



REZENSIONEN

Carlo Natali (ed.): *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics, Book VII. Symposium Aristotelicum*.
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1. Introduction

In July 2005 the Symposium Aristotelicum met on a secluded island in the Venetian lagoon to discuss Book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*NE*). Ten papers were presented that together comprised a discursive and sequential commentary upon its fourteen chapters. (Authors other than those whom I shall mention by name below are Sarah Broadie and Teun Tieleman.) Carlo Natali recalls “lively and intense discussion” among the thirty or so participants through “torrid weather” that defeated even the air conditioning of an officers’ mess. Less privileged Aristotelians may exclaim “O that we were there!”; but perusing the resulting collection in one’s own time (and not in a heat wave) will be found a richly compensatory experience.

The contributors largely keep to their assignments, though there are inevitably cross-references (and John Cooper enlivens his exemplary treatment of VII.1–2 by devoting a barbed footnote, 23, n. 33, to a crux in VII.3). Readers of the Greek text of the *NE* will know that there are two different numberings of chapters within books, one most familiar from Bekker, the other from Bywater. (Susemihl and Bywater print both.) This collection uses Bywater’s numbering in appearance (in its chapter-titles if not in all its texts), but Bekker’s in substance. Thus Gwenaëlle Aubry is assigned Bywater’s VII.14 minus §§ 1–2, which comprises Bekker’s VII.15. In this case, the policy is a pity: those two sections turn out more important to her than to Christof Rapp, who is given them in addition to Bywater’s VII.13. Otherwise, the differences are insignificant. There is an invaluable *index locorum* (which inevitably inherits occasional slips by contributors). It is unimportant, though slightly odd in effect, that no uniform policy has been imposed in respect of Greek script *versus* transliteration.

The general level of the contributions is very high, and they are almost all worthy of the company they keep. Readers may be especially grateful for careful explorations of relatively neglected chapters, often with no axe to grind – I think especially of Chris Bobonich on VII.7, and Rapp and Aubry on VII.13–14. It is salutary to be reminded how much of Book VII has only been scrutinized by writers of commentaries.

Though the editorial policy of keeping to a sequential commentary is doubtless justified, it would have been interesting to have had a summative chapter considering the placing of *NE* VII within the *NE* or *Eudemian Ethics* (*EE*), in the light both of earlier work (stylometric and other) and of observations made here. I think it true to say that (outside Hendrik Lorenz’s treatment of VII.4, which is a special case) the latter most often, but not always, suggest reconceiving *NE* VII as *EE* VI – despite a frequency of references that, as always, privileges the *NE*. Yet for most of the contributors this issue is recurrent but not focal.





A reviewer faces an *embarras de richesse* that is preferable to the opposite embarrassment. Two papers stand out in that they argue for strikingly controversial theses: those of David Charles and Lorenz. For that reason – and also, no doubt, because I am not persuaded – I shall focus primarily upon them, after touching on a selection of other things of interest. I shall start with VII.11–14 on pleasure, turn to points arising within VII.5–10, and end by more fully discussing first Lorenz on VII.4, and finally Charles on VII.3.

2. *Pleasure*

Famously, we read in VII.12, in correction of the *Philebus*, “It is not right to say that pleasure is perceptible process, but it should rather be called activity of the natural state, and instead of ‘perceptible’ ‘unimpeded’” (1153a13–15, tr. Ross; cf. VII.13, 1153b9–12). It is extraordinary, to us, that this seminal and salient thought should be thrown out, with minimal explication, in the course of a defensive response to arguments against hedonism that, to us now, are of lesser interest. Dorothea Frede finds parallels to this polemical pre-occupation only in the attack upon Plato’s Theory of Forms in *NE* I.6 (and, of course, *EE* I.8). She finds this to be very different from the respectful, if not uncritical, treatment of *phenomena* and *endoxa* in VII.1–2. She wonders whether “the discussion of the anti-hedonist arguments may originally have been a separate treatise that Aristotle appended at a fairly late stage to the rest of book VII” (185). It does too little to illumine positively how he relates pleasure to the virtues.

In discussion of Aristotle’s cryptic definition Frede differs in focus from Rapp: she is critical of its psychological adequacy, whereas he is sceptical of any substantive divergence from *NE* X.4. Which need not constitute a disagreement.

Aristotle counters Plato’s analysis of pleasure by the claim that, while processes of restoration may indeed cause pleasure, they are only incidentally pleasant themselves: the *real* pleasure is an activity of a part that has remained unimpaired (VII.12, 1152b34–36; VII.14, 1154b17–20). Frede rightly finds this problematic (195f.). For instance, if we owe the pleasures of illness to some part that has remained healthy, we might expect to enjoy the same things whether we are ill or well. We need an explanation of how the presence of illness affects healthy functioning that is distinct from, and yet of a piece with, the process of recovery.

What of the pleasures of virtuous activity? Frede felicitously distinguishes *adverbial* from *adjectival* pleasure. When I take a praline that it is good for me to take, I have a double pleasure, enjoying both how it tastes (adjectival), and tasting temperately (adverbial). Frede questions (201) whether this involves two activities or “only different aspects of one and the same activity”, and concedes (201, n. 65) that the first may be the case. (This is also Aubry’s view, 253f.) That the adverbial comes apart from the adjectival is clear in the case of courage: the man who lays down his life nobly in battle can be said to be pleasantly active only in respect of achieving an ethical end (III.11, 1117b7–16). As Frede notes (202f.), the case is complex: he in fact suffers *two* pains, that of a spear through the midriff (or whatever), and that of the prospect of premature death. “What”, she asks, “is natural and unimpeded about acts of courage?” Aristotle’s answer is unclear in *NE* VII.11–14 (and will become no clearer in *NE* X.1–5). Yet she suggests (205) that must surely be the right answer, which is that the impediment attaches to the action concretely or contextually described. *As an instance of acting bravely*, it contains its end right from the beginning, even if it is “thwarted by some unforeseeable impediment”, and





even if the result is regrettable from other points of view (some of which may themselves be ethical).

Christof Rapp attends to a question that Frede (184, n. 3) had to set aside: how does *NE VII*'s conception of pleasure as unimpeded activity relate to *NE X*.4's conception of pleasure as a supervenient perfection that completes activity? The answer is not obvious. Rapp (221 f.) is one of those who play down the difference: "It is only a small step from saying that the unimpededness of the activity is rewarded or perfected by pleasure (as in the *NE X* account) to saying that this unimpeded activity is pleasure *qua* being unimpeded (as in the *NE VII* account)." As he notes (222, n. 36), we should not, within either account, conceive of pleasure as "a second activity which exists over the above the activity it completes". One might support this approach by noting that *NE VII* can have no ambition to achieve an adequate analysis of the nature of pleasure – as is evidenced at once by the simplicity of its formulation and the bareness of its presentation. Aristotle could not have anticipated the refinements of *NE X* without complicating his task – which, as Frede notes (184 f.), he (or his editor) takes to be accomplished (VII.14, 1154b32–34). If this is right, to *oppose* the skeleton of an analysis in *NE VII* to the fleshing-out in *NE X* would be a mistake.

Let the last word here go to Gwenaëlle Aubry, who lends French senses to a number of abstract terms and yet expresses perceptive ideas with felicity (and offers the only modern literary allusion in the volume, though not – for the French – an abstruse one). She notes that VII.14 ends negatively, in a way: "Here, human nature is the object of a kind of ontological condemnation" (262). And yet the divine aspect of a man makes him capable of "a pleasure which, although it is rare, nevertheless removes him, in dazzling intermit- tencies, from his duality" (263).



3. *A Few Points about Acrasia*



One of the most densely difficult passages in *NE VII* comes in chapter 10 (1152a13–17). It states that the *prohairesis* of the acratice agent is good, and that he acts voluntarily, though not wickedly. What here does *prohairesis* signify? Should we think of III.2, 1111b26–28 (where *prohairesis* is of a means), or of VI.12, 1144a20 (where it is of an end)? How does he know, yet only "in a way", what he is doing and for what end? And how does the imperfection of his knowledge bear on the voluntariness of his action? Possibly no real help could have been given without trespassing into VII.3; none to count is given here. In compensation, the acratice agent is characterized as a man "who always allows desire to prevail" (175). This is certainly more demanding than Aristotle (who talks weakly of a below-average mastery of appetites, VII.7, 1150a11–13; VII.10, 1152a25–27), and expands the range of human possibilities.

It falls to Carlo Natali to survey the perversions of VII.5, and the contrasts of VII.6. Perhaps he does not have things perfectly in focus in the less *outré* case of "love affairs between men" (VII.5, 1148b29). He suspects those who prefer the textual reading "abused from childhood" to "habituated from childhood" (b30 f.) of "some trace of nineteenth-century homophobia" (110). He is surely right that Aristotle is not targeting Greek pederasty. I take him to be thinking of sexual inversion. He may be supposing that one cause of this is being subjected to the wrong kind of intercourse (anal rather than respectfully intercrural) at a young age (cf. the end of *Problemata* IV.26).

More illuminating is Aristotle's treatment of anger and appetite in VII.6, notably in 1049a25–b3. Here several significant details are unclear, though it is clear enough that he





is making a distinction between their characteristic workings that is both perceptive and significant (one that may derive from *Republic IV*). He supposes that anger responds to some rational judgement, though in an irrational manner, whereas appetite merely leaps at an opportunity. Natali initially takes it (117) that reason judges “One must fight every offence”, and that the acratia’s failure is just “that of not giving time to thought to do its job”, viz. of calculating the best way of retaliating. That is improbably what Aristotle has in mind, for two reasons: first, the universal principle is insane; secondly, it misses the analogy with servants who *mishear* (*parakouein*, 1149a26) an instruction. Happily, Natali later implies something different (125): he notes that reason may draw no conclusion from “One must avenge every offence” and “This is an offence” *because other considerations interfere*. This implicitly rewrites the universal principle as holding only for the most part – in which case it is still implausible, but not insane.¹ I take this to suggest a satisfactory scenario: reason states a principle with a qualification that anger disregards. This may fit Aristotle’s text, his moral psychology, and common sense.

4. Lorenz on VII.4

J. Cook Wilson argued minutely that VII.4 contains two versions of a distinction between qualified and plain acrasia, of which the second was intended to supersede the first.² Hendrik Lorenz is persuaded of this, as others have been before him. He calls these Versions A and B: A extends from 1147b23 to 1148a13, B from 1148a22 to b14. Original to Lorenz is a claim that differences of substance between A and B have the effect that A fits better with the *EE*, B with the *NE*. As a developmental thesis, this is at once elegant and audacious. Lorenz advances it with an admirable lucidity.

The main issue arising is the scope of the subject-matter of plain acrasia, which Aristotle identifies with that of temperance and self-indulgence (1147b26–28; 1148b11f.). He centrally conceives of this as taking in pleasures of taste and especially touch that we share with the lower animals. This was spelled out clearly in the *NE*. Pains too enter in, but in a secondary way. We read that temperance is also concerned with pains, but “less and not in the same manner” (III.10, 1117b26; cf. the corrupt II.7, 1107b5). This appears to be in two derivative ways, of which the second depends upon memory: appetite is generally accompanied by pain (III.11, 1119a4), presumably such as that of feeling hunger or thirst; and further pain can attach to the conscious frustration of an appetite over an appreciable period of time (II.3, 1104b6f.; III.11, 1118b30–32; 1119a14).

It is then surprising that, within the first half of VII.4, plain acrasia and self-indulgence are associated not only with pursuing “the excesses of things pleasant”, but with shunning “those of things painful, of hunger and thirst and heat and cold” (1148a6–8). (Which is loosely written, but *may* mean pursuing pleasures to excess, and *must* mean avoiding pains to excess.) Aristotle infers, “We group together the acratia and the self-indulgent, the encratia [i.e., self-controlled] and the temperate man [...] because they are concerned somehow [i.e., either by, or not by, choice] with the same pleasures and pains” (a13–15).

¹ However, “One must fight against such” (1149a33f.), where “against” renders the Greek dative, should rather mean *such a person* than *such an offence*. (In English, similarly, one “fights with” the provoker, not the provocation.)

² J. Cook Wilson, *Aristotelian Studies I: On the Structure of the Seventh Book of the Nicomachean Ethics. Chapters I–X*, Oxford 1879, §§ 6–9.





By apparent contrast, when he writes at the end of VII.4, “That alone must be taken to be acrasia and encrasia which is concerned with the same objects as temperance and self-indulgence” (b11f.), this comes after a discrimination only between different kinds of *pleasure*.

What of the *EE*? In its initial table of virtues and vices (II.3, 1220b38–1221a12), temperance and self-indulgence belong to a different triad from endurance and delicacy (*truphê*). The self-indulgent man “desires what he should not and goes to excess in every possible way” (a19–21), whereas the delicate man “can stand no pain at all, even when it would be better if he did” (a28f.).³ III.2 is arguably less clear. Self-indulgence relates to “certain pleasures, and pains” (*peri hêdonas tinas kai lupas*, 1230b9f.); objects of taste and touch are also perceived by other animals, “both with pleasure and with pain” (*chaironta kai lupoumena*, b36–38). Thus b9f. is wholly unspecific, though the pairing of *lupein* with *chairêin* (literally, “be glad”) at b37f. perhaps indicates not pleasant or painful sensations, but enjoyments and frustrations. More informative, and certainly in line with the *NE*, is 1231a29–32: “All naturally take delight (*chairousi*) in these things and conceive appetite for them, and they neither are nor are called self-indulgent (for they exceed neither in being delighted when they get them, or being pained when they miss them).” It is true that examples of what fall *outside* the sphere of temperance include the pains of seeing what is ugly, hearing what is inharmonious, and smelling what is malodorous (1230b27–29); but this leaves open what pains fall *inside* its sphere. There is no mention of the unpleasant sensations of hunger, thirst, heat, and cold to anticipate *NE* VII.4, 1148a8.

Cook Wilson inferred that Version A of *NE* VII.4 contrasts as much with *EE* III.2 as with *NE* III.10–12.⁴ While the *EE* is too unspecific to make this certain, Lorenz says nothing, to my mind, to make it unlikely. What of the rest of *NE* VII? While Version B focuses upon pleasures and says nothing about pains, it would be rash to argue from silence that it implies that no pains are pertinent to temperance other than those specified in *NE* III.10–11. VII.7 opens by taking an apparently wide view of the spheres of temperance and self-indulgence, while distinguishing endurance (*karteria*) from encrasia, and softness (*malakia*) from acrasia:

With regard to the pleasures and pains and appetites and aversions arising through touch and taste, to which both self-indulgence and temperance were formerly narrowed down, it is possible to be in such a state as to be defeated even by those of them which most people master, or to master even those by which most people are defeated; among these possibilities, those relating to pleasures are encrasia and acrasia, those relating to pains softness and endurance (1150a9–15).

Both Ross and Gauthier/Jolif relate the allusion to *NE* III.10, but that said nothing about aversions from things unpleasant. It might instead relate to *EE* III.2, though that is inexplicit (cf. 1230b9f.), and, if read so, conflicts with *EE* II.3. Possibly the reference is to nowhere else than VII.4 itself – and then one might delete it as a clumsy insertion intended by an editor to connect VII.7 to VII.4.

Later in VII.7, there is a pairing of “appetites and pains” (1150a18), presumably because pain typically accompanies appetite. The man who pursues pleasant things to excess out of choice, and for their own sake, is called self-indulgent (a19–21). We then read,

³ This agrees well with what is said about delicacy and softness at *NE* VII.7, 1150b1–5.

⁴ Cook Wilson 1879, §§ 39, 57.





“Similarly, there is the man who avoids bodily pains not because he is defeated by them but by choice” (a23–25, on which see Bobonich, 140f.). In the context set by the opening of the chapter (unless we delete a10f.), this is naturally taken also to instance self-indulgence. However, it is later suggested that excess in avoiding pains relates to excess in pursuing pleasures as “a kind of softness” to self-indulgence (a31 f.). Among those who do not act on choice, those who are led by the prospect of pleasure are then distinguished from those led by “the pain arising from the appetite” (a25–27). Presumably these are both acratia agents. The distinction between encrasia and endurance is further explained, and the first ranked above the second:

While to the acratia man is opposed the encratic, to the soft is opposed the man of endurance; for endurance consists in resisting, while encrasia consists in conquering, and resisting and conquering are different, as not being beaten is different from winning; this is why encrasia ranks higher than endurance (a32–b1, which apparently correct a11–15 in ascribing *kratein* to encrasia, but only *antechein* to endurance).

Then the pain that Philoctetes felt when bitten by a snake is apparently counted as *being of a kind* with pains that, if too intense, it is a mark of acrasia not to resist (b5–9). Finally, the lover of amusement is said to be appear to be self-indulgent but really to be soft, since amusement is pursued as a relief from work (b16–18), i.e. rather in order to avoid pain than to achieve pleasure.

Detailing Aristotle’s tergiversations doubtless becomes tedious. The upshot is anything but *übersichtlich*; for where Lorenz is clearcut, Aristotle is vacillating. In short, VII.7 (as we have it) is rather ruminative than definitive. It shows tendencies to extend the spheres of temperance/self-indulgence and of plain encrasia/acrasia from pleasant to painful sensations – and also tendencies to extend one or the other of them, or neither. By contrast, the *NE* associates softness with cowardice (III.7, 1116a14), and enduring pains with courage (III.9, 1117a32–35; III.11, 1118b28f.). The *EE* distinguishes cowardice in the face of death from softness in the face of heat and cold and similar things unpleasant but not dangerous (III.1, 1229b1–10). That seems better grounded: if I recoil from getting soaked in a shower, even when I have pressing reason to go outside, not because I am afraid of catching pneumonia but because I dislike feeling cold and wet, I am rather soft than cowardly. But should softness be subsumed within self-indulgence, when it is chosen, or within plain acrasia, when it is not? Lorenz (96, n. 60) cites Xenophon as relating acrasia to inability to put up with lack of sleep, or hard work. To the extent that he tends to set such things aside, Aristotle may be sensitive to the real etymology of *akolasia* (cf. *EE* III.2, 1230b3–7): *kolazein* is to chastise or chasten, which he associates with infliction of pain as corrective of indulgence in pleasure (cf. *NE* II.3, 1104b16–18). Or he may be influenced by his own etymology for *sôphrosunê*: he suggests that we call it that for preserving practical wisdom (*hôs sôzousan tên phronêsin*, VI.5, 1140b11f.), and it is mostly pleasure that is deceitful (III.4, 1113a33–b1). However, any restriction of plain encrasia and temperance to pleasures (and only associated pains) leaves a lacuna when no comparable status is granted to endurance. If Lorenz’s Version B within VII.4 is rejecting a previous extension of plain acrasia present in Version A, it is far from evident that this represents progress.⁵ (Nor any-

⁵ I agree with Bobonich when he writes (148), “There is a real danger that Aristotle’s conception of the pleasures of moderation is too restrictive; a broader account, even if it does not include all that we might wish, seems preferable”. However, even Homer nods, and I find eccentric his supposal that the “hunger and thirst and heat and cold”





way, as I have argued, is there any reason to be confident that it would reflect a change of mind between the *EE* and the *NE*.)

Lorenz has, however, two particular complaints to make against Version A in respect of which Version B is more clearly an improvement. Both have force, though one troubles me more than the other. On any reading of either Version, Aristotle wishes to distinguish plain or unqualified acrasia, which is reprehensible as not just an error (*hamartia*) but a kind of vice (*kakia tis*, 1148a2–4; cf. b2–10), from qualified forms of acrasia that are regrettable but less reprehensible. What links these varieties of acrasia is a *resemblance*, which does not suffice to yield a genus of acrasia of which plain and qualified acrasia are species. (This general point is also present in Aristotle’s treatment of the three basic varieties of *philia* in *NE* VIII.3, where a resemblance does not yield a genus.) Version A, but not B, offers a parallel: “Compare the case of Anthropos (Man), who won a contest at the Olympic games: in his case the general definition of man differed little from the definition peculiar to *him*, but yet it *was* different” (1147b35–1148a2). Unfortunately, the comparison limps: *man* was the species of Anthropos (though he was unique in winning the boxing content at Olympia in 456 B.C.), while unspecified acrasia is *not* a genus of which plain acrasia is a species. This would significantly distinguish Version A from Version B if the former *did* hold there to be a genus of acrasia. However, it is clear in context that it does not, for Aristotle proceeds to say not of plain acrasia as a species, but of acrasia spoken of without qualification, that it is reprehensible (1148a2–4). Though Lorenz (93) agrees with that, it may just be worth noting that, if A *was* more receptive of a genus than B, this would not make it more *Eudemian* than B: though on slightly different grounds (an appeal to focal meaning rather than resemblance), *EE* VII.2 rejects any genus of friendship no less firmly, and in fact more explicitly (1236a15–18), than *NE* VIII.3. So what is the substance of Lorenz’s complaint? That Version A makes a comparison that it knows to be of limited application.

More troublesome is an earlier feature of the same sentence (1147b31–35) within Version A. Aristotle says that, in speaking of qualified forms of acrasia, we add a qualification, such as “in respect of money” or “of profit” or “of honour” or “of anger” (b33f.). That in itself is fine. The problem is that it falls within the context of a distinction between sources of *pleasure*, bodily pleasures that are necessary but liable to excess, and pleasures that are unnecessary but desirable in themselves – examples of which are victory, honour, and wealth (b23–31). Anger doesn’t belong on such a list. Possibly it is accommodable given Aristotle’s presumption that it is a pleasure to take revenge (*NE* II.8, 1117a6f.; IV.5, 1126a21–23), and his definition of anger as involving a desire to take revenge, and even an enjoyable anticipation of success (*Rhet.* II.2, 1378a30–b10; cf. *EE* III.1, 1229b31f.). It remains a niggle that he would then more aptly have written “of revenge” rather than “of anger” in 1147b34. It becomes a substantive point that, as Lorenz nicely observes (91), the text creates “the wholly mistaken, and in fact bizarre and ludicrous, impression that lack of control over anger consists in a tendency to be irresistibly attracted to the pleasure of taking revenge”, with the peculiar implication that anyone so disposed should welcome outrages and insults as “opportunities for indulging their foible for taking revenge”. There is no such anomaly within Version B, where anger defines a qualified variety of acrasia without being associated with pleasure.

of VII.4, 1148a8 identify pleasures as well as pains (and so prefer 147, n. 34 to his main text).





Here I would hazard a suggestion. If we do find the occurrence of “of anger” in 1147a34 gravely defective, we are surely free to excise it. The following seems to me a conceivable train of events: an editor found or suspected a lacuna after *kai timês* (a34); uncertain how to fill it, he looked forward to the end of the chapter (*thumou hôsper timês kai kerdous*, b14) instead of backwards to the previous list (*nikên timên plouton*, a30); he then created our puzzle by adding after *kai timês* (a34) not *kai nikês* but *kai thumou*. I don’t pretend that this is probable. I do suggest that anyone who makes a meal of this anomaly within Version A should reckon with the possibility of something like it. (After all, that an editor has been active, and not always as Aristotle would have preferred, is part of Lorenz’s own narrative.)

Lorenz raises other points in advancing his proposal. I believe them to be equally uncertain or indecisive. If we *do* take his Version A and B to be substantially in disagreement, we place ourselves in a quandary, as it seems to me, in relation to other chapters of *NE* VII. He accepts that one function of Version B is to anticipate, though with a light touch (a few words within 1148a24), the unnatural pleasures that will be graphically treated in VII.5. However, we have seen that Version A seems to stand behind VII.7.⁶ Hence any assignment of Versions A and B to different stages in Aristotle’s development must have a complex story to tell about the evolution of Book VII. This is not to say that no such story could be true.⁷ But we may well despair of ever being in a position to tell it. And it would be a further question how it related to the unshared books of the *EE* and *NE*.⁸

5. Charles on VII.3

VII.3 has received more recent attention than any other chapter of the *NE* – more, indeed, than all the other chapters of *NE* VII taken together. It was apt that it should be entrusted to David Charles, who has long championed one of the most interesting variants of the *nouvelle vague* of interpretation initiated by Anthony Kenny. His treatment is a model of a close but motivated reading of a text – by which I mean a reading that does not look innocently for whatever is there to be found, but ransacks the data in pursuit of evidence either to suit a preferred interpretation or to be explained away on its behalf. (This is not a criticism: an interpretative presumption can be like a torch that makes visible details that would otherwise escape notice; it lends profile to a landscape in shedding new light upon it.)

On the face of it, though much is uncertain, VII.3 makes a proposal about central cases of *acrasia* that is simple if unsatisfying: the effect of appetite is temporarily to blind the agent to the truth of the final premise (*hê teleutaia protasis*, 1147b9) of what should be a

⁶ As Bobonich notes (139, n. 20), VII.7, 1150a16f. seem reminiscent of VII.4, 1147b23–31, which fall within Lorenz’s Version A.

⁷ Suppose that VII.4.5–7, and VII.5 which VII.4, 1148a24 anticipates, were added after VII.4.1–4. It could fit that VII.6, 1148b27 appears to ignore VII.5 in referring back to VII.1, 1145a30f. (see Cook Wilson 1879, § 17).

⁸ Bobonich well observes (132, n. 6) that the *NE*’s description of pleasures of touch, and the related disposition, as “bestial” (*thêriôdês*, III.10, 1118a25; b4) jars with recurrent and more narrowly focused remarks in Book VII about the bestial disposition (1, 1145a24f.; 29–32; 5, 1148b19; 24; 1149a6–10; 17) and bestial desires (6, 1149b29). It better fits Book VII that the *EE* does *not* call the pleasures of touch bestial.





practical syllogism prohibiting him, say, from ϕ 'ing; consequently, appetite is left a free hand in causing him to ϕ . With some simplification, this may be called the *traditional* reading. Something can be said (and was already said by Buridan) to make this less blankly unexpected within an Aristotelian context: being perceptual (cf. b17), the final premise depends upon the very stratum of the soul that houses irrational desire, and so may be particularly liable to being obscured by desire. Yet it is not surprising that a *revisionist* line of interpretation, introduced by Kenny in 1966 and refined in 1979, has gradually become prevalent. Kenny advanced two core proposals. First, to *attend to* a proposition (*theôrein*), or to *put it to use* (*chrêsthai*), is to do more than to assert it. Kenny proposes that it is also to *derive* something *from* it, whether this be a further proposition, or even an action. Secondly, the *teleutaia protasis* is not specifically the final premise: rather, it is the last proposition that the agent asserts before his reasoning ceases or breaks down.⁹ This pair of theses applies differently to cases of weakness and of impetuosity (explicitly distinguished at VII.7, 1150b19–28): the impetuous agent gets no further than a universal principle to which he does not count as attending; the weak agent attends to it in adding a particular premise – and perhaps even a conclusion that falls short of action. Of course, in the case of weakness more needs to be said: that the agent fails to act on his reasoning is the problem, not a solution.

Charles's own position lacks some of the flexibility of Kenny's but is intelligibly motivated in a way that resonates well within current analytical philosophy. Focusing on cases of weakness, Charles identifies the *teleutaia protasis* (as Kenny had originally) with the conclusion, which (again like Kenny) he does not identify with the action. And he takes fully assenting to it to involve a composite state of mind that includes aspects of cognition and of motivation but is not reducible to a complex of distinct elements:

Practical knowledge is not decomposable into two (ontologically) independent components [...]. Rather, it is best seen as a *sui generis* state which, although describable (roughly) either as a form of desire or as a form of intellect (or opinion), is properly speaking neither (nor yet a complex of the two). It is a distinctive type of state, irreducible to desire, intellect, or a combination of the two (65).

It thus has something in common with what J. E. J. Altham once termed “besires” – states of mind that are somehow at once belief-like and desire-like. Nothing less than action (or at least attempt) becomes the criterion of the presence of a state of mind that is at once, and irreducibly, both desiderative and doxastic.

Before offering comments, I should mention that, on this occasion, Charles concedes that the text of VII.3 permits an alternative, which he calls “the intellectualist answer” (64). According to this, the akratic agent “fully engages with and uses the premisses of his argument”, yet “desire intervenes and prevents him from having intellectual confidence in his conclusion (although he is aware of it)”. He apparently infers the conclusion logically from premises that he still fully accepts; and yet, through the effect of irrational desire, lacks intellectual confidence in the conclusion that he is deriving. Which is baffling – as Charles virtually concedes (66). Though he evidently wishes to open the gate to an alternative, it is hard to see this competitor as more than a pace-setter. It is clear why Charles himself should focus upon the agent's grasp of the conclusion. The final premise could well be some simple matter of fact, like “This is sweet” (1147a33), which can hardly form

⁹ Anthony Kenny, *Aristotle's Theory of the Will*, London 1979, 161.





the content of an indissolubly dual instance of practical knowledge. It is rather a prescriptive conclusion, like “I must not taste this”, that an agent may assert *in a way* but fail *fully* to assent to. Yet applying the phrase *hê teleutaia protasis* to the conclusion is controversial. Hence it suits Charles strategically to pretend that this is well grounded *on any interpretation* – which imposes it upon the “intellectualist” as well. However, *he* has no need to take a line that both exposes him to criticism in itself, and commits him to a view which is less plausible than the traditional reading. So we may set Charles’s alternative aside.

To defend his distinctive variant upon Kenny’s line of interpretation, Charles needs to do at least two things: he has to sustain his reading of *hê teleutaia protasis*, and to show that his conception of practical knowledge is both plausible in itself and fit for Aristotle’s purposes. I believe that each of these is problematic.

First, then, how are we to understand *hê teleutaia protasis*? Charles devotes three pages to this (67–69), without, as it appears to me, grasping the crux of the matter. Though *protasis* may on occasion be translated by “proposition”, it carries the connotation of something premised, or apt to be premised, taken as such. No parallel has yet been adduced for applying it, even with the qualification “final”, specifically to a conclusion, let alone to a *terminal* conclusion in its role *as a conclusion*.¹⁰

Charles also faces a finer objection. (Significantly, it is not an objection to Kenny’s position in 1979.) It arises from a sentence within VII.3 that I translate as follows (in a way that actually suits Charles better than his own rendering, 52):

The one [sc. belief, or *protasis*?] is universal, while the other concerns particulars, of which perception is determinant. Whenever a single belief results from them, what is concluded (*to sumperanthen*) must in the one case be asserted by the soul, and in the case of practical reasoning immediately be done [...]. The agent who is able and not held back must simultaneously actually *do* this (1147a25–31).

This would seem to yield the fair point that, having an unequivocal term for a conclusion in *to sumperanthen* at a27, Aristotle hardly needed to come up with an equivocal “the final *protasis*” at b9.

Charles’s reply to this (70f.) hovers between the ingenious and the disingenuous. He objects that what an agent can *do* or perform (*prattein*, a31) is not a conclusion (*sumperasma*) but an action, and so takes “what is concluded” to be the conclusion in its theoretical application, but the action specified within the conclusion in its practical application. (It is better to distinguish the *act* that is done, a *prakton*, from the doing of it that is the *action*, a *praxis*; but let that pass.) Yet this is strained, when the phrase only occurs *once* within a sentence where it has, in the two different connections, to mean *both* (a27f.). And Charles knows that Aristotle is capable of writing in the *De Motu Animalium* “The two propositions result in a conclusion (*sumperasma*) which is the action” (7, 701a12f.), and even “The conclusion, the ‘I have to make a cloak’, is an action” (a19). Charles suggests that what, strictly, can be performed is not an order or a conclusion, but *what* is ordered or concluded (71, n. 45); properly, however, what is ordered is that I ϕ , or possibly my ϕ ’ing, whereas what I do is simply to ϕ . (To do as one is told is to do what is told *to do*, say to ϕ .) It turns out that, where Aristotle is careless, Charles’s Aristotle has to be assigned an imperfect but precise degree of finesse.

¹⁰ Succinct and still successful against Charles on this point is David Bostock, *Aristotle’s Ethics*, Oxford 2000, 132.





Secondly, Charles must have Aristotle suppose that not merely motivation but *effective* motivation is integral to a full grasp of, say, “It is best for me not to ϕ ”. Otherwise, acrasia is already explicable once we suppose that appetite can be *stronger* than rational desire, and there need be no talk of “ignorance” (*agnoia*, 1147b6) in any sense. Now current “internalists” in moral psychology may hold that evaluative and practical judgements essentially involve *some* element of motivation where this is appropriate (as when one is assessing one’s own options). Yet it is another thing to claim that this motivation must then be sufficient to result in action or attempt. One may wonder whether the thesis that an agent cannot fully grasp that it is best for him not to ϕ if he is not *effectively* motivated not to ϕ is any more intuitive than a brute insistence that he cannot fully grasp that it is best for him not to ϕ if he intentionally ϕ ’s.

There is a further, and perhaps clearer, objection. Interpreters of VII.3 have to agree that even the acratice agent fully knows the general proposition that whenever *p*, one must not ϕ (for 1147b13–17 makes explicit that *this* knowledge is not impaired). Yet it seems arbitrary to allow that he always knows *that* fully, although on certain occasions it fails to motivate him not to ϕ when he knows that *p*, while alleging that, on the same occasions, his failure of motivation entails that he fails fully to know that he must not ϕ . To maintain his account, Charles has to draw what appears to be an arbitrary distinction between grasp of a general hypothetical (expressed in the universal premise), which is *not* impaired by a temporary loss of motivation, and grasp of a particular application (expressed in the conclusion), which *is* impaired by that. *Why* should accepting an application of a principle take on an essential motivational aspect that is lacking to accepting the principle itself?

For these and other reasons, I do not think that Charles’s interpretation of VII.3 is likely to be correct, for all its energy and ingenuity. (Whether it is less likely than a traditional reading is another question.)

I hope to have made it evident that I have hardly begun to do justice to this collection.

Anthony W. Price
Department of Philosophy,
Birkbeck College, Malet Street,
London WC1E 7HX, United Kingdom

Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung/Colleen McCluskey/Christina Van Dyke: *Aquinas’s Ethics: Metaphysical Foundations, Moral Theory, and Theological Context*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 2009, ix + 242 pp.

Recent work on virtue ethics has led to a continual flow of introductory level texts on the ethical thought of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the Hellenistic philosophers. The works of these thinkers serve, we are told, not just as models for those developing a virtue ethics for the 21st century, but also as excellent texts for undergraduate education, since they were meant not just to clarify our thought but to guide our lives; and universities in many quarters are once again taking seriously the idea that undergraduate education is a sort of formation for life. *Aquinas’s Ethics* shows that Thomas Aquinas has as much to contribute to the development of virtue ethics and to the formation of undergraduates as any of the ancients. It casts Aquinas’s work as a guide to life and explains that the philosophy it employs is crucial for our embracing the right sort of life in a clear-sighted way. Nevertheless, its focus is squarely on Aquinas’s philosophical arguments and their interpretation, and

