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## V. AKRATIC BELIEVERS

AMELIE RORTY

A person has performed an action akratically when he intentionally, voluntarily acts contrary to what he thinks, all things considered, is best to do. This is very misleadingly called weakness of the will; less misleadingly, akrasia of action.

I should like to show that there is intellectual as well as practical akrasia. This might, equally misleadingly, be called weakness of belief; less misleadingly, akrasia of belief.

For a person to suffer akrasia of action, he must implicitly recognize that his action conflicts with a range of his principles about what is best to do; he must be the sort of person who can voluntarily act from his judgment. Since akrasia of belief has the same structure as akrasia of action, some kinds of believings are, for some kinds of people, as voluntary as some kinds of actions are, for some people.

A person believes akratically when he believes that  $p$ , being implicitly aware that  $p$  conflicts with the preponderance of serious evidence or with a range of principles to which he is committed. Just as an akratic agent must be capable of acting in accordance with his judgment about what is best to do, so an akratic believer must be capable of forming and maintaining a belief that is in accordance with his judgment about what is appropriate for him to believe. Now it might seem that we have already expanded akrasia of belief in a way that distinguishes it from akrasia of action. But this is not so, for these complications are also required for akrasia of action. An analysis of the conditions for akratic beliefs brings out some of the hidden conditions for akrasia, conditions that remind us of Aristotle's insistence that akrasia is primarily attributed to persons and only secondarily to actions.

Actions are not vectorial outcomes of a person's occurrent beliefs and desires: they are also formed by habit, by imitation and by social pressure. Although pure cases are hard to find, there are signi-

ficant differences in the ways that different sorts of agents characteristically form and formulate their actions. Such differences in aetiology are reflected in the ways that actions are performed. Similarly beliefs involve more than the assertion of a propositional content. They are also formed by a person's characteristic ways of organizing his perceptions, by catch phrases sometimes used as prefabricated modules of thought, by imitation and by conformity to social pressures. Again, although pure cases are hard to find, there are significant differences in the ways that different sorts of believers characteristically form their occurrent beliefs, and these differences are reflected in their beliefs.

Now of course the epistemology of all of this is very problematic. For one thing, akrasia is often—though not necessarily—accompanied by self-deception: the person rationalizes his action or belief. Furthermore, it is in any case difficult to attribute psychological states in opaque contexts, without the additional problems of embedding them in counterfactual conditionals. (“Normally he would have seen, accepted, noticed, been aware of evidence or reasons of a counter-vailing sort.”) But of course these difficulties attend akrasia of action, just as they do akrasia of belief. For once, however, epistemology does not recapitulate ontology. We can proceed with an analysis of conditions for akrasia, letting the specialists in that sort of thing tell us how to discover and to establish that the conditions obtain. The only constraints that the epistemology of attribution imposes are that the conditions of akrasia must be consistent, and that they should not be grossly ad hoc.

### I

An akratic action must of course be voluntary. But it should also not reduce to a case of error or

to a case of unresolved conflict. Before turning to the central issue of whether beliefs and the varieties intellectual actions that form them can be voluntary, I want to show that the conditions required to distinguish akratic action from error and from conflict also apply to akratic belief. These conditions apply primarily to the akratic *person* rather than the akratic *action*: they tell us something about the special capacities that are required for akrasia, capacities beyond those required for acting voluntarily. Interestingly enough, the capacities required for akrasia are the very same as those that make it possible—at least in principle—to reform or correct it. Since the best explanation of akrasia of action characteristically lies in akrasia of belief, the best correction for akrasia of action lies in the correction of akrasia of belief.

A person capable of akrasia must be capable of critical reflective awareness, capable of recognizing and evaluating his reasons, forming a summary judgment about what, given the evidence and his reason and principles, it is appropriate for him to do or to believe. The sort of attitude that Frankfurt describes as a condition for being a person—an attitude that evaluates not only actions but also motives—can also be taken towards the principles that fix patterns of salience and importance.<sup>1</sup>

But even someone capable of critical reflection is not yet assured of the dubious privilege of qualifying as capable of akrasia. For such a person might reflectively and critically discover that his principles conflict with his patterns of judgment, finding himself vacillating in an indecisive manner, accepting now this principle of salience and then another, conflicting one. Since reflexive attitudes can themselves conflict, the person capable of akrasia must also be capable of underwriting one side of his conflicting judgments or conflicting motives, must be capable of some sort of commitment, a *pou stō* of the mind, giving priority to one of a set of principles as guiding the patterning of relevance and salience, letting those principles direct his thoughts, interpretations and inferences.<sup>2</sup> This is not only a matter of being able to

carry out one's choice between (say) Riemannian and Euclidean assumptions in geometry, drawing the inferences appropriate to the system. It might, for instance, involve making the principles of charity in interpretation consistently guide one's judgments of one's colleagues' motives. Or, having committed oneself to non-elitist principles, describing (and thus coming to think of) people in ways appropriate to that principle, focusing on some of their traits and letting others recede. All this of course within the limits of truth. But well within the limits of truth different issues can become salient, treated as primarily relevant or organizationally central to one's inferences.

But truthful clarity of mind and firm principles are not yet enough to establish a capacity for akrasia of belief. The person capable of akrasia of belief cannot merely be an exquisitely sensitive, critically self-reflective evaluator, a character in a novel by Gide or James, who reflects: "Oh woe, I have betrayed my commitment to the principle of justice by thinking ill of him."

Akrasia is a disease that only the strong can suffer. To be capable of it, a person must not only be able to note his failures but also be capable of voluntary intervention in his thought patterns, directing attention and inferences by the principle to which they commit themselves.<sup>3</sup> This is not merely a matter of aligning ends, inferences and actions at a time, and at each time, without regard for reasoned consistency over time. A person who is consistent and unified on each occasion, at each time, but erratic and vacillating over time, only marginally qualifies as responsible. If he is akratic, his is the unusual akrasia of the moment. Standardly, both akrasia of action and akrasia of belief presuppose a person's commitment to a stable pattern of reasonable judgment, to the realization of a relatively fixed hierarchy of ends.

The conditions for responsibility are stronger than those for voluntary action at least in this: if the person does change his priorities and his evaluative interpretations, such changes form a reasonable pattern; they are not ad hoc vacillations. This means that we cannot explain away akrasia as a case of vacillation: the person capable

of akrasia is committed to a steady (but not arbitrarily fixed) purpose and a characteristic (but not rigid) mode of interpretation. For him, random ad hoc vacillation of judgment and action itself constitutes a type of akrasia.

When we locate places where voluntary intervention—intellectual self-reform—can occur, we also locate the varieties of intellectual activities that form occurrent beliefs. Sometimes this enables us to distinguish types of believers: those whose beliefs are primarily formed by phrases and descriptions, and those whose beliefs are primarily formed by inference.

## II

A catalogue, then, of types of voluntary beliefs, locating possible akratic breaks:<sup>4</sup>

*Type 1.* A person can fail to commit himself to his general beliefs about what is best, divinely commanded or morally desirable. Such intellectual akrasia might be called deflection of direction or aim. It can consist of a person refusing to follow his primary ends, or of a person voluntarily failing to follow them, allowing himself to succumb to lassitude, cynicism, depression. Someone who suffers what the medievals call *accidie* or *melancholia* often self-deceptively treats himself as powerless to realize his ends. Like other forms of intellectual akrasia, *melancholia* carries other failures in its wake: the person sees the world in ways that does not accord with his principles, perhaps only noticing what is dim or shabby and never what, by his principles, is admirable or beautiful. Or having failed to commit or engage himself to ends he judges best, a person can, as did Goncharov's Oblomov, form akratic intentions and decisions. Despite his general principles about the worthy things he could do, he could not find any reason for getting up because he could not think of anything worth doing on any given day.

It is also possible to refuse, rather than to fail to follow one's general views about what is best. A Dostoyevskyan character, Goethe's Mephistopheles, Iago can for a time or at least in principle,

decline to serve ends he takes to represent the human good, the highest principle of the importance for action: "Non serviam. Let evil be my good. I will be the imp of the perverse." This form of akrasia is probably only notional: the prime examples are of course fictional. If it exists at all, this form of akrasia would be very difficult to attribute: we would be inclined to suppose that the person does not have the ends he proclaims.

*Type 2.* More commonly, akrasia of belief occurs between a person's principles and commitments on the one hand and his interpretations of the situation in which he finds himself on the other. Aristotle and some of the Stoics diagnosed this form of akrasia as a flaw of the capacities of imaging: the person's perceptions and desires are malformed by inappropriate *fantasia*. There are several forms of akrasia of interpretation: akrasia of perception, akrasia of description, akrasia of emotion.

1) A person's perceptions can fail to conform to his views about what ought to be salient, or to his principles about what is important. Someone who has repudiated chauvinism might see Germans as ill-formed or hear Swedes as crude; someone who denies ageism might see the lines on the face of the elderly as deformations, their motions as comical. Of course many aspects of perception are not voluntary; but that is true of action as well: the physical constraints on bodily motion are as rigid as those on perception.

At least some aspects of perceptual interpretation can be voluntary, and they can conflict with a person's principled judgments. A person can choose where to focus attention: Necker cubes can be seen now as emergent, now as recessive; other gestalt sketches can be seen as figure or ground, as an old woman or as a young girl. So too by focusing and attending in the right way, a person can see the lines on the face of an elderly as marks of humour or endurance rather than as grotesque deformations. There are more obviously voluntary aspects of perception: one can akratically attend to someone's status or power rather than paying attention to what he is saying, diverted from a scholarly discussion by thoughts of ambition or

advancement. Or someone might akratically perceive a seminar gathering as an occasion for showy and impressive polemical contest. For some people, at least some aspects of seeing involve *looking for*. When scanning the visual field is a way of answering questions, it is possible to reorganize one's perceptions by reorganizing one's questions. A painter who has become a military commander might akratically look at a landscape as a composition, endangering his troops by his aesthetic musing, forgetting to look for defensible strongholds because he is absorbed in the reflection of the sky and trees in the stream. *Scanning, focusing, attending, looking for* are activities that some people, at least, can direct and control. Implicit questions that direct attention form patterns of salience that structure ground and figure in perception.

It is because a person's general evaluations can become ingredient in the habitual organization of perception that the person of practical wisdom can straightway act from what he sees. His perceptual habits permit him to see how best to realize his ends in his immediate situation. But someone who has changed his mind about important principles, who has undergone religious or moral conversion, can have difficulty in realigning his perceptual habits to conform to his new beliefs. There may be times when his lapses to older modes of interpretation are voluntary, and akratic.

2) Because most people can reflect on the patterns of their speech more readily than they can on their patterns of thought, descriptive akrasia is more common than perceptual. The phrases that a person uses to describe his situation carry categorical and classificatory implications and presuppositions that affect action; they are often strongly but latently evaluative. It is easy to fall into strongly pre-fabricated patterns of speech, self-deceptively thinking that such lapses don't matter. Often such lapses are social: a person engaged in conversation can fall into a way of talking that he disapproves. Someone committed to non-sexist attitudes usually can avoid following his cohort in describing women in demeaning ways, knowing that if he talks of women as *broads* or *chicks* he is less likely

to listen to what they say, less likely to interpret their remarks in the same charitable way that he would interpret the same words as spoken by a man. What he calls imaginative initiative in a man, he calls conniving manipulation in a woman; akratically he comes to think the man requires and deserves respect and cooperation while the woman is to be belittled, avoided. Or a person can be led by the standard moves—the rhythms and dramatic requirements—of conversation: The astronomer who derides astrological conversations can nevertheless akratically leap to his own defense when a colleague remarks “You must be a Leo,” by answering, “Oh no, certainly not. Isn't it obvious? I am a Libra.”

3) Interpretative akrasia can also involve emotional reactions. A person might for instance be hostile to someone whom he believes to be friendly, knowing that he does so solely because of a superficial resemblance to an ancient enemy. Or he might approach certain sorts of situations with a vengeful or envious cast of mind, when he thinks that such attitudes are quite inappropriate, knowing that if he redescribed the situations, he could modify his responses. Because emotions are rarely under direct voluntary control, akrasia of the emotions standardly follows akrasia of description or perception, and is voluntary only for those who can redirect their perceptions and descriptions to accord with their principles. It is because we tend to bring our interpretive attitudes into consistent alignment, that we have some leeway in changing those that are less voluntary by changing those that are more voluntary. But the maximally efficient point of intervention is not always the same for all sorts of people. For instance, someone might have difficulty shifting patterns of perception, but might be able to redirect emotional attitudes by redescription. Another person might best succeed in shifting his responses by putting himself in social contexts where the pattern of reinforcement could predictably modify his reactions. This is the familiar strategy of a good deal of monastic training; such training has been adopted and adapted by various forms of behavior psychotherapy.

Because descriptive akrasia has such direct efforts on action, political reforms tend to stress revising and changing the vocabulary of the old regime. Shifting from *Madame* to *Citoyenne*, from *Gaspadin* to *Tovarisch* can modify the tone, the manner and demeanor that is the beginning and often the central part of larger action. Perceptual, descriptive and emotional akrasia are intimately connected. In "The Idea of Perfection," Iris Murdoch describes how a woman learned to take new affective attitudes towards a daughter-in-law whom she had thought vulgar by learning to describe the young woman as candid rather than presumptuous, direct rather than crude.<sup>5</sup>

Because very few people have direct reflective control over their emotions and perceptions, the reform of interpretive akrasia is usually best assured by the person placing himself in the appropriate sorts of social and political structures, where patterns of speech and attention are most likely to be modified. But this can often also generate akrasia—a person's habits of description can pull in one direction, and his perceptual and emotional habits in another. The conflict of habits can generate the sort of discomfort and tension that is often the psychological seed bed of akrasia.

*Type 3.* Sometimes a person can also come to believe something against his better judgment, can come to a conclusion following a pattern of inference that he regards as illicit. While one cannot choose straightway to believe, to decide to come to a certain conclusion, one can place oneself in a situation where, predictably, one will accept judgments that one had merely used provisionally, or expressed out of some form of sociability, following a charismatic authority. We cannot directly control our expectations; but knowing our tendencies to detach judgments from their contexts, we can avoid accepting views just for the sake of the argument, when it seems clear that doing so will lead to accepting them *tout court*, despite general principles against forming and acquiring beliefs and judgments in this way. (Of course such beliefs would be akratic only for those who are capable of reflecting on their intellectual habits and who have some measure of direction or

control over such habits.)

A person can akratically abridge an inquiry, being aware that it would lead to his having to reconsider a range of treasured beliefs. Or he can conduct an experimental inquiry in ways that will predictably confirm his hypotheses, cannily avoiding lines of investigation that might jeopardize them, selecting a heuristic terminology and a set of examples that will lead him where he wants to go. Of course such direction of inquiry is often self-deceived, but it need not be. Someone might admit that, contrary to his principles and better judgment, he is trying to avoid embarrassing discoveries. Akrasia of inquiry can sometimes infect a whole scientific community, or a governmental elite: they can follow habitual and comfortable procedures that they do not underwrite or that they regard as irresponsible modes of investigation.

*Type 4.* Another variety of akrasia of belief appears primarily in practical contexts: it might be called akrasia of intention and decision. It occurs when the conclusion of a piece of practical reason fails to conform to the premises. This sort of akrasia stands half way between akrasia of inference and akrasia of action. It can occur when the person draws a conclusion inappropriate to the premises of an isolated piece of practical reasoning, that he accepts without placing it in the larger context of his preference rankings and ends. Sometimes just doing this—forming an intention without placing it in a comparative context—is itself akratic.

Akrasia of intention can be quite extended: the person comes to form habits of decision-making by means that he does not underwrite, allowing daydreams to have more weight than he thinks they should. Or he can concentrate on stories and images that form his expectations and strategies of choice, praising and blaming, excusing and condemning actions and motives in ways that will affect his own intentions and decisions, often predictably violating his primary principles. Such cases can involve hypocrisy or conflict rather than direct akrasia. There are not many who can self-consciously reflect on the ways that their patterns

of thought can, in practical contexts, affect their decisions; and even fewer can, without self-deception, change what they consider inappropriate patterns.

More commonly, the akratic break occurs in the formation of a comparative resolution rather than in the formation of an isolated intention from only one line of practical reasoning. Since a resolution involves a summary of weighted comparisons, a person can form a resolution contrary to the balanced outcome of his practical reasoning. Habit and frustration often explain such akratic resolutions.

The akratic break can also occur when a decision is detached from the practical reasoning in which it is embedded and which provides its grounds. Unlike a resolution, a decision is no longer treated as a conditional.

One of the reasons akrasia of practical inference is difficult to attribute is that there are two criteria for identifying an intention or a decision. On the one hand it is presumptively identified by the behavioral action which it typically initiates. Since actions are standardly intentionally identified, standard action descriptions—"going to the bank," "looking for a job"—carry a presumptive description of the agent's intention. But standard intentions are also presumptively embedded in standard patterns of practical reasoning—going to the bank to make a deposit or draw a check; looking for a job to earn a living. On the other hand, a decision is identified by the particular practical reasoning in which it nestles and of which it is the conclusion. So although "going to the bank to draw a check" might describe the *sort* of action a person performs and so locate the *sort* of decision which prompted it, the details of that decision (going to *this* bank, to get *this* amount of money, for *this* purpose) are filled in by the details of the practical reasoning of which the decision is the conclusion. The standard action description provides the initial "thin" identification; the practical reasoning provides the fuller contextual identification.

Certainly the two criteria for identifying decisions—the agent's practical reasoning and the

behavioral action typical of such reasoning—normally coincide. Our social practices would be unintelligible if they did not. Because we can reasonably expect that a person's practical reasoning conforms to standard social norms, we are able to make dependable judgments about the characteristic motives and traits of those around us. By reading off a person's psychological dispositions from what he typically does, we are able to determine the patterns of his practical judgments, his ends and interpretive directions. That is how we distinguish friends from enemies and decide with whom to cooperate and whom to combat. But the two criteria can diverge. When they do, it is difficult to substantiate an attribution of akrasia because we can't tell whether the person's action is supported by atypical or appropriate reasoning. For instance, someone might go to the bank in order to gossip with his friend or an anthropologist might look for a job because she is interested in the rituals of socializing the labor force. Such differences in practical reasoning would of course also affect the description of the action: going to the bank to see a friend, looking for a job as a part of a piece of anthropological research. An action that might seem akratic by standard action descriptions may not be when it is identified by its nestling in the structure of the agent's practical reasoning. But over-determination being what it is, it may be difficult for the agent herself to determine whether her primary intention was formed by the standard normic description of her action, or by her particular typical practical reasoning. This is one of the reasons that isolated cases of akrasia are difficult to identify: it is difficult to establish their connections with the person's extended practical reasoning, or to locate the action within the larger context of the agent's ends and commitments, the habits of interpretation that characteristically form his decisions. But there may well be more akrasia of practical and theoretical inference than is commonly supposed. Even when the agent's decision or intention conforms to his practical reasoning, his ends and commitments, he may in fact have formed his decision through a deviant chain that does not con-

form to his preferred judgments. His decision then only nominally and accidentally coincides with his preference, his judgment about what is best: it is in fact formed by, and because of, principles that he does not underwrite. Despite its apparent appropriateness, it is nevertheless genuinely, but submergently, akratic.

### III

It should now be clear that the phenomena standardly classified together as *believing* are in fact quite various and diverse. The propositional content that we detach as *the belief* occurs only as an isolatable aspect of a complex series of actions and activities, many of them habitual: attending, focusing, seeing as ..., classifying, describing as .... One might think that it is just this that assures a disanalogy between akrasia of belief and akrasia of action. But I think not. What we standardly think of as *the action* is also only an isolatable aspect of a whole series of actions and activities, many of them habitual.

In both cases, what we might call the bearer—the sentence or the behavior—is intentionally as well as physically identified, and in both cases, the agent/believer's intention presupposes a standard normic description. As a sentence must have a meaning for someone to mean something by it, so a standard action must have a typical normic intentional description for an agent to perform it intentionally. In both cases, the believer/agent can deviate from the norm ... but only by standard moves within normic description. And in both cases, different sorts of believers/agents can arrive at their beliefs/actions by distinctive sorts of routes: the aetiological explanation of their beliefs/actions can significantly vary in characteristic ways.

Our catalogue of varieties of intellectual akrasia suggests that asserting and denying are sometimes the last of a range of activities that form the content of a belief or decision. One might think that all of this argues against, rather than for, treating believing as the sort of voluntary condition that

can be akratic. It might seem as if akratic belief requires akratic focusing, inference, or akratic perceptual and intellectual attention. That seems right. But it is in fact just this that makes it more rather than less plausible that there should be akratic belief. Directing attention, focusing, re-describing, following and continuing to follow a train of thought can be voluntary.

The role that an occurrent belief—the assertion or denial of a propositional content—plays in thought or in action is largely a function of the way that it has been formed by the rest of a person's intellectual habits. When believing-that-*p*, is actually thinking-that-*p*, then believing is an activity. But a person can believe that *p*, without thinking-that-*p*: even occurrent beliefs can be dispositional. They are then attributed on the basis of what a person is likely to say if asked, to infer if they were to consider, etc. Even when holding an occurrent belief does not consist in thinking-that-*p*, when believing is a state, a condition or disposition, a person can be held responsible being in that state, condition or disposition. Not every voluntary action for which a person can be held responsible is, in the event, immediately and directly controllable or avoidable. All that is required is that the person could under normal circumstances have foreseen what would occur and could have avoided it. "You ought to have known ...; you should have remembered ...; you surely were aware that ..." indicate parallels between cognitive states and action outcomes. Even more tellingly, the attribution of responsibility for an action (which in the event is not avoidable) often rests on the attribution of a culpable and negligent ignorance of some sort. Even when a person's belief is not an occurrent act-event of his thinking-that-*p*, even when his belief (or failure of belief) is dispositional, he can be responsible for his disposition. It is, to that extent, voluntary.

The advantages of cataloguing and locating varieties of intellectual akrasia do not stop with providing a sharper, more precise and acute diagnosis of the intellectual and character flaws of our friends. Distinguishing the varieties of intellectual akrasia enables us to distinguish the strands in the

intentional components that determine actions: it enables us to supplement the standard story of how beliefs and desires determine actions. Of course Aristotle's account of the practical syllogism was intended as a reconstruction rather than as a description of practical reasoning: certainly he thought that the minor and major premises are condensations and syntheses of a range of intellectual activities that he analyzed in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. It is significant that Aristotle's discussion of *akrasia* follows directly upon his analysis of the varieties of intellectual virtues and their respective contributions to moral virtue. It seems clear that the larger explanation of *akrasia* of action requires an examination of the activities, and the failures of mind. One can, of course, classify such failures as species of irrationality. But when we see the varieties of voluntary irrationality—varieties of intellectual *akrasia*—it is not difficult to understand the strong attractions of *akrasia*, to understand how an otherwise normal and rational person could fail to exercise one of his intellectual virtues.<sup>6</sup>

Because akratic irrationality is a failure of character, its explanation requires that the conditions for voluntary action be supplemented by an account of responsible or prohairetic agents. The conditions for the sort of responsible agency that can be charged with vice and *akrasia* are, as we saw, stronger than those required for voluntary agency. For someone to act voluntarily, he must have genuine options and he must know what he is doing. But someone might meet those qualifications without being the sort of person who can reflect on his ends, being able to modify and realign his immediate purposes in accordance with his general principles. In Aristotle's terms, only a person capable of *prohairesis* as well as of voluntary action is strongly responsible. Such a person's practical reasoning is formed by his ends, as well as directed towards them. Only a person capable of end-formed and end-directed voluntary action is capable of virtue, vice or *akrasia*. Because he is the sort of person who can modify his motives and ends, he is responsible for his character as well as for his actions. Of course those who are capable of

voluntary actions can act akratically, just as those who are capable of voluntary actions can act virtuously or viciously. But although they do *what* the virtuous, vicious or akratic person does, they do not, on that account alone, act *as* the akratic, virtuous or vicious person does. An action can be voluntary without being prohairetic. The motives of a prohairetic action are what they are because the person has the ends that he has: they are formed by, or are expressions of those ends. But even when the motives of voluntary action conform to a person's ends, those motives can be formed by occurrent beliefs and desires that have no particular connection to the person's ends: the beliefs and desires of voluntary actions need not express a person's character.<sup>7</sup>

Although this seems to be strong requirement for responsibility, it is a requirement that can be satisfied in several ways, and at different points in the "movement" from general principles to decision and action. We distinguished: a person's commitment to general ends and principles; his (perceptual, descriptive, emotional, his habits of inference) interpretations of his situation; his intentions, resolutions and decisions. Not all of these cognitive or intellectual determinants are equally dominant for every action; and different sorts of agents tend to have different "points" dominant. So, for instance, for one person *akrasia* of action tends primarily to be explained by *akrasia* of description, if only because that is the point at which the agent could, but did not, intervene to align his action with his general principles. But for another, the akratic break is more likely to take place in the formation of a resolution derived from calculative comparisons. Because he is the sort of person who is capable of voluntary intervention in such calculations, he is the sort of person for whom such lapses can be voluntary. He knows he could have directed his comparative reasoning in a way that would accord with his ends. These differences fix what we might call different styles of responsible agency. And different styles mark different types of akratic agents.

But even when the akrates suffer the additional blatant *akrasia* of giving a self-deceptive justifica-

tion of his akratic action, he is in principle capable of recognizing his action as akratic. Someone capable of akrasia of a particular kind—say akrasia of perception or intention—is, in the very nature of the case, capable of voluntary intervention in *that* domain, at that point. He is the sort of person who could have done that sort of thing in a way that would conform to his commitments and principles. The condition for akrasia assures the condition for the self-reform of akrasia, and the precise location of the akratic break locates the place where intervention is optimally appropriate. For some, reform consists largely in exercises of redescription; for others, it consists largely in persistent and careful attention to inferential patterns, avoiding hasty detachment of marginally relevant conclusions. For some, it involves learning to redirect focused attention; for others, it involves making careful lists of comparative goods.

But what is possible is not therefore easy. That the conditions of akrasia assure the possibility of its reform by no means assures the ease of that reform. Indeed our catalogue of intellectual habits helps to show at least one reason why the akratic self-reformer cannot, with all the acutely intelligent good will in the world, straightway align

his beliefs and actions in accordance with his ends. Habits hunt in packs: they support and reinforce one another. We not only have habits of perception, description and inference; we also have habitual ways of connecting our habits, being led from one to another. It is very rare that a person can modify or correct one habit, without affecting the balance of related and supporting habits. And of course intellectual habits, like habits of action, are in their very nature patterns of responses that are often set in motion before we can deliberately decide on their appropriateness. That is precisely why they are so serviceable: though they are voluntary, they operate much more rapidly than our careful deliberations.<sup>8</sup>

But it is just here that our catalogue of varieties of intellectual akrasia can help the self-reforming akrates. A person's characteristic akratic slip locates the optimal point of intervention. Since akrasia can take place only where the person has a genuine option, locate the akratic break and you have located the point at which end-directed self-intervention can, in principle and with great difficulty, take place. Locating the point of intervention is however just the beginning of the self-reformer's task: the complex strategies of deploying habits against each other must follow.<sup>9</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 68 (1971).
2. Charles Taylor, "What is Human Agency?" in T. Mischel (ed.), *The Self*, (Oxford, 1977).
3. W. Alston, "Self Intervention and the Structure of Motivation," in Mischel, *ibid.*
4. Cf. "Where Does the Akratic Break Take Place?" *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 58 (1980).
5. Iris Murdoch, "The Idea of Perfection," in *The Sovereignty of the Good*, (New York, 1971).
6. Cf. my "Akrasia and Conflict," *Inquiry*, Vol. 23 (1980) and "Self-Deception, Akrasia and Irrationality," *Social Science Information*, (UNESCO: London) vol. 19 (1980), pp. 905-22, to be reprinted in Jon Elster (ed.) *Multiple Selves*, Cambridge.
7. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III.2-3, and VI.2. Cf. also the articles by David Wiggins, Myles Burnyeat, Julia Annas, John McDowell, and Amelie Rorty in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. by Amelie Rorty, (Berkeley, 1980).
8. Cf. my "Akrasia and Conflict," *loc. cit.* and "How to Cure Akrasia," forthcoming.
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