

# What is akrasia (incontinence) according to aristotle in book 7 of nicomachean et...

[Philosophy](#)



of Lecturer August Akrasia The psychological explanation of akrasia (incontinence) according to Aristotle is based on the perception that the actions of people are not usually uncontrolled and unrestrained. When incontinent people feel the guilt of their actions, they are usually willing and ready to abandon them. Aristotle believes that it is not the emotions and passions of people that really make them to behave or act in a particular way. It is also not the absence of reason that makes people to behave in a particular manner and Aristotle believes that akrasia poses an extraordinary challenge for moral education. According to Aristotle, the feelings of an incontinent person are not usually more powerful than their reason as people have been made to believe (Aristotle 106).

The incontinent man, knowing that what he does is bad, does it as a result of passion, while the continent man, knowing that his appetites are bad, refuses on account of rational principle to follow them.

Aristotle (106)

Thus, an incontinent person could also be driven by reason as well as by their feelings and emotions. Other philosophers like Socrates believed that incontinence presents a scenario where individuals have let their emotions control their lives and they have found it difficult to control their emotions. “It would be strange... if knowledge was in a man, something else could master it and drag it about like a slave” (Aristotle 107). This was an anomaly that Aristotle sought to correct. Aristotle believes that it is on the basis of akrasia that people are influenced or propelled to act irrationally and this is not to say that these people are not logical in nature. Aristotle also opined

that the incontinent people have not totally lost their sense of reasoning and even in cases that there seems to be no appreciable amount of reasoning in them, these people could still decide to behave logically, but they prefer to use the pleasures of their emotions (Aristotle 108).

Since we use the word “ know” in two senses (for both the man who has knowledge but is not using it and he who is using it are said to know), it will make a difference when a man does what he should not, he has knowledge but is not exercising it...

Aristotle (109)

Aristotle uses these arguments to explain the uncontrolled and unrestrained nature of the incontinent people that it is not due to the fact that they are incapable of keeping their emotions at bay and this is really not the reason that they behave in an irrational manner. Aristotle believed that the fact that incontinent people have knowledge of their actions goes a long way to show that they also make logical calculations and people should not see them as irrational human beings that are only driven by their feelings. Aristotle believed that akrasia does not imply irrationality or ignorance as he was of the opinion that akrasia is not a total neglect of reason and that people should not assume that incontinence results only from pleasurable feelings. Aristotle agrees that the incontinent person is quite aware that his actions could lack some form of social principles and moral values, but still goes ahead to act in that way and he then went on to say that it is really not the thoughts or feelings of the incontinent people that influence their actions as believed by other philosophers that made arguments on the same subject matter (109). This represents a great psychological dimension to the issue of

akrasia and on this note, I disagree with Aristotle. I do not endorse Aristotle's account of akrasia as incontinent people usually act based on their emotions. Let us consider the issue of sexual urges. In spite of the alarming increase in the rate of unwanted pregnancy and the issue of sexually transmitted diseases, people still allow their emotions and feelings to rule their lives not minding the consequences. These people are incontinent in nature as they have let their emotions to overpower their sense of reasoning. The same reasons anyone would give to indulging in sexual frivolities against all odds may be applicable to kleptomaniacs. From the foregoing, it would not be far from the truth to assume that many of us, as humans, are naturally weak. I therefore do not believe that Aristotle's psychological explanation of akrasia is valid as these incontinent people have shown that, they are weak in nature and that, they cannot control their emotions in anyway and have also shown that, they cannot give any room to reasoning in their lives.

#### Work Cited

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Ross W. D. (Ed.). Kitchener: Batoche Books. 1999.