

## Plato's *Protagoras* – Virtue & Expertise

A conflict:

- The *elenchus*: virtue is knowledge
- Experience: virtue can't be taught

## Plato's *Protagoras* – The Unity of the Virtues

### Posing the Problem (329c & 349b):

- Are virtues like wisdom, temperance, courage, justice and piety
  1. non-resembling “parts” of Virtue, each with its own essence, or
  2. do the names “wisdom”, “temperance”, “courage”, “justice” and “piety” all refer to the same thing, i.e., Virtue?

### Answering the Problem:

- Against #1: Mutual Implication Argument (329e-331a)
- For #2: Opposites Argument (332a-333b)

## Plato's *Protagoras* – The Unity of the Virtues

### The Mutual Implication Argument

*Claim to be refuted:* Virtues like wisdom, temperance, courage, justice and piety are non-resembling “parts” of Virtue, each with its own essence.

1. 330b: Justice is a “thing”, i.e., a subject of predications.
2. 330c: Virtues self-predicate, e.g., Justice is just, etc.
3. 331a: Piety & Justice cross-predicate and therefore belong to the same genera, e.g., Piety is just & Justice is pious.
4. So piety and justice do resemble each other insofar as they share the same genera.

## Plato's *Protagoras* – The Unity of the Virtues

### The Opposites Argument

*Claim to be refuted:* “Wisdom is different from temperance and each is a part of virtue, and in addition to being distinct, they are dissimilar, both in themselves and in their powers or functions, just like the parts of a face.”

1. All actions are either wise or not wise, and actions that are not wise are foolish. No actions are both wise and not wise (i.e. foolish).
2. All actions are either temperate or not temperate and actions that are not temperate are foolish. No actions are both temperate and not temperate (i.e., foolish).
3. From this we can infer that the set of not-wise actions is the same as the set of not-temperate actions.
4. But if this is true, then the set of wise actions is the same as the set of temperate actions.
5. So wisdom and temperance are “one thing” (333b).

## **Plato's *Protagoras* – *The Akrasia Argument***

*Akrasia*: weakness of will or incontinence; literally, “a lack of sovereignty,” esp. over oneself.

Hedonism consists of two doctrines:

- All pleasures are good and all pains are bad.
- All goods are pleasures and all evils are pains.

## **Plato's *Protagoras* – *The Akrasia Argument***

*Claim to be proved*: If one knows the benefits and harms of performing an intemperate action, one will never let desire cause one to do it.

1. To live well is to live pleasantly, and to live badly is to live distressed and in pain. (351b)
2. Since to live well is good and to live badly is bad, to live pleasantly is good and to live distressed and in pain is bad. (351b)
3. Protagoras: Not all pleasures are good, i.e., taking pleasure in dishonorable things is presumably not good. (351c)
4. Socrates: “Isn’t a pleasant thing good just insofar as it is pleasant, ... and ... aren’t painful things bad ... just insofar as they are painful?” (351c)

## **Plato's *Protagoras* – *The Akrasia Argument***

The majority of people would agree that:

5. Diseases and poverty are bad for no other reason than that they result in pain, and that health, wealth, and power are good for no other reason than that they either result in pleasure or the avoidance of pain. (354a-b)
6. Pleasures and pains are good and bad for the sole reason that, by indulging in them or enduring them, we end up getting more pleasure than pain in the end or vice versa. (354d-e)
7. The good = pleasure and the bad = pain. So “the good” and “pleasure” and “the bad” and “pain” are synonyms. (355a)

## **Plato's *Protagoras* – *The Akrasia Argument***

8. The majority of people also claim that while knowing that X is better than Y, the akratic person chooses Y because he is overcome by pleasures. (355b-c)
9. But since “good things” and “pleasures” are synonyms, this implies that while knowing that X is better than Y, the akratic person chooses Y because he is overcome by good things. But this is absurd.
10. Since “more pleasurable” and “better” are synonyms, this also implies that while knowing that X is more pleasurable than Y, the akratic person chooses Y because he is overcome by pleasures. This is even more absurd.
11. Since 9 and 10 are absurd, we can conclude that the majority of people are wrong, and if one knows the benefits and harms of performing an intemperate action, one will never let desire cause one to do it.

## **Aristotle on *Akrasia***

### **Aristotle's Definition of *Akrasia* (EN 7.1-2)**

- De-linking of knowledge and conviction.
- Bestiality & Divinity
- Bad conditions of character:
  - Vice
  - *Akrasia*
- Good conditions of character:
  - Continnence
  - Temperance

## **Aristotle on *Akrasia***

### **Aristotle's Definition of *Akrasia* (EN 7.1-2)**

Odd results of these definitions:

- Continnence + Good Appetites  $\neq$  Virtue
- Continnence + Weak Appetites = Not Praiseworthy
- Continnence + Foolishness = Vice
- Incontinence + Foolishness = Virtue

## Aristotle on *Akrasia*

### The Practical Syllogism (MA 7)

- Practical syllogism = *df.* explanatory model of action that is meant to apply equally to animals and to humans.
- Answers the question: “how is it that thought (viz. sense, imagination, and thought proper) is sometimes followed by action, sometimes not; sometimes by movement, sometimes not?”
- Practical syllogism:

Major Premise

Minor Premise

Conclusion

## Aristotle on *Akrasia*

### The Practical Syllogism (MA 7)

- Major premise: a desire (either rational or irrational)
  - *Rational desire* (arrived at through reasoning)
  - *Irrational desire* (not arrived at though reasoning)
- Minor premise: a perception of a particular object of desire
- Conclusion: an action caused by a desire and a perception of a particular object of desire

## **Aristotle on *Akrasia***

### **The Practical Syllogism (MA 7)**

- Examples of practical syllogisms from the text:

*Major Premise:* every man ought to walk (rational desire)

*Minor Premise:* one is a man oneself (perceptual knowledge)

*Conclusion:* straightway one walks (action)

*Major Premise:* no man should walk (rational? desire)

*Minor Premise:* one is a man (perceptual knowledge)

*Conclusion:* straightway one remains at rest. (action)

*Major Premise:* I ought to create a good (rational desire)

*Minor Premise:* a house is good (perceptual knowledge ?)

*Conclusion:* straightway I make a house (action)

## **Aristotle on *Akrasia***

### **The Practical Syllogism (MA 7)**

*Major Premise:* I want to drink (irrational desire)

*Minor Premise:* this is drink (perceptual knowledge)

*Conclusion:* straightway I drink (action)

## **Aristotle on *Akrasia***

### **The Practical Syllogism (MA 7)**

- Necessity, Causation & Counter-factuals:
  - *Necessity of a Law of Nature*: "If he hadn't dropped the wine glass (which he did), it wouldn't have shattered (which it did)."
  - *Necessity of a Law of Psychology*: "If he didn't like sweets (which he does), he wouldn't have gone into the candy store, or have bought the sucker (which he did)."

## **Aristotle on *Akrasia***

### **The Practical Syllogism (EN 7.3)**

- The case of *akrasia*:
  - Major Premise 1*: Everything sweet must be tasted (irrational desire)
  - Major Premise 2*: One ought not to taste sweet things (rational desire)
  - Minor Premise*: This is sweet.
  - Conclusion*: I taste the sweet thing.

## **Aristotle on *Akrasia***

### **The Practical Syllogism (EN 7.3) – Socratic Elements**

- Not knowing the perceptual premise:
  - Two ways of knowing:
    - knowing as having knowledge in one's head but not in one's consciousness
    - knowing as having knowledge both in one's head and one's consciousness.

## **Aristotle on *Akrasia***

### **The Practical Syllogism (EN 7.3)**

- The case of *akrasia* (revised):

*Major Premise 1:* Everything sweet must be tasted (irrational desire)

*Major Premise 2:* One ought not to taste unwholesome things (rational desire)

*Active Minor Premise:* This is sweet.

*Inactive Minor Premise:* This is unwholesome.

*Conclusion:* I taste the sweet unwholesome thing (not paying attention to the fact that it is unwholesome).

## **Aristotle on *Akrasia***

### ***Akrasia*: Voluntary or Involuntary? (EN 3.1, 3.5)**

#### ***Akrasia* is voluntary because:**

- His actions are *done in* ignorance but not *caused by* ignorance.
- *Akratic* ignorance is due to inattention.
- Emotions depend on character and character is up to us.