

Akrasia and Perceptual Illusion

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Abstract: *de Anima* III.10 characterizes *akrasia* as a conflict between *phantasia* (“imagination”) on one side and rational cognition on the other: the akratic agent is torn between an appetite for what appears good to her *phantasia* and a rational desire for what her intellect believes good. This entails that *akrasia* is parallel to certain cases of perceptual illusion. Drawing on Aristotle’s discussion of such cases in the *de Anima* and *de Insomniis*, I use this parallel to illuminate the difficult discussion of *akrasia* in *Nicomachean Ethics* VII.3, arguing that its account of *akrasia* as involving ignorance is compatible with, and in fact crucially supplements, the more straightforward account we find elsewhere in the corpus of *akrasia* as a struggle between desires.

Discussions of Aristotle’s view of *akrasia* (incontinence, weakness of will, lack of self-control) usually center on Book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and in particular on the notoriously difficult third chapter of that book. Here Aristotle argues that Socrates was in some sense right to maintain that *akrasia* involves ignorance. This much is clear. As to the details, however, the text is so dense and so thorny as to leave little of Aristotle’s view beyond doubt. What is the akratic agent ignorant of: the minor premise of the practical syllogism forbidding her action, or only the conclusion?¹ And what is the nature of her ignorance? Does she lack the relevant knowledge altogether, or merely neglect to combine it with her other beliefs? Or does she know it some sense but not in the crucial sense of having integrated it into her character?²

Underlying these questions is a much broader worry about *EN* VII.3’s account: How does an account of *akrasia* as involving ignorance of any kind fit with the more straightforward account we find elsewhere in the corpus, on which *akrasia* involves a struggle between opposing desires?

¹ The former view has been predominant. For the latter, see Kenny 1966; Santas 1969; Charles 1984 and 2009; the view dates back to the medieval commentator Walter Burleigh.

² For the view that the akratic agent knows the relevant information but fails to combine it with her other beliefs see Joachim 1951, 224–9; Irwin 1999, 261. Dahl argues that the akratic agent has the relevant knowledge but has failed to “integrate it into her character” (1984, see especially 188, 213); I think McDowell’s and Wiggins’ views (discussed below) can be understood as versions of this one (see McDowell, e.g. 1998; Wiggins 1975); compare also Charles 2009.

The starkest statement of that account is in the *de Anima* (III.11 434a12–14), but it is clearly present in the ethical works too. Consider how Aristotle first describes *akrasia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

(1) We praise the reason (λόγον) and the reasoning part of the soul of enkratic and akratic agents: for this exhorts them correctly and toward what is best. But there seems to be something else in them too, by nature contrary to reason, which fights and resists it. For exactly as with paralytic limbs which when their owners decide to move them to the right take off in the wrong direction, moving to the left, so it is in the case of the soul. For the impulses of the akratic agent lead in opposite directions (ἐπι τάναντία γὰρ αἱ ὀρμαί) [...]. [T]here is something in the soul besides reason, opposing it and going against it. (*EN* I.13 1102b13–25)³

This picture of *akrasia* as a struggle between the opposing “impulses” of the rational and non-rational parts of the soul – a close descendent of Plato’s account of motivational conflict in *Republic* IV – is clear enough. The *Eudemian Ethics* gives it even more emphasis: in *akrasia* (and *enkrateia* – continence, strength of will, self-control), so separate and opposed are the rational faculty and the appetitive one that we could even speak of one part being forced and compelled by the other (*EE* II.8 1224b24 ff.). Does Aristotle simply ignore this picture later in both works (at *EN* VII.3 = *EE* VI.3) when he characterizes the akratic agent as ignorant?

There are two problems here. First, why, given his resources for a “Platonic” account of *akrasia* as the victory of non-rational over rational desire, did Aristotle see the need for a “Socratic” account of *akrasia* as involving ignorance at all?⁴ Second, and more gravely, how can the account of *akrasia* as involving a struggle between opposing desires even be compatible with an account on which the agent is unaware that she is doing something wrong?

³ Translations of the *EN* are based, sometimes very loosely, on those of Rowe in Broadie/Rowe 2002. Translations of other works are mine except where noted. Some propose an alternative reading of these lines on which there is no conflict between impulses: “the impulses of the akratic agent lead in the opposite direction [sc. to what reason commands]”. Two considerations support the conflicting-impulses reading, however. First, later passages in the *EN* make clear that the akratic agent acts on appetite against a contrary motivation: in book VII akratic agents act against their *prohairesis* (for discussion and citations see below); in book IX they “have appetites for some things and rationally wish (βούλονται) for different things” (IX.4 1166b7 f.). Second, Aristotle attributes ἐναντίας ὀρμαί to the akratic and the enkratic agent at *EE* II.8 1224a33, where the context makes it very clear that this means “impulses opposite to one another”.

⁴ The so-called Platonic account is that of *Republic* IV, the so-called Socratic that of the *Protagoras*. Many of those who discuss *EN* VII.3 address the relation between the two accounts, although not always in these terms.

Ross puts this second worry sharply in his criticism of VII.3. He, along with a majority of scholars, interprets the chapter as saying that the agent lacks the minor premise of the syllogism forbidding her action. The problem with this explanation, he argues, is this:

It says nothing of a moral struggle; the minor premise of the moral syllogism (and with it the conclusion ‘I ought not to do this’) has never been present, or it has already been suppressed by the appetite. And the account which explains how the wrong act can be done in the absence of this knowledge cannot explain how the knowledge has come to be absent. But Aristotle elsewhere shows himself alive to the existence of a moral struggle, a conflict between rational wish and appetite [...]. We must suppose that interest in his favourite distinctions of potential and actual, of major and minor premise, has betrayed him into a formal theory which is inadequate to his own real view of the problem.⁵

Other responses are more radical. Perhaps *EN* VII.3 was written by some other author and smuggled into Aristotle’s text (Cook Wilson 1879). Or perhaps, despite appearances, VII.3 does not explain *akrasia* in terms of ignorance at all: Aristotle proposes ignorance not as an explanation, but rather as a special description, of failure to do what one judges best (Broadie 1991; cf. Dahl 1984).

In what follows I will argue that we can reconcile the struggle account of *akrasia* with the ignorance account, and can do so without downplaying the ignorance at issue in *EN* VII.3. Properly understood, that chapter’s explanation of *akrasia* in terms of ignorance is not only compatible with the picture of *akrasia* as involving a struggle between opposing desires, but also supplements it by offering an explanation of how the non-rational desires win out over the rational ones. To see why Aristotle thought the victory of non-rational desire in need of special explanation, however, and to settle the question of just what explanation VII.3 provides, we will have to look outside the ethical works altogether.

I wish to show that Aristotle provides another account of *akrasia*, one that has not been properly appreciated, in *de Anima* III.10.⁶ This account is philosophically interesting in its own right, and also proves very useful in illuminating the discussions of *akrasia* in the ethical works. It presents *akrasia* as involving a conflict in the agent between rational judgment on

⁵ Ross 1949, 140.

⁶ The account has received surprisingly little attention. It receives brief mention from Cook Wilson 1879, 50; Walsh 1963, 124–7, and is otherwise generally neglected. (What Walsh does say suggests an understanding of the relation between the two accounts very much in line with what I propose here). Many have argued that *de An.* III.10’s general theory of action is relevant to an understanding of *akrasia*, but without attention to what I see as that chapter’s distinctive account of *akrasia*: see e.g. Santas 1969; Destree 2007.

one side, and on the other side *phantasia*, the faculty of receiving appearances.⁷ This entails something surprising: that *akrasia* is the practical equivalent of certain cases of being taken in by perceptual illusion.

By following the parallels between *akrasia* and perceptual illusion through the psychological works, we will uncover an account which fleshes out *EN* VII.3's comparison of the akratic agent with the person mad, drunk, or asleep (1147a12–15), and thereby guides our interpretation of Aristotle's account of akratic ignorance in that chapter, dictating answers to its main interpretative puzzles. The view that results will reconcile the account of *akrasia* as ignorance with the account of *akrasia* as a struggle between desires, for it will show that non-rational desire wins out not by overpowering rational desire in a direct battle of strength, but rather by undermining the cognitive basis of that desire. That is, the non-rational desire wins by driving out the agent's knowledge of what is to be done or avoided, and with it the rational motivation dependent on that knowledge.⁸

Finally, the parallels between *akrasia* and perceptual illusion will indicate why Aristotle may have thought such an explanation of *akrasia* necessary in the first place – why he may have thought it impossible for appetite to overpower rational desire directly, and thus have sought to explain *akrasia* in terms of ignorance instead.

1. *Akrasia in de Anima III.9–10*

Chapters 9 and 10 of *de Anima* III seek to identify the psychological source of what Aristotle calls locomotion (κίνησις κατὰ τόπον). When a person or animal voluntarily and purposefully moves her body, what is the efficient cause, within the agent, of that movement? Aristotle quickly dismisses as possible candidates both the nutritive faculty (432b15 ff.) and the perceptual (432b19 ff.). Then he turns to consider the remaining

⁷ *Phantasia* is standardly but inadequately translated 'imagination'. The word has its root in φαῖνταίεσθαι: to appear or be made apparent. To capture the literal force we should have to say something like 'being-appeared-to'; as this is awkward, I prefer to leave it untranslated. There is a further difficulty in that Aristotle uses *phantasia* to refer variously to a capacity (as (arguably) at *de An.* 438a1–4), to the exercise of that capacity (as at *de An.* 428b11), and sometimes even to its contents or deliverances (as at *Insomn.* 460b20, quoted below); compare a similar ambiguity in our 'perception'. For relative clarity I will use *phantasia* to refer only to the first two of these, translating the last use as 'appearance'.

⁸ This same view is defended, on different grounds, by Charles 1984 (see especially 163 f.).

faculties, intellect (νοῦς) and desire (ὄρεξις). What he says at first seems to dismiss these as well:

(2) Neither can the reasoning faculty (τὸ λογιστικόν) and what is called intellect (νοῦς) be the mover. For theoretical intellect thinks nothing practical, nor says anything about what is to be avoided or pursued [...]. Further, even when intellect does give an order (ἐπιτάττοντος) and thought (διανοίας) says to avoid or pursue something, [the agent] isn't moved, but acts in accordance with appetite (ἐπιθυμίαν), as for instance does the akratic agent [...]. But neither is desire decisive (κυρία) for motion: for enkratic agents, although desiring and having an appetite, do not do what they have a desire to do, but follow intellect. (*de An.* III.9 432b26–433a8)

This passage seems to say that neither intellect nor desire can be the mover, because each may be overridden by the other, as in *akrasia* and *enkrateia*. It characterizes these conditions as conflicts between intellect and desire: in *enkrateia* the former wins out, in *akrasia* the latter.

In fact, however, this turns out to be quite misleading, as we see from the fuller picture Aristotle gives in the lines that follow:

(3) (a) It appears, then, at any rate, that there are two movers, desire or intellect, if one classifies *phantasia* as a sort of thinking (νόησις).

(b) For many follow *phantasiai* contrary to knowledge, and in the other animals there is neither thinking nor reasoning, but *phantasia*.

(c) Therefore both of these cause locomotion, intellect and desire – intellect, that is, that calculates for the sake of something, i.e. practical intellect; this differs from theoretical intellect in its end. And all desire is for the sake of something: for that which is the object of desire is the starting point of practical intellect, and what is last is the starting point of the action. So that these two reasonably appear to be movers, desire and practical thought. For the object of desire moves, and on account of this thought moves, because its starting point is the object of desire.

(d) And when *phantasia* moves it doesn't move without desire. So the mover is one and is the faculty of desire.⁹ For if two things, intellect and desire, moved, they would move in accordance with a common form. But as it is, intellect doesn't appear to move without desire. For wish (βούλησις) is desire, and whenever one is moved in accordance with reasoning, one is moved in accordance with wish.

(e) But desire moves contrary to reasoning [too]: for appetite is a kind of desire. While intellect is always correct, however, desire and *phantasia* can be correct or not correct. Wherefore while the object of desire always moves, this is either the good or the apparent good. But not every good, but the good achievable by action [...].

(f) Since desires arise that are opposed to one another, and this happens when the *logos* and the appetites are opposed, and this occurs in those who have perception of time – for intellect orders one to hold back on account of the future, but appetite [orders? moves?] on account of the now; for the presently pleasant appears

⁹ Reading ὄρεκτικόν at 433a21 with one group of manuscripts; another group has ὄρεκτόν, object of desire.

(φαίνεται) both without qualification (ἀπλῶς) pleasant and good without qualification, from a failure to look to the future –

(g) the mover will be one in form, the desiderative faculty, insofar as it is desiderative, but before everything the object of desire, for this moves, itself unmoved, by being thought or represented by *phantasia* (φαντασθηναί)[...]. (*de An.* III.10 433a9–b12)

(3) – especially (3g) – shows us what lesson to draw from (2)’s examples. Neither intellect nor desire has sovereign power over action (neither is κυρίον, 433a6), but they are nonetheless both movers, because together they cause action.¹⁰ More precisely, action results from the combination of desire with some form of cognition:¹¹ either intellect or *phantasia*. Let us investigate how desire combines with cognition to produce action, what difference it makes whether intellect or *phantasia* is involved, and how this analysis of action bears on the account of *akrasia*.

How do desire and cognition jointly cause action? Modern readers may assume that Aristotle has in mind here an account of the kind often called Humean: desire sets the end, and cognition determines the means. (3c) suggests that Aristotle did indeed recognize that practical cognition can play the role of finding means to given ends (compare *MA* 701a32 f.); the rest of III.10, however, emphasizes a different role. In (3e), Aristotle says that desire is for the *good*, genuine or apparent – a claim we find frequently in the ethical works.¹² That is, desire is for what the agent finds good, whether or not it is good (and whether or not, as we shall see, this “finding” entails believing). This suggests that cognition contributes to action not merely by recognizing things as, e.g., drinks or predators, but also and crucially by finding things *good*, thereby rendering them objects of desire (or by finding them bad, rendering them objects of avoidance).¹³ We will see that (3e) and (f) support this reading once we make sense of the difference between desires that follow intellect and those that follow *phantasia*. Let us turn to that distinction now.

¹⁰ This must be compatible with desire being in some sense the primary mover, as (3d) and (g) say it is. Aristotle’s view seems to be that desire does the actual moving, but in order to do so must be somehow conditioned by intellect (or by *phantasia*), as indicated in (3g). For further discussion, see below.

¹¹ I am using ‘cognition’ to cover the faculties Aristotle calls κριτικά (*MA* 700b19–21): faculties of discernment or discrimination.

¹² See *EN* III.4 in its entirety, *EN* III.5 1114a31–b1, and *EE* VII.2 1235b25–9; for related claims, see the first lines of the *EN* and of the *Politics*.

¹³ For variations on this view in recent literature, see Hudson 1981; Richardson 1992; Charles 1984, 89; Freeland 1994; Segvic 2002; Destree 2007. Alexander of Aphrodisias interpreted Aristotle in this way and incorporated the view into his own theory of action: see e.g. his *de Fato* XI. 178, XIV. 184, and *Mantissa* XXIII 172.

Intellect is a form of cognition that belongs only to rational animals. Thus Aristotle speaks indifferently, in (3c)–(3f), of desire in accordance with intellect, desire in accordance with thought (διανοία), desire that follows reasoning, and rational wish (βούλησις). It will be important for what follows that Aristotle also ascribes belief (δόξα), to rational animals alone,¹⁴ so that when he speaks of desire in accordance with belief he is again referring to desire specially linked to reasoning.¹⁵

What about *phantasia*? *De An.* III.3 has defined it as “a movement resulting from the activity of perception” (429a1 f.), something that “belongs to perceivers and is of the objects of perception” (428b12 f.). *Phantasia* is a close cousin of perception (see especially *Insomn.* 459a15–18); through it we and other animals experience quasi-perceptual appearances (*de An.* 428a1 f.), many of which are false (428a12). Often, although certainly not always, when Aristotle says that something appears (φαίνεται) to someone, or is apparent to them (φαινόμενον), he is using these words in a technical sense in which for x to appear F to S is for S to experience a quasi-perceptual appearance of x as F via her faculty of *phantasia*.¹⁶

As to the details of *phantasia*'s nature, scope, and role, there is a great deal of controversy among scholars, and I cannot hope to offer a thorough account here. What I wish to emphasize are two features of *phantasia* that should be relatively uncontroversial. First, *phantasia* is non-rational, in that it is possessed by animals who cannot exercise rational thought, and sometimes opposes rational thought in those (us) who can (see (3b) above).¹⁷ Second, the appearances it presents are fairly rich and

¹⁴ See the argument distinguishing belief from *phantasia* on just these grounds at *de An.* III.3 428a22 ff., and the *EN*'s equation of the δοξαστικόν, faculty of belief, with the λογιστικόν, faculty of practical reasoning or deliberating (*EN* VI.5 1140b25–8).

¹⁵ In the strict sense of the term νοῦς (see e.g. (3e)), νοῦς is infallible, while διανοία, λογισμός, and δόξα are fallible. For the purposes of this paper, the distinction is mostly unimportant; Aristotle himself argues that the difference between knowledge and belief has no bearing on the account of *akrasia*, at *EN* VII.3 1146b24 ff. See, however, the caveat about (3e) below.

¹⁶ For clear examples see (4)–(7) below, passages which emphasize the contrast between what appears to someone and what they rationally judge to be the case.

¹⁷ I am here restricting my discussion to what Aristotle later calls perceptual *phantasia*, in contrast with rational or deliberative *phantasia*, which he introduces only after our passage (III.10 433a29, III.11 434a5–7). It is clear from context that the former kind, the kind we share with non-rational animals, is the kind at issue when we act against reason, as in *akrasia*. There are hints in *de An.* III.9–10 that all desire and all action involve *phantasia* (432b15–16, 433b27–29; cf. *MA* 702a17–19); if this is right, then strictly speaking when we act against perceptual *phantasia* by following intellect, we will be acting in accordance with *phantasia* of a different kind, the

complex: they are the sort of thing that can guide action (see (3b) again, and compare *MA* 700b19–21).¹⁸

In III.10 we see Aristotle applying the distinction between *phantasia* and rational thought to the practical realm – that is, to practical cognition. And the differences he emphasizes here between action in accordance with *phantasia* and action in accordance with rational thought indicate that practical cognition, the kind that plays a crucial role in action, is in the first place cognition of things as good or bad, worthy or unworthy of pursuit. (3e) links the claim that intellect is always correct but *phantasia* sometimes not correct to the claim that desire is for “the good or the apparent good”. The natural inference is that the object of desire is either what is apprehended by intellect, a genuine good, or what appears to *phantasia*, a (perhaps merely) apparent good. Read in the context of this suggestion, (3f) confirms the un-Humean reading of this claim: the object of desire is either what is thought good by intellect, or what appears good to *phantasia*.¹⁹ Appetite pushes one toward some pleasant thing because that thing *appears* pleasant and good: this suggests that through *phantasia* we are aware not only of things like “This is cake” (as on the Humean reading) but also, and crucially, of things like “This is pleasant and good”. Intellect, meanwhile, “orders” one to hold back: this suggests that it says not merely (e.g.) “This is unhealthy”, but also “This is not to be pursued”, or “This is not good”.

If we are to take this account seriously, we need to clarify what it is for something to appear “pleasant and good without qualification”. One might worry that this is far too sophisticated an appearance to be available to non-rational *phantasia*, but we can interpret the claim in a way that defuses the worry.

First, a point about ‘good’. Aristotle seems to hold that non-rational creatures, and the non-rational part of the soul, perceive pleasure as good (*de An.* 431a8–11), and (therefore) desire the pleasant as good (c.f. (3f);

rational (λογιστική) *phantasia* involved in deliberation. I leave this complication aside in what follows (although see my comment on Destree in note 57 below).

¹⁸ Whether this entails that they have what we would call propositional content I will not try to address here; I am not at all sure that Aristotle had a determinate view on the matter. There is a contemporary use of ‘rational’ on which cognitions as complex and structured as these will count as rational, but I see no evidence that this is Aristotle’s use.

¹⁹ On the Humean reading of (3e) neither intellect nor *phantasia* need apprehend their objects *as* good.

MA 700b15–701a5; *EE* 1235b26–29). However we interpret this,²⁰ it entails that we need not attribute to him a view on which the appearance in (3f) contains one representation of the immediate pleasure as pleasant, and in addition a distinct representation of it as good. For a non-rational creature or part of the soul to desire something as pleasant *is* for it to desire that thing as good; we should read the καί ('and') in (3f) as epexegetical.

Second, a point about 'without qualification' (ἀπλῶς – *simpliciter*, in Latin; it may also be translated 'absolutely' or 'simply'). Aristotle would indeed be saying something implausible if the "without qualification" implied that the non-rational part of the soul makes an all-things-considered judgment, taking into account (although miscalculating) the future consequences of the desired action, along with other relevant concerns.²¹ We can make more sense of the passage if we take his point instead to be that this part of the soul simply fails to notice any of the factors that qualify the pleasure (and goodness) of what it desires. What is pleasant to a debased person, or what is only immediately pleasant, is pleasant only in a qualified way (see the citations in note 21): if you look more closely or from a better perspective (that of the virtuous person) – if you "look to the future" (3f) and to other factors – you will find ways in which it is not pleasant, and not good. Thus the qualifiedly pleasant appears pleasant and good without qualification just as the sun appears a foot wide: in both cases the appearance fails to capture important facts about perspective, or context, or other complicating factors.²²

Furthermore, the claim that we have appetites for things *because* they appear pleasant and good without qualification implies that insofar as one finds something not to be good and pleasant, one does not desire it. This helps us understand what it is to mistake the qualified for the unqualified good and pleasant. To notice qualifications that render something in some way bad or painful is, to that extent, to be put off by the thing – to

²⁰ For an exploration of a non-deflationary reading, see my "Aristotle's non-trivial, non-insane view that we always desire things under the guise of the good", forthcoming.

²¹ Nor indeed should we take it that the non-rational part grasps any version of Aristotle's claim in the ethical works that the pleasant and good without qualification are those things which please and are thought good by the virtuous person – things pleasant and good in themselves, which contribute to the end of happiness (*EN* VII.11 1152b2–3, VII.12 1152b25–1153a7, 1153a29–35; *EE* III.1 1228b20–22, VII.2 1237a25).

²² It is worth noting that the passages from *EN* VII.12 cited in the previous note strongly imply that no object of appetite is ever pleasant without qualification: things pleasant without qualification are "not accompanied by appetite or pain".

experience an aversion to it, or at least a weakening of desire. Insofar as something appears good and pleasant without qualification, by contrast, we desire it.

Thus *de An.* III.10 attributes motivational conflict to a conflict between two cognitions, each of which represents something as good: an appearance to *phantasia* on one side, and a rational judgment by intellect on the other. In the case described in (3f) it is obviously better to follow intellect than *phantasia*. (3e) provides a general explanation as to why this should be so: when we engage in rational thought about what is good, we hit on what is genuinely good, but when things appear good to us through *phantasia* the appearance may be false. Intellect is always correct (and more generally, rational thought is naturally such as to hit on the truth).²³ *Phantasia*, however, is not, and thus “the object of desire always moves, but this is either the good or the apparent good”.

Thus the distinction between rational and non-rational desire – wish and appetite – is a distinction between desire for what is judged good by rational cognition and desire for what appears good to non-rational *phantasia*. This can in turn be expressed as a distinction between desire for the genuine and the apparent good (as in (3e)), where the latter may be merely apparent. We find confirmation of this view in passages from other works:

²³ (3e) may seem to overstate its case: we do, as Aristotle is well aware, sometimes make mistakes in our practical thinking. (For a telling example, see the discussion of Neoptolemus at *EN* VII.2 1146a16 ff.: like one who acts akratically, he goes with passion against rational judgment, but in his case his rational judgment is wrong, and it is passion that leads him to do what is good. Here is a case where (on the account of *akrasia* I offer below), it is better to go with *phantasia* and appetite than with rational thought and rational desire). This might suggest that in (3e) Aristotle is using *νοῦς* in the restricted sense he often employs on which it is a “success term”: if one makes an error, one turns out not to have been exercising intellect, but mere thinking. But this restricted use will not fit Aristotle’s purposes here, where he has been using *νοῦς* to cover rational cognition more generally (note that the contrast between *νοῦς* and *phantasia* in (3e) looks as if it is meant to be exhaustive). We can, however, generalize the point about the correctness of *νοῦς* to other forms of rational cognition by comparing the present argument with that of *EN* III.4. There Aristotle argues that the object of wish is “without qualification” (*ἀπλῶς*) the (genuine) good, although for each person the object of wish is what appears good to them, and thus vicious people wish for things in fact bad. If wish (*βούλησις*) is, as I have argued, desire for what one rationally judges good, then by *EN* III.4’s logic rational cognition “without qualification” is correct, although in particular cases it will get things wrong. Vicious people will have false rational judgments about the good, and corresponding wishes for what is not in fact good, but it is still somehow in the nature of rational cognition (and therefore of wish) to hit on the genuine good, while this is not in the nature of *phantasia* (nor therefore of appetite).

(4) The desired and the wished for is either the good or the apparent good. Now this is why the pleasant is desired, for it is an apparent good; for some believe (δοκεῖ) it [good], and to some it appears so even though they do not believe it so. For *phantasia* and belief (δόξα) do not reside in the same part of the soul. (EE VII.2 1235b25–9)

(5) The primary objects of desire and of thought are the same. For the apparent καλόν [fine, noble, beautiful] is the object of appetite, and the really καλόν is the primary object of wish. (*Met.* XII.7 1072a27 f.)²⁴

Now we have an account of how cognition and desire jointly cause action: when cognition finds something good, desire moves the agent to pursue it. We also see the relevance of the distinction between intellect and *phantasia*. Let us now investigate what all this entails for the account of *akrasia*.

Passage (2) describes *akrasia* and *enkrateia* as conflicts between desire and intellect, but (3) shows this characterization to be misleading. Instead, the agent is torn between two desires, each based on a different form of cognition. On one side is her wish, the desire that moves her “in accordance with reasoning” (3d). To be moved by wish is to be moved by intellect: one has a wish for something *because* intellect thinks that thing good. (Thus it is true but incomplete to say, as in (2), that the enkratic follows intellect: more precisely, she acts on a desire – a wish – for what intellect declares good). On the other side is an appetite for what appears good, the present pleasure (3f) – that is, a desire in accordance not with intellect but with *phantasia*.

This characterization has a striking consequence: it entails a very close parallel between motivational conflict and something on the face of it quite different, the experience of perceptual illusion.²⁵ Just like someone who believes that the lines in the Müller-Lyer illusion are of equal length but cannot help seeing one as bigger than the other, akratic and enkratic agents experience conflict between how things quasi-perceptually appear to them and how they rationally judge things to be. Indeed, earlier in the *de Anima* Aristotle has explained the experience of perceptual illusions as involving precisely the same kind of conflict that explains *akrasia* in III.10: a conflict between *phantasia* and rational thought. He appeals to the fact that

²⁴ Aristotle uses καλόν and ἀγαθόν (good) interchangeably in this context: see *MA* 700b25 f.

²⁵ Here Aristotle is following Plato, who draws this parallel in the *Protagoras* and in *Republic X*. (For discussion of Plato’s use of the parallel, see Moss 2008).

(6) false things appear (φαίνεται) concerning which one at the same time has true supposition (ὑπόληψιν): for example, the sun appears a foot wide although it is believed (πιστεύεται) to be larger than the inhabited earth. (*de An.* III.3 428b2–4)

to argue that *phantasia* cannot be identical with belief (δόξα): in one who believes the truth but experiences the illusion, *phantasia* and rational cognition are opposed.

The same argument appears in another work concerned with *phantasia*, the *de Insomniis*. Here Aristotle describes various perceptual illusions, and concludes:

(7) The cause of all these things happening is that the faculty (δύναμις) in virtue of which the ruling part (τὸ κύριον) judges (κρίνειν) is not identical with that in virtue of which *phantasmata* arise [i.e. the faculty of *phantasia*]. A proof of this is that the sun appears (φαίνεται) only a foot in diameter, though often something else contradicts (ἀντίφησι) the *phantasia*. (*Insomn.* 460b16–20)²⁶

This last passage precisely echoes one we have seen above from the *Eudemian Ethics* on the object of desire: sometimes the pleasant appears good to those who do not believe it so, because “*phantasia* and belief do not reside in the same part of the soul” (*EE* VII.2 1235b26–29). Aristotle is explaining both the motivational conflict one experiences when tempted by a pleasure one judges bad, and the cognitive dissonance one experiences when subject to a perceptual appearance one recognizes as illusory, as conflicts between the rational faculty and *phantasia* – between what one believes and how things appear. In perceptual illusion the appearances in question are straightforward perceptual appearances such as the appearance of the sun as a foot wide; in *akrasia* and *enkrateia* they are appearances of things as *good* – more precisely, the appearance that the qualified pleasant is “without qualification pleasant and good without qualification”.²⁷

²⁶ That what appears through *phantasia* can be contradicted by a rational judgment confirms that on Aristotle’s view the appearances we are aware of through *phantasia* can be rich and complex, perhaps even propositionally structured. (Cf. Modrak 1987, 101).

²⁷ For confirmation of this parallel, consider Aristotle’s odd remarks about melancholics. In the psychological works he describes melancholics as being particularly sensitive to *phantasmata* (appearances to *phantasia*), or experiencing particularly lively ones (*Mem.* 453a21; *Div. Somn.* 463b17). When we look to the ethical works, we find that these same people are particularly prone to moral error: they tend to impetuous *akrasia* (*EN* VII.7 1150b25 f.) and are “constantly in a strong state of desire [...] intemperate and base” (*EN* VII.14 1154b11–15). People in whom *phantasia* is strong are prone not only to nonveridical perceptions but also to the desires that prompt vicious and akratic behavior.

There are important questions as to how Aristotle means us to understand this notion of value-appearances. What sort of thing is an appearance of goodness? In what way is it derived from perception, as it must be if it is literally an appearance to perceptual *phantasia*? I will not address these issues here.²⁸

Rather, I want to make use of the fact that Aristotle draws such a strong analogy between the experiences of perceptual illusion and of motivational conflict to answer the questions about *akrasia* with which we began. For, I shall argue, the parallel with perceptual illusions can help explain why Aristotle thought it necessary to explain akratic action as the result of ignorance, how the ignorance account can be compatible with the motivational-struggle account, and what sort of ignorance he must have in mind.

2. Following appearances against knowledge

It would be very puzzling indeed for someone who recognizes an ordinary visual appearance as illusory to act in accordance with the appearance rather than with her knowledge. To take an example from the *de Insomniis* to which we will return below, could we take seriously the claim of someone who says “I know those cracks in the wall are just cracks, but they look like animals, and that’s why I’m swatting them?” (Or: “I know the sun is larger than the inhabited portion of the earth, but it looks a foot wide, and that’s why I’m going to try to catch it with my net?”). Arguably the most we could say of such a person is that she is able to say the same words as someone who really knows that the appearance is false; so long as she continues to act as she does, however, we must assume that she does not really believe, or perhaps even understand, what she is saying, for if she really knew that the appearance was false she would not act on it.²⁹

²⁸ I do elsewhere, in my MS, “Aristotle on the Apparent Good” where I argue that appearances of goodness are literal perception-based appearances, deriving from pleasurable perception of things of the same type as their objects.

²⁹ One might protest that if the appearance is affectively charged in some way – as in the example in Hume’s *Treatise* of the man suspended over a precipice in an iron cage – the mystery dissolves. For interesting treatment of the role of rational belief in such cases, including discussion of historical background and recent experimental psychology on the subject, see Gendler, forthcoming. I will return to the issue briefly in the final section, but my main point is to show that Aristotle thought it impossible to act on an appearance one actively recognizes as false – as evidenced

On the account we have derived from *de An.* III.10, the akratic agent is just like the swatter of illusory animals. Both the akratic and the enkratic agent experience a false appearance (of the present pleasure as good), and both – as we will see from *EN* VII.3 – may be able to express a rational thought that contradicts it. If one of them nonetheless acts as if the appearance were true – eats a third piece of cake, for example – it is natural to think that although she can say the same words as the other, she does not really believe or does not really understand them: that she is in some sense ignorant of the fact that what she is doing is bad.

A passage from Aristotle's discussion of *phantasia* in the *de Anima* strongly implies that he does indeed think that one who knows an appearance is false will not act in accordance with it; it also suggests that this view applies to his account of *akrasia*:

(8) Animals do many things in accord with *phantasiai*, some because they have no intellect, i.e. beasts, some because intellect is sometimes covered over by *pathos* or diseases or sleep, i.e. people. (*de An.* III.3 429a5–8)

If a person “follows *phantasia* contrary to knowledge” (3b) – where this seems to mean: if she acts on an appearance in defiance of what she (usually, or dispositionally) knows to be the case – she does so, this passage implies, only because her intellect is impaired, “covered over” by something like an eye that is shut.³⁰ Furthermore, the cause of the impairment is some psychophysical affection: disease, sleep, or a *pathos*.³¹ *Pathos* – literally ‘suffering’ or ‘undergoing’, something that happens to one as opposed to something one does – refers in some contexts to a broad range of conditions and experiences, but the juxtaposition with sickness and

by (8) and (11) below – whether or not this is the best philosophical view of the matter.

³⁰ For this reading, with helpful citations for ἐπικάλυμμα (cover or lid), see Lorenz 2006, 199 note. Aristotle calls *nous* the eye of the soul at *EN* I.6 1096b28 f., and implies the same analogy at VI.13 1144b10–12.

³¹ A passage in the *de Sensu* might suggest another explanation: when there are conflicting motions in the soul, “the greater motion always knocks out (ἐκκρούει) the lesser, wherefore people do not perceive things held right before their eyes if they happen to be intensely thinking about something, or feeling fear, or hearing a loud noise” (447a14–17). If thinking can knock out perceiving, then perhaps perceiving (or misperceiving) can knock out thinking (although it is perhaps significant that Aristotle does not mention this converse as a possibility). Given the emphasis in *EN* VII on the causal role of the agent's appetite in *akrasia*, however – and given that our analysis of *de An.* III.10 shows that experiencing a *phantasia* of something as pleasant and good entails having an appetite for it – we can safely take (8)'s explanation of going with *phantasia* against intellect as most relevant to cases of *akrasia*. See also the passages I cite below in which it is *appetites* rather than perception that “knock out” (ἐκκρούειν) reasoning: *EN* III.12 1119b10 and *EE* II.8 1224b24.

sleep here shows that Aristotle has in mind the narrower sense: emotions and appetites, like those involved in *akrasia*.

We get a more fleshed out account of how such conditions can “cover over” intellect and leave us to follow *phantasia* in Aristotle’s most extensive discussion of perceptual illusions, in the *de Insomniis*. Although that discussion is not directly concerned with *akrasia*, the parallels we have seen above suggest that we can use it to fill out the account of *akrasia* we have derived from the *de Anima*. I will lay out the *de Insomniis*’ account of following *phantasia* against intellect in this section, apply it to *de Anima* III.10’s account of *akrasia* in section 3, and then consider how the resulting account of *akrasia* fits with *EN* VII.3’s discussion in section 4.

In the *de Insomniis*, as in *de An.* III.3, Aristotle is concerned to distinguish between being subject to an appearance and actually accepting it. When all goes well, if we are subject to a false appearance something in us “contradicts the *phantasia*” (see (7) above and (10) below): it says of a dream-image, for example, “This appears to be Coriscus but is not Coriscus” (462a5).³² As (7) strongly suggests (especially when read in conjunction with (6)), and as we would expect, the faculty that does this “contradicting” is the faculty responsible for belief – intellect, the rational faculty:

(9) Sometimes belief (δόξα) says that the appearance is false, as it does for those who are awake, while at other times it is held in check (κατέχετται), and follows the appearance (*phantasma*). (*Insomn.* 459a6–8)³³

What does it mean for the rational faculty to be “held in check”? This is illuminated by a later passage on dreams. When one is asleep,

(10) that which is similar to something seems to be the real thing (δοκεῖ τὸ ὅμοιον αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ ἀληθές). And so great is the power (δύναμις) of sleep that it makes this escape one’s notice (ποιεῖν τοῦτο λαμβάνειν). For just as if it escaped someone’s notice that a finger was pressed under his eye, one thing would not only appear to be two but he would believe that it was (δόξει), while if it did not escape his notice it would appear but he would not believe, so it is in sleep: if one is aware

³² Aristotle treats dreams as *phantasmata*, the work of *phantasia*, so that they count for him as a something very like perceptual illusions (*Insomn.* 458b26–30 and *passim*).

³³ At 461b26–29 Aristotle seems to imply that the “common sense” (the central faculty of perception) is responsible for noticing and contradicting false appearances, but this (*pace* Modrak 1987, 94, 137 f.), cannot be his considered view, for he explicitly contrasts the appearance-contradicting part with the appearance-receiving part in (7), while elsewhere he identifies the common sense as itself the organ of appearance-reception (the organ of *phantasia*) (*Mem.* 450a1–11).

(αἰσθάνηται)³⁴ that one is sleeping, i.e. [aware of] the sleeping condition (*pathos*) that one's perception is in, something will appear, but something in the person says that this appears to be Coriscus but is not Coriscus. For often something in the soul of the sleeper says that what appears is a dream. But if it escapes his notice (λανθάνη) that he is sleeping, nothing contradicts the *phantasia*. (*Insomn.* 461b29–462a8)

In the finger-on-eyeball example, the agent's rational faculty is functioning normally: she simply happens not to know that there is something non-standard in her viewing conditions, and thus fails to notice that what appears to her is a mere appearance. Here there is no systematic psychological or physiological explanation for why her rational faculty fails to contradict the false appearance. The dreamer example, however, is importantly different: here a *pathos* – sleep – inhibits the agent's ability to notice the difference between real things and mere appearances, and thus prevents anything within her from “contradicting the appearances”.³⁵ Other *pathê* – sickness, emotions, and desires – can have the same effect:

(11) We are easily deceived in our perceptions when we are undergoing *pathê*, and different people according to their different *pathê*; for example, the coward when excited by fear, the person in love by *erôs*; so that from a slight similarity the first seems (δοκεῖν) to see his enemies, the second his beloved. And the stronger the *pathos*, the less similarity is needed for these things to appear. In the same way all people become more prone to deception when they are angry or undergoing any appetite, and the more so the more strongly they are undergoing the *pathos*. This is also why lines on the walls sometimes appear to feverish people to be animals, from a slight similarity in how the lines are put together. And sometimes these things increase along with (συνεπιτείνει) the *pathê* so that, if the people are not severely ill, it doesn't escape their notice (λανθάνειν) that the appearance is false, but if the *pathos* is greater, they even move themselves in accordance with the appearances. (*Insomn.* 460b3–16)

Someone slightly angry or fevered, the passage suggests, may be subject to a false appearance but will notice that it is false. If the *pathos* is stronger, however, the fact that it is a mere appearance will “escape her notice” (λανθάνει again), and thus nothing in her will contradict it.

I take these passages from the *de Insomniis* to illustrate the *de Anima*'s claim that we follow *phantasia* against intellect when the latter is “covered over” by a *pathos* (8), and also to elucidate what this “covering over”

³⁴ We could translate ‘perceives’, but Aristotle clearly means to contrast this with λανθάνει: hence ‘notices’ or ‘is aware’ seems better. (See the above footnote on the problems with taking the perceptual faculty as the subject of these verbs).

³⁵ Aristotle acknowledges that sleep does not always have this effect: sometimes we are aware that we are asleep, and in these cases we can experience the dream-appearances without mistaking them for real things (compare (9) above). He does not say what accounts for the difference between the two kinds of case, but a natural suggestion is that it is a matter of how deeply one is asleep, i.e. how powerful the *pathos* is. The last lines of (11) confirm this suggestion.

consists in. For intellect (the rational faculty) to be covered over – or, as the *de Insomniis* puts it, to be “held in check, or not move with its proper motion” (461b5–7; cf. (9)) – is for it to be unable to perform its natural and crucial function of noticing and contradicting false appearances.

Moreover, the last lines of (11) confirm (8)’s implication that if the agent *does* notice that the appearance is false, she will not act on it – will not “move herself [or ‘be moved’, κινεῖσθαι] in accordance with it”. Someone with a slight fever may see the cracks on the wall as animals, but so long as her rational faculty remains unimpaired she will not get out of bed to swat at them, or to run away. Strong *pathê* lead us to act on appearances, then, because they impair the rational faculty, preventing it from detecting false appearances. (The first lines of (11) suggest that *pathê* can also be responsible for generating false appearances in the first place. I will comment on the possible application of this fact to the explanation of *akrasia* below).

There remains a question about the *de Insomniis*’ view of the dreamer’s or fevered person’s rational attitude toward the appearances she follows. Does her rational faculty actively assent to the appearances, as (9) implies (belief itself “follows” the appearance), or is it simply silent on the matter? The latter seems a more plausible view: to say that the dreamer outright believes the appearances is to ignore the difference between cases in which the rational faculty is impaired by a *pathos* and cases (like the finger-on-eyeball illusion) when it is functioning normally. (This is Gallop’s interpretation of Aristotle’s view: in dreams, belief “simply fails to oppose” the appearances, so that they “gain acceptance by default” (1991, 25). Pickavé/Whiting (2008, 342) offer compelling arguments for a similarly nondoxastic interpretation of the fever case in (11)). Passages like (9) seem to count against this interpretation, but Gallop points out that Aristotle’s use of δοκεῖν and variants is looser here than in the *de Anima*, where Aristotle criticizes Plato for conflating seeming (δοκεῖν) with mere appearing (φαίνεσθαι). (See e.g. *Insomn.* 458b29, a clear case of Aristotle using δοκεῖ to mean φαίνεται, and, arguably, the uses of δοκεῖν in (10) and (11)). Given this loose and inconsistent usage, I think it most likely that Aristotle did not have a clearly worked out position on the question in the *de Insomniis*; I will argue below that he has a decisive answer to a parallel question in the *Ethics*.

One further note on the subject: appearance-scrutiny and (when necessary) appearance-contradiction are far from arbitrary functions for Aristotle to select as the ones essential to the full functioning of reasoning. For an argument that they are the defining functions of rationality ac-

ording to Plato, see Moss, 2008. It is uncontroversial that they are so for the Stoics:

Ensouled things are moved by themselves when a *phantasia* occurs within them which calls forth an impulse [...]. A rational animal, however, in addition to its impressionistic (φανταστική) nature, has reason (λόγον) which judges (κρίνοντα) *phantasiai*, rejecting some of these and accepting others, in order that the animal may be guided accordingly. (Origen, *On principles* 3.1.2–3 (SVF 2.988))³⁶

There are clear affinities between the views I am attributing to Aristotle on the distinction between being subject to an appearance and rationally accepting it and the Stoic's theory of belief (and desire) as involving rational assent to *phantasiai*. I cannot explore these connections in detail here, but I think that there is strong reason to think of the Stoics as developing and modifying an idea that is implicit in Aristotle (and Plato), and that attention to these connections could help to illuminate Aristotle's view of *phantasia* and its relation to reason, belief, and desire and emotion.

3. *Applying the account to akrasia*

The *de Insomniis* explains the cognitive effects of *pathê* in physiological terms: sleep and other conditions involve changes in the blood which affect cognition. We do not need to go into the details of Aristotle's physiology here; what is crucial for our account is that he treats appetites and emotions as involving similar bodily conditions (see especially *de An.* I.1, 403a5 ff.), which explains why *erôs* or anger can have the same effects as fever or sleep, as in (11). Indeed, Aristotle reminds us of the physical aspects of emotions and desires in *EN* VII.3 itself, in a passage that compares the cognitive effects of such *pathê* to those of more straightforwardly physical ones: the famous comparison of the akratic agent to one mad, asleep or drunk (see (14) below).

This gives us strong encouragement to use the account of following *phantasia* against intellect that we derived from the *de Insomniis* to fill out the account of *akrasia* implied by *de An.* III.10. The result will be as follows:

Sometimes an agent reasons that some temptation – e.g. a third helping of cake – is to be avoided (intellect “orders her to hold back” (3f)). Nonetheless, the cake appears to her “without qualification pleasant and

³⁶ Translation based on Long/Sedley 1987.

good without qualification”. This is an appearance to *phantasia*, and it is a false one. A temperate person would not even be subject to it:

(12) [...] it is thought to be what appears so to the good person that *is* so [...]. So too with pleasures: the ones that appear so to [the virtuous person] will be pleasures, and the things he delights in will be pleasant. If the things that disgust him appear pleasant to a given person, there is nothing surprising in that, since there are many forms of corruption and damage to which human beings are subject; pleasant the things in question are not, though they are for these types, and for people in this condition. (*EN* X.5 1176a15–22)³⁷

Thus our agent, like someone knowingly experiencing a perceptual illusion, has conflicting rational and non-rational cognitions. Her case is special, however, because the cognitions in question are evaluative ones, and we have seen from *de An.* III.10 that these have motivational consequences. The rational judgment that the cake is to be avoided brings with it a rational desire to abstain from it (*de An.* III’s wish; *EN* VII’s *prohairesis*). The appearance of the cake as good, meanwhile, brings with it an appetite to eat the cake.³⁸ Thus just as the temperate person is not subject to false evaluative appearances, neither is she subject to appetites that conflict with what her rational faculty commands (see *EN* I.13 1102b27–28, III.12 1119b15–18). And thus our ethically inferior agent has conflict-

³⁷ Cf. *EN* III.4 1113a24–31: “For each person what is wished for is what appears good [...]. The virtuous person judges each thing correctly, and in each case what is true appears to him”. I think it significant that in these and similar contexts Aristotle tends to use variants on φαίνεσθαι rather than on δοκεῖν. In construing these appearances as appearances to *phantasia*, I am arguing that the virtuous person has correct non-rational cognition of a kind that all others (except the person with “natural” virtue – see *EN* VI.13) lack. This is importantly different from a similar-sounding claim that McDowell and Wiggins express by saying that the virtuous person “perceives” things differently from the enkratic, for what they have in mind is a point about the intellectual cognition central to *phronēsis*, a kind of cognition Aristotle sometimes compares to perception. (For citations and brief discussion see main text below). It is certainly right that on Aristotle’s account only the virtuous excel at perception in this metaphorical sense, for only they have *phronēsis*; what I wish to emphasize is that the virtuous also excel at a different kind of quasi-perception, namely evaluative *phantasia*. This is what we should expect, given that character-virtue is (at least primarily) the excellent condition of the non-rational part of the soul, the part that exercises not intellect but *phantasia*.

³⁸ This may seem to clash with Aristotle’s assertion in *EN* VII.3 that the appetite that causes akratic behavior just “happens to be present” (see (16) below). If we appeal to the distinction between general and specific appetites that I mention below, however, we can say that the agent just happens to be in a state of general craving, but only after the false appearance focuses that craving on the cake does she have the appetite that causes her action.

ing desires as well as conflicting cognitions: she undergoes motivational struggle.

For some time, these conflicting motivations wage war; then a crucial change occurs. The appetite for sweets is a bodily *pathos*, and it can affect cognition in much the same way as *pathê* do in the *de Insomniis*' examples: it can impair the rational faculty's crucial function of noticing and contradicting false appearances. If the agent's appetite were milder, or her rational faculty more resilient, she would continue to recognize the appearance as false, but she is like those "who become drunk quickly, on a little wine, and on less than most people" (*EN* VII.8 1151a4 f.): the *pathos* "covers over" her intellect.

Now there is no longer anything to contradict the *phantasia* ((7), (10)), and so she follows it ((3b), (9)). I have argued that even in the perceptual illusion case such following is best understood as default yielding rather than as active rational assent (whether or not Aristotle was clear on this point in the *de Insomniis*); in the case of akratic action, this is certainly so. Someone who acts akratically, unlike someone who is self-indulgent (*ἀκόλαστος*), pursues harmful pleasures without ever believing that they are good (see *EN* VII.3 1146b22–24, VII.8 1151a20–24, and IX.4 1166b8 f.). She does not actively assent to the appearance as true, but with her rational faculty impaired neither does she reject it as false: there is simply nothing active in her to resist the appearance. Likewise, she does not acquire a rational desire to eat the cake, but with her intellect silent she temporarily loses her rational motivation to avoid it, and so there is nothing active in her to resist the appetite. Appetite can (as we see in (16) below) move the agent all on its own, and with nothing left now to counter its force, it does: she eats the cake.³⁹

There is a possible complication. We saw above in (11) from the *de Insomniis* that *pathê* can cause false appearances: an emotion, desire, or fever can exaggerate similarities so that a stranger appears to be one's enemy or some lines on the wall an animal. (If one were not afraid one would not even be subject to the appearance of the stranger as one's enemy; if one were not fevered one would not even be subject to the appearance of the lines on the wall as animals). Is the agent's appetite, like the fever in (11), responsible not only for rendering intellect unable to contra-

³⁹ We have seen that in ordinary perceptual illusion cases "following" the appearances can involve acting in accordance with them: the fevered person gets out of bed to swat at the animals. But in such a case the appearance is not an evaluative one, not essentially motivating, and thus it will affect action only if it interacts with some independent motivation the agent has (e.g. fear of animals, or a desire to be left in peace).

dict a false appearance but also for generating that appearance in the first place? Aristotle does say elsewhere that an appetite can cause something to appear good.⁴⁰ When we try to apply this idea to the case of *akrasia*, we get an account which may seem worryingly circular: earlier (in (3f)), we saw that the false appearance of something as pleasant and good without qualification gives rise to an appetite, while now we see this kind of false appearance itself generated by an appetite. We can, however, construe this not as vicious circle but rather as a causal chain, if we distinguish general states of intense desire from specific desires for particular objects that can directly cause action. (For an account of Aristotle's view of *akrasia* that makes use of this distinction, see Destree 2007). First the general craving for sweets distorts appearances to make the cake appear pleasant and good without qualification; then, because the appetitive part of the soul goes for what appears pleasant and good without qualification, that general craving gets focused on the cake. (Or perhaps the right thing to say is: a new appetite arises, a specific one for this particular piece of cake). There will be a further question as to whether the general appetite in its turn arises from a general *phantasia* of pleasures as good. I think that given Aristotle's view of the relation between desires, appearances of goodness, and moral character, this will indeed be the case, and will involve no vicious regress; the argument for this claim would, however, take us too far afield.

We have now developed a full account of *akrasia* based on Aristotle's psychological works; let us call it 'the illusion account'. We have also seen some reasons – beyond the general but highly defeasible principle of wishing to find consistency in Aristotle's thought – to expect this account to be compatible with the account of *akrasia* in *EN* VII.3. First, because it is hard to understand how someone could act in accordance with appearances that she recognizes as illusory, construing motivational conflict as a species of perceptual illusion naturally invites an account on which acting akratically involves some kind of ignorance – just the kind of account we find in VII.3. Second, the fact that VII.3 appeals to the body-altering and knowledge-impairing effects of appetites and emotions in a passage

⁴⁰ "Things do not appear (φαίνεταί) the same to people insofar as they are friendly or hostile, nor to the angry and the calm [...] but either altogether different or different in importance. To one who is friendly [i.e. favorably disposed], the person about whom he makes a judgment seems not to do wrong or only slightly; to one who is hostile, the opposite; and to a person appetitively desiring something (ἐπιθυμοῦντι) and full of good hopes, if something in the future is a source of pleasure, it appears (φαίνεταί) that it will come to pass and will be good; but to an unemotional person and one in a disagreeable state of mind, the opposite [appears]" (*Rh.* 2.1 1377b31–1378a5, translation based on Kennedy, emphasis mine).

that compares these with more straightforwardly physical conditions like sleep ((14) below) suggests that the chapter's account of *akrasia* is meant to be compatible with – and indeed naturally supplemented by – a physiological account of how such conditions affect cognition, an account of the kind Aristotle himself supplies in the *de Insomniis*.⁴¹ A remark later in VII.3 bolsters this suggestion:

(13) As to how the ignorance is resolved and the akratic agent becomes a knower again, the same account [holds] as about the drunkard and the sleeper, and is not particular to this *pathos*; this account we must hear from the students of nature (φυσιολόγων). (*EN* VII.3 1147b6–9)

Let us turn, then, to the text of *EN* VII.3, to see if we can provide an interpretation that bears out these suggestions by rendering the chapter compatible with the illusion account of *akrasia*. I will not pretend that the fit is easy or obvious: VII.3 makes no mention of false appearances, and hardly any mention of *phantasia* at all. But I hope to show that we can read Aristotle as presupposing the illusion account as the background for VII.3. This will prove that chapter compatible with the struggle picture, and help illuminate the other questions that plague its interpretation.

4. *EN* VII.3

The discussion opens with the question of whether akratic agents act “knowing (εἰδότες) or not, and in what way knowing” (1146b8 f.). The previous chapter has made clear that this is a version of the question Socrates famously answered in the negative in the *Protagoras*: Does anyone willingly do what she knows is not best? (See especially 1145b26 f.).

Beginning at 1146b31, Aristotle introduces several distinctions between ways of knowing, with the aim of showing that while in some senses of ‘knows’ it would be very strange for someone to do what she knows she should not, in others it would not be strange at all: one may act against the dictates of knowledge one is not presently exercising (1146b31–35), and, as a particular case of this phenomenon, one may act against one’s general maxims if one does not notice that they apply in a particular situation (1146b35–1147a10). Someone might know, for example, that all dry food is good for people, and that he is a person and that some type of food is dry, but if he “either does not have or is not exercising” the knowledge that some particular morsel of food is of this type (1147a8), there will be nothing strange in his failing to eat it.

⁴¹ For this same approach, with rather different results, see Pickavé/Whiting 2008.

Many have taken this “dry food” case to be an example of *akrasia*.⁴² But if we are to fit VII.3 to the illusion account, this cannot be right. As Ross points out in the passage quoted in the introductory section, the person who fails to eat something dry because he simply does not know that it is dry, or is not “exercising” that knowledge (where the contrast with the condition Aristotle describes in (14) below shows that this means something like: he happens not to be attending to the fact), undergoes no inner struggle. He has no *logos* commanding him to eat the food, and thus no corresponding rational desire (*prohairesis*) to eat it. Perhaps we are meant to assume that he has some appetitive aversion to it, but this is not enough to make his avoidance of it akratic. Thus we should conclude that, as Kenny puts it, in this passage “Aristotle is simply explaining *one* sense in which a man can εἰδῶς ἄ μὴ δεῖ πράττειν [knowingly do things he should not]” (1966, 173).

This reading is confirmed by the next passage, the passage I mentioned above on the body-altering and knowledge-impairing effects of appetites and emotions. For the opening lines of the passage strongly indicate that only here does the explanation proper of *akrasia* begin:

(14) Furthermore, there is *another way besides those just mentioned* in which having knowledge belongs to human beings. For within ‘having but not using’ we observe a *different condition*,⁴³ such that one both has it in a way and doesn’t have it, like the one sleeping or mad or drunk. But those who are in the grip of *pathê* are in this kind of condition: for spirited passions (θυμοί) and appetites for sex and some other things of this sort clearly alter (μεθιστᾶσιν) the body too, and in some cases even cause madness. It’s clear then that we should say that akratic agents are in a condition similar to these people [the sleeping, mad and drunk]. (EN VII.3 1147a10–18, emphasis mine)

The akratic agent’s ignorance, like that of those mad, drunk, or asleep, is to be explained by the presence of a body-altering *pathos*, and this is “another way” (ἄλλον τρόπον) of being disposed with regard to knowledge, different from “those just mentioned” (1147a11 f.). People affected by *pathê* do not merely fail to exercise knowledge that is at their disposal, as do those who inadvertently neglect to eat nutritiously because they do not recognize a particular piece of food as being of particular kind; instead, they “both have it in a way and don’t have it” (1147a12 f.). While under the influence of the *pathos* they are literally unable to exercise their knowledge, as Aristotle says in a related passage from the *Physics*:

⁴² Translators often beg the question by making “the incontinent man” the subject at 1147a8 (thus Ross), although in fact there has been no mention of the ἀκρατής within the discussion of ways of knowing at all.

⁴³ Διαφέρουσιν τὴν ἐξίην: possibly “an extreme condition”?

(15) Whenever someone has passed from being drunk (μεθύειν) or asleep or diseased to the opposite state [...] he was earlier [while affected] *incapable of using his knowledge* (ἀδύνατος ἦν τῆ ἐπιστήμῃ χρῆσθαι)[...] [The change back to] using and activity occurs through the alteration of something in the body. (*Ph.* VII.3 247b13–247a6, emphasis mine)⁴⁴

This can serve as a preliminary answer to our interpretative question about the nature of akratic ignorance; I return to the point below.

This reading entails that (contrary to e.g. Dahl 1984, 209) both the young students and the actors mentioned in the next lines (1147a21–23) are brought in only as illustrations of the fact that one can say “words that come from knowledge” without possessing that knowledge, and the one undergoing *akrasia* is like them only in this respect. She speaks in the same way as them insofar as she says something she does not really know, but in her case – like that of the drunkard who recites proofs or verses of Empedocles (1147a20), but unlike that of the students or the actors – the ignorance results from a strong bodily *pathos*.

Next we must face one of the most difficult passages of the chapter, Aristotle’s attempt to explain *akrasia* in terms of the beliefs the agent holds and the way they combine to influence action (1147a24–b5). The passage is very hard to understand on its own terms; there is also a serious *prima facie* obstacle to reconciling it with the illusion account of *akrasia*. I want to show that we can in fact reconcile the two, and also that we can use the illusion account to go some way toward illuminating the passage itself.

Aristotle begins by laying out his theory of the syllogism: when universal and particular premises combine, they yield either assent to a conclusion or an action (1147a25–28).⁴⁵ Then he applies the theory to cases of *akrasia*:

(16) Whenever one universal [belief? proposition? premise?] is present forbidding tasting, and another, that all sweets things are pleasant, and this is sweet, and this [belief/proposition/premise] is active, and appetite happens to be present, then the one [belief/proposition] says to avoid this, but the appetite leads: for it is capable of moving each of the parts.⁴⁶ (1147a31–34)

⁴⁴ Compare also the sleeping geometer often cited in this context (*GA* 735a9–11), who must undergo a bodily change before he can exercise his knowledge.

⁴⁵ Most commentators take it that the former occurs with theoretical syllogisms, the latter with practical, but there are disagreements here, and it will not matter to us to take sides.

⁴⁶ Or “for each of the parts [of soul: rational and non-rational] is capable of moving [the body]” – a less common reading, but one which fits well with the *de An.* III.10 account of *akrasia*.

Most commentators interpret this passage as describing two syllogisms.⁴⁷ The first one is a practical syllogism forbidding tasting. Remaining fairly neutral on the details undetermined by the text, we can represent it as follows (using ‘U’ for universal premise, ‘P’ for particular, and ‘C’ for conclusion):

- (U1) Avoid all F things.
- (P1) This [piece of cake] is F.
- (C1) Avoid this.⁴⁸

(I mean to leave it open for now whether the middle term is ‘sweet’ or something else (e.g. ‘unwholesome’); we will return to this point below).

(16) tells us that the agent reasons that she should avoid the cake, which is to say that her rational faculty generates a rational command, a *logos*, to hold back (compare (3f) above). But there is something else that “happens to be present” in her, an appetite, and as we find out a few lines below, “the appetite is opposed (*ἐναντία*) [...] to the correct *logos*” (1147b2 f.). I will return to the intervening lines shortly. For now we can note that this description is strikingly similar to the picture we saw in *de An.* III.10, where “desires arise that are opposed (*ἐναντία*) to one another, and this happens when *the logos and the appetites are opposed*” (3f). This encourages us to read *EN* VII.3 as employing the same shorthand we found in *de An.* III.9 (passage (2)).⁴⁹ That passage characterized *akrasia* as a conflict between a motivational state on one side and a cognitive one on the other, but the ensuing discussion made clear that on a fuller description it is a conflict between two *pairs* of states: a rational evaluative cognition with its corresponding rational motivation on one side, and a non-rational evaluative cognition (an appearance to *phantasia* of the cake as good) with its corresponding non-rational motivation (an appetite) on the other. (16) (and (17) below), like (2), mention only a rational cognition and a non-rational motivation. Elsewhere in *EN* VII, however, Aristotle mentions the rational motivation that depends on the *logos* forbidding action: he says that the akratic agent acts against her *prohairesis* (see e.g. 1148a9), where a *prohairesis* is a (partly) desidera-

⁴⁷ Kenny 1966 argues for a very different reading on which there is only one syllogism.

⁴⁸ Some, wishing to deny that the agent ever reaches the conclusion of the syllogism forbidding tasting, insist that “Avoid this” must be a universal premise, not a conclusion. But this is so plainly out of keeping with the idea that a universal premise contains no reference to particulars (like ‘this’) that I think we should rule it out.

⁴⁹ For this same strategy see Santas 1969.

tive state.⁵⁰ Thus, *contra* Ross and others, VII.3 does imply the struggle picture: in *akrasia* a rational motivation conflicts with an appetite.

As to how the appetite wins out, this passage says nothing explicit, but a remark Aristotle makes a few lines below strongly suggests that the explanation is the same as on the illusion account. On that account, after the appetite and the rational desire vie against one another for some time the physical alterations involved in the appetitive state impair the agent's rational faculty so that it no longer "contradicts the appearance", i.e. no longer orders her to hold back. But to say that appetite wins out when the agent is intellectually impaired is to say that it wins out when she becomes in some way ignorant. And in keeping with this explanation, after some more comments on the syllogistic explanation to which we will return, Aristotle concludes the discussion with a comment we have already seen: "As to how the ignorance is resolved and the akratic agent becomes a knower again, the same account [holds] as about the drunkard and the sleeper [...]" (13). Commentators have sometimes argued that these lines must be misplaced (see e.g. Irwin), but on our reading they are just where they should be: they serve to remind us that appetite was able to "lead" the agent in (16) only by way of inducing the kind of ignorance we saw it capable of inducing in (14).

This, however, brings us to the serious worry I mentioned above about applying the illusion account to VII.3. The worry concerns the cognition that grounds the agent's appetite. I have argued that in the *de Anima* this cognition is a non-rational one, a *phantasia* of the cake as pleasant and good. But Aristotle's syllogistic explanation in VII.3 does not merely neglect to mention explicitly that the agent's appetite is grounded in *phantasia*; it strongly implies that it is grounded in *rational* cognition instead, in the lines immediately following (16)'s syllogistic account:

(17) Thus it happens that the agent acts akratically in a way by the agency of *logos* and belief (ὑπὸ λόγου πῶς καὶ δόξης ἀκρατεύεσθαι), but not [belief] that is opposed in itself, but only accidentally: for the appetite, but not the belief, is opposed to the correct *logos*. (1147a35-b3)

⁵⁰ *Prohairesis* is described as deliberative or intellectual desire at VI.2 1139a23 (ὄρεξις βουλευτική) and 1139b5 (ὄρεξις διανοητική). In *de An.* III.10–11 the rational motivation is called a wish (βούλησις) rather than a *prohairesis* (there is only one mention of *prohairesis* in the *de Anima*, at 406b25), but the description of wish as desire in accordance with reasoning (3d) applies well to the *EN*'s notion of *prohairesis*. It seems that in the *de Anima* Aristotle uses βούλησις to cover all forms of rational desire, not employing the ethical works' distinction between desire for an end (βούλησις) and desire for something within one's power that contributes to an end (*prohairesis*).

The appetite for the cake is guided by the belief that it is pleasant, and this belief is the product of a piece of full-blown reasoning, the second syllogism mentioned in (16):

- (U2) All sweet things are pleasant.
 (P2) This [the cake] is sweet.
 (C2) This is pleasant.

This may well be formally compatible with the view that the agent acts on *phantasia*: plausibly a belief (that “This is pleasant”) can give rise to an appearance (of the thing as pleasant and good without qualification) and thereby an appetite.⁵¹ But if appetite is dependent on a syllogism and belief, even indirectly dependent, how can it win out by “covering over” intellect? Once intellect is impaired, the worry goes, won’t the agent lose access to the beliefs that guide appetite, in addition to those that sustain her *prohairesis*? If so, then appetite can no longer motivate action, for it will revert to the status of objectless craving.

Before we respond directly to the worry, it is worth noting that (16)–(17)’s characterization of akratic action as dependent on reasoning is in apparent tension not only with the illusion account, but also with common sense and even with Aristotle’s claims later in book VII itself. One might on occasion become aware that some cake is pleasant by beginning with a universal belief about sweet things and going through the steps of a syllogism, but surely this is not the standard case. And Aristotle himself, in a later passage contrasting those who are led to act akratically by appetite with those who are so led by spirit, recognizes that a much simpler form of cognition can do the job:

- (18) Appetite, if *logos* or *perception* (αἴσθησις) only says that something is pleasant, will impel one (ὀρμηῖ) to enjoy it [...]. (VII.6 1149a34–b1, emphasis mine)

(18) tells us that while the akratic agent’s appetite *can* be guided toward an object by *logos*, it can also be guided by mere perception.⁵² This means

⁵¹ Lorenz argues (not with reference to this passage) that this is the basic mechanism of communication between rational and non-rational parts of the soul, communication in virtue of which the non-rational part can “listen to” or “obey” *logos*, as in *EN* I.13. Aristotle “sees intellect and sense as integrated so that all acts of the intellect are accompanied by exercises of the sensory imagination [*phantasia*] in and through which the subject envisages the objects of thought in a sensory mode. As a result, his psychological theory can easily explain how it is that thoughts of, say, prospective pains or pleasures can get a grip on the non-rational part or aspect of a person’s action-producing apparatus” (2006, 118).

⁵² Aristotle must have in mind not only the direct perception of some pleasant quality (e.g. tasting something sweet), but also cases like the one he mentions in *EN* III.10,

that (16) and (17) describe at best one species of akratic action, and (17)'s claim that the agent acts "in a way by the agency of *logos* and belief" picks out at best a contingent feature of *akrasia*; perhaps Aristotle got carried away in those passages by his zeal for the explanatory power of syllogisms. If the illusion account can accommodate cases of the kind described in (16)–(17), therefore, we should not worry too much if it does not emphasize them. And there are, I think, two plausible ways to reconcile (16)–(17) with the illusion account.

The first is to suppose that even if *phantasia* is first alerted to the fact that the cake is pleasant by a belief to that effect, it can continue to apprehend the cake as pleasant – and thus continue to guide appetite toward it – even when the rational faculty is silent and the agent loses her grasp on her beliefs. To use one of Aristotle's metaphors for communications between the rational and non-rational parts of the soul, if a father's off-hand remark that there is cake in the cupboard excites his child, the child can on his own cognitive steam set off to find it after the father has fallen asleep, or passed out drunk.

The second possibility is to suppose that even when intellect is impaired to the extent that it cannot command "Avoid this", it is still able to function in other ways. The worry about (16)–(17) stems from the assumption that on the psychological works' view, we follow *phantasia* against intellect only when intellect is completely disabled by a *pathos*. This may be a natural reading of the *de Anima*'s claim that we act on *phantasia* when intellect is "covered over", but the *de Insomniis* implies a less radical account. Even someone asleep or mad with fever can exercise intellect and reason to some degree: his rational faculty is "held in check or not moving with its proper motion", but not totally inert, as evidenced by the fact that – as the text seems to imply – he still has beliefs and thoughts.⁵³ The account I gave in section 2 of what it is for the

where the sight, sound or smell of food alerts an animal that pleasure is near. (On the account he gives in the psychological works this will probably involve *phantasia*, but he does not mention that here, and indeed contrasts such perception with *phantasia* in the lines preceding (19)).

⁵³ On a plausible reading of the *de Insomniis*, Aristotle holds that even while we are being taken in by dreams we can still have thoughts (see 458b15–26, 462a28 f.) and beliefs (see e.g. (9) above: δόξα, when held in check, is not utterly inert but rather "follows the *phantasmata*"; the same point is made at 461b6–8). None of these passages provide indisputable evidence that the rational faculty is active even when "held in check", however. For doubts about the strictness of Aristotle's use of δόξα and δοκεῖν in the *de Insomniis*, see the discussion in section 2 above. As to the thoughts we have when dreaming, what Aristotle says is that "when we are sleeping we sometimes think other things (ἄλλὰ) παρὰ the appearances" (458b18 f.;

rational faculty to be “held in check” gives us a non-arbitrary way to demarcate these intellectual abilities and disabilities. Aristotle is interested, both in the *de Insomniis* and in VII.3, in a kind of intellectual impairment that is drastic but nonetheless localized.⁵⁴ When affected by the *pathos* intellect cannot perform its crucial function of noticing and contradicting false appearances, but it may be able to perform other functions. Thus the agent’s appetite, in “covering over” intellect, can leave intact her belief that “This is sweet,” and even her belief that “Everything sweet is pleasant”; what it knocks out is her ability to recognize that “This appears to be good but is not”. (I will consider which element of the syllogism this corresponds to below).

We might even suppose that the effect on intellect is so localized as to be surgical: the *pathos* knocks out the agent’s awareness that the cake is bad but leaves everything else intact. On this interpretation, even when in the grips of passion our agent is aware of the difference between how things appear and how they really are in general (she will, for instance, reach for the cake on the counter instead of its reflection in the mirror); all she loses is her ability to notice and contradict one crucial false appearance, the appearance of the cake as good. This may be a more philosophically plausible picture than the one I have suggested; I do not, however, see any principled way to extract it from the psychological works’ characterization of *pathos*-induced ignorance. What physiological fact could explain so specific an effect?

A final note on this subject: while there is certainly no explicit claim in *EN* VII that the akratic agent’s appetite is grounded in a *phantasia* of the cake as pleasant and good, there are two mentions of *phantasia* that fit well with that account. The first of these immediately follows the claim that in *akrasia* an appetite is opposed to a *logos*:

cf. 462a28 f. which also uses παρά). I have (following Gallop 1991, 138) taken him to mean that we sometimes think about other things, “over and above” the dreams. We might, however (following Modrak 1987, 101), translate παρά as “contrary to”, in which case Aristotle has in mind thoughts like “I’m asleep right now, and this is just a dream” – in other words, the thoughts that constitute the noticing and contradicting of false appearances; if this is right, then these passages provide no evidence that intellect can be active even when “held in check”. I find Gallop’s reading more natural, especially given the emphasis on what is thought being something “other” than the appearances (ἀλλά, 458b18), but this is inconclusive. (The passage on mnemonics in dreams (458b18–25) might settle the point in Gallop’s favor, if only we knew how to interpret it, but I do not).

⁵⁴ Charles 2009 argues that it is important that VII.3 compares akratic agents to those who are οἰνωμένοι, “tipsy-drunk,” rather than μεθύοντες, “dead-drunk,” unable to think at all.

(19) Beasts are not akratic, because they have no universal supposition, but only *phantasia* and memory of particulars. (1147b3–5).

Beasts lack the rational faculties that yield universal knowledge, so in their case acting on (an appetite for what appears good to) *phantasia* cannot be acting as their knowledge would forbid if it were active. We do not fault dogs for pursuing the present pleasure any more than we fault them for barking at their own reflections: where *phantasia* is the highest form of cognition, there can be no blame for following its lead.⁵⁵

The second is an otherwise puzzling remark in *EN* VII.7. Here Aristotle is distinguishing weak akratic agents, who deliberate but then act against their decisions, from impetuous ones, who “are led by the *pathos* on account of not having deliberated”: the latter, he says, “don’t wait for the *logos*, because they tend to follow the *phantasia*” (1150b27 f.). Our account makes sense of the remark: the impetuous akratic agent goes with his *phantasia*-based desire, i.e. appetite, without ever going through the *logos* that would oppose it. The weak one, by contrast, follows a *phantasia*-based desire in opposition to a *logos*-based one.

In sum, *EN* VII.3’s syllogistic account of *akrasia* is in obvious tension with the illusion account’s focus on *phantasia* as the cognition that grounds appetite, but I have tried to show that this plausibly represents a difference of emphasis rather than a substantial change of view.

We are nearing the end of VII.3, but the last lines are among the most disputed. Giving an interpretation of them will mean addressing head-on one of the main points of interpretative dispute that I mentioned in the introduction: what is the proper object of akratic ignorance? When appetite impairs intellect, does the agent lose her grasp on (P1), the minor premise of the syllogism that forbids tasting, or does she retain her grasp on that premise but lose her grasp of (C1), the conclusion? That is, what is “the last *protasis*” in the following lines?:

(20) Since the last *protasis* [premise or proposition] is a belief about something perceptible, and is decisive (*κυρία*) for actions, it is this that the one undergoing the *pathos* either does not have or “has” in the way that we saw is not [really] having knowledge but [merely] speaking, like the drunk with the verses of Empedocles. (*EN* VII.3 1147b9–12)

⁵⁵ Compare (3f): *logos* and appetites can be opposed only “in those who have perception of time [...]” – i.e. in rational creatures (see Hicks’ note *ad loc.*). (19) is often taken to concern the role of rational cognition in generating the “bad” syllogism; but given (18) (akratic appetites can depend on perception alone), this would be very misleading.

The first thing to be said is that our account of the chapter renders this question much less pressing than it would otherwise be. The most common reading of the passage takes ‘last *protasis*’ to refer to the minor premise, and makes this very significant by in effect taking the passage as confirmation that the “dry food” syllogism discussed above is a paradigm of akratic reasoning: the agent never notices that the cake falls into the category of things forbidden by the major premise, and thus never reaches the conclusion “Avoid this”. I have argued, however – as have all those who want to make VII.3 compatible with some version of the struggle picture of *akrasia* – that at some stage before her action the agent grasps both premises of the syllogism forbidding tasting, and thus reaches the conclusion; it is only after this that her ignorance sets in. (More precisely, this is what occurs in the cases Aristotle later calls “weak” *akrasia*, in which “people who have deliberated do not stick with the results of their deliberation on account of the *pathos*”; impetuous akratic agents “are led by the *pathos* on account of not having deliberated” (VII.7 1150b19–22), and thus, it would seem, never undergo struggle. As many have pointed out, if the standard version of the minor-premise reading is correct – if *akrasia* is to be understood on the model of the dry food syllogism – all *akrasia* reduces to the impetuous kind). This view is in principle compatible with either reading of (20): perhaps under the influence of appetite the agent loses her grip on the minor premise, and thereby also on the conclusion which depends on it, or perhaps the appetite leaves the minor premise intact and robs her only of the conclusion. So long as she has earlier grasped both, we can account for her having undergone struggle before appetite won out.

One would still like to know which account Aristotle has in mind, and while our interpretation does not rule decisively in either direction it does put important constraints on the answer. First, the knowledge she lacks must be the product of, and dependent on, the proper functioning of her rational faculty. This follows from the picture of *akrasia* as a conflict between *phantasia* on one side and intellect on the other (see (3f) and (8)). Second, more specifically, the knowledge she lacks must be the product of, and dependent on, her rational faculty’s capacity to notice the falsity of the appearance on which she acts – the appearance of the cake as pleasant and good without qualification, i.e. as to-be-gone-for. This follows from the characterization of being taken in by perceptual illusions in (10) and (11) (and cf. (7)): she acts as she does because she is temporarily unaware of something analogous to “The sun is in fact larger than the inhabited portion of the earth”, or “Those things on the wall are really just lines”.

The reading on which ‘last *protasis*’ refers to the conclusion meets both constraints very naturally. “This is to-be-avoided” is a direct contradiction of “This is to-be-gone-for”, and as the conclusion of a piece of reasoning (syllogizing), it is produced by and depends on that reasoning.

What about the much more common reading, on which the agent lacks the minor premise? As to the first constraint – that the knowledge she loses be dependent on the proper functioning of her intellect – things might look bad, for on the standard interpretation the minor premise is the province not of reasoning but rather of perception. Perception is a close cousin of *phantasia*, and both are activities of what is in some sense the same faculty of the soul, the perceptual faculty (*Insomn.* 459a15). If grasping (P1) simply amounts to being aware of some perceptible fact (e.g. “This is sweet” or “This is cake”), then the minor premise reading construes *akrasia* as a conflict between contradictory perceptions rather than, as the illusion account has it, a conflict between a perceptual cognition (*phantasia*) on one side and a rational cognition on the other. (Furthermore, this reading offers no explanation of why the *pathos* knocks out one perception while leaving the other intact).

There is, however, a version of the minor premise reading on which it meets the constraint. In several passages Aristotle describes *phronêsis* (the excellent condition of practical intellect) as a quasi-perceptual capacity primarily concerned with particulars (VI.8 1142a23–30, VI.11 1143a25–b5). McDowell and Wiggins have applied these claims to VII.3’s analysis of *akrasia*, arguing that the agent’s grasp of the minor premise – or more precisely her “selection [of it] as minor premise: as what matters about the situation”⁵⁶ – is itself an exercise of practical intellect. If this is right then the “covering over” of intellect will after all entail the loss of the minor premise.⁵⁷

As to the second constraint – that the missing piece of knowledge be an exercise of the rational faculty’s capacity for contradicting false appearances – the commonest version of the minor premise reading, on which (P1) is “This is sweet”, clearly fails to meet it: there is no conflict at all between the belief that the cake is sweet and the appearance of it as

⁵⁶ McDowell 1998, 29; cf. Wiggins 1975.

⁵⁷ There are other readings which make the grasp of the minor premise intellectual. Greenwood argues that recognizing something as belonging to a certain class (e.g. recognizing some cake as falling into the category of unhealthy things) must be an act of intellect (1909, 55). Destree gives an account on which (P1) is grasped by rational or calculative (λογιστική) *phantasia* (2007, 152–4). This would fit our constraint, but I do not think it is right: as I understand Aristotle’s brief description of calculative *phantasia* (*de An.* III.11 434a7–10), what it yields are *prohairesis* about what to do – conclusions, rather than particular premises, of practical syllogisms.

good. Here too, however, there is a version of the minor premise reading which may work, one in fact presupposed by the intellectualist reading above. We might take it that (U1) (the universal forbidding tasting) is not “Avoid sweets”, but instead something like “Avoid excessive numbers of sweets” or “Avoid unwholesome foods” – that is, that the middle term of the syllogism is evaluative or prescriptive in nature – and thus that (P1) is something like “This is one too many”, or “This is unwholesome”.⁵⁸ If this is right, then (P1) is arguably a contradiction of the appearance on which the agent acts. To recognize something as unwholesome or excessive is precisely to notice qualifications about it that render it *not* pleasant and good “without qualification”.

This version of the minor premise reading has its supporters on other grounds, and is perhaps a philosophically attractive view of *akrasia*. It is worth noting, however, that it is a particularly hard fit with the text of VII.3: it would be strange for Aristotle, having spelled out both premises of the second syllogism, never to name the crucial middle term of the first, nor to draw any attention to the fact that it must be something different from ‘sweet’. Insofar as our account makes this the only viable version of the minor premise reading, therefore, it may count in favor of rejecting the minor premise reading altogether.

Both the minor premise reading and the conclusion reading struggle with the lines that follow, and the illusion account gives us little help here:

(21) And since the last term (*ἄρον*) seems to be neither universal nor scientific (*ἐπιστημονικόν*) in the same way as the universal, what Socrates sought also seems to happen. For it is not what seems to be knowledge in the strict sense that is present (*παρούσης*) when the *pathos* occurs, nor is this dragged around on account of the *pathos*, but instead the perceptual kind [of knowledge]. (1147b12–18)

These lines seem to say that what the agent lacks is knowledge of the universal premise forbidding tasting. This is formally compatible with the conclusion reading: if one loses one’s grasp of (U1) there is no syllogism, and so one loses one’s grasp of (C1) as well. It also fits the constraints we derived from the illusion account: “Avoid all sweets” or “Avoid all unwholesome foods” plausibly contradicts the appearance of the cake as to-be-gone-for, and, being a universal claim, it is clearly a product of intellect. On the other hand, this reading is a bad fit with the preceding lines (20), in which we are told that the knowledge the agent lacks is knowledge of something perceptible – with the strong implication that this is the *only* knowledge she lacks, not that she lacks it as a consequence of lacking

⁵⁸ For variations on this reading see Aquinas’ commentary and Grant’s.

universal knowledge – and thus most interpreters reject the implication that the agent lacks knowledge of the universal premise, often resorting to *ad hoc* emendation of the text.⁵⁹ If we do take (21) at face value it lends support to the conclusion reading and counts strongly against the minor premise reading; I can, however, see no argument based on the illusion account for choosing this reading over the straightforward reading of (20).

In sum, the illusion account rules out the standard versions of the reading on which *akrasia* involves ignorance of the minor premise, leaving admissible some philosophically intriguing but textually thin interpretations. It fits very well with the reading on which it involves ignorance of the conclusion. I will not claim, however, that these arguments are decisive.

As to the nature of the agent's ignorance, our account has yielded a much firmer answer. She is at the time of action literally unable to access the knowledge that would prevent tasting. She does not merely fail to combine it with other propositions (Joachim; Irwin), nor does she merely fail to use her knowledge in the sense that she fails to act on it (Broadie), nor is her lacking it a matter of her having failed to integrate it fully with her character or with her conception of the good life (Dahl; McDowell; Wiggins). And certainly she does not merely fail to use it the way that an absent-minded person might fail to notice that the piece of cake she is about to eat is her third. Instead, she is literally prevented by her physical condition from exercising some knowledge that was recently at her disposal. That is why Aristotle compares her not simply to those who have knowledge but fail to use it, but instead to those who, like the madman, sleeper, and drunkard “both have it in a way and don't have it”,

⁵⁹ Supporters of the minor premise reading often follow Stewart's proposal, reading περιγίνεται for παρούσης γίνεται in 1147b16, to yield “It is not in what seems to be knowledge in the strict sense that the *pathos* overcomes [...] but the perceptual kind”. Kenny 1966, and Charles 2009 offer plausible readings of the unemended text in support of the conclusion reading: *akrasia* does not occur in the “immediate presence” (παρούσης) of the universal knowledge (Charles), or “it is not the mental utterance of the major premiss” which gives rise to the appetite (Kenny); instead, trouble sets in when one comes to the level of the particular. A version of this strategy should be available to supporters of the minor premise reading as well: *akrasia* occurs not when we are merely contemplating universal truths, but rather when we are faced with the task of applying such truths to tasty particulars. For an extended defense of the face-value reading of (21), the view that the akratic lacks knowledge of the universal (that is, fails to actualize her universal knowledge by applying it to the relevant particular), see Pickavé/Whiting 2008.

and that is why he says we must go to the φυσιολόγοι to discover how her ignorance is resolved.⁶⁰

This interpretation leaves Aristotle vulnerable to an objection which has often been leveled against his account of *akrasia*: surely not every instance of acting against one's knowledge of what is best involves a strong passion, let alone any bodily affect. The present suggestion makes the complaint even sharper: surely not every instance of failing to act on one's rational judgement about what is best involves a passion so strong that it shuts down one's ability to think. To this I reply simply that while there may be cases of "clear-eyed" irrational action, they are not among those Aristotle is concerned to explain under the rubric of *akrasia*. As the passage on drunkards, madmen and sleepers so strongly suggests, the Aristotelian akratic has little in common with Austin's cool bombe-hogger, let alone Davidson's bedtime tooth-brusher:⁶¹ she is someone in the grip of strong passion. The account I have developed here indicates that it is a mistake to expect Aristotle's account of *akrasia* to apply even in an extended way to cases that do not involve powerful passions. This might arguably be a defect of Aristotle's account of *akrasia*, but it is not a quirk of our interpretation.

Thus Aristotle's akratic agent is closer to Socrates' than many have thought. She is far from "clear-eyed": her intellect, the eye of her soul, is not merely clouded but actually covered over. In the grips of the *pathos* she loses the ability to distinguish how things appear from how they are, and – what amounts, on our account, to the same thing – to distinguish what is good for her from what is presently pleasant.

⁶⁰ For this reading see also Charles 1984; Pickavé/Whiting 2008; Lorenz 2006, 197. It gains support not only from the *Physics* passage cited above (15), but also from a passage from the *EN*'s discussion of temperance: "if the appetites are large and intense they even drive out (ἐκκρούουσιν) reasoning" (III.12 1119b10; cf. *EE* II.8 1224b24). It is worth noting too that there is strong precedent for this view in Plato. See *Timaeus* 86b–c (when undergoing intense pleasures, pains, or appetites a person "is incapable of seeing or hearing anything right. He goes raving mad, and is at the moment least capable of reasoning"), and especially *Laws* 645d–e and 649d–e, a discussion to which Aristotle is surely indebted in *EN* VII.3: strong passions, just like excessive wine, make all forms of cognition "abandon" us (ἀπολείπει, *Laws* 645e2). If I am right then Aristotle's view is of modification of Plato's in the *Timaeus* and *Laws*: passion drives out reasoning, but leaves perception and *phantasia* operative.

⁶¹ Austin 1961, 146; Davidson 1970.

5. *Ignorance and struggle revisited*

We began with two questions about the relation between *EN VII.3*'s account of *akrasia* and the struggle picture that we find elsewhere in the corpus. Why, given his resources in the struggle picture for a common-sense account on which non-rational appetite overpowers rational motivation and leads us to do what we know full well is wrong, would Aristotle want to make the radical Socratic claim that *akrasia* must in some way involve ignorance? And is the ignorance account a stark rejection of the struggle account, as it has seemed to many, or is there some way to reconcile the two? I have tried to answer these questions by fleshing out an account of *akrasia* implicit in the psychological works and applying this account to the interpretation of *EN VII.3*.

First, because Aristotle construes motivational conflict as involving a variety of perceptual illusion, and because he holds the plausible view that no one who recognizes an appearance as illusory will let it guide her behavior, he has strong reason to deny that one can act on an appetite in direct defiance of a rational desire. If *akrasia* involves a choice between what quasi-perceptually appears good and what reason declares to be good in direct opposition to that appearance, then a clear-eyed akratic will be no more possible than a clear-eyed swatter of illusory animals. (One might object that because the illusions involved in *akrasia* are evaluative ones, and so necessarily have motivational force, here, unlike in ordinary perceptual illusion cases, it becomes possible for appearances to overpower knowledge in a battle of brute strength. Perhaps Aristotle overlooked this possibility, or perhaps he had reasons to reject it; in any case on the interpretation I have argued for he has substantive and compelling reasons, if not decisive ones, to hold that *akrasia* must involve temporary ignorance).

Second, the account of *akrasia* as ignorance is not merely compatible with the more straightforward account of *akrasia* as the victory of non-rational over rational desire, but forms a crucial part of that account. Appetite wins out over rational desire precisely by knocking out the rational cognition on which that desire depends – by rendering the agent temporarily ignorant of the fact that her action is bad.⁶²

⁶² An early version of this paper was read at the workshop on *Nicomachean Ethics VII.3* organized by M. Pickavé and J. Whiting at the University of Toronto in May, 2006. I benefited enormously from the workshop: I owe special debts to D. Charles, H. Lorenz, J. Muller, M. Pickavé, J. Whiting, and C. Young. For extremely helpful comments and discussion on later versions, I am grateful to U. Coope, C. Dorr, T. Irwin, K. Setiya, and W. Mann and the other editors and referees of this journal.

<i>de An.</i>	= <i>de Anima</i>
<i>Div. Somm.</i>	= <i>de Divinatione per Somnum</i>
<i>GA</i>	= <i>de Generatione Animalium</i>
<i>Mem.</i>	= <i>de Memoria</i>
<i>MA</i>	= <i>de Motu Animalium</i>
<i>Insomm.</i>	= <i>de Insomniis</i>
<i>EE</i>	= <i>Eudemian Ethics</i>
<i>EN</i>	= <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
<i>Ph.</i>	= <i>Physics</i>
<i>Rh.</i>	= <i>Rhetoric</i>

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