

Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics 1150a9-1150b28

On both Bekker's and Didot's chaptering, NE 1150a9-1150b28 constitutes a single chapter, 7.8 for Bekker and 7.7 for Didot; in this paper, I shall follow Didot. In any case, this chapter has attracted much less scholarly interest than Book 7's earlier chapters (or the later chapters on pleasure) and the extant discussions tend to see it as somewhat disjointed and confusing. Although I do not think that 7.7 is as philosophically rich as, e.g., 7.3, I shall try to show that it has more interest than is often supposed. I shall also consider some issues about the consistency and unity of this chapter, since they have been questioned. Most famously, Cook Wilson thought that Book 7 consists of at least three different versions of similar material, not all of them by Aristotle.

To begin by putting 7.7 very roughly into context, in chapters 7.4-6, Aristotle tries to clarify what it is to be akratic without qualification (haplôs) and to distinguish this, especially in terms of its objects, from akrasia that is qualified in some way, e.g. 1147b20-1, 1148b9-14, and 1149a21-4. In chapter 7, Aristotle distinguishes akrasia without qualification from other related dispositions

(besides qualified akrasia) and takes up some of the issues raised in 7.1-2. I shall note these as we go through the chapter.

(1) He distinguishes the following paired dispositions from each other and the other pair: akrasia/self-control (enkrateia), and softness (malakia)/endurance (karteria). All of these are dispositions that are in some way in between fully developed virtue and full-blown vice (cf., e.g., 1151a5-6).<sup>1</sup> Aristotle's treatment of these dispositions, as we shall see, neither begins nor finishes in 7.7, but he marks the end of the whole discussion at 1152a34-6: "We have said what self-control and akrasia, and endurance and softness are, and how these dispositions relate to one another."

(2) Aristotle makes some practical and evaluative judgments about these dispositions and self-indulgence (akolasia).

(a) The self-indulgent are without regret and so are incurable (1150a21-2),

(b) the self-indulgent are worse than the akratic (1150a30-1), and

(c) self-control is more choiceworthy (hairetôteron) than endurance (1150a35-1150b1).

(3) Aristotle distinguishes, and briefly characterizes, two kinds of akrasia (1150b19-28):

(a) weakness (astheneia)

(b) impetuosity (propeteia).

In (a), the person deliberates, but does not abide by the results of his deliberations; in (b), he is led by his affections without having deliberated. Exactly what this distinction comes to is not clear and will depend on the understanding we have developed of akrasia on the basis of the rest of Book 7.

Most of these topics are treated again in chapters 8-10 with the interesting exception of the claim that self-control is more choiceworthy than endurance.

For convenience, we can divide our chapter into the following six sections. I do not mean to suggest that these sections are entirely self-contained or to deny that at least some of them naturally unite to form larger units. Indeed, I shall explore some of the connections among these

sections, since some scholars think that at least part of this chapter's text is displaced.

- #1. 1150a9-16,
- #2. 1150a16-25,
- #3. 1150a25-32,
- #4. 1150a32-50b1,
- #5. 1150b1-19,
- #6. 1150b19-28.<sup>2</sup>

### **Section #1: 1150a9-16**

I begin with a translation.

Concerning the pleasures and pains and desires and avoidances through touch and taste, (which both self-indulgence and moderation [sôphrosunê] were previously distinguished as concerning), it is possible to be in such a condition so that one is weaker [hêtasthai] than even those that the many are stronger [kreittous] than, and it is possible to be [in such a condition so that one is]<sup>3</sup> stronger [kratein] than even those that the many are weaker [hêtous] than. Of these, the ones concerning pleasures are the akratic and the self-controlled; the ones concerning pains are the soft and the enduring. The disposition of

most people is in between, even if they incline more towards the worse [dispositions].

In 7.1, Aristotle tells us that they must go on to discuss *akrasia*, softness, self-control, and endurance: none of these dispositions are instances of virtue or vice, but they are not of a different kind (1145a35-1145b2). But Aristotle's discussion up to 7.7 has focused primarily on the two negative dispositions, *akrasia* and softness, and especially on the former. So the first sentence of our chapter seems to suggest that Aristotle will say more here about the positive conditions and at least sketch some of the systematic relations among these four dispositions.

Aristotle tells us that these dispositions have the same objects previously attributed to moderation and self-indulgence, and at least conversationally implies that these are their only objects (at least in the dispositions' unqualified forms). The issue of the restriction of moderation and self-indulgence to the pleasures and pains of touch and taste has arisen in both the earlier discussion of moderation in the unique books of the Nicomachean Ethics (3.10-12) and the Eudemian Ethics (3.2), as well as in the earlier part of Book 7.

In Nicomachean Ethics 3.10, Aristotle says that he will investigate "about what sort" (peri poias) of pleasures moderation and self-indulgence relate to (1117b27-8). Moderation and self-indulgence are concerned with pain "less and not in the same way" (1117b26, and this is a point to which we shall return.)<sup>4</sup> The rest of 3.10 discusses the relevant pleasures: they are of the body (sômatikai, 1118a1-3), but do not include all bodily pleasures. They are the pleasures shared with all other animals, in particular, those of touch and taste (although those of taste play a small role, if any, 1118a23-7). Since they are shared by all other animals, they appear slavish and bestial (1118a24-5).

In the corresponding Eudemian Ethics discussion, Aristotle also asks the "about what" question and moves quickly to the claim that moderation and self-indulgence are apparently about pleasures of touch and taste (1230b24-6), but "really" (têi d'alêtheiai, b25) about those of touch.<sup>5</sup> These are senses that are shared by all other animals (1230b36-8). We get a bit more physiological detail (1231a12-5) and Aristotle does not explicitly call these pleasures slavish or bestial.<sup>6</sup>

In 7.2, the last puzzle or *aporia* asks if *akrasia*/self-control can be displayed with respect to anything, and what it is to be *akratic* without qualification (1146b2-5). In 7.3, the second point to be considered is whether *akrasia*/self-control are concerned with all pleasures and pains or only some (1146b9-11). The beginning of 7.4 explicitly picks up this second question of 7.3 (and thus implicitly the last *aporia* of 7.2). *Akrasia* without qualification is limited to things with which self-indulgence/moderation are concerned (1147b26-8) and 7.4 has much to say about these pleasures/pains. This limitation of *akrasia* is mentioned again in 7.5 and 7.6 (1149a21-4, 1149b25-6).

So the restriction of these four dispositions to the pleasures and pains specific to moderation/self-indulgence is well-established by the beginning of 7.7. 7.7 thus opens by reminding us of the answer to the second item to be considered in 7.3 and will go on to answer the third. Indeed, 7.7. is the only part of Book 7 that answers the question at 7.3 1146b11-13. What section #1 of 7.7 does is to specify further what these four dispositions are.

### The Restriction of the Pleasures of Moderation

Before returning to the details of the first section of 7.7, let me make a brief digression on a related issue. This limitation of the pleasures and pains relevant to moderation (and thus to the four other dispositions we are considering) to those of touch and, perhaps, taste is surprisingly restrictive. Why deny that the obese glutton bent on the flavor of Big Macs or a person devoted to the pleasures of (visual or perhaps auditory) pornography is self-indulgent? Offhand, it intuitively seems that these should count. They do not seem to be plausibly subsumed under any other virtues and vices and they also seem to account for a good deal of going wrong with respect to food and sex. Here I can only raise some issues that merit fuller discussion.

It has long been accepted that Aristotle, in both the Eudemian and the Nicomachean Ethics, probably in response to Plato's broad conception of the four virtues, narrows the scope of the virtues he treats. He can, however, make room for cases outside of his strict accounts in several ways, e.g., by seeing them as F, but not F without qualification (haplôs).<sup>7</sup> Non-canonical kinds of indulgence in pleasure might be handled similarly, but we

should first consider the motivation of Aristotle's restriction.

We might think that the following passage rules out delighting in pornography as a candidate for self-indulgence.

It will be to bodily pleasures that moderation relates—but not all of these, either; for those who enjoy what comes to us through sight, e.g. colors, shapes, or painting, are not said to be either moderate or self-indulgent; yet it would seem possible in these cases too to take pleasure as one should, or excessively or deficiently. (NE 1118a1-6)

Perhaps the pleasures of pornography, like these pleasures "through sight," simply come through the wrong sense modality, and we might think this is supported by Aristotle's immediate extension of the point to hearing at 1118a8-9. But coming through touch cannot be sufficient to make a pleasure relevant to moderation, since "the most refined" (eleutheriôtatai) pleasures of touch are also excluded (1118b4-5). What seems more important for Aristotle than simply the sense modality is the limitation of the pleasures of moderation to those shared with animals

and those enjoyed, so to speak, in much the way that an animal does (1118b1-4). Those pleasures that might otherwise seem clearly related to those that moderation does genuinely concern—e.g. those of rubdowns and of winetasters (1118a26-b6)—are excluded if they are value-laden in a way that an animal's cannot be (although, strictly, non-human animals cannot be self-indulgent, 1147b3-5). The restriction to pleasures of touch rather than taste takes this point to an extreme, since some animals lack a tongue which is the organ of taste, but still enjoy food moving through the throat.<sup>8</sup>

Interestingly, the Eudemian Ethics, unlike the Nicomachean, explicitly takes up the case of sexual desire arising from sight and appears at least to flirt with the idea that such pleasures might fall under self-indulgence.

For the moderate man is not moderate with respect to the pleasure, coming through sight, of beautiful things (without sexual desire) or the pain caused by ugly things, or with the pleasure, coming through hearing, of harmonious sounds or [the pain] of discords . . . For neither is anyone said to be self-indulgent because of being affected or not being affected [by things of that sort]. As, for example, a man

would not seem to be considered self-indulgent if when looking at a beautiful statue or horse or person, or listening to someone singing, he did not wish to eat or drink or have sex, but only to look at the beautiful objects or listen to the singing . . . (EE 1230b25-35)

One main option for interpreting this passage allows that, e.g., a man wishing for sex while looking at a statue can display self-indulgence in virtue of his erotic pleasure in looking at the statue. Or we might deny this, holding that Aristotle intends to take advantage of a distinction he draws below and would say that the self-indulgent enjoys these visual pleasures only incidentally (kata sumbebêkos).<sup>9</sup>

If Aristotle keeps to his insistence that the pleasures of moderation are just those of touch and adopts the first option, such pleasures would then have to count as pleasures of touch in some relevant way. This may not be impossible if we stress the privileged role that memories of actual pleasures of touch play in the person's, e.g., imagining of pleasure. Is imagining such pleasures of touch itself in some way an instance of a pleasure of touch and, if so, what restrictions are there on the way it can be imagined and still count as a pleasure of touch? Is

stimulation of certain bodily parts not needed or is this perhaps brought about by the imagination (cf. NE 1117b28-31)?

Another option is to hold that moderation concerns only the pleasures of touch without qualification, but may concern others incidentally. Aristotle discusses such a possibility with respect to smell and perhaps taste in human beings at EE 1231a4-12 and to smell in human beings and sight and hearing in other animals at NE 1118a9-23. But he does not explicitly generalize the point.

I cannot here explore these issues fully, but I note two points before returning to the text of 7.7.

(1) To handle some cases in which animals or the self-indulgent appear to enjoy something beyond the pleasures of touch, Aristotle appeals to the idea of having pleasure in something incidentally. The self-indulgent, may, for example, take pleasure incidentally in smelling perfumes or tasty dishes.

Nor in the other animals does pleasure come from these senses [hearing, sight, smell], except incidentally. For neither do hounds enjoy the smell of hares, but eating them; the smell made them aware of the hares. Nor does

the lion enjoy the sound of the ox, but eating it; he perceived through the sound that the ox is near, and so appeared to enjoy the sound. Similarly, he does not enjoy seeing 'a stag or wild goat,' but that he will have food. (NE 1118a16-23)<sup>10</sup>

So what, exactly, goes on when X enjoys F incidentally? On one popular line of interpretation, in these cases X does not really enjoy F.<sup>11</sup> Consider the parallel with incidental causation: a pale sculptor makes a statue. The pale man is incidentally the cause of the statue coming to be; the sculptor is the intrinsic (kath'hauto) cause of the statue, but he also happens to be pale. In such a case, e.g., the statue's efficient cause is the sculptor or his knowledge of sculpting; his paleness has no efficient causal role.

Analogously, I might enjoy yellow food incidentally when yellow food is oily and my pleasure is in eating oily food. In this case, what X really enjoys is only G, but G is F incidentally. One might read the example of lions and hounds in this way as suggesting that they do not really or actually take pleasure in sounds, but only appear to do so.<sup>12</sup>

But this seems to be too crude a picture for all cases. A passage from De Sensu may suggest a slightly different idea.

One class of smells, then, is that which runs parallel, as we have said, to flavors, and they are pleasant and painful incidentally. For because they are affections of nourishment, these smells are pleasant to those desiring [food], but to those who are full and require nothing, they are not pleasant.<sup>13</sup> (443b19-24)

One might read this as allowing that such smells really are pleasant to a hungry man (cf. 1118a13-5). Similarly, one might allow erotic sights to be pleasant to those desiring sex. Aristotle suggests that certain things are enjoyed incidentally insofar as they bring a memory of the desired object (e.g. 1118a12-3). And the pleasures connected with imagination are especially interesting. Here, imaginings are often elaborated and indulged in even when one's desires are not very pressing, and such imaginings seem to pass at least one test of being pleasant by themselves: in many cases, even if the object is not attained, one might still want to have the pleasures of the imagining, that is,

one might find them worthwhile under the guise of the pleasant even if nothing further came from them. But little in either the Eudemian Ethics or the Nicomachean Ethics, except perhaps the passage noted at EE 1230b25-1231a1 suggests this broader understanding of the pleasures relevant to moderation.

(2) A second issue arises from what Aristotle has to say about taste.

Moderation and self-indulgence relate to the sorts of pleasures that are shared by all the other animals, too, so they appear slavish and bestial. These are the pleasures of touch and taste. But they involve even taste to little or no extent; for it is the function of taste to discriminate flavors, as is done by wine-tasters and those seasoning dishes; but they hardly enjoy this, or at least the self-indulgent do not, but they enjoy the consumption involved, which comes about wholly by means of touch, alike in eating and drinking and the pleasures of sex. This is why a certain gourmand prayed that his throat might be longer than a crane's, so showing that it was the sense of touch in which he took pleasure. (NE 1118a23-b1)

The Eudemian Ethics is at least as stringent in restricting moderation to the pleasures of touch (1230b22-5, 1231a12-22). This is, I think, implausibly narrow, if it does not allow for pleasures in tastes (or lets in them incidentally in such a way that the person does not actually or really enjoy the taste itself.)<sup>14</sup> But Aristotle may be tempted here by this narrow conception, since in the immediate context he stresses that the pleasures related to moderation are "slavish and bestial" (NE 1118a25) and belong to us not as human beings, but just as animals (NE 1118b2-3, cf. 1118a24-5).

The distinction in NE 3.11 between "common" and "peculiar" or "acquired" (epithetoi) pleasures may add to our worries. With respect to common or natural desires, few err and, even then, only in the direction of excess. Although acquired pleasures may "have something natural" (1118b13-4) about them, we might wonder whether our food preferences and sexual preferences can all be cashed out as some sort of desire for (or taking pleasure in) a particular kind of contact. But these acquired desires are a major source of self-indulgence, 1118a21-8.<sup>15</sup> In sum, if Aristotle presses too far the affinity with animals and the

limitation to touch, (i) moderation will exclude some things we want it to cover, and (ii) its attainment will not be an especially fine achievement. Even if we accept (ii), (i) remains a worry.

To return to 1150a9-16: Aristotle tells us here that akrasia/self-control are related to pleasures and softness/endurance to pains. Further, they are specified with respect to the dispositions of most people. At least as a simple first approximation, Aristotle seems to be claiming

S is disposed to be weaker than the pleasures that most people are stronger than if and only if S is akratic.<sup>16</sup>

S is disposed to be stronger than the pleasures that most people are weaker than if and only if S is self-controlled.

S is disposed to be weaker than the pains that most people are stronger than if and only if S is soft.

S is disposed to be stronger than the pains that most people are weaker than if and only if S is enduring.

These characterizations raise some issues.

(1) If most people think that it is good to go for many excessive pleasures, then Aristotle should not want to count those doing better than most as self-controlled: they might merely be self-indulgent to a lesser degree. We can avoid this, if it is wrong to say that the self-indulgent are weaker than pleasures (as 1150 a23-5 suggests). Similarly, we can avoid having the moderate man satisfy the characterization of self-control here if it is wrong to say that he "is stronger than" the relevant pleasures. In any case, it is clear that for a fuller account of these four states we must either supplement the above characterizations or draw out the notion of "being weaker (or stronger) than," since, for example, they do not explicitly mention choice.

But this does raise the question of, so to speak, how far down the scale Aristotle allows self-control and endurance to go. Are there four groups: moderate, self-controlled, akratic and self-indulgent? If most people are weaker than too many pleasures, then being self-controlled would not be that much of an accomplishment. 1150a15-16 seems to respond to this worry; most people fall between, e.g., the self-controlled and the akratic, the enduring and

the soft, although they tend towards the worse dispositions. (So although it would be allowed by the above biconditionals, it should not be the case that, e.g.,  $n$  are self-controlled,  $n+1$  are in between and  $n$  akratic.) We might think that this is a surprisingly optimistic view of most people (or perhaps most Greeks). This is especially the case if even the akratic have (more or less) a correct conception of happiness or at least typically make the right choice with respect to moderation.<sup>17</sup> After all, although few may err with respect to natural desires, with respect to peculiar pleasures, many err and in many ways (NE 1118b15-22).

(2) What is the relation of these characterizations to Aristotle's remarks elsewhere? For example, in NE Book 2, Aristotle says:

The pleasure or pain that supervenes on actions should be treated as a sign of dispositions; for someone who refrains from bodily pleasures and takes pleasure [chairôn] in doing so is moderate, while someone who is upset [achthomenos] at doing so is self-indulgent. (1104b3-7)

This seems to classify one who has the right choice and acts on it, but does so with pain, as self-indulgent. But how is this person distinguished from the enduring, and is this disposition really worse than softness (as it should be if it really is self-indulgence)? I shall return to this passage below.

(3) Here, both the enduring and the self-controlled are stronger than certain pains or pleasures, but 1150a33-1150b1 may suggest that "being stronger than" belongs only to the self-controlled. So we shall have to consider whether this chapter is internally consistent and whether the distinction Aristotle tries to draw at 1150a33-1150b1 is successful (and some commentators think it is not).

## **Section #2: 1150a16-25**

Since some pleasures are necessary, and others are not, and they [i.e. the necessary ones] are up to a point, but excesses [of pleasures] are not, nor deficiencies [of pleasures]; and similarly for both desires and pains, the person who pursues excessive pleasures or pursues [non-excessive, i.e. necessary] pleasures to excess, and because of choice, on account of themselves and not on account of

anything else coming from them is self-indulgent. For it is necessary that he is without regrets and so is incurable. For he who is without regrets is incurable. The one that is deficient is the one opposite to this, and the moderate man is in the middle. And similarly also the one who avoids bodily pains not through being weaker, but because of choice.

Although some have worried that 7.7's text includes displacements or traces of several versions, this section contains the only place in which there is some serious worry about the actual reading of the text, i.e. at 1150a19-20. The reading of most manuscripts, ἡ καθ' ὑπερβλάσῃ, should not stand, since it would allow that the self-indulgent need not act on choice. Fortunately, the sense seems tolerably clear. Aristotle at least characterizes the self-indulgent as acting on choice, and going for excess with respect to pleasures, for their own sake. But it is plausible to see Aristotle going further and distinguishing two ways for the self-indulgent to err: (i) pursuing pleasures that are excessive in themselves, or (ii) pursuing to excess pleasures that are not excessive in themselves.<sup>18</sup> We get this sense either by emending to ἡ καθ' ὑπερβλάσῃ

καὶ (with most commentators) or ἢ καθ' ὑπερβολὴν καὶ which is the reading of M<sup>b</sup> (along with Ross-Urmson and Rowe), so our choice must be made on philological grounds which support the latter emendation.<sup>19</sup>

Along with most commentators, except Grant, I take καὶ μέχρι τινός not with αἰ δ' ἔτι, but with ἔνιαι τῶν ἡδονῶν ἀναγκαῖαι. The division here is between necessary pleasures (which one can go for to excess or deficiently) and pleasures that are not necessary, but are choiceworthy in themselves.<sup>20</sup>

The order of explanation at 1150a21-2 is that (i) because such a person is incurable, he is (rightly called) self-indulgent (akolastos) and (ii) he is incurable because he is without regrets.<sup>21</sup> The idea behind (i) is that chastisement (kolasis) is a kind of cure.<sup>22</sup> This passage picks up the sophistic worry at 1146a31-1146b2 (the sixth aporia of 7.2). There the sophistic suggestion was that one acting because he was persuaded and from choice in going for excessive pleasures is better than the akratic because the former is easier to cure, since he can be (presumably rationally) persuaded to change his evaluation of the pleasures. Aristotle's answer in 7.7 is not his last or even

his main discussion of this worry in Book 7: much of 7.8 is concerned with it (cf. 1151b4-12).

Aristotle's repeated return to this problem suggests that it is not merely superficial. Responsiveness to reason is plausibly a central determinant of the goodness of a practical disposition. If the self-indulgent had not been given good reason for the virtuous course and would accept it if given (and the akratic is already in possession of these good reasons), then there might be some temptation to think that the self-indulgent is more curable and that perhaps even that his disposition is as good as (or better than) the akratic's. This could be true even if the self-indulgent has no regrets, while the akratic does. (Of course, after accepting the good reasons, the self-indulgent should come to regret, in some way, his previous choice.)

But this line of thought that may motivate the puzzle has several errors. First, and perhaps less important, on the side of the akratic: (a) the failure of the akratic to act in accordance with his choice does not show that he is incurable, since he might be curable by the training of his desires and emotions, and (b) it may not even show that he is not curable by aiming directly at rational persuasion, since, for example, perhaps a fuller understanding of his

reasons for the good choice might bring about a change in his non-rational motivations.

On the side of the self-indulgent, it assumes that they are right now in a condition such that they would respond to good reasons and this seems false. Aristotle gives further argument as to why this is so at 7.8, 1151a11-28. It is at least tempting to see 1151a11-9 as suggesting that the self-indulgent will only be able to change their choices (at least typically) after their desires and emotions have been changed. This is stronger than the idea that choices (and deliberation) cannot be changed without a change in desires and emotions; it gives the latter change some sort of temporal and perhaps causal priority. Corruption in one's views of what is to be pursued is especially damaging to our overall evaluation of the person, and difficult to cure (1151a11-28). Both of these claims rest on further substantive views about (i) the value of deliberation and what sets its end (telos), and (ii) the psychological processes by which one's end is acquired.

This is not to deny that the akratic has a serious failing that may be difficult to cure: that the disposition to act against choice is a serious failing and (relatively) hard to correct underlies the judgment at 1152a27-9 that

melancholic (and thus impetuous) akratics are easier to cure than those who do not remain by the results of their deliberation (cf. 1151a1-5).

(4) Finally, 1150a23-5 tells us that something similar is going on in the case of one who avoids bodily pains not through being weaker, but by choice; but what, exactly, is similar? The most straightforward answer is that such a person is also self-indulgent.<sup>23</sup> This reading explicitly characterizes (the appropriate) deliberate error with respect to pains as self-indulgence and thus seems to spell out what is implicit in 1150a9-11. It may, however, create a certain tension with 1150a31-2 and I shall return to that issue in the next section.

There would, I think, be much less temptation to think that the one deliberately going wrong with respect to pain is without regrets. If the pains are something other than the pains of the frustration of the desire for the bad pleasure, then intuitively it seems that regret may be more likely than in the case of pleasure-based self-indulgence. Pain seems to provide quite a strong impulse to action even in the face of opposed values. If the pains are those of a (potentially) frustrated desire for pleasure, perhaps it is still more likely that regret would be felt. Aversiveness of

pain is perhaps more likely to co-exist with conflicting value-based judgments and emotions than the attractiveness of pleasure is. (This is consistent with Aristotle's view that pain can undermine one's judgments about goodness, e.g. 1140b11-20).

### Section #3: 1150a25-32

Of those who do not choose [a25, τῶν δὲ μὴ προαιρουμένων], the one is led because of pleasure, the other because of avoiding the pain of desire, so that they are different from each other. And it would seem to everyone that one is worse, if one should do something base [aischron] without desiring it or desiring it weakly than if one desires it greatly; and if one should strike another while not angry rather than angry. For what would he have done if he had been experiencing some affection? For this reason, the self-indulgent is worse than the akratic. Of the ones mentioned [a31, τῶν λεχθέντων], one is more a form of softness, the other is the self-indulgent.

(1) I begin with a question affecting our reading of this entire section: to whom does "the ones mentioned" at 1150a31 refer?

Option #1. This sums up the discussion begun at 1150a25 of "those who do not choose" and refers to the soft and the akratic. Those taking this view, emend, without any manuscript authority, "self-indulgent" (ἀκόλαστῆς) in a32 to "akratic" (ἀκρατῆς).

Option #2. "The ones mentioned" goes all the way back to 1150a19-21 and 1150a23-5. Aristotle distinguishes those who act on choice for pleasure and those who act on choice to avoid pain: the former are akratic, the latter "a form of softness." It is not, strictly speaking, softness, since the soft do not act on their choices.

As noted, this interpretation has costs: if 1150a23-5 characterizes deliberate going wrong with respect to pain as self-indulgence, why should Aristotle muddy the waters at a31-2 and call this "more a form of softness"? Perhaps the best solution is to see 1150a23-5 and a31-2 as consistent in the following way. While both the pleasure and pain forms of deliberate going wrong are properly described as self-indulgence, nevertheless self-indulgence is primarily concerned with pleasure, cf. NE 1117b23-7 and

EE 1230b9-12, 1231a26-b4. But why is moderation less concerned with pains? This is easiest to see if the pains are those of the frustration of desire, but this is not necessary. Even if it includes, e.g., the pains of heat, etc., much greater problems typically arise from the inappropriate pursuit of pleasures. I shall return below to the question of how Aristotle understands the nature of the pains involved in moderation and self-indulgence, and in particular, whether they are limited to the pains of the frustration of a desire for a relevant pleasure.

If we take Option #2, 1150a25-31 is often seen as an awkward digression (Stewart) or simply excised (Wilson). Wilson worries that (i) a27-31 interrupts and is irrelevant, and (ii) the restriction of the relevant pain in a26-7 to that from desire does not fit Aristotle's own examples in 7.7 1150b1-16.<sup>24</sup> So at least part of our task is to see whether we can keep the text as it stands.

There are several significant links between 1150a25-7 and the foregoing parts of this chapter. (1) If we see 1150a21-2 as a slight digression, a19-21 and a23-5 have as their main point the characterization of those going wrong in accordance with their choice with respect to pleasures and pains. Taking up immediately afterwards at a25 those

who do not act in accordance with their choice, but also go wrong with respect to pleasures and pains (and Aristotle again explicitly mentions both), is quite natural. (2) What is the subject of "they are different" (diapherousin) in a27? If it is the one who is led because of pleasure (a25-6) and the one avoiding the pain of desire (a26-7), one might think that such an obvious point does not need the emphasis of a hôte clause. It is better, I think, with Grant and Burnet, to take the subject as those who act wrongly but not on their choice, and those who act wrongly on their choice (a19-21 and a23-5).<sup>25</sup>

But even if we allow "Of those who do not choose" (a25 τῶν δὲ) . . . "each other" (a27 ἀλλήλων) to remain, perhaps it is still the case that "And it would seem to everyone" (a27 παντί) . . . "is worse than the akratic" (a31 ἀκρατῆς) is out of place? Wilson makes this suggestion and is followed by some commentators. I would prefer to avoid this, since Wilson's work shows that there are a number of passages in Book 7 that are (at least partial) duplicates or echoes of one another as well as a number of digressions. If we bracket or move such texts when there are some, but not very strong reasons indeed, to do so, it is

not clear where we might end (and Wilson's own work shows where such speculation can end).

As many have noted, a27 . . . a31 is close to 1148a16-22. Indeed, if we are not motivated by Wilson's more involved speculations, the worry about duplication seems to be by far the strongest reason for moving the whole of a25-31. But the lines, as they stand, fit the context since they offer an explanation of how those who act on choice differ from those who do not. Also, if the text is sound, we might expect 1150a27-31 to be briefer than 1148a16-22 (as it is), and its phrasing seems appropriate to making a similar point in this later context.<sup>26</sup> Finally, once we accept the above view of the subject of "they are different" in a27, there is less inclination to think that a27. . . a31 out of place, since these lines now offer a reason why the self-indulgent differ from those who act wrongly, but not on choice.

(2) 1150a27-31 makes a comparative judgment about the self-indulgent (A) and the akratic (B) and provides the following rationale for it.

(I) If A and B each do something X that is base, but A feels little or no desire for X, while B feels great desire for X, then A is worse than B.

By itself, this is not an obviously acceptable principle, and some commentators think that Aristotle's argument here simply fails.<sup>27</sup>

That the self-indulgent is worse than the akratic is uncontroversial for Aristotle and can be supported by more than one line of argument (although these lines may be related.) To begin, let us locate this claim with respect to the introductory material in 7.1 and 7.2. (i) In 7.1, Aristotle says that some people mix up the self-indulgent and the akratic, while others hold that they are different (1145b14-7); (ii) the second sophistic argument in 7.2 (1146a31-b2) noted above claims that the one who goes wrong deliberately with respect to pleasure is "better" than the akratic, since the former is easier to cure. As we saw, 11150a21-2 claimed that it really is the self-indulgent who are incurable, but it did not explicitly mention the akratic or goodness and badness.

So one way to ground the value judgment at 1150a27-31 would be to accept that comparative goodness/badness covaries with curability. Aristotle returns to the

comparison at 1151a11-26 which appeals to the more fundamental line of thought that the self-indulgent is worse because in him the principle (archê) of deliberation and action has been corrupted, while it is still (at least to a significant degree) preserved in the akratic.

Aristotle supports (I) at a30 by asking what the person who acted wrongly with little desire or emotion would have done if he had felt great emotion or desire. Both (I) and this line of thought supporting it can be linked to the point about curability, and perhaps ultimately rest on the idea that the principle in the self-indulgent is corrupted. But there is also a more direct line of argument. The anticipated answer to the question at a30 seems to be that if the self-indulgent were to feel an affection of the same intensity or degree that the akratic does when the akratic does X, then the self-indulgent would do something much worse or more base (call it "Y") than X. This would not, however, obviously show the great superiority of the akratic, if, when given the chance, he were still to do that worse thing, Y, while feeling a yet more intense desire to do so.<sup>28</sup>

The picture that Aristotle may be suggesting (which is, I think, plausible) is that for something worse than X, e.g.,

Y, the self-indulgent will feel a strong desire for Y and act on it from choice, while the akratic will not feel (such) a strong desire for Y and will not do Y. E.g. the self-indulgent feels a weak desire for a fourth glass of whisky at a party, thinks it good to take it and does so; the akratic feels a strong desire for that whisky at a party, thinks it best not to take it, but does so anyway. The self-indulgent will also feel a strong desire, e.g., to spend a weekend binge drinking, and will do so; but akratic will not feel a strong desire for this nor will he do so. Such a pattern of desires and actions (including counterfactual ones) would plausibly make it seem obvious "to everyone" that the self-indulgent is worse, without, at any rate, an explicit, appeal to the comparative corruption of his principle.

(3) Finally, 1150a26-7 seems to display a narrow understanding of the pains relevant to these dispositions (i.e. it is the pain of frustrated desire), and I take up the general issue in the next section.

**Section #4: 1150a32-50b1**

The self-controlled is opposed to the akratic, and the enduring to the soft; for endurance [to karterein] depends on resisting [antechein], but self-control depends on being stronger [kratein]. And to resist [antechein] and to be stronger [kratein] are different, just as not being weaker [to mê hêttasthai] is different from winning [nikan]. For this reason, self-control is more choiceworthy than endurance.

Section #4 returns to the issue presented at the beginning of this chapter, that is, the relation between the self-controlled/the akratic, and the enduring/the soft. In section #1 at 1150a13-5, these pairs are distinguished by their objects: the former are concerned with pleasures, the latter with pains. Commentators sometimes wonder whether 1150a32-6 is intended to be a supplement to 1150a13-5, or whether it supersedes 1150a13-5 so that, e.g., the self-controlled is one who is stronger than either pleasures or pains, while the enduring (only) resists pleasures and pains. On the whole, I think it is better to regard 1150a32-6 as supplementing 1150a13-5. Both before and after 1150a32-6 (e.g. 1150b2-8, b17-9) Aristotle distinguishes akrasia and softness in terms of their different

objects—pleasure and pain, respectively—and it is unlikely that he adopts a very different conception here without marking it in some way.

This is the most controversial section of our chapter, since, first, it is not clear exactly how Aristotle intends to distinguish self-control from endurance (indeed, several commentators think that Aristotle's claim that the former is more choiceworthy is simply unfounded), and, secondly, it brings to a head the issue of what sorts of pains are relevant to these dispositions. I begin with the latter issue. Assuming being enduring is a matter of resisting pains, and being self-controlled is matter of being stronger than pleasures, what pains does Aristotle have in mind here? It is what he finds to be the text's inconsistencies on this point that is one of Wilson's main reasons for thinking that Book 7 is a composite.

A narrow construal, according to Wilson, is suggested by the passages on moderation in the unique books of the NE and the EE.

Excess about pleasures, then, is clearly self-indulgence and blameworthy; as for pains, one is not, as in the case of courage, called moderate for facing them nor self-

indulgent for not doing so, but the self-indulgent is so called because he is pained more than he should at not getting pleasant things (even his pain is caused by pleasure), and the moderate man is so called because he is not pained at the absence of what is pleasant and at his abstinence from it. The self-indulgent . . . is pained both when he fails to get them [pleasant things] and when he is desiring them (for desire is with pain).<sup>29</sup> (NE 1118b27-1119a4)

The EE texts are, I think, less clear.

The man in such a condition as to be deficient in the pleasures which all must in general share in and enjoy is insensible . . . the man who is excessive is self-indulgent. For all naturally enjoy these objects and conceive desires for them, and neither are, nor are called self-indulgent; for they neither exceed by enjoying them more than they should when they get them, nor by feeling greater pain than they should when they do not get them. (EE 1231a26-32)<sup>30</sup>

The Eudemian Ethics' brief discussion of moderation is focused more on pleasure, and we should not conclude that Aristotle means to restrict the relevant pains to only those arising out of the frustration of desire. In particular, in the above passage, Aristotle seems more concerned to show that one can enjoy many pleasures without being self-indulgent. So his attention is on the differences between the moderate and the self-indulgent both when they attain the pleasures they seek and when they fail. If 7.4 and 7.7 broaden the pains associated with moderation, they are slightly more compatible with the E.E. passages, I think, than with the NE passages.

Wilson also claims in support that in both the Nicomachean and the Eudemian Ethics Aristotle associates endurance and softness with the objects of courage and cowardice (deilia) and may, e.g., see softness as a form of cowardice.<sup>31</sup> But this evidence is weaker than Wilson suggests. NE 1116a12-4 does see softness as a form of cowardice, but this is very much a remark in passing and it does not seem to be an attempt to make the notion of softness precise. It certainly does not exclude the possibility that in the same work Aristotle offers a more precise or strict understanding of softness.

But Wilson also claims that the same picture is found in the following passage.

But fear only occurs in connection with the expectations of pain whose nature is to be destructive of life. Therefore men who are very soft as to some things are brave, and some who are hard (sklêroi) and enduring are cowards . . . For if a man were such as to be patient as reason requires towards heat and cold and other similar, not dangerous pains, but weak and timid about death, not for any other feeling, but just because it brings destruction, while another was soft in regard to these but unaffected in regard to death, the former would seem cowardly, the latter brave. (EE 1229a39-b10)

This passage, however, makes precisely the opposite point from that suggested by Wilson. Softness here is certainly not seen as a kind of cowardice: one can be both soft and brave and enduring and cowardly. Although the relations among virtues may be so strong that it is not, strictly speaking, possible for one to be genuinely brave, but also soft, the basic point seems clear. Endurance and softness are not concerned with the objects of courage, and their

own objects at least include some pains connected with hunger and cold (cf. EE 1229b13-21).

To begin to sort this issue out, let us first consider what the pains directly related to a desire for pleasure would be. Most straightforwardly, (a) just having a desire itself may be (at least sometimes) painful, and (b) the frustration of desire is painful.<sup>32</sup> Aristotle seems to broaden this account substantially, however, in 7.4.

But of those having to do with bodily enjoyments, (with which we say the moderate and self-indulgent man are concerned), he who pursues the excesses of things pleasant and shuns those of things painful, of hunger and thirst and heat and cold and all the objects of touch and taste, not by choice but contrary to his choice and his judgment, is called akratic, not with the qualification "in respect of this or that", e.g., of anger, but just without qualification.<sup>33</sup> (NE 1148a4-11)

This passage might constitute a broadening in two ways. First, it may allow in as concerning moderation, quite generally, the pleasures of hunger and thirst and heat and cold (although these are still said to be pleasures of touch

and taste).<sup>34</sup> Second, and more controversially, it may allow in quite generally, the pains of hunger and thirst and heat and cold. The worry here is that, as noted above, some have thought that Aristotle in the unique books of the Nicomachean Ethics (and more questionably the Eudemian Ethics) restricts the relevant pains to those associated with the frustration of desire. But the pain of frustrated desire is distinct from these expanded pains: when I am freezing, it is no doubt usually the case that my desire to be warm is (painfully) frustrated, but it seems also that being cold is painful in itself.

Burnet (followed by Gauthier-Jolif and contra Wilson) argues that such broadening is acceptable, and citing the claim at Parts of Animals 646a16 that wet and dry and hot and cold are the matter of "composite bodies", infers that the pleasures of warmth and coolness are thus on "exactly the same footing as the pleasures of nutrition and reproduction."<sup>35</sup> Yet we might have several worries. First, with respect to the gourmand, Aristotle is concerned to localize the relevant pleasures of touch to certain body parts, and Burnet's inference threatens to let all tangible pleasures in. Burnet's idea might be that if we first restrict (on some independent grounds) the relevant pleasures of

touch to certain parts of the body, then, because the objects enjoyed with those parts are composites of wet and dry and hot and cold, we can see them as pleasures taken in warmth, coolness and so on. But this, too, seems problematic: if all sensible composite bodies were in some way composed out of prime matter and form, would this show that these are pleasures taken in prime matter and form? To put it anachronistically, even if the composition claim is true, it does not show that the composite things are desired or enjoyed under that description.<sup>36</sup> But Aristotle does specify hot/cold and dry/wet as objects of touch and such a claim may rest on some of his basic views about the nature of the elements and of perception.<sup>37</sup> We might also restrict these pleasures in the way suggested above so that they are, more or less, those shared with other animals. The details would still need to be worked out, but we can perhaps see the beginning of a story that would allow pleasures of warmth and coolness to be pleasures of touch.

But there is a more basic worry. Aristotle remarks:  
  
it is for facing what is painful, then, as has been said, that men are called courageous. Hence courage also involves

pain, and is justly praised; for it is harder to face what is painful than to abstain from what is pleasant. (NE 1117a32-5, cf. 1119a21-33)

The pains relevant to courage are those of wounds or death, especially on the battlefield. Nevertheless, there is something in the general point apart from these qualifications. First, certain sorts of resistance to pain seem more difficult and thus perhaps finer than refraining from pleasures (and this may present a difficulty for Aristotle's claim that self-control is more choiceworthy than endurance.) More generally, many instances of resistance to pain do not seem to belong obviously to the sphere of moderation as we seem to have understood it so far, e.g., enduring heat and hunger during a military campaign.

NE 1111b27-33 may show an awareness of the general problem and it is here that Aristotle may seem to adopt a narrow understanding of the relevant pains. The pains here acquire their orientation from the goal of seeking pleasure. And although we shall return to the point below, the narrow construal may seem prima facie to be the most promising strategy for vindicating Aristotle's preference for self-control over endurance. Resisting the pain of heat and

hunger on a military campaign seems finer than being stronger than the desire for getting drunk and, offhand, there is some plausibility in the idea that resisting pains arising from the frustration of, e.g., a desire to get drunk are least fine.<sup>38</sup>

Is there any good substantive motivation for expanding the range of pleasures and pains? Proponents of the Cook Wilson interpretation often seem to assume that the narrow construal is preferable, but that the fact that Aristotle only explicitly gives the narrow construal in NE 3.12 is not a reason for thinking that this construal is philosophically superior. There has been surprisingly little discussion of this issue by those concerned with the question of the broadening at 7.4. I can only touch on this topic here, but there are reasons to think that the broader account has advantages.

(i) As we have seen, 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. Allowing pleasures taken in, e.g., hot/cold, dry/wet, would give Aristotle a better account of the pleasures associated with eating and drinking (and similarly for the pleasures of sex).

(ii) Even if the pleasures of food, sex, and drink are typically for human beings more likely to affect one's other activities than the pleasures of warmth and so on, these pleasures form a natural group. (The pleasures of warmth may allow Aristotle to account for the pleasures of alcohol, which seem otherwise difficult for him.) An important aspect of Aristotle's conception of the pleasures relevant to moderation is that they are those shared with animals; they are enjoyed in a way similar to animal enjoyment (e.g. without the mediation of notions of fineness or beauty) and the latter pleasures fit well into this category. Indeed, as the De Anima account of touch makes clear, hot/cold and wet/dry are the proper objects of touch and thus must be perceptible by all animals. Similarly, Aristotle's criteria for distinguishing the pleasures relevant to *akrasia* without qualification (haplôtês) from its qualified forms will group pleasures of warmth and so on with the former (at both 1147b23-31 and 1148a22-6).

(iii) Finally, there is something unsatisfactory about marking out the pain of frustrated desire as a particular sphere for moderation. Other virtues require appropriate desires, and part of having these virtues will involve the proper reaction to their frustration. At least some further

argument is needed as to why dealing with the frustration of desires for food, sex, and drink deserves such a special place in the virtue of moderation. Picking up on (ii), it is also the case that the pains of heat and cold are much more clearly shared with animals than the pain of the frustration of desire which quickly shades into a distinctively human reaction (including spirited emotions).

Is there any way of expanding beyond the pains of frustration while still avoiding the worry of overbreadth? As a first approximation of the range of pains softness is concerned with, we might allow in—in addition to those of frustrated desire—the pains of heat and hunger, etc. that are experienced in the course of the proper satisfaction of normal healthful bodily desires, e.g., enduring thirst while having an illness that makes it better not to drink. More generally, we might allow in the day to day bodily pains of touch that are part of commonplace everyday activities. Such pains will have to avoided for their own sake. Endurance complicates the matter, since, as we saw, we might rate it very highly if the pains are endured for a very fine goal, and it seems implausible to see endurance as the right point on a scale of enduring too many or too few pains for their own sake, since it is hard to see what pains are to

be endured for their own sake.<sup>39</sup> So perhaps it is most plausible to see endurance as in service, e.g., of bodily health or the normal, commonplace activities of life. But we still need to see whether this allows us to make sense of the being stronger/resisting distinction, and of Aristotle's preference for self-control over endurance.<sup>40</sup>

This is perhaps the most controversial part of the chapter. Aristotle offers a simple argument by analogy (1150a33-b1).

(A) Being enduring depends on resisting; being self-controlled depends on being stronger.

(B) Resisting is like not being weaker (or defeated); being stronger is like being victorious.

[(C) So being enduring is like not being weaker (or defeated); being self-controlled is like being victorious.]

(From A and B.)

[(D) Being victorious is more choiceworthy than not being weaker (or defeated).]

(E) Being self-controlled is more choiceworthy than being enduring. (From A,B,D.)

I shall leave aside here tidying up the argument form.

Aristotle does not give us much help in unpacking this argument, and as I have noted, some commentators think that there is no reasonable distinction to be drawn here. Before turning to their specific worries, let us consider some of the constraints on an interpretation.

(1) The positive characterization of the self-controlled cannot be strong enough to turn him into the moderate man, nor can negative characterization of the soft turn him into the self-indulgent.

This constraint should be uncontroversial, but, as we shall see, it is not without some bite.

(2) There are further constraints on how far the self-controlled "is stronger than" pleasure:

(a) he has strong (ischurai) and bad (phaulai) desires (1146a9-10),

(b) the self-controlled man has bad desires, but the moderate man has none; and the moderate man is such as to take no pleasure contrary to the prescription [logos], but the self-controlled man is such as to take pleasure contrary to the prescription, but is not led by it. (NE 1152a1-3)

So to begin, the self-controlled has strong and bad desires, but still makes and acts upon the right choice. What, exactly, is the meaning of he "is such as to take pleasure contrary to the prescription?" It will certainly be the case that he actually takes pleasure in this kind of thing when it is not contrary to the prescription, e.g. he may enjoy a glass of wine with dinner. (But then so might a moderate man.) When the self-controlled has chosen not to take a fourth glass of wine, what is true of him with respect to pleasure? He will still have a strong desire to take the drink, he may take pleasure in imagining taking the fourth glass, and it might be the case that if he were to drink it, he would find it pleasant. We might also ask whether he would merely find it pleasant by itself, or whether he would also find it pleasant overall, since, e.g., he will presumably feel regret. One attractive line of interpretation holds that he would find it pleasant overall.<sup>41</sup>

If this is right, it suggests a corresponding account of the enduring: he has strong and bad desires (or avoidances), but still makes and acts upon the right choice. Let us add that he is such as to take pain in things contrary

to the prescription. So when faced with a choice in which the good option has the appropriate pains, the enduring makes and acts upon the good choice, but feels pain overall (here we do not have to evaluate the pleasure and pain in counterfactual situations, cf. NE 1179b32-3).

An important worry about this characterization is provided by a passage noted earlier.

The pleasure or pain that supervenes on actions should be treated as a sign of dispositions; for someone who refrains from bodily pleasures and takes pleasure in doing so is moderate, while someone who is upset at doing so is self-indulgent. (NE 1104b3-7)

This passage—at least on one plausible interpretation which takes it to claim that one who acts rightly with pain overall is self-indulgent<sup>42</sup>—seems to classify the enduring as self-indulgent, and, a fortiori, the soft as self-indulgent as well. There are ways to try to disarm NE 1104b3-7.<sup>43</sup> In any case, I do not think that we should allow this passage to control our interpretation of Book 7, so let us accept the above characterization of endurance. Finally, we should note that the above characterizations make no reference to

time and time might be relevant, e.g. perhaps the self-controlled can bring it about that his desires are less pressing before action.

Commentators have raised a number of objections to the cogency of Aristotle's distinction here and the conclusion that he draws. Let me focus on what I take to be the most important. Wilson objects to Aristotle's distinction between the akratic and the soft, and thus between the self-controlled and the enduring, that there is no way to distinguish acting for gaining pleasure (akratic), and acting to avoid the pain of frustrated desire (soft).<sup>44</sup> But as David Charles rightly points out, Aristotle does draw a distinction between acting from pleasure and acting to avoid pain at 1150a25ff.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, it intuitively seems quite reasonable to think that people might act on one rather than the other, even if both are present. I might sometimes act against choice and smoke a cigarette for pleasure (e.g. at a party) while still having the pain of a frustrated desire until I give in, and sometimes to avoid pain (e.g. when I am bothered by my desire for a cigarette when stressed), although I still get pleasure from the cigarette.

So what are the options in understanding how the self-controlled is stronger than or is victorious over pleasure?

(1) The simplest account would be that the self-controlled's previous habituation and previous virtuous (or semi-virtuous) activities have shaped his desires so that they are weaker, less intense, less likely to come into play and so on than those of most people. The self-controlled might have strong and bad desires, but those of most people are worse. It is reasonable to think that this is at least part of what is going on. But as we shall see, 1150b22-5 suggests some more active measures a person might take in closer temporal proximity to the possible temptation.

(2) The self-controlled may take active steps to diminish the negative impact of the bad desire. Since, as we have seen, there are many ways for desires to influence a person, there are many strategies:

- (a) he might be able to reduce directly the strength, intensity etc., of the bad desire,
- (b) he might turn his attention away from the pleasant object, and no longer dwell on it in imagination, which may reduce the strength of his bad desire (as well as, perhaps, his estimate of the pleasantness of the bad pleasure),

(c) he might rehearse the bad consequences of the bad choice, especially in terms of similar pleasures and pains, e.g., when faced with an extra drink, instead of thinking about the long-run effects on his liver, focus on memories of the room spinning, nausea, etc.,

(d) greater awareness of his situation may make him find the bad pleasure less pleasant than previously imagined: he may have increased awareness of the regret he will feel, and of the other desires frustrated by the bad option.

(3) Perhaps in some of these cases, a person can simply make up his mind that the pleasure is not a "live option" for him. It seems, introspectively, that we sometimes can do this: when faced with a café latte, I, as a tempted vegan, can simply make up my mind that this is not something that I will go for and this, in some way, may block the desire from having as much motivational effect on me.

Some of these steps not only reduce the strength of the desire, but also actually influence the degree to which the person finds (or imagines) the bad option to be pleasant.

Since Aristotle does not give us much to go on, these suggestions must remain somewhat speculative. These strategies are not, I think, simply rendered otiose, even if

the agent has gone through the deliberation necessary for choice (whatever that amounts to).

What about the enduring person and pain? Some similar options should be available to him, e.g., (1). One important distinction, however, is that while the self-controlled will not actually experience the bad pleasure, the enduring will experience the pain attendant on acting on the good choice. Even if some analogues of the above strategies are available to the enduring, this remains an important disanalogy.

So can we now ground the being stronger than/resisting distinction and, with it, the greater choiceworthiness of self-control? Let us first consider restricting the relevant pains to those of the frustration of desire. To take an example, the self-controlled and enduring are offered another drink, both choose to refrain and do refrain, although both would enjoy the drink. Perhaps the self-controlled can, in one of the ways noted above, bring it about that he feels little pain at the frustration of his desire or anyway less than the enduring. This might be the case because a person is more troubled by the pain of frustration the more intense his desires are. In this case, we might reasonably think the enduring is

worse than the self-controlled. Could it be that pains and pleasures in the self-controlled were equally intense as those in the enduring? A distinction between the two character types then seems harder to draw, but perhaps still possible. The akratic might be more susceptible to pleasure than pain while the reverse is true of the enduring. (This will require cashing out intensity, etc., in some other way than causal power to bring about action; at most, we might understand intensity in terms of causal power to bring about action apart from the rest of the agent's character or dispositions.)

If we include the pains of hunger, thirst, and so on (either in the pursuit of health or in the course of day to day living, like the cloak dragger below), the distinction between some of the self-controlled and some of the enduring becomes easier to draw. The self-controlled will win out over desires for the pleasures of food and sex, while the enduring resists, e.g., the pain of hunger when he needs to fast for a day.<sup>46</sup> We might also think that usually the intensity of such pleasures is harder to resist, so that the enduring is less impressive.

But do these solutions give enough force to the idea that the self-controlled is stronger, the enduring only

resists, and that for this reason the former is more choiceworthy? It is easiest to accept this if, for example, the self-controlled has reduced desires for pleasure and thus less pain or if he can succeed in making the pleasure not a live option, while the enduring cannot do this for the avoidance of pain. More speculatively, Aristotle might have direct grounds for distinguishing between susceptibility to pleasure and pain. There does, for example, seem to be a certain kind of passivity in being motivationally responsive to pain and this is especially so if the pains are merely the reactive ones of the frustration of desire. Such responsiveness is a focusing of one's attention and energies on deficiencies, and aims merely at enduring them. (I do not mean to endorse this line of thought without qualification and, as always, it becomes less plausible the greater the pains are.)

Finally, perhaps there are some relevant differences in the ways that pleasure and pain affect our judgments about goodness. Aristotle does, of course, following Plato, think that both pleasure and pain tend to corrupt one's conception of the proper end and beliefs about goodness and badness (e.g. NE 1104b9-13, 18-24, 1140b11-20, 1151a15-20). But one might think that there is one way in

which pain can be more corrupting of one's values. Even if pleasure is the apparent good, the self-controlled will have gained experience in seeing that the pleasant and the good can come apart (some pleasant things may not be good, some are less good than they appear). He has grown used to overriding pleasure's tendency to appear as good. This may be more difficult with pain: it may be very hard to perceive something as painful without also seeing it as bad, even if its badness is outweighed (NE 1119a23-4 is an extreme case). The enduring man, in resisting the pains of frustrated desires and day to day pains takes them seriously and attributes a significant badness to them. This gives them too much weight in his views of what is good and a better person will take little or no notice of them. (This again requires that the pains not be too great.) If the enjoyments of the self-controlled can be more insulated from his ends and judgments of what is worth taking seriously, this gives some additional sense to the idea that the self-controlled is stronger and is victorious.

#### **Section #5: 1150b1-19**

The one who is deficient with respect to those things that the many struggle against [antiteinousi], and successfully,

is soft and dainty; for daintiness too is a kind of softness.<sup>47</sup> Such a man drags his cloak so that he will not suffer the pain of lifting it up, and while imitating a sick person does not think he is miserable, although he is like a miserable man.

Similar things hold about self-control and akrasia. For if someone is weaker than strong or excessive pleasures or pains, it is not surprising; rather it is pardonable if he struggles against [them], just as Theodectes' Philoctetes does when bitten by the viper or Cercyon in the Alope of Carcinus, and just like those trying to hold their laughter who burst out laughing all at once, as happened to Xenophantus. But [it is surprising], if someone with respect to those things which the many are able to resist [antechein], is defeated by them and is not able to struggle against them, unless it is on account of his congenital nature [physin tou genous] or on account of disease, as there is softness in the kings of Scythia on account of heredity [genos], or as women differ from men.

The man fond of amusement also seems to be self-indulgent, but is soft. For amusement is a relaxation, since it is a rest. And the man fond of amusement is among those who exceed with respect to this.

Presumably, "those things" that the many struggle against at 1150b1 are pains, since this is a characterization of the soft. Aristotle reapplies here the criterion of what "most people" would do that opened the chapter at 1150a9-15. He perhaps shifts now to "resist" (antiteinein), instead of "be stronger than" (1150a12 kreittous, kratein) to avoid, in light of 1150a32-1150b1, saying that those who succeed with respect to pain are stronger than the pain.

Aristotle's example here of such a case of softness, is the cloak dragger who imitates the sick. This person may or may not be a hypochondriac, but is probably fussy about drafts, spicy food etc. This case is a good illustration of softness in that it emphasizes the pettiness of the pains involved (and the pettiness of mind of the corresponding character). It is also much easier to see these as minor bodily pains than as pains arising from frustration of desire. In this man, there is not much sense of inner conflict or struggle, but it is not clear how much struggle is required for all cases of akrasia. In any case, the description does not, I think, suggest that this person straightforwardly acts on a bad choice. (1150b5 need not mean that he is confident that he is acting for the best).

Having restated his criterion for being soft (and implicitly for being enduring), Aristotle turns to self-control and akrasia at 1150b5-6. Here the general point is that there are pleasures and pains so great that although it would be good to be stronger than (or resist) them if possible, failure to do so does not disqualify one from the positive disposition (self-control, endurance) nor place one into the negative disposition (akrasia, softness). Aristotle makes this point by reference to the idea that certain pleasures and pains are strong and excessive or overpowering rather than by appeal to what the many would do, but the two are presumably intimately related (excessiveness is especially important, since, as we have seen, the akratic has strong bad desires).

The reference to pain at b6 complicates the otherwise tidy division between endurance/softness and self-control/akrasia, since Aristotle goes on to consider cases that are not primarily, if at all, of akrasia. Further, these examples are somewhat puzzling in their own right.<sup>48</sup> But it may not be necessary to see each of these as even an instance of one of the dispositions related to moderation and self-indulgence, but only as some sort of pardonable overcoming. The case of Philoctetes is perhaps especially

problematic. There is no difficulty in allowing that he was not displaying softness when he finally gave in, but if he displayed endurance for a time, then such endurance seems to be a fairly impressive accomplishment.<sup>49</sup>

Aristotle's comment about amusement is perhaps primarily of interest insofar as it is an instance of his willingness to distinguish acting for pleasure and to avoid pain (even when both are present).

#### **Section #6. 1150b19-28**

Of akrasia, one kind is impetuosity [propeteia], the other, weakness [astheneia]. For some, having deliberated, do not abide by the results of their deliberations on account of their affections [to pathos]; others, on account of not having deliberated, are led by their affections. For some people (just like those who tickle first are not tickled), if they have seen it coming, and looked out for it, and have roused themselves and their calculative faculty [logismon], are not weaker than the affection, whether it is pleasant or painful. Those who are keen and melancholic are especially prone to impetuous akrasia. For it is on account of their quickness in the one case, and on account of their intensity in the other that they do not wait for reason,

because they are prone to follow appearances [têi phantasiai].<sup>50</sup>

The distinction between impetuous and weak akrasia, although it is not among the topics explicitly mentioned in 7.1-2, is important for Aristotle's overall views about akrasia. But it is also the case that an interpretation of this passage must be informed by one's overall understanding of the theory of 7.3 and of Aristotle's conception of deliberation. Both traditional and non-traditional interpretations of 7.3 can make sense of this passage and I do not think that it can by itself give us decisive grounds for choosing among these interpretations.

Nevertheless, this passage has been seen, not unreasonably, as providing difficulties for traditional interpretations that deny that Aristotle allows any akratic to hold the good conclusion and act against it. Ross, for example, at least at one time, thought that the psychological theory of 7.3 is only compatible with impetuous akrasia.<sup>51</sup> And, indeed, the most straightforward reading of 1150b19-28 identifies the weak akratic with those who reach the good conclusion, but hold it in an "off-color" way; the impetuous fail earlier, e.g. they

do not deliberate at all or fail to complete their deliberation by reaching the good conclusion. But traditional interpretations can be made consistent with this passage. We might, e.g., identify the impetuous with those who fail to have the minor premise, and the weak with those who have it, but fail to use it.<sup>52</sup>

1150b23-5 are especially interesting, since they seem to describe strategies for avoiding being overcome that might be employed even by well-brought up, decent people. Moreover, they involve both reflection and some sort of activity of a person with respect to his own psychic dispositions and faculties. These strategies seem designed to prevent impetuous, rather than weak, akrasia and this is made more explicit by the author of the Magna Moralia.<sup>53</sup>

The possibility of such strategies for the impetuous, but not the weak, akratic suggests that the impetuous akratic is more open to change and that such change can grow out of his own efforts and rational reflection. This theme and the resulting preferability of the impetuous akratic are picked up in the following chapters.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Outside of 7.7., for the NE, I quote, with modifications, the translation in Broadie and Rowe (2002); for other works of Aristotle, my translations draw on those in Barnes (1985).

<sup>2</sup> These correspond to the Didot subsections, although it subdivides 1150b1-19 into b1-b5, b5-16, and b16-19. These further subdivisions may mark slight shifts, but 1150b1-19 is a natural unit for discussion.

<sup>3</sup> Whether or not we add the bracketed phrase to our translation, this is how we should understand the text. The two possibilities at a11-12 and a12-13 are two possible ways for a person to be disposed.

<sup>4</sup> This issue first arises in the NE at 1107b4-5, although the "not in the same" qualification is absent there unless we emend the text.

<sup>5</sup> Strictly, the EE passage begins by saying that the moderate person is concerned with pleasures, infers that

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he is thus concerned with certain desires, and then asks "about what" desires (1230b20-1).

<sup>6</sup> The claims that the pleasures of touch are in themselves "bestial" (ἄθηριόδês, NE 1118a25) as is the disposition devoted to them (1118b4) is at least awkward to combine with Aristotle's remarks in Book 7 about the bestial disposition (1145a24-5, a29-32, 1148b19, b24, 1149a6-10, a17) and, especially, bestial desires (1149b29).

<sup>7</sup> Or not F in the primary way (kuriôs, 1115a32-3). Note the slightly less formal way of qualifying a virtue ascription at 1115a34-5.

<sup>8</sup> PA 2.17 and 690b19-691a5, cf. EE 1231a12-7 and NE 1118a27-b1 (note the discriminatory role of taste).

<sup>9</sup> Perhaps one might say that he is self-indulgent in virtue of his excessive sexual desire, not in virtue of the pleasure taken in looking at the statue.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Sorabji (1993, 35-40, 55-8); Stewart (1892, 308) rightly notes that this is an implausible account of, e.g., dogs' pleasures.

<sup>11</sup> E.g. Gosling and Taylor (1984, 339). Related issues may arise for Aristotle's claim that some things are pleasant without qualification, others only for a certain person.

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<sup>12</sup> A disanalogy is that in the case of the pale sculptor, the same thing possesses F and G simultaneously. In the case of the hounds, they enjoy the sound before eating the ox. The claim that instrumental means are only chosen or pursued incidentally (1151a35-b3) provides a closer parallel. The temporal gap might no longer be there if what is enjoyed is imagining eating an ox, since the imagined ox might be lowing.

<sup>13</sup> For discussion, see Johansen (1998, 228-30) and Stewart (1892, vol. 2 306-7).

<sup>14</sup> This restriction is not inconsistent with the view in De Anima (e.g. 434b18) that taste is a form of touch as long as Aristotle can distinguish the faculties of touch and taste (on this, see Johansen (1998, 178-225)). Curzer (1997, 8) suggests that Aristotle allows the pleasures of flavors (but not those of the discrimination of flavors) as proper objects of moderation, but this is not consistent with Aristotle's view that it is only the stimulation of the throat that gives rise to the pleasure of eating; the organ of taste is the tongue or its tip (HA 492b27-8, EE 1231a13-4).

<sup>15</sup> Pace Curzer (1997, 11) and Young (1988, 528) self-indulgence is not displayed only with respect to acquired pleasures. It is wrong to assimilate those with "belly-lust"

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(1118b19-20) who go to excess with respect to shared desires to the "brutish" (1145a15-17 and 7.5). gastrimargos in Plato (Phd. 81E6, Phdr. 238b1, Tim. 73a6) and Aristotle clearly refers to ordinary gluttony, not to, e.g., eating one's children, and Aristotle explicitly counts it as a form of self-indulgence at EE 1231a19, cf. 1221b2, b16.

<sup>16</sup> One plausible refinement is: S is disposed to be weaker than the pleasures that most people are disposed to be stronger than if and only if S is akratic.

<sup>17</sup> Grant contrasts this with the pessimism of "the Semitic point of view" (1885, vol. 2, 220). Aristotle is especially optimistic if "most people" is understood statistically (cf. Burnet (1988, 158)), but is fairly optimistic even if it is construed as a claim about what is species-characteristic. If this seems in sufficient tension with Aristotle's other remarks (e.g. 1095b14-22), we might read "most people" weakly as meaning "most people whose choice is correct." Garrett's suggestion (1993, 182) that Aristotle here includes, e.g., among the self-controlled those overcoming pleasure, but choosing wrongly runs together self-control without qualification and a very weak form of incidental self-control (cf. 7.9). Aristotle, perhaps more precisely,

also characterizes these dispositions with respect to, e.g. the relevant pleasures' strength (1150b6-7, cf. 1118b22-5).

<sup>18</sup> At NE 1118b22-7, enjoying what one ought not in either way (i) or (ii) is explicitly characterized as going for excess. The distinction between (i) and (ii) is not so explicitly drawn in EE 3.2, but that chapter postpones more detail about the relevant pleasures to the future discussion of "self-control and akrasia" (EE 1231b2-4).

<sup>19</sup> See, e.g. ad loc. Burnet (1988) and Gauthier-Jolif (1970). TLG finds in Aristotle 21 instances of καθ' ὑπερβολήν, and only one of καθ' ὑπερβολὰς here at 1150a19.

<sup>20</sup> This distinction is quite similar to that at 7.4 1147b23-31, although the similarities are not so great that they could not occur in the same book. 1147b23-31 is part of what Cook Wilson and his modern followers dismiss or delete as either non-Aristotelian or inferior Aristotle. So must we also delete or dismiss these lines from 7.7?

<sup>21</sup> This is in tension with NE 1166b5-25 which depicts both the akratic and the self-indulgent as self-conflicted; see Broadie, Gauthier-Jolif, and Grant ad loc. and cf. EE 1240b12-30. Aristotle's claim is more plausible construed

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quasi-definitional: the self-indulgent as such (i.e. taking into account only what is in the definition) will not have regrets, the akratic as such will. This is only quasi-definitional, since it still requires some further substantive assumptions, e.g., that akratic's good motivations persist after his bad action. On regret in the EE, see 1224b19-21 and 1240b21-3.

<sup>22</sup> EE 1230a36-1230b8 explains this thought and with its reference to curability (1230a38) seems more closely connected with 1150a21-2 than the corresponding passage in the NE, 1119a33-1119b18.

<sup>23</sup> This is endorsed, e.g., by Aspasius, Gauthier-Jolif, and Rackham.

<sup>24</sup> Our attraction to Wilson's views may diminish on seeing their full intricacy: he holds that 1150a25-6 really describes two varieties of akrasia proper and that 1150a25-31 was originally found after 1148b9-14; these form fragments of a duplicate of 1148a4-22 which itself is fragmentary. Wilson holds that τῶν δὲ λεχθέντων should immediately follow a24-5 διὰ πρῶταις.

<sup>25</sup> Aspasius, too, seems to prefer a similar view (Heylbut 1889, 132).

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<sup>26</sup> 1150a27-31 has less detail, but generalizes to being angry which is not self-indulgence or akrasia without qualification (anger is prominent in 7.6 and the first instance of the verb orgizesthai in Book 7 is there at 1149b22). At 1148a16-22, the weak or no desire/strong desire contrast is used to distinguish the akratic from the self-indulgent; at 1150a27-31, it supports the related, but distinct, point that the latter is worse.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. Rowe (1971, 94-6).

<sup>28</sup> If the akratic's desires really would display this pattern, it is plausible that in such circumstances his principle would be corrupted.

<sup>29</sup> Wilson also cites 1117b24-7 and 1119aa24-5.

<sup>30</sup> It is probably wrong to think that the EE's claim (1230b36-8) that moderation concerns the sensory objects that other animals enjoy and are pained by entails that its conception of moderation's objects is less restrictive than the NE. The NE (especially 3.10) also emphasizes that moderation's objects are shared by non-human animals and EE 1231a26-32 only mentions the pains of frustration. Other passages are more important. (1) NE 1145a35-6 links softness (malakia) and daintiness (truphê) and promises a later discussion. The only NE passage this could

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refer to is 1150b1ff., where the pains include more than those of frustration. Would followers of Wilson delete 1145a35-6 or dismiss it as part of the Eudemian strata of NE Book 7? (2) EE 1221a28-9 and 1221a9 clearly have the broader conception of pain for daintiness (cf. Rhet. 1384a1-2), although 1221a9 seems to make endurance a virtue distinct from moderation.

<sup>31</sup> Wilson (1912, 33).

<sup>32</sup> The relation between pain and desire is too complex to discuss here, but cf. NE 1119a1-5 and 1154b9-14 (I am grateful to David Charles for pointing these out).

Sometimes relevant might also be, e.g., (c) the pain of the anticipation of frustration, (d) the pain of having conflicted desires, or pain at being conflicted in one's desires, and (e) the frustration of a desire for an orderly character, although these may not be generally shared by other animals.

<sup>33</sup> Against Ramsauer's and Rassow's emendations at 1148a7, see Stewart (1892) ad loc. I agree with Gauthier-Jolif and Stewart that it is wrong to assume that 1148a11-13 states Aristotle's own account of softness (which is given in 7.7); such a reading overlooks the difference between legomen at a5 and legetai at a10. An interpretation of 1147b21-3

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resting on such an assumption is thus insecure. Since 1148a11-13 is not discussing softness in Aristotle's strict sense, tautas at a12 need not be restricted to pains (as opposed to pleasures or pleasures and pains). Outside Aristotle, softness is not confined to pains, e.g., Plato Rep. 556b7-c1 and the note on 1150a13-4 in Gauthier-Jolif is useful. Finally, it is wrong to think that Wilson's Version A (1147b23-1148a13) of 7.4 relates akrasia without qualification to pleasures and pains, while Version B (1148a28-1148b14) relates it only to pleasures. 1148b9-14 holds that akrasia and self-control have the same objects as moderation and self-indulgence and that these are pleasure and pain (1146b10-11, 19-22).

<sup>34</sup> This might be avoided if we take pantôn at 1148a8 to be limited by tôn lupêrôn in a7. Perhaps 1119a16-18 suggests some broadening of the relevant pleasures.

<sup>35</sup> Burnet (1988, 308).

<sup>36</sup> Worse is the suggestion that heat gets in because "digestion depends on it," Burnet (1988, 308). All sensible bodies depend on the Unmoved Mover too.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. D.A. 2.11 and the useful discussion in Johansen (1998, 178-225).

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<sup>38</sup> This may conflict with some modern intuitions, e.g., about the value of a recovering alcoholic's willpower.

<sup>39</sup> At least for sensory pains, contrast, e.g., pain at the unjust suffering of one's friends.

<sup>40</sup> If we hold with Cook Wilson, that NE 3.10 and "Version B" of 7.4 agree in restricting the pains that are the proper objects of moderation and self-indulgence to those of frustrated desires for pleasures, we should not think that this is consistent with the broader conception of pains relevant to softness and endurance in 7.7. Aristotle is explicit that the proper objects of akrasia and self-control and softness and endurance are the proper objects of moderation and self-indulgence, 1150a9-15.

<sup>41</sup> The best discussion of the general problem is Charles (1984, 168-77); I have learned much from his interpretation even when I am not in full agreement.

<sup>42</sup> Charles (1984, 169-71).

<sup>43</sup> We might construe the passage not in terms of pleasure and pain overall, but pleasure or pain taken in abstaining. Cf. Dent (1984, 144-6) and Pears (1978, 284). But 1152a2-4 may provide further reason for preferring an overall notion. Here the moderate do not take pleasure contrary to the prescription, but it is plausible that in some cases the

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moderate would feel physical pleasure if they acted contrarily (e.g. taking one extra drink). The point seems to be that the moderate do not feel pleasure overall, because of regret etc. "Not taking pleasure contrary to the prescription" here should not be construed instead as merely denying that the moderate do not take pleasure in acting against the prescription as such: none of the self-controlled, the akratic, or the self-indulgent does that. I am much indebted to David Charles for his suggestions on this point.

<sup>44</sup> Wilson (1912, 47).

<sup>45</sup> Charles (1984, 171).

<sup>46</sup> Aspasius 132.4-12 takes this line, cf. EE 1221a28-31.

<sup>47</sup> On the basis of 1150b12-3, we might understand antechein with dunantai at b2: ". . . those things that the many struggle against and are able to resist".

<sup>48</sup> (a) Cercyon fits awkwardly into the sphere of moderation, since his pain is at his daughter's bearing a child to Poseidon. This is not a pain shared with all animals, nor does it seem to be one of touch (even if his daughter failed to control the pleasures of touch). Nor does it even seem to be true that Cercyon's pain is primarily the pain of the frustration of any desire,

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although, no doubt, a desire of his was unsatisfied. On this story, see Harrison (1890, cv-cix). (b) We could see Xenophantus as a case of being overcome by the desire for pleasure or becoming overcome by the pain of restraint, but it may just be fine to see it as some sort of pardonable overcoming. (c) On the kings of Scythia, commentators send us to Herodotus 1.105 and Hippocrates On Airs, Waters, and Places 21-2. But neither story gives an explicit place to avoidance of pains, although one could see how the Hippocrates story, could be developed in that way. (d) On women, cf. 1148b31-4.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Cicero Tusc. II, especially 7.19, on the fear of pain.

<sup>50</sup> On 1150b22, Stewart and Gauthier-Jolif have useful notes. I follow Burnet, Bywater, Stewart and Susemihl in reading progargalisantes at b22; Gauthier-Jolif prefer progargalistenthes which has some manuscript support. On this description of impetuous akrasia, it seems that the affection that leads is not responsible for the lack of deliberation, rather the lack of deliberation allows the affection to lead. The lack of deliberation might be explained by the action of some other affection, or the person's character. More speculatively, it might be possible

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for the same affection to act twice, first to prevent deliberation and then to lead the person.

<sup>51</sup> See Gauthier-Jolif on 1150b20-1.

<sup>52</sup> For discussion of the options, see Bostock (2000, 125-35), Charles (1984, 117-43), Irwin (1986, 76-81), and Price (2006, especially 235-46).

<sup>53</sup> MM 1203a30-b12. For a thorough discussion of melancholy in Aristotle, van Eijk (2005, 139-68); Eijk points out that MM 1203b1-2 may misclassify melancholics as subject to weakness because of a misunderstanding of NE 1152a27-29.

<sup>54</sup> I would like to thank all the participants at the Symposium; special thanks are owed to David Charles, Ursula Coope, Emily Fletcher, Corinne Gartner, Aditi Iyer, Christine Kim, GER Lloyd, Katy Meadows, Alisa Sanchez, David Sedley, and Jennifer Whiting for their comments and suggestions. This paper is much the better for them.