotle's inquiry of *akrasia* begins at *NE* 1145b8, rightly after presenting his methodological instructions (*NE* 1145b2-7). Aristotle offers us a set of *endoxa*:

that" to "the why" (cf. *Phys.* 184a23-b14). *Ethics*, in Aristotle's view, definitely pursues such theoretical clarity, though it will pursue "as the subject matter allows", see *NE* 1094b11-14; *EE* 1217a18-21. An objection, however, can be made on behalf of *NE* 1095a6-7, in which Aristotle suggests that when the ἀρχή or "the that" is sufficiently manifest (φαίνοιο ἀρκούντως), there will be no need to seek for "the why". The implication of this passage is much debated, and it is impossible to handle the whole issue here. From my point of view, the phrase φαίνοιο ἀρκούντως is of importance. It shows that Aristotle does not think that "the why" is never needed. "The why" is not needed only when "the that" is sufficient clear, that is, the inquirer has already grasped some essential attribute of the object sought (cf. *APo.* 93a17-18: "sometimes indeed the that and the why become plain at the same time"). In that case, "the why" is not needed, because the inquirer has already grasped "the why" in a partial way that is sufficient for all practical purposes.

¹⁷ By saying this, however, I do not mean that the method sketched in *APo.* II,1-2 and 8-10 is the method of *Posterior Analytics*, nor do I suppose that *Posterior Analytics* has a unified method. But I do think that *APo.* II,1-2 and 8-10 offer some methodological prescriptions that any scientific inquiry must follow. Those prescriptions are about (i) the different objects to be sought in a scientific inquiry (*APo.* II,1-2) and (iii) the different stages a scientific inquiry should go through (*APo.* II,8-10).

¹⁸ This is the reading of BOLTON 1976 and DEVEREUX - DEMOSS 1988. CHARLES 2000, 23-77, develops a "three-stage" reading of *APo.* II,8-10, according to which, the nominal definition can signify a name that does not involve any existence or essence (e.g., "goatstag").

(T2) Now, [1] *enkrateia* and endurance seem to fall among things good and praiseworthy, *akrasia* as well as softness among things base and blameworthy; [2] the enkratic person seems to be the same as someone who abides by his calculation, the akratic person to be one who departs from his calculation. [3] Moreover, the akratic person, knowing that what he does is base, acts on account of his affection, while the enkratic person, knowing that his desires are base, does not follow them, on account of his reason. And [4] it is said that the moderate person is enkratic and endurant, some assert that a person of this latter sort is moderate in all respects, while others deny it. And [5] some assert that the licentious person is akratic and the akratic person is licentious, without discriminating between them, but others assert that they are different. [6] And sometimes people deny that the prudent person can be *akrates*, whereas sometimes they assert that some who are prudent and clever are akratic. [7] Further, people are said to be akratic also in point of spiritedness, honor, and gain (*NE* 1145b8–20).

At first sight, the passage seems to consist of a few *endoxa* loosely connected with *enkrateia* and *akrasia* corresponding to the first step of the endoxic method. Yet it is in fact very well organized: first, it informs us the fact that *enkrateia* and *akrasia* exist (For calling someone enkratic or akratic is, in effect, to claim that we find *enkrateia* and *akrasia* exist in such a person).¹⁹ Second, in [1], [2], [3] and [7], it gives us some descriptions about the fact (e.g., *akrasia* is base and blameworthy; *akrasia* is the character trait under which people knowingly depart from reason on account of affections). Third, in [4], [5] and [6], it shows that there are disagreements about the fact (e.g., whether *akrasia* and licentiousness are the same? whether *akrasia* can be said about spiritedness, honor and gain?), impelling us to inquire further.

Aristotle's reason for this particular organization of the passage can be illuminated by the *Posterior Analytics*. According to *APo.* II,8, the first stage of every scientific research is to see whether the object to be inquired exists (εἰ ἔστιν, 89b23–25). This is exactly what Aristotle does in *NE* VII. At the beginning of *NE* VII,2, in raising difficulties about the aforementioned *endoxa*, Aristotle first takes up the claim famously attributed to Socrates that *akrasia* does not exist

¹⁹ Indeed, Aristotle has confirmed the existence of *akrasia* and *enkrateia* in the first two sentences of Book VII, by including them in a list of εἶδη. But it is important to note that this confirmation happens in the general introduction section of *NE* VII,1 (1145a15–1145b2, rightly before the methodological paragraph). In other words, Aristotle has not yet begun his pedagogical display. It is not until *NE* 1145b10–12 that Aristotle for the first time confirms with his audience that the objects of their study, *akrasia* and *enkrateia*, exist.

(NE 1145b25–26).²⁰ Aristotle rejects the claim because it is not in contention with the “plain fact” or phenomena (φαινομένοις ἐναργῶς, NE 1145b28). By phenomena, Aristotle perhaps has in mind some perceptually apparent cases which are accepted by everyone or by most people.²¹ We know that *akrasia* exists because we can identify some apparent cases of it – as Aristotle says in *Magna Moralia*, II,6, “for the akratic men exist” (ἀκρατεῖς γὰρ εἰσὶν ἄνθρωποι, MM 1200b30). But Aristotle does not stop here. He impels us to inquire further (NE 1145b28–29). This inquiry, from NE 1145b30 to 1146a9, ultimately leads to one question: what is the character of the ignorance if *akrasia* occurs through ignorance?²² (= what is B if A occurs through B, which is, in effect, to ask what is the cause of *akrasia* or *why akrasia* exists).

This approach is again illustrated in *APo.* II,8:

(T3) For just as we seek the reason *why* (τὸ διότι) when we already grasp the fact (τὸ ὅτι) (sometimes indeed the fact and the reason *why* become clear together, but we cannot know the reason *why* before the fact), similarly, it is clear that we cannot grasp what it is to be something without grasping that it exists. But

²⁰ Indeed, the *aporia* raised in the context is not about the existence of *akrasia*, but about whether someone can be both prudent and akratic. Yet as Aristotle makes it clear in the sequel that Socrates’ *endoxon*, viz. no one who has scientific knowledge can be akratic (1145b23), is based on (ὡς, b25) his existential claim that *akrasia* does not exist. He refers to this claim (ὁ λόγος, b27) as the starting point of his resolution of the aforementioned *aporia*.

²¹ It is much disputed as to what Aristotle means by φαινόμενα and how they are related to the *endoxa*. Some scholars, such as BARNES 1980, NUSSBAUM 1986 and KRAUT 2006, hold that *endoxa* and φαινόμενα are somewhat synonymous, referring to the same thing, whereas some scholars, such as COOPER 1999, argues that *endoxa* and φαινόμενα are not the same because Aristotle take Socrates’s view as *endoxon* while claiming that it conflicts with the φαινόμενα (NE 1145b28). The issue, of course, cannot be handled here. My view is that φαινόμενα is not equivalent to *endoxa* unqualifiedly. For otherwise, Socrates’ *endoxon* cannot be said to be contradicted with φαινόμενα. Yet φαινόμενα is synonymous to one particular kind of *endoxa*, namely, the *endoxa* accepted by everyone or by most people. Compare, for example, NE 1145b28 with *Top.* 104a8–10, where Aristotle says that an *endoxon* held by a wise and notable person cannot be used as a dialectical premise if it conflicts with what most people generally believe.

²² One may reasonably argue that Aristotle is challenging Socrates here to explain the character of the ignorance in question. Yet even if we grant that Aristotle is mainly questioning Socrates here (viz. as the procedures of the endoxic method requires), we can say that Aristotle is also interested in conducting such an investigation himself. For nowhere else in this chapter does Aristotle give such detailed instructions on how one should conduct the further investigation in order to resolve the *aporia* (δέον ζητεῖν περὶ τὸ πάθος, εἰ δι’ ἄγνοιαν, τίς ὁ τρόπος γίνεταί τῆς ἀγνοίας), and most importantly, the following chapter, NE VII,3, shows that Aristotle actually follows these steps, and completes what Socrates has failed to bring out (cf. 1147b14–15: “It turns out what Socrates was seeking is the case”).

as to whether it exists, sometimes we grasp that something exists accidentally, and sometimes by grasping something of the thing itself (for example, that thunder is a certain kind of noise in the clouds, that eclipse is a certain kind of loss of light, that the human being is a certain kind of animal, and that the soul is that which moves itself) ... to seek what something is without grasping that it exists is to seek nothing. But when we grasp something [of the thing], it is easier. Hence in so far as we grasp that the thing exists, to that extent we also grasp what it is" (*APo.* 93a16–29; cf. 89b37–90a1).

As we have seen, all scientific inquiries begin with an awareness of the existence of its object. We can attempt to get an account of what something is (τί ἐστὶ) only when we are aware of its existence (εἰ ἔστιν). Yet this awareness can be accidental.²³ Aristotle claims that only non-accidental knowledge contains some provisional understanding of what the thing is (τι τοῦ τί ἐστίν), and hence contributes to our knowledge of what it is (*APo.* 93a20ff).²⁴ This non-accidental knowledge, according to Aristotle, is usually conveyed by a nominal definition, e.g., thunder is a certain kind of noise in the clouds, eclipse is a certain kind of loss of light.²⁵

The *endoxa* we find in *NE* VII,1–2 is not unlike those definitions in that they, by giving an initial characterization of what *akrasia* is and is about, enable us to fix on suitable phenomena for further investigation.²⁶ Through a survey of

²³ That's why Aristotle identifies εἰ ἔστιν with τὸ ὄν (*APo.* 89b37–38), because by determining something really exists, one determines that something possesses certain attributes non-accidentally.

²⁴ It is a point widely accepted by Aristotelian scholars. See, for example, DEVEREUX – DEMOSS 1988, 133–154; CHARLES 2000, 34, n. 67. BARNES 2002, 218–219, however, holds that to grasp the existence of an object requires grasping some essential knowledge rather than any non-accidental knowledge of the object.

²⁵ There are debates concerning whether those definitions are examples of accidental or non-accidental knowledge (see ACKRILL 1997, 120–124). I adopt the reading of BOLTON 1976, 523–526, that the nominal definition implies existence, and the existence in turn presupposes some non-accidental knowledge of the subject. For a competing view that the nominal definition has no existential import, see CHARLES 2000, 23–56.

²⁶ Generally speaking, *endoxa* can be false, so they cannot be used as premises for demonstration. Yet Aristotle admits that *endoxa* are truth-like, and contain truth (*Rhet.* 1355a14; *NE* 1098b27–29). Therefore, although *endoxa* as *endoxa* cannot be regarded as “the ὄν”, nothing prevents them from containing facts that are “the ὄν” (cf. *NE* 1094b6, where *endoxa* is identified with “the ὄν”). ROSSI 2021, argues that only those *endoxa* remained through a critical procedure of resolution can be used as “the ὄν”. On this interpretation, the discussion of *akrasia* in *NE* VII,1–10 only aims at a nominal definition of *akrasia*. I disagree with Rossi in that I think Aristotle is seeking the cause or explanation of *akrasia* in *NE* VII,3. Thus, *NE* VII aims more than a nominal definition.

the *endoxa* on *akrasia* (NE 1145b8–20), we now know that *akrasia* is bad and blameworthy, but we do not know whether all akratic actions are bad, or, as the sophistic puzzle suggests, whether two wrongs can make a right. We know that the akratic person, knowing what he does is bad, act nevertheless on account of his affections. But we do not know whether this sort of person is curable. We know what the akratic person possesses is certain sort of knowledge rather than ignorance, opinion or prudence. But we do not know what sort of knowledge exactly does he possess. We know that *akrasia* is not licentiousness. But we do not know whether it is a vice. We also know that *akrasia* is concerned about pleasure. But we do not know whether *akrasia* also pertains to other things, such as wealth, gain, honor, spiritedness. So, by listing what the majority or the wise think and say about *akrasia*, Aristotle gives us some non-accidental knowledge of the existence of *akrasia*.²⁷ Of course, this is just a very preliminary sort of knowledge, but with its help, Aristotle can now work toward acquiring scientific knowledge of *akrasia*, viz., why it exists and what it is about.

Aristotle's First Attempt for the Definition of *akrasia* in NE VII,3

So far, we have seen that the first two chapters of NE VII is in line with the *ᾠτι*-stage of Aristotle's scientific method. Aristotle has, *en effēt*, given out a nominal definition (ND) of *akrasia* through *endoxa*:²⁸

ND: *akrasia* is the character trait (ἦξις) under which one does things contrary to the sort of knowledge one has, due to pleasure.²⁹

²⁷ This non-accidental knowledge of *akrasia* involves both knowledge of the *per se* features and *per se* accidents of *akrasia*. By *per se* features of *akrasia*, I mean those that are part of the essence of *akrasia* (*Metaph.* 1029b13–22). For example, doing things contrary to one's knowledge is a *per se* or essential feature of *akrasia*. By *per se* accidents of *akrasia*, I mean those that are external to the essence of *akrasia*, but are somehow derivable from it (*Metaph.* 1025a30–34). For example, badness is a *per se* accident of *akrasia*, because although it is not part of the essence of *akrasia*, it can be explained by appealing to part of the essence of *akrasia*.

²⁸ On requirements of nominal definitions, see DEVEREUX – DEMOSS 1988, 149–150. My reconstruction of the nominal definition of *akrasia* below meets those requirements. It is important to note that this is not the sole case that the nominal definition of *akrasia* derives from *endoxa*. In fact, *endoxa* have provided Aristotle with much preliminary information in his searching for definitions, such as the definition of justice in NE V and the definition of imagination in DA III. See ZUCCA 2018, 72–97; NATALI 2015, 148–168.

²⁹ That *akrasia* is a character trait is clear from the very beginning of NE VII,1 (cf. NE 1145a15,

But ND has a few qualifications that call for further elaboration. Aristotle has not specified in this definition the sort of knowledge that the akratic person has, and the differences or similarities between *akrasia* and other similar dispositions (e.g., whether they are said with reference to the same thing or not). Those are the gaps to be filled in as the inquiry proceeds from the ὄτι-stage to the διότι-stage. In other words, while ND captures some essential aspects of *akrasia*, it is still deficient.

The third chapter of *NE* VII marks the beginning of the διότι-stage of Aristotle's inquiry into *akrasia*:

(T4) First, then, is [1] to examine (σκεπτέον) whether the akratic persons do so knowingly or not, and how they might do so knowingly. Next [2] one must set down (θετέον) the sorts of things that the akratic persons and the enkratic persons are concerned with, I mean whether they are concerned with every pleasure and pain or with some definite ones, and, [3] as regards the enkratic and the enduring, whether they are the same or different, and similarly for all other points belonging to this study (θεωρίας) [*NE* 1146b8–14].

Aristotle here is concerned with three things. First, in [1], the cause of *akrasia* (= what sort of knowledge (or ignorance/lack of knowledge) is involved in the phenomena of *akrasia*); second, in [2], the object of *akrasia* (= what *akrasia* is about); third, in [3], the difference between *enkrateia* and its generic disposition, endurance (and similarly, the difference between *akrasia* and its generic disposition, softness).³⁰ Thus Aristotle's account of the procedure to follow in investigating *akrasia* conforms to his recommendations in the *Analytics*. We begin with an initial account of *akrasia* which reflects the common or “endoxic”

1145b1–2). Sometimes Aristotle speaks of *akrasia* as if it is a type of action (ἀκρατεύομαι, “to act akratically”) or an affection, yet the impression is misleading. For Aristotle, actions and affections should be discussed and defined because definitions of the actions and affections that characterize a ἕξις is prior to the definition of the ἕξις itself (cf. *DA* 415a16–20, where Aristotle claims, in the same spirit, that the definition of an activity is prior to the definition of the potentiality for the activity). In fact, it seems to be a common practice for Aristotle to discuss actions or affections as part of his effort to characterize a give virtue (viz. a “character trait”) of which they are characteristic. I owe this point to one of the anonymous reviewers.

³⁰ The genus/differentia structure also works for those events that have something else as their causes. In the case of thunder (= thunder is the noise in the cloud caused by quenching of fire), for example, “the noise in the clouds” is the genus, and “caused by quenching of fire” is the differentia. Generally speaking, in definitions of those that have other things as causes, the genus is the predicate of the conclusion, and the differentia is the middle term of the demonstration. Cf. DESLAURIERS 2007, 63–64.

understanding of it on which our initial knowledge that *akrasia* exists is based. We then work our way toward a real definition which will explain the cause of it.

Aristotle begins to explain the cause of *akrasia* with the following argument:

(T5) [1] Since we say “to have knowledge” (τὸ ἐπίστασθαι) in two senses – both the person who has the knowledge but is not using it and he who uses it are said to have knowledge – it will make a difference whether someone who does what he ought not to do has the relevant knowledge but is not actively contemplating it, or whether he is actively contemplating it. For this latter does seem to be a terrible thing, but not so if he is not actively contemplating. Further, [2] since there are two kinds of premises, [namely, the universal and the particular,] nothing prevents someone who holds both from acting contrary to the knowledge he possesses because he makes use of the universal premise but not the particular one, matters of action being of course particulars ... Further, [3] another way of having knowledge, different from those just now mentioned, is available to human beings. For in the case of having but not using knowledge, we see that the “having” is different, such that a person both has it in a way and does not have it – for example, someone who is asleep, mad, or drunk. But surely those in the grip of the affections are disposed in this way; for outbursts of spiritedness, the sexual desires, and certain other such things clearly bring about a change in the body too, and in some people, they even cause madness. It is clear, then, that those akratic must be said to in a way similar to such people (NE 1146b31–1147a18).

Though Aristotle begins with the term “we say” (λέγομεν), the argument that he appeals to clearly leaves behind the realm of received opinion. For Aristotle here rejects completely the previous endoxic distinction between knowledge and opinion. He claims that it makes no difference whether the akratic person has true opinion or knowledge (NE 1146b24–26). As an alternative, Aristotle introduces his own distinction between first actuality and second actuality, universal premise and particular premise, sleeping and waking, which are based on his general metaphysics, psychology and physiology. By doing this, Aristotle aims to make some progress toward giving an explanation of the ignorance involved in the phenomena of *akrasia*.

Formerly, we learn from some perceptually apparent case that *akrasia* is the character trait under which one does things contrary to the knowledge one has, due to pleasure (see ND). Now Aristotle’s general metaphysics, psychology and physiology offers us reasons why people commit such knowingly wrongs. First, as [1] informs us, “to have knowledge” (τὸ ἐπίστασθαι) is said in two ways (NE 1146b31–32). It is possible for someone to have knowledge to the extent of hav-

ing it, but does not activate it at given circumstances. Furthermore, as [2] tells us, there are two kinds of knowledge or premises, the universal and the particular. It is possible for someone to have the knowledge of the universal but not to have the knowledge of the particular. As a result, an akratic person cannot activate their universal knowledge at given circumstances because the conclusion of a practical syllogism, which is an action,³¹ cannot be produced without the final or particular premise (*NE* 1147a25–29). Finally, given the physiological fact in [3] that the final premise (τελευταία πρότασις) is grasped by our faculty of perception, people who are in grip of certain affection (such as sleeping, madness or drunkenness) either cannot grasp the final premise or grasp it in such a way that their grasping it does not amount to their knowing it (οὕτως ἔχει ὡς οὐκ ἦν τὸ ἔχειν ἐπίστασθαι, *NE* 1147b9–12).³²

At this point of the inquiry, Aristotle is able to answer the διὰ τί question as discussed in the *Posterior Analytics*. What is the cause of a lunar eclipse? Why does the moon suffer an eclipse? Aristotle's answer is: because of the loss of light due to the screening of the earth (*APo.* 90a16–18).³³ What is the cause of

³¹ There is a controversy over what the conclusion of a practical syllogism is. The traditional candidates, as scholars have proposed, include action (e.g., CORCILIOUS 2008) and decision/choice (προαίρεσις) to perform an action (e.g., MOSS 2014). For an interesting alternative view, see MORRISON 2012, who, by applying Aristotle's distinction between knowing universally and unqualifiedly in *APr.* II,21 into the discussion of *akrasia*, argues that the conclusion of a practical syllogism is some unqualified knowledge (or “knowing particularly” as Morrison calls it) which one cannot act against.

³² It is much debated as to the question where does the akratic fail. According to the traditional intellectualist interpretation, the akratic either fails to grasp the minor premise or wrongly subsumes the minor premise (e.g., “This is sweet”) under the major premise which is not the prescription of practical reason (e.g., “All sweet things are pleasant”). As a result, the akratic arrives at the wrong conclusion, and commits the wrong action. Yet this view is heavily challenged these years by a so-called non-intellectualist interpretation (the most influential one might be CHARLES 2009, 41–71). The non-intellectualists argue that if there is an inner struggle, there must be two conclusions. Therefore, the τελευταία πρότασις at *NE* 1147b9 must mean “final proposition/conclusion” rather than “final premise”. On this interpretation, the akratic produces both right and wrong conclusions, but fails to stick to the right one. Now I adopt the traditional reading here not because I think there is no problem with the traditional interpretation, but mainly because I am not fully convinced by the non-intellectualist reading of πρότασις. First, Aristotle uses πρότασις before at 1147a1, and its meaning is unarguably “premise”. Second, Aristotle also uses συμπερανθὲν, a technical term for the “conclusion” of a syllogism, at *NE* 1147a27. It is difficult to see why he would choose, only a few lines latter, πρότασις to denote the same meaning. CRIVELLI – CHARLES 2011, 193–203, argues that “conclusion” is actually a more basic meaning for πρότασις. But even it is granted, I am still not persuaded that “the final πρότασις” at *NE* 1147b9 refers to such a basic meaning. For some conciliatory attempts at solving the dispute, see DESTREE 2007, 139–165; ERGINEI 2016, 573–593.

³³ It should be noted that Aristotle does not always give full explanations of this sort. For

a thunder? Why do the clouds release a thunder? Aristotle's answer is: because of the noise due to quenching of fire. Similarly, we can ask what is the cause of *akrasia*? Why does a person get into the akratic condition? Aristotle's answer is: because of the failure of grasping the final premise due to being in a state of affection. This new account gives us a better understanding of the phenomena of *akrasia*. For it explains the cause of *akrasia*. We are now able to tell how *akrasia* arises. But it clearly is not yet an account which fully reveals to us what *akrasia* is. For it does not yet make clear what state of affection the akratic are in. From the *Analytics* and Aristotle's initial remarks at the beginning of *NE VII,4*, we should expect Aristotle to work further toward such an account.

Aristotle's Second Attempt for the Definition of *akrasia* in *NE VII,4-10*

NE VII,4 marks a new beginning of the διότι-stage of Aristotle's inquiry. Aristotle begins with the following methodological introduction:

(T6) It must be stated next in order [1] whether anyone is akratic unqualifiedly, or whether all who are akratic do so in some partial respect, and, [2] if the former is the case, with what sorts of things the akratic person is concerned (*NE* 1147b20–21).

Aristotle declares that next he will do two things. First, in [1], he is going to determine whether *akrasia* is said univocally – by which he must differentiate the qualified forms of *akrasia* from the unqualified form of *akrasia*. Second, in [2], he is going to determine the objects of *akrasia* – by which he must address the question of “about what” (περὶ ποῖα) with regard to *akrasia*.

In this context, Aristotle offers two arguments, both from *endoxa* and from signs (σημείων, *NE* 1147b21–1148a5; 1148a5–13). He claims, in the first argu-

example, in *APo.* II,2, he says that the moon is eclipsed because of the loss of light caused by the screening of the earth, while in II. 8, he simply gives a shortened explanation, saying that the moon is eclipsed because of the screening of the earth. There is a controversy, therefore, about whether the shortened part, e.g., “loss of light”, belongs to the causal part of the definition or not (for the controversy, see ACKRILL 1997, 120–121). Now the shortened definition (A belongs to C because of D), on my view, is less adequate than the fuller one (A belongs to C because of B because of D), because it omits part of the middle term, B (or what Bronstein calls “what the cause is the cause of”). To give explanations fully require giving such B in the relevant underlying subject. For a helpful discussion of this, see BRONSTEIN 2016, 104.

ment, that there are two sorts of pleasures. The first are the bodily ones which are necessary (e.g., the pleasures bound up with nourishment and sex), and the other are those unnecessary but choiceworthy in themselves (e.g., victory, honor, wealth). He argues first from *endoxa* (οὐ λέγομεν, 1147b32) that people who are excessively concerned with unnecessary pleasures are never said to be akratic without qualification and they are spoken of as such only in reference to a certain similarity they share with unqualified *akrasia* (NE 1147b31–35). But these *endoxa* alone cannot establish the thesis that unqualified *akrasia* is about necessary pleasures. So, Aristotle immediately adds that there is also an argument from sign (NE 1148a2),³⁴ which runs as follows:

- P1: Unqualified *akrasia* is blamed on the grounds that it is a vice (NE 1148a3).
 P2: People who are akratic with those unnecessary pleasures are not blamed on the grounds that it is a vice (NE 1148a4).
 —————
 C: People who are akratic with those unnecessary pleasures are not akratic unqualifiedly (NE 1147b32–33).

In the second argument, Aristotle claims that unqualified *akrasia* is not about any other affection, such as anger. He first appeals to something “said to be” (λέγεται), namely that the one who cannot control their affections with regard to “hunger, thirst, heat, cold, and all those pleasures associated with taste and touch” (NE 1148a7–9) are not said to be akratic with reference to some addition. This argument is, of course, dialectical. But it is also followed by another argument from sign (“and there is a sign of this”, 1148a11):

- P1: *Akrasia* and softness are about the same things (NE 1148a13–15).
 P2: Softness is said to be about pleasures or avoiding pains associated with taste and touch, but not about any other affection (NE 1148a11–13).
 —————
 C: *Akrasia* is about pleasures or avoiding pains associated with taste and touch, but not about any other affection (NE 1148a13–14).

³⁴ Sign-arguments are known as *enthymemes* (viz. rhetorical syllogisms), which are used in rhetorical discourse to produce persuasion – in contrast to ἀπόδειξις (viz. scientific syllogisms). But although rhetorical syllogism is different from scientific syllogism in that it aims at producing persuasion rather than scientific knowledge, nothing prevents it from being useful for achieving scientific truth. For the sign-argument, according to Aristotle, is conducive to truth in its own ways: “The truth, then, can occur in all signs, though they have the difference stated” (*APr.* 70a37–38).

It is important to note that the two sign-arguments used are both necessary or deductively valid.³⁵ At *APr.* II,27, Aristotle calls such kind of sign τεκμήριον, viz. the necessary sign, in contrast to σημείον, viz. the ordinary sign. For Aristotle, such sign-argument is demonstrative (αποδεικτική), though in a weaker sense of the term.³⁶ But it shall suffice for Aristotle's purpose here, for only "knowledge of the that" (namely, the knowledge of what *akrasia* is about) is needed here.

Through these two sign-arguments, Aristotle is now able to arrive at a definition of the unqualified form of *akrasia*:

(T7): There is the person who pursues the excesses of the pleasures and avoids the pains bound up with hunger, thirst, heat, cold, and all those pleasures and pains associated with taste and touch; but he acts in this way not from choice but contrary to his choice and thinking. This person is said to be akratic without qualification (*NE* 1148a6–11).

This is the definition of akratic person without qualification, and it is also the intermediate definition of *akrasia*.³⁷ Compared with the previous nominal definition, this definition is more complete. For it not only answers the question of "what is" (τί ἐστί), but also addresses the questions of "about what" (περὶ ποῖα) and "how" (πῶς), which is the guiding principle Aristotle uses for reaching definitions of particular virtues in *NE* III–V: "taking up each, let us say what they are, what sorts of things they are concerned with, and how (τίνες εἰσὶ καὶ περὶ ποῖα καὶ πῶς)" (*NE* 1115a4–5).³⁸ Yet the definition is not yet adequate. For it

³⁵ Aristotle's own example of this kind of figure is:

P1: The woman (C) has milk (B).

P2: The one who has milk (B) is pregnant (A) [Having milk is a sign of pregnancy].

C: The woman (C) is pregnant (A) [*APr.* 70a11–23].

³⁶ Cf. *APr.* 70a7: the sign [in a τεκμήριον] serves as "either a necessary or an endoxic demonstrative premise" (πρότασις ἀποδεικτική ἢ ἀναγκαία ἢ ἔνδοξος) in a rhetorical syllogism. A τεκμήριον or a deductively valid sign-argument is thus demonstrative but not in the strong sense of the term, because it does not fulfill the causal requirement of *APo.* I,2. Yet it is still demonstrative in the weak sense of the term, that is, it is a deductively valid argument comparable to the kind of demonstration of ὄντι in *APo.* I,13 (see BELLUCCI 2018, 426–427).

³⁷ Compare Aristotle's search for the definition of citizen in the unqualified sense in *Pol.* 1275a19ff.

³⁸ Karbowski takes this principle as a topic-specific norm for reaching definitions of particular virtues in *NE* III,6–V (see KARBOWSKI 2019, 197). Yet as we see, this norm is also at work in *NE* VII. This shall not surprise us, because, after all, *akrasia* is also considered by Aristotle as a character trait (ἕξις), just like the virtue.

has not fully revealed to us how *akrasia* is different from other similar dispositions in terms of $\pi\tilde{\omega}\varsigma$.

After stating the “about what” ($\pi\epsilon\rho\iota\ \pi\tilde{\omega}\alpha$), therefore, Aristotle proceeds to answer the question of “how” ($\pi\tilde{\omega}\varsigma$). We have already learned that unqualified *akrasia*, like licentiousness, is concerned with those “pleasures and pains associated with taste and touch”, but we do not know yet how *akrasia* is different from licentiousness. To that end, Aristotle says:

The licentious choose the pleasures in question, while those akratic do not choose them (*NE* 1148a16–17).

At the end of *NE* III,3, we learn that choice is in fact a deliberative desire: we choose something because we desire it in accord with our deliberation (*NE* 1113a9–12). Now by saying that the akratic do not choose, Aristotle implies that the akratic either do not deliberate or do not desire the action deliberated. This, in fact, corresponds to the two species of unqualified *akrasia* that Aristotle elaborates at the end of *NE* VII,7.³⁹

The text from *NE* 1148a22 to 1148b9 is much debated. Some scholars feels that this section is repetitive and not well-organized.⁴⁰ Yet this feeling may not be so accurate. Aristotle at 1148a22–1148b9 adds a discussion of qualified *akrasia* in order to answer a question not clarified before: whether qualified *akrasia* is a species of *akrasia* or not? This question, in fact, naturally arises when we are aware the difference between qualified *akrasia* and unqualified *akrasia*. According to what Aristotle says here, the relationship between qualified *akrasia* and *akrasia* is like that between bad doctor and badness, or presumably, that between good doctor and goodness. Previously, in *NE* I,6, Aristotle has claimed that goodness is not, just like being ($\delta\tilde{\nu}\tau\iota$), a genus:

(T8) Goodness ($\tau\acute{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\theta\delta\tilde{\nu}$) is spoken of in as many ways as is the term being ($\delta\tilde{\nu}\tau\iota$), for goodness is spoken of in relation to what something is (for exam-

³⁹ Cf. *NE* 1050b19–28.

⁴⁰ STEWART 1892, 176, holds that 1148a22ff. is a duplicate of 1147b23ff. (Susemihl’s Teubner text also holds the same view, and brackets 1148a22–1148b9). LORENZ 2009, 72–101, holds the contrary. He argues that the whole of 1147b23–1148a22 is superseded by 1148a22–1148b9, which is a revised version of the previous passage. While I don’t think that 1148a22–1148b9 is a simple duplicate of 1147b23–1148a22 (for reasons I will explain in the text below), I am unconvinced that the whole of 1147b23–1148a22 is superseded by 1148a22–1148b9. For, as my previous analysis shows, 1147b23–1148a22 contains an intermediate definition of *akrasia*, which has no parallel either in 1147b23–1148a22 or in the rest of *NE* VII.

ple, the god and intellect); as for what sort of thing something is, goodness is spoken of as the virtues; as for how much something is, it is spoken of as the measured amount; in its relation to something, as what is useful; as regards time, as the opportune moment; as regards place, as the [right] location; and other things of this sort. It is clear that goodness would not be something common, universal, and one. For if that were the case, it would not be spoken of in all the categories but in one alone (NE 1096a23–29).

Aristotle seems to argue here that just like good doctor is not a species of goodness, qualified *akrasia* is also not a species of *akrasia*. It is only similar to unqualified *akrasia* by way of analogy (NE 1148b10). Aristotle thus denies that *akrasia* in the qualified sense is *akrasia* properly: “We speak about *akrasia* in point of spiritedness by way of a certain similarity only ... just as in the other cases (e.g., honor and gain) as well” (NE 1148b12–14).

After clarifying that qualified *akrasia* is not a species of *akrasia*, Aristotle moves to discuss beastliness (θηριότης), a theme that seems unconnected to the series of *aporiai* distinguished in NE VII,2. Yet as we have seen, if the whole aim of NE VII is to search for a definition of *akrasia* rather than solving *aporiai* around the phenomena of *akrasia*, the significance of NE VII,5 emerges, that is, to exclude the bestial form of *akrasia* from the proper or unqualified form of *akrasia*. We are told, from 1149a1, that unnatural pleasures, like the unnecessary ones, can also be the object of a certain kind of *akrasia*, which is not *akrasia* properly, but belongs to a different kind, “by way of a certain similarity” (NE 1149a2–3). The unnatural pleasures are differentiated according to their cause and origin, which result either from a corrupted nature, or from disease, or from habit.⁴¹ It is possible to feel these pleasures without being mastered by them, or being overcome by them, whatever their origin is. Yet all these cases are distinguished from the unqualified *akrasia*, which concerns the natural pleasures of human beings (NE 1149a12–20).

NE VII,6 is an extended discussion of *akrasia* related to spiritedness, which was mentioned earlier as a qualified form of *akrasia* in NE VII,4 (1149a3–5). The point Aristotle wants to prove is that *akrasia* related to spiritedness is less shameful than that pertaining to desires. This question, again, is not present in the list of *aporiai* in NE VII,2.⁴² It is a digression, therefore, that aims not at solv-

⁴¹ The *akrasia* that results from a corrupted nature is called bestial (θηριώδης) *akrasia*, and the one that results from disease or habit is called *akrasia* through disease (νοσηματώδης).

⁴² Indeed, *akrasia* related to spiritedness is mentioned in the list of *endoxa* of NE VII,1, but there Aristotle only suggests that he is going to investigate whether it is really a species of

ing pre-fixed problems, as we already saw, but at further distinguishing various pseudo-forms of *akrasia* from the unqualified *akrasia*, and most importantly, at situating unqualified *akrasia* in a much wider moral spectrum. This scheme is also manifested in the following chapter, *NE VII,7*: on the one hand, Aristotle goes on distinguishing unqualified *akrasia* from other related dispositions (viz. those ethical look-alikes besides qualified *akrasia*, e.g., softness and endurance), arguing that although all these dispositions are in some way in between virtue and vice (1150a), and are not of a different genus (1145a35–b2) to *akrasia*, they are pertaining to different things (viz. pains instead of pleasures). On the other hand, Aristotle continues comparing these dispositions with *akrasia/enkrateia* from the point of view of their goodness and badness (e.g., licentiousness is worse than *akrasia*, 1150a31; *enkrateia* is better than endurance, 1050a36) so as to locate unqualified *akrasia* within the sphere of moral evaluation. It is worth emphasizing that throughout *NE VII,4–7*, Aristotle is trying to define what is unqualified *akrasia*, and to distinguish it from qualified *akrasia* and other related dispositions in terms of its objects and moral status. From this perspective, these chapters are not as disjointed or loosely connected as scholars commonly assumed.

At the end of *NE VII,7*, Aristotle introduces a new element. He divides *akrasia* into two species, viz. impetuosity (προπέτεια) and weakness (ἀσθένεια). The weak are those who deliberate but do not act in accord with their deliberations, whereas the impetuous are those who do not deliberate and act solely on account of their affections (*NE* 1150b19–28). This account is in line with the psychological theory he sketches in *NE VII,3*: the impetuous cannot grasp the minor or final premise, and therefore cannot bring about the conclusion of a practical syllogism; the weak grasp the minor or final premise, but, as they are in grip of affections, grasp it in such a way that their grasping it does not amount to their knowing it.⁴³ In *NE VII,8*, indeed, Aristotle answers the *aporia* he raises at 1146a31–b2 in *NE VII,2*, namely that the vicious seem to be supe-

akrasia or is only said to be a species of *akrasia*. Nowhere does Aristotle suggest that he is going to compare it with unqualified *akrasia* in terms of goodness/badness and praiseworthiness/blameworthiness.

⁴³ The mechanism is perhaps that the weak deliberate and make a choice before they are gripped by affections, and then at that point they lose their active cognition of the minor premise (I own this point to one of the anonymous reviewers). This is, of course, not the only possible interpretation. In fact, the interpretation depends on how we understand the theory of *VII,3*, and, above all, how Aristotle uses the term *πρότασις*. Both intellectualist and non-intellectualist interpretations of *VII,3* can be made compatible with this passage. Cf. BOBONICH 2009, 155–156.

rior to the akratic as they are more curable. Yet by way of solving this *aporia*, Aristotle aims to distinguish the genus to which *akrasia* belongs from that to which vice or licentiousness belongs (*NE* 1150b35–36). In other words, Aristotle is still searching for the real definition of *akrasia*. He solves *aporai* chiefly for that purpose. As we have seen from the methodological remarks given at the beginning of *NE* VII, solving *aporai* is never meant to be an end itself for Aristotle: *aporai* are solved for a demonstration (δεδειγμένον) of the subject (1145b6–7) and a discovery of the truth (1146b7–8).

From this point of view, *NE* VII,9 also aims not at solving *aporai*, even though it answers two *aporai* listed in *NE* VII,2: 1151a29–b17 responds to the puzzle at 1146a16–18 (if *enkrateia* makes one abide by every opinion, it is a bad quality); and 1151b17–22 responds to the puzzle at 1146a18–21 (if *akrasia* makes one depart from every opinion, *akrasia* sometimes will be a good quality). Aristotle’s chief aim, as we shall see, is to distinguish unqualified *akrasia* (and in this chapter, unqualified *enkrateia* also) from other similar dispositions. This aim is achieved through two steps: in the first part (*NE* 1151a29–b22), Aristotle introduces the *per se/per accidens* distinction at 1151a33–b4, arguing that unqualified *enkrateia* and *akrasia* are distinct from obstinateness (ισχυρογνώμων) and a nameless (ἄνώνυμος) type of *akrasia*;⁴⁴ in the second part (*NE* 1151b23–1152a6), Aristotle compares *enkrateia* with moderation, and *akrasia* with licentiousness, arguing that the pair of *enkrateia* and *akrasia* is different from the pair of moderation and licentiousness in that moderation does not involve base desires (φάλας ἐπιθυμίας) and licentiousness does not involve shame (*NE* 1151b32–1152a5).

Aristotle concludes at the end of *NE* VII,10 and VII,14 that he has given us definitions of *akrasia*, *enkrateia* and their other genus members (*NE* 1152a34–6;

⁴⁴ It is tempting to equate the obstinate with the akratic *per accidens* and Neoptolemus with the akratic *per accidens*, even though Aristotle himself does not draw the equivalence. BROADIE 2009, 170, thinks that Aristotle’s example of Neoptolemus in the *Philoctetes* of Sophocles is not compatible with Aristotle’s description of *akrasia per accidens*. This is indeed a tricky case. According to Aristotle, *akrasia per accidens* is the state in which one who does not hold on to the false opinion – although he thinks that it is true – and pursues a noble desire as though it were base (cf. ASPASIIUS, 138,14–15). Neoptolemus’s case suits with this pattern only in a pretty rough way: Neoptolemus does conceive of Odysseus’s command as true (cf. *SOPH. Phil.* 925–926, where Neoptolemus characterizes the plan as just and expedient). Yet after being a friend with Philoctetes, Neoptolemus has serious reservations about Odysseus’s plan. I say “serious reservations” because although Neoptolemus abandons the means that Odysseus suggests to him (viz. cheating), he still tries to persuade Philoctetes to achieve Odysseus’s goal (cf. *SOPH. Phil.* 1278–1280, 1393–1396. Twice Neoptolemus claims to leave the argument, yet twice he goes on to persuade Philoctetes. This, I think, shows an inner conflict of Neoptolemus himself). Thus, although Neoptolemus does not conceive of his action as base, he somehow conceives of his action to be unjust in a certain degree.

1154b32-4). But for reasons that can only be speculated, this promise is unfulfilled.⁴⁵ Aristotle does not actually give out his most complete or final definition of *akrasia*, alongside with others. We can infer, however, such a definition from Aristotle's discussion in *NE VII*. This definition, as we expect, shall recapitulate the progress made from *NE VII*,4-9:

- (i) *akrasia* is about necessary pleasures
- (ii) *akrasia* is about and only about pleasures of taste and touch
- (iii) *akrasia* is the character trait under which people either act without deliberation (impetuosity), or do not act in accord with deliberation (weakness)
- (iv) *akrasia* is about natural pleasures

To combine (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv) with Aristotle's previous explanation of the cause of *akrasia* in T5, we get a real definition (RD) that explains not only how *akrasia* arises but also what it is about and in what way:

RD: *Akrasia* (either in the form of weakness or in the form of impetuosity) is the character trait under which one fails to grasp the final premise of a practical syllogism, due to being in the possession of necessary and natural pleasures of taste and touch.

Concluding Remarks

According to the interpretation I have proposed so far, the endoxic method Aristotle uses in *NE VII*,1-10 does not aim merely at resolving the inconsistency among a group of *endoxa*. Rather, it is used by Aristotle to search for the definition of *akrasia*. The search for the definition, and the corresponding explanation, of the phenomena of *akrasia*, illustrates Aristotle's scientific method presented in *APo*. II,1-2 and 8-10, and it proceeds in stages.⁴⁶ In the $\delta\tau\iota$ -stage (*NE VII*,1-2),

⁴⁵ One may propose, for example, that part of the text of *NE VII* is lost. It is also possible, on my view, that Aristotle does not give the definition of *akrasia* here because he may think that it is more proper to give such a definition in a science to which the current discussion subordinates, e.g., the *De Anima*. Cf. *APo*. I,13, where Aristotle explicates how sciences can stand in subordination to each other: astronomy, for example, subordinates to mathematics because the former is more concerned with the "facts" ($\delta\tau\iota$), whereas the latter "the reason why" ($\delta\iota\omicron\tau\iota$).

⁴⁶ There is another way we can say that the inquiry of *akrasia* in *NE VII* proceeds in stages. According to GOTTHELF 2012, 371-398, an Aristotelian scientific inquiry, as exemplified by

Aristotle determines whether *akrasia* exists and what the akratic are like (e.g., how the akratic behave, what the akratic look for) by examining pre-existing *endoxa*. The examination shows that *akrasia* is the character trait out of which one does things contrary to the sort of knowledge one has, due to pleasure. Yet a scientific explanation requires to single out the most precise description of the phenomena of *akrasia*. This entails finding out how *akrasia* arises, and what it is about and how. Aristotle turns to these questions in the *δῶτι*-stage of the inquiry (*NE VII*,3–10). He identifies the cause of *akrasia* with the failure of grasping the proper final premise caused by being in a state of affection, and the object of *akrasia* with necessary and natural pleasures bound up with taste and touch. Although the final or real definition of *akrasia* does not appear by the end of the discussion of *NE VII*, its constitutive elements have already been spelled out by Aristotle. The discussion in *NE VII*,1–10 thus follows the main guidelines of the *Posterior Analytics* II, with some adaptations possibly in view of the *Ethics* itself.

Now one possible objection toward this is that while my interpretation shows that *NE VII* plausibly contains such resources to define *akrasia* in a way that Aristotle would find acceptable, Aristotle does not, as I have admitted, *actually* define *akrasia* in *NE VII*. It follows that if, on my interpretation, adhering to the scientific method of *APo.* II,1–2 and 8–10 does not require *actually* constructing a definition, then a wide variety of practices would be counted as “scientific” or “definitional” in Aristotle.⁴⁷

There is a sense, I think, in which this objection is obviously right. That is, if we hold that the scientific method Aristotle sketches in *APo.* II,1–2 and 8–10 only aims to promote scientific discoveries, viz. to establish definitions that can be used later by the experienced experts as the principles of a demonstrative science, then Aristotle’s discussion of *akrasia* in *NE VII* definitely fails to live up to that standard by not giving out a definition.

Yet the method, as is sketched in *APo.* II,1–2 and 8–10, is not wholly for the experienced experts like Aristotle. It is also for the apprentice learners, such

History of Animals (HA), has three stages: the collection of data, the organization of data and the explanation of data. In the context of *NE VII*, the inquiry of *akrasia* also proceeds in a similar manner, except that the collection of data is replaced by the examination of *endoxa* (for ethical phenomena exist in the *endoxa*), and the organization of data is replaced by the resolution of *aporiai* (for the features of *akrasia* and its variations are manifested through the resolution of *aporiai*). By this interpretation, I, following FALCON 2019, 540, n. 29, identify the pre-explanatory stage (including the stages of data collection and organization) with the *ῶτι*-stage.

⁴⁷ I am indebted to one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing this out to me.

as the young audience of the *Ethics*.⁴⁸ The method thus understood also has a pedagogical function, that is, to impart scientific understanding of the knowledge that the apprentice learners already have but in a very primitive and insufficient way.⁴⁹ I think this is exactly the situation of *NE VII*: the young audience of Aristotle's *Ethics* have already got themselves with a good deal of pre-existing knowledge about *akrasia*, viz. a good variety of *endoxa* about *akrasia*, but they are perplexed as to which ones are correct and which ones are false. For this reason, they come to Aristotle. On the other hand, Aristotle, as an experienced expert of ethics, has promised to help them out. He knows that at this stage, they have already grasped some primitive form of knowledge of *akrasia*. That's why he claims surprisingly in that famous methodological passage of *NE VII* that he is not going to impart any new knowledge to replace the *endoxa* they have (*NE* 1145b2–7: “we must ... prove all the reputable opinions [ἔνδοξα] ... the matter would be sufficiently proved if ... reputable opinions [ἔνδοξα] remain standing”), because he knows that what his young audience need is just a deeper scientific understanding or explanation of it. Now this scientific understanding or explanation, as I have shown, is offered during the search for the definition of *akrasia* in *NE VII*,1–10.

To conclude, if what I said above is right, we may agree that a pedagogical use of the method in *APo*. II,1–2 and 8–10 does not require the definition to be actually given, because in that case, the definition is only instrumental for achieving the pedagogical purpose Aristotle has in mind.

⁴⁸ Aristotle seems to have a particular sort of young audience in mind. See *NE X*,9: “But as things stand, arguments appear to have the capacity to exhort and to incite those youths who are free, and to make someone who has a well-born character and is truly a lover of what is noble to be possessed by virtue” (1179b7–9).

⁴⁹ For how demonstration and definition can be understood as tools of pedagogy, see BARNES 1969; BURNEYAT 1981, 115–120.

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Summary

This paper revisits Aristotle's discussion of *akrasia* in *NE* VII,1-10. I try to offer a scientific reading of the book, according to which *NE* VII,1-10 closely instantiates the main guidelines of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*. I propose that *NE* VII,1-2, which aims to establish the fact that *akrasia* exists, corresponds to the ὄτι-stage of an Aristotelian scientific inquiry, and *NE* VII,3-10, which aims to explain both the cause and the object of *akrasia*, corresponds to the διότι-stage of the inquiry.

Keywords: Aristotle; *Posterior Analytics*; endoxic method; *akrasia*

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